

**NGO statement on Agenda item 3:
thematic priorities for the pledging process and the sharing of good practices**

Dear Chair,

This statement has been drafted following wide consultations with NGOs and attempts to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

As many NGOs expressed last year at the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), we view the Compact as an important milestone in how the international community approaches its joint responsibility to support and care for displaced people worldwide. It provides a solid framework to more effectively and sustainably share this responsibility between States, communities, and all actors involved. Arriving within a year of GCR adoption, the Global Refugee Forum, a key responsibility-sharing arrangement, provides an important opportunity for States and other stakeholders to come together and send a strong signal that we are committed to translating the words of the GCR into meaningful action.

Already, at this year's March UNHCR's Standing Committee, NGOs articulated a set of expectations for the first Global Refugee Forum.¹

Specifically, in relation to **pledging**, NGOs highlighted the need to match pledging with *specific* gaps, challenges and opportunities in *existing* refugee situations. We called for a context-informed approach as the preferred way to ensure that pledges lead to concrete changes in the lives of refugees and host communities across the scope of the Compact's objectives and within the four-year time-frame until the next Global Refugee Forum in 2023. We encouraged host countries, and where feasible countries of origin, and UNHCR to initiate inclusive processes to identify specific challenges, gaps and opportunities against which to pledge. Such an approach will not only ensure that pledges match specific gaps in specific situations, thereby ensuring accountability vis-à-vis affected people including for gross human rights violations, it is also the only way to generate collective ownership at country level, and to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation of affected communities, local civil society, and local businesses.

Moreover, pledging at the Global Refugee Forum should be designed with consideration to the positive learnings from the Leaders' Summit in New York in 2016. Here pledging had to meet certain eligibility criteria. Establishing thresholds, relative to the capacity of an actor, is vital in order to ensure pledges remain focused, targeted and, importantly, bring additionality.

¹ https://www.icvanetwork.org/system/files/versions/SCom_Mar2019_GCR_GRF.pdf

On **thematic priorities**, given the short time since the background note's release, detailed NGO comments will be provided at a later stage. We, however, find there are pro's and con's related to the theme-based pledging proposed by UNHCR in the background document. While we acknowledge that pledges on themes may be easier to mobilize, a theme-based approach may run counter to a context-based approach. Gaps, challenges and opportunities in a given context may not match pre-defined global themes. We believe that a global logic needs to be balanced with our preference for a context-informed approach in defining relevant pledges. However, when we look at the proposed themes, they appear to be broad enough to secure that balance. But we recognize that some thematic areas (such as solutions) are more complex than others and, as such, may require more elaborate and multi-dimensional pledges.

On **showcasing of good practices**, we welcome the suggestion to tie pledging to good practice. In this regard, our first suggestion is that this segment of the Global Refugee Forum be organized in such a way as to thematically link the practices being discussed to (a) the pledging format and initial commitments, and (b) to the indicators' framework being presented at the same event. Done in such a way, these topics would hopefully contribute to each other in a fruitful way, rather than remain self-contained and disconnected. For example, a pledge on improving reception and admission capacities could be paired with an example on good practice in this area, and lead to a discussion on related indicators, which would provide an opportunity for immediate, practice-based feedback on the framework being proposed.

Secondly, as there are likely to be many requests for showcasing good practice, some guidance should be developed well ahead of time to facilitate the selection of examples. From our perspective, it would be advisable to prioritize those practices that showcase partnerships between different actors, including those not traditionally included—so not only donors, NGOs, national and local authorities but also the private sector and faith-based organizations. We would request that guidance at least indicates a clear pathway for this approach and requires case studies to include support for refugee leadership and meaningful participation, with attentiveness to age, gender and diversity considerations.

We would, however, like to raise a concern that we think needs to be considered with this approach: good practice may not exist, or may exist yet have no traction, on the issues that need action. What if, for example, there are no financial service providers with risk-appetite to cover refugees and poor members of the local population in a given context, or if there is no political willingness to consider freedom of movement to enhance self-reliance, or if policies and practices relating to refugees are gender-blind? Or what if there are good practices on complementary pathways, but no political appetite in a given third country to offer this opportunity? We would caution against an approach overly reliant on *laissez-faire* and recommend that States and UNHCR take leadership to drive progress on all GCR objectives even if 'good practice' is missing or lacks traction.

Lastly, opportunities to learn from less positive elements of initiatives should also be factored into the approach. Few initiatives will be entirely positive, and this should be acknowledged

and those bringing them forward encouraged not to dissimulate with respect to problems, but rather to offer reflections on areas for improvement.

On the **stocktaking, following-up and assessing progress** element of the Forum, NGOs strongly believe that pledging should be closely connected to the GCR's outcome and indicator framework to ensure accountability. As an example, if national and international actors pledge to invest X amount in building property restitution or compensation mechanism to underpin good governance and access to justice in return areas (objective 4), then the outcome of that pledge should be measured against an enhanced GCR indicator under outcome 4.3. If a theme-based approach to pledging is pursued, a methodology should be developed to make sure that pledges are monitored under the GCR outcome and indicator framework. A Global Refugee Forum detached from the GCR objectives and indicators will not be able to drive GCR implementation.

As an overall reflection, we would like the Global Refugee Forum to represent a starting point for a consistent and sustainable collaboration. In the absence of a comprehensive framework to address the multiplicity of needs across the triple nexus – humanitarian, peace and development – we believe it is important to ensure that the GCR is not reduced to a one-time exhibition of vision, good practices and financing commitment every four years. To avoid this, good practices should be linked to pledges, and UNHCR, in collaboration with stakeholders including NGOs at the national and regional level, should establish workstreams that can follow up on expanding, improving and promoting cross-regional exchanges in between the Forums. Moreover, at a minimum, micro-level investments to support refugees should be more dynamically initiated and implemented covering the common streams of survival and livelihoods of refugees and vulnerable host communities. This is critically important for low-income countries, where a majority of host communities are already vulnerable due to a variety of reasons including conflicts and adverse climate factors.

Considering the short time between the release of the background note and the meeting, detailed collective NGO comments on the thematic priorities will have to be provided to UNHCR and other stakeholders at a later stage.

In conclusion, we hope the first Global Refugee Forum will provide an important occasion to bring together a wide range of actors and promote diverse partnerships going forward.

We thank UNHCR for giving us the opportunity to contribute and look forward to engaging constructively in the months ahead leading to the first Global Refugee Forum in December, including at the 2019 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations.