

High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges 2017: "Towards a global compact on refugees"

12 & 13 December 2017

Thematic session 6: Strengthening burden- and responsibility-sharing

Summary

Thematic session six reflected upon the way in which the global compact on refugees can strengthen burden- and responsibility-sharing to support refugees and the countries and communities that host large numbers of them, in a spirit of international solidarity and cooperation. The discussion revolved around three key points.

First, responsibility-sharing is a crucial part of the international refugee regime and must be at the heart of the global compact on refugees.

- Refugee issues are global issues, and the international community must work together to share the responsibility for addressing them.
- Although the 1951 Refugee Convention did not establish any concrete arrangements for burden- and responsibility-sharing, the need for such arrangements is strongly endorsed in the New York Declaration. The process leading to the global compact on refugees provides an opportunity to enhance burden- and responsibility-sharing.
- Participants also talked about language, with many preferring to refer to "responsibility-sharing" – as opposed to "burden-sharing" – because refugees cannot just be thought of as burdens.

Secondly, responsibility-sharing is multi-faceted.

- Responsibility-sharing is often discussed in a manner that suggests that it is purely a question of financial support. It is a much broader concept than this, however. Responsibility-sharing also involves:
 - recognizing the crucial role that host countries and communities play in the international refugee regime by hosting refugees; the hosts are, in that sense, the biggest donors;
 - providing political support to host countries, as well as financial, material and technical resources, to help them prepare for large movements of refugees and to provide refugee protection;
 - expanding access to third-country solutions, including resettlement and complementary pathways, such as regional mobility schemes;
 - providing support to emerging resettlement countries;
 - preventing the conditions that force people to leave their homes;
 - peacefully resolving conflicts; and
 - creating conditions that allow refugees to return home.
- Responsibility-sharing is also often discussed in a manner that suggests that it is something that only States do.
 - Participants noted that it is a broader concept in which relevant stakeholders have a role to play and contribute according to their capacity.

- Contributions can be made by regional organizations promoting regional mobility, universities providing scholarships, the private sector employing refugees, cities and communities welcoming refugees, and private citizens sponsoring refugees.
- As one of the youth delegates noted, it also includes refugees themselves contributing to their host communities.

Finally, the key challenge for the global compact on refugees is finding a way to strengthen responsibility-sharing by making it more equitable and more predictable.

- There was a very rich discussion of ways in which the programme of action could create robust arrangements to ensure better responsibility-sharing.
- Some advocated for the creation of a model for calculating burden and responsibility, while others cautioned that this could have unintended consequences.
- Another idea was to use a global forum, like the proposed global refugee response platform, to explore and coordinate better responsibility-sharing.
- Some suggested that the Leaders' Summit on Refugees could be replicated more regularly, with a mechanism to ensure that pledges are followed up on.
- Participants also stressed that any such arrangements should be consistent with the sustainable development goals, and that refugees should be included in programmes in order to achieve their goals.

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