



Refugee Council
of Australia

POSITIONS RELATING TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES IN THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

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This document outlines three key positions of relevance to the thematic discussions taking place on 14-15 November in Geneva regarding the Global Compact on Refugees and *measures to be taken in the pursuit of solutions and issues that cut across all four substantive sections of the comprehensive refugee response, and overarching issues*. These positions have been developed by NGOs in Australia with applicability for different stakeholders in other countries and contexts.

1. DEVELOPING NATIONAL-LEVEL PROGRAMS OF ACTION

Australian NGOs believe that, alongside regional and global programs of action, the development of country-level programs of action can put in place concrete measures and timeframes to work towards realising the many important commitments made in the New York Declaration. Ideally, developing such a program would:

- involve multi-stakeholder collaboration, equally including men and women, boys and girls who have been displaced;
- be based on a review of a country's own domestic policies and international engagements, based on its commitments in the New York Declaration; and
- be framed as a multi-stakeholder approach which identifies actions for different levels of government, civil society, refugee and host communities, the private sector, and media.

By taking such an approach, the concept of a whole-of-society approach may be realised, with actions that further protection and solutions for displaced populations resting not only on traditional actors. To this end, Australian NGOs are working to collaborate with different stakeholders on a Program of Action for Australia, which includes identified actions for civil society actors. We are happy to share this approach with others who are interested.

2. SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF REFUGEE-LED ORGANISATIONS

Civil society plays an important role in advocating for constructive and humane responses to forced displacement at all levels, from the local to the global. In shaping responses to forced displacement, it is imperative that the knowledge, experiences, perspectives and ideas of those directly affected (refugees, people seeking asylum, stateless and internally displaced) are given space. It is important that this space reflects the fact that at least 50% of all refugees are women and girls, and that men and boys, women and girls have similar but different needs. While refugee self-representation happens more readily at a local level, these spaces shrink at national, regional and international levels.

Sydney office:

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Phone: +61 (02) 9211 9333 • Fax: (02) 9211 9288
admin@refugeecouncil.org.au
Web: www.refugeecouncil.org.au • Twitter: @OzRefugeeCounc

Melbourne office:

Level 6, 20 Otter Street
Collingwood VIC 3066 Australia
Phone: +61 (03) 9600 3302
admin@refugeecouncil.org.au
Incorporated in ACT • ABN 87 956 673 083

The Network for Refugee Voices (NRV), Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW) and Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) are working together to develop some practical steps to building an effective network of refugee-led organisations and advocates with diverse representation (in terms of region, gender, age, etc.) who can contribute to the creation of more effective responses to forced displacement. NRV, ANCORW and RCOA are working towards an international gathering of representatives of refugee-led organisations in Geneva in June 2018, just prior to UNHCR's Annual Consultations with NGOs. We would welcome the collaboration of those interested in supporting refugee self-representation at national, regional and international levels.

3. ENGAGING REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN PLANNING DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Linked to the above, it is imperative that refugees themselves are engaged in discussions about, and the planning of, durable solutions. While refugees are often consulted about their needs and hopes, too often refugee voices are excluded from decision-making, planning and implementation of solutions. For solutions to be successful — including the success of voluntary return — the perspectives of refugee communities must be taken much more seriously. If refugee representatives are listened to and enabled to make decisions, the success of solutions — even when there are compromises made — are likely to be greater. After all, compromises can only legitimately be made by affected people themselves, ensuring they have as full a picture of what is possible and what is at stake.

Engaging refugee communities in planning durable solutions requires supporting and actively engaging a diverse representation of refugee leaders in decision-making processes. This requires consideration of capacity building and resourcing for refugee-led organisations and networks, and providing spaces for refugee representatives to meet, organise, prepare and speak. Because of previous barriers to participation, refugee women may need specific support to participate on an equal footing with refugee men. Not the least of these barriers is the endemic sexual and gender based violence experienced by refugee women. Until women feel confident and secure they will not be able to participate in a range of forums where their wisdom, experience and social capital would make a significant contribution.

For further information or to discuss collaboration on any of these positions, contact the Refugee Council of Australia through Louise Olliff (louise.olliff@refugeecouncil.org.au) or Paul Power (or ceo@refugeecouncil.org.au)