
“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 three: In what ways can regional institutions contribute to comprehensive refugee responses?

Summary

Some key considerations in terms of the role of regional institutions included the following:

- Regional organizations, fora and arrangements play a vital role in preventing and responding to forced displacement: the roll out of the CRRF has demonstrated this through the involvement of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for the Somali situation, as well as the Organization of American States (OAS).
- Participants advocated regional solutions for regional challenges and urged that there not be a “one size fits all” approach – regional institutions can indeed ensure context-specific responses, based on burden- and responsibility-sharing.
- The convening power of regional organizations was particularly highlighted; as was the ability of regional bodies to help formulate a common vision of their Member States and mobilize high-level political momentum and support.

Suggestions for the programme of action

From the concept paper

Generally, the proposals in the concept paper were welcomed and a number of very concrete examples, practices and arrangements were highlighted on which we could build in the programme of action. These included the following:

1. Role of regional institutions in a comprehensive refugee response
 - Regional norms and frameworks may provide an important basis on which to build comprehensive responses e.g. 1969 OAU Convention; the Nairobi Declaration; the regional cooperation framework of the Bali Process; the Brazil Plan of Action; the human rights instruments of the Inter-American system; the regional housing programme in the western Balkans; the recently-adopted San Pedro Sula Declaration; and the Arab Convention on Regulating Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries, which is currently being revised.
 - Regional organizations can facilitate cooperation with the private sector, e.g. the government and business forum of the Bali Process.
 - Regional institutions can provide essential support for technical cooperation and capacity building for States and civil society, as demonstrated by the League of Arab States (LAS) and the OAS; and emergency support mechanisms in the European Union.

- In terms of complementary pathways, regional frameworks may provide a basis e.g. free movement protocols of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which have achieved some solidarity in how States treat refugees and asylum-seekers.
 - The proposed solidarity conferences could have more impact if implemented at regional level and underpinned by regional plans and commitments e.g. 2016 London Conference on “supporting Syria and the region”.
 - Mechanisms could be explored to ensure regional organizations would be involved in the proposed global refugee response group from the early stages.
 - Regional platforms could be an important support to voluntary and sustainable repatriation, as complement to tripartite agreements on voluntary return.
2. Regional institutions and prevention, addressing root causes
- Regional institutions can play a vital role in seeking to address root causes of displacement including through preventive diplomacy – as well as bringing high-level political support to address conditions in countries of origin.
 - Some existing examples of early warning and response mechanisms at the regional level include:
 - The ministerial consultation mechanism established as part of Bali Process to address emergency humanitarian situations.
 - Monitoring carried out by the OAS to identify the causes of forced displacement and to identify protection risks faced by those in transit.
 - Conflict resolution mechanisms in the African Union (peace and security architecture) – it was noted that the ability to create processes through which conflicts can be resolved is key.
 - The ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council and Observation and Monitoring Centre, to be complemented by a planned observatory for disasters.
3. Regional institutions and disaster displacement
- Panellists and delegates reiterated the importance of regional norms and platforms in preventing and responding to disaster displacement. For example, the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (with a focus on response in 24 hours, and improving national capacities) may be a model on which to build.

Additional suggestions for the programme of action

- Regional platforms for mobilizing more resources and assistance.
- A tool to monitor efforts and responsibilities of the international community in implementing the New York Declaration at a regional level.
- Frameworks to counter xenophobia.
- Regional support for refugee-led organizations, and involvement of refugees in peace processes.
- Regional thematic meetings and/or cross-regional standardized processes e.g. to ease recognition of refugee credentials including education certificates.
- Explore the feasibility of regional financing mechanisms based on regional and country specific contingency plans.

- Explore a process for regional organizations to identify what additional resources, partnerships and support they need to foster comprehensive responses in their regions.
- Encourage regional institutions to develop gender frameworks, and frameworks for vulnerable groups, in line with existing international standards.
- Platforms for cooperation and exchange of information between regional and international organizations.
- Regional programmes for refugee children, e.g. the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) programme in West Africa.
- A mechanism for collaboration convened on a regular basis to ensure exchange of good practices between different regional fora.

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