
“Towards a global compact on refugees”

Thematic discussion five:

Issues that cut across all four substantive sections of the comprehensive refugee response framework, and overarching issues

15 November 2017

Panel two: How can we ensure a whole-of-society response to large movements of refugees and protracted situations?

Summary

The New York Declaration calls for comprehensive refugee responses to be grounded in multi-stakeholder, “whole-of-society” approaches that include local authorities, international organizations, civil society partners, the private sector, media and refugees themselves. Panel two reflected upon what this approach could look like, and what parameters could apply to it, in order to move the concept out of the abstract and into concrete proposals for the programme of action.

Panellists and participants emphasized that whole-of-society approaches are central to responses to large movements of refugees, including because:

- they ensure that local voices (refugees, hosts, authorities, civil society, etc.) are engaged;
- they mobilize new resources;
- they bring humanitarian actors into partnership with non-traditional government ministries;
- they target and harness financial, private and development actor contributions; and
- they assist coordination between a range of different initiatives, therefore maximising effectiveness and efficiency.

At its core, the whole-of-society approach invites responses that tap into the personal resources of both refugees and their host communities – including their faith, insight, entrepreneurship, compassion and culture. Participants also reiterated the need for whole-of-society approaches to avoid creating confusion, overlap or delay and to be underpinned by principles of partnership, gender equality, transparency and complementarity. Participants underscored the need for continued engagement in the development of the programme of action by refugees, particularly women and youth, and other actors.

Suggestions for the programme of action

From the concept note

1. On a “global network of solidarity” that encompasses municipalities committed to refugee protection and solutions
 - This was widely supported because the majority of refugees live in cities, and because cities provide the umbrella under which all other actors can respond.
 - A key example on this regard was the Solidarity Cities Network, which has invited the mayors of all cities in all European Union Member States to join.

- There is also great potential in the activities of chambers of commerce, including matching refugees with local labour demand by removing regulatory barriers, familiarizing potential employers with their new workforce, and providing public workshops on writing job applications and CVs.
2. On the role of faith-based organizations
 - There was strong emphasis on recognizing the role that churches play in supporting refugee health, gender equality and security along refugee routes and in crisis situations. As existing and trusted partners of refugees, they are critical to implementing all activities under the CRRF.
 - It was noted that while churches and other organizations can bridge gaps in service provision and represent best practice methods in people centred approaches, they should not replace specifically-mandated duty bearers.
 3. On the role of the private sector (and a possible “global platform of businesses” to invest in refugees and affected host communities complemented by a working group to compare good practices on private sector support for refugees and hosting communities)
 - The private sector was recognized as a central player in fostering positive attitudes towards and sourcing solutions for refugees.
 - In addition to enabling the exchange of existing best practices that concern refugee hiring policies, social enterprise development and refugee access to financial services, a global platform of businesses could effectively mobilize businesses around the world to raise general awareness of the work of humanitarian actors in refugee contexts, offer innovative solutions for refugee response, use empirical data to show that engagement in refugee response makes economic sense and identify gaps as well as preliminary interest in engagement. This platform could be linked with other related fora.
 - National online platforms can provide refugees with access to information on locally available employment markets, laws, customs and other applicable regulations including required skills for employment.
 4. On the role of universities and academic networks and on a “refugee academic alliance”:
 - Academic participants reiterated the role that universities can play in designing new research initiatives not simply about refugees, but also *for* them.
 - Refugee students could be extended the opportunity to become research assistants, which enhances research validity and provides them with opportunities for their own advancement.
 - Scholarships and programme design must take into account the barriers faced by many refugee women and girls in obtaining secondary education in particular.

Additional suggestions for the programme of action

- Build refugee studies programmes in academic institutions where there are currently none, particularly in host communities.
- Invite commercial law firms to expand their clientele to refugees and refugee legal aid organizations, for example through providing pro bono support for rejected asylum-seekers, facilitating introductory workshops for new arrivals on their rights and obligations in a host State, and in aiding non-governmental organizations with cross-jurisdictional research.

- Ensure that financing is aligned to national development plans and integrated into responses to crises. The UNHCR and UNDP regional refugee resilience plans for the Syria crisis is a good example of the “new way of working” and includes over 200 local, national, regional, and international actors, an integrated development/humanitarian response that has shown positive results and could serve as a model.
- Others recommended developing a joint fund for private sector actors to contribute to refugee self-reliance either as part of separate to, the global platform for business.

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