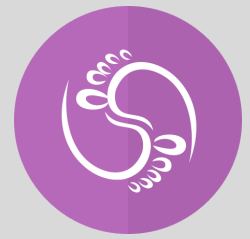


JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ROLE OF LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITIES IN REFUGEE RESPONSE



Resources for refugee response are increasingly squeezed as the number of displaced people around the world grows. Yet within local communities there are already strong bases of diverse human, cultural (including spiritual), and social capital that support refugees through efforts that include provision of food, shelter, and protection. When working with faith communities for refugee response, we build on existing local infrastructure and capital that would be near impossible to recreate. Working with local faith actors leads to a more coherent, joined up, and efficient response that is of direct benefit to refugees. We are pleased that the Global Compact on Refugees calls for a “multi-stakeholder approach,” identifying faith-based organizations as part of that stakeholder group. Para 41 of the second draft states that,

“Faith-based organizations could play a crucial role in developing arrangements to maximize support to refugees and host communities, including in the areas of conflict prevention, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. They could also support private sponsorship programmes or other pathways for admission to third countries.”

We welcome the inclusion of faith-based organizations in the multi-stakeholder approach. We want to underline the ways in which a diversity of types of faith-based organizations have and will continue to play crucial roles in maximizing support to refugees and host communities in more ways than conflict prevention, reconciliation, peacebuilding and private sponsorship pathways alone. We also call for a recognition of the role that local and national faith actors (not just international) can play in coordination and planning and a need to address barriers that have prevented more of this previously. As such, we suggest the following rewording of the article.

“Faith-based actors at local, national and international levels should be considered in the joint planning and delivery of protection and assistance for refugees and support to host communities, including in the areas of conflict prevention, reconciliation and peacebuilding, and private sponsorship programmes or other pathways.”

Mechanisms for responsibility sharing – comprehensive & coordinated response

- 1. Local faith actors are civil society stakeholders.** Local communities, including local faith communities, take on much of the responsibility sharing in refugee response. To understand how equitable partnerships can be devised with local faith actors, more is needed to map, understand, and include local communities. This is a question of leveraging, supporting and valuing local human, cultural, and social capital. We welcome the recognition of local actors in the compact. We reiterate that local actors should include local faith actors in local service delivery and as development actors. In paragraph 21, we would suggest addition to the wording: “...supported by a secretariat, that ensures culturally relevant and appropriate services.”
- 2. Support Platform** – Recognising the fact that displacement crises have been increasing both in number and duration, and the fact that, as pointed out above, other relevant stakeholders, including those mentioned para 26, are often driving the implementation of both immediate responses and durable solutions, we suggest that the proposed Support Platform (paras 23-28) (a) have the character of a standing arrangement, enabling it to help pursue such commitments effectively and sustainably; and (b) ensure dedicated representation for participation of other stakeholders, including civil society and local and national faith actors, in order to adequately reflect the spirit of the whole-of-society approach characterising the GCR and CRRF as a whole.
- 3. Financial Inclusion.** Bank de-risking and the hardships of refugees and aid agencies not receiving money transfers. The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) agenda has led to poorly designed legislation by some UN and EU states that have threatened banks with draconian fines for transferring money to terrorists or proscribed groups, which has impacted the transfer of funds to agencies with religious titles or who work in conflict areas. Of relevance to paragraph 42, we would like to add “efforts should be made by banks and States to facilitate financial inclusion for refugees, particularly female headed households and other vulnerable and marginalised groups, as well as local civil society actors supporting them, enabling legitimate transfers.”
- 4. Increasing equitable partnerships.** Of relevance to paragraph 38, it is recognized that there are real barriers around lack of capacity, lack of compliance with international standards, and fears of proselytization and partiality that have previously prevented partnerships with local faith actors. Breaking down barriers for partnership with local faith actors includes state actors and relevant agencies proactively strengthening capacity, working with mediating organizations, mapping local actors, familiarizing external staff with local faith community structures, and using validated ways of working to scale up and replicate.

5. **Acknowledge efforts made to support the generation and dissemination of evidence.** We call for systematic research efforts to enable validated ways of working with local faith actors that are generalizable and replicable. We therefore would recommend adding in paragraph 47 last sentence –‘and share good practices, lessons learned and ways of working that would assist in the development...’

Reception and Admission

6. **Preparedness.** In paragraph 55, we recommend that capacity strengthening for local authorities and local actors be supported.
7. **Coordination.** There is a lack of reference to coordination in reception and admission. Arrangements for coordinated response in reception and admission must work to include local faith actors, as duplication and parallel systems will otherwise occur. In paragraph 49, first paragraph, last line we recommend therefore emphasizing the importance of coordination between stakeholders by adding; ‘will encourage coordination in the contribution of resources and expertise for:..’

Meeting Needs and Supporting Communities

8. **Gender.** We recognize attempts to address gender inequality, SGBV and denial of rights in the compact. Where appropriate this must be in partnership with faith actors and in faith literate ways to ensure acceptance and sustainable change. There must be acknowledgement in para 77 that gender includes men and boys, as well as women and girls, in recognition of the pressures and challenges that also men face in refugee settings. Efforts should be made to ensure representation and leadership from women as well as men in faith actor partnerships.
9. **Psychosocial and spiritual support.** Refugees turn to medical, psychological, and spiritual resources for healing following traumatic experiences. People frequently turn to their religious leaders for this type of support. Psychosocial response can take a particularly secular psychological lens. However, emerging good practices show how secular psychology and provision of support within the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) spectrum of activities can work alongside or be delivered by local faith communities and places of worship, including spiritual counselling for refugees when they require closure from a spiritual perspective. In para 76, we encourage the inclusion of other relevant stakeholders alongside healthcare workers, such as local faith and community-based actors (including women).

10. **Access to services.** We welcome the reference to the inclusion of local service providers in paragraph 70. In many countries local faith communities are well placed to provide a substantial proportion of local services, including schools and health centres. Especially where the state and other local civil society provision is inadequate to meet the needs of refugees, UNHCR should seek to integrate local faith actors as partners and address barriers to mainstreaming this provision in order to avoid parallel systems.

Durable Solutions

11. **Peacebuilding and development efforts for repatriation.** Faith communities, particularly in interfaith initiatives, can be instrumental in addressing reconciliation and healing following conflict. We therefore feel that they should be specifically mentioned in paragraph 92, echoing the reference in paragraph 41.
12. **Quality of resettlement.** The main role of FBOs in receiving and providing for resettled refugees, sponsoring refugees, enabling integration and longer term support, and encouraging social solidarity has been significant. In paragraph 97, twinning efforts should recognize the role that faith actors have played in resettlement and therefore specifically include them in the list of stakeholders. We would recommend adding an additional point in paragraph 98 to encourage a tolerant and accepting environment for incoming refugees.
13. **Local Integration.** This usually involves tackling xenophobia and racism as well as public fears. Supporting refugees in welcoming them into local community structures. In paragraph 104, local faith communities should be recognized within the range of host communities. Likewise, frameworks for local solutions should include provision for increasing acceptance and tolerance towards incoming refugees.
14. **Follow-up arrangements.** In relation to agreeing indicators we would like to stress the importance, in paragraph 107, of inclusion of faith and other community-based actors in both the development and implementation of these indicators.

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