
“Towards a global compact on refugees”

Thematic discussion two: Measures to be taken at the onset of a large movement of refugees

17 October 2017

Panel one: How can we better prepare for and respond rapidly to large movements of refugees?

Summary

The New York Declaration and the global compact on refugees (GCR) provide important opportunities to improve the international community’s response to large movements of refugees, by extending greater solidarity and timely support to impacted countries.

A “change of paradigm” was called for as part of the comprehensive refugee response, that sees refugees as people, not as statistics and which builds on a “whole of society” approach. The participation of the refugee youth in the panel discussion was particularly welcomed in this regard. It was now vital that commitments in the New York Declaration be put into practice through clear follow-up mechanisms.

Some important factors in terms of preparedness and response highlighted by participants included the following:

1. International burden and responsibility sharing is crucial from the outset of any refugee crisis, including to ensure better preparedness for and response to large movements.
2. Preparedness and prevention: we cannot wait for refugee crises to occur, and measures to better predict and prevent crises were encouraged. Greater investment in preparedness and long-term planning has been shown to pay dividends financially and in terms of speed of response. A shift from a “crisis-based” to a “risk-based” response was urged, informed by data and evidence.
3. “Context is king”: effective preparedness and response will “map” and take into account regional and national situations, including regulatory frameworks, the capacities of receiving countries, and the needs and profiles of new arrivals. Responses in urban areas, for example, require particular planning, including improving infrastructure.
4. It is vital to support local actors, leaders, civil society, and municipal authorities as the front line of the response to large refugee movements. The international community was urged to support their role and institutional capacity, including in advance of any particular crisis.
5. Leadership and a coordinated response are key. A dedicated national coordination structure to facilitate whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches was recommended by some participants. It was also recommended to ensure better coordination between relevant organizations and agencies in line with “grand bargain” commitments – including through data collection and sharing, comprehensive needs assessments and joint risk assessments.
6. Standby structures and surge support bringing together expert personnel and additional resources are important tools. NORCAP is a good model, as are standby structures and stocks in place to respond to natural disasters.
7. The forecast-based financing approach being applied in disaster contexts could have lessons learned for large refugee movements.

8. The humanitarian-development nexus, and the need to plan for solutions from the outset were recalled. It was envisaged that the GCR would build on existing initiatives and structures, rather than duplicating them e.g. World Bank IDA 18 and “Education Must Not Wait” initiative. Provision of more capital for the World Bank was encouraged.

Suggestions for the programme of action

From the concept note

- Global refugee response group:
 - The idea of a global refugee response group was generally welcomed and could ensure a faster and more comprehensive response is in place from the start of a refugee crisis.
 - The purpose of the group could be to mobilize political commitments, resources, early joint assessments and planning to ensure a whole of society approach, and to provide opportunities for legal pathways for admission to third countries in a timely and concerted manner. Fostering technical support for refugee hosting countries and strengthening links with development actors could be other functions.
 - Duplication of existing structures was discouraged.
 - It was suggested that membership include a broad range of stakeholders in order to foster better communication and coordination, including international organizations, regional organizations, development actors, civil society, donor, resettlement and hosting countries, and refugees and hosting communities themselves.
 - To activate the core group, a “bell ringer” would be needed – UNHCR could play this role. The leadership of hosting countries would be important.
 - Some delegations queried whether the response group could be convened at the regional, rather than global, level to ensure a context-specific response.
 - While a different setting, lessons learned from disaster response demonstrate the need for full coordination with regional, national and local authorities.
 - It was suggested that relevant stakeholders and UNHCR could elaborate further on the terms of reference, potential criteria for participation and other modalities.
- Solidarity conferences
 - General support for this proposal was expressed, as a tool to mobilize additional resources.
 - Identifying a clear purpose and goals, together with emphasis on buy-in and follow-up, could ensure that the systematization of such conferences adds value compared to the existing ad hoc approach.
 - It was suggested that differences in capacity between States be taken into account in identifying roles, responsibilities and contributions from the beginning of a refugee crisis.

Additional suggestions for the programme of action

- Innovative pre-crisis financing mechanisms (e.g. contingency funds, insurance models).
- A pool of potential asylum case workers drawn from different State authorities and organizations.

- A refugee response toolkit for local authorities.
- Mechanisms to ensure participation of refugees in planning from the onset of crisis. The importance of gender sensitivity and including women and girls was particularly emphasized.

UNHCR
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