



The Global Compact on Refugees in Action: Progress since the first Global Refugee Forum

Virtual Informal Briefing

2 July 2020, 11:00-12:30 hours (ET) / 17:00-18:30 (CEST)

Summary

Introduction

The informal briefing was a first opportunity to provide an update to the New York-based Permanent Missions and other stakeholders on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), six months after the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) was held in Geneva and in the new context of COVID-19 and a record-high level of displacement the world over.

The event was chaired and moderated by the Director of UNHCR's New York Office, Ruven Menikdiwela, with opening remarks by the Permanent Representative of Switzerland in New York, H.E. Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl, and a briefing by UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs. Reflecting the high level of interest in the GCR and the momentum generated by the pledges made at the GRF, the virtual briefing gathered almost 300 participants and included statements and questions by Member States, UN agencies, civil society, cities, parliamentarians, faith-based actors, academia, as well as the Olympics Committee.

Opening remarks

H. E. Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl, Permanent Representative of Switzerland in NY

The Ambassador recalled that Switzerland co-hosted and closely engaged in the preparations of the first Global Refugee Forum and reiterated the strong commitment to the implementation of the pledges made:

- Switzerland considers the GCR to be an essential beacon for refugee responses in a world that is struggling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its vision and principles are as relevant as ever, notably in the areas of protection, inclusion in national systems, responsibility and burden sharing.
- All actors need to stay on course to support the GCR. 'Everyone can make a difference, Every Action Counts' (Slogan of the World Refugee Day, 20th June). The new pledges, partnerships and initiatives made at the GRF are of even greater importance now.

- Switzerland is activating the pledges made, through support to UNHCR with multi-year and un-earmarked funding, knowing what a difference flexibility can make in UNHCR's response to the pandemic.
- Switzerland pledged to welcome 1,600 refugees in 2020 and 2021, under a two-year resettlement scheme, in light of the resumption of resettlement activities and with the aim to have more burden sharing.
- There has been progress in the creation of a Geneva hub for Education in Emergencies. The co-signatories of the pledge have already been active in bringing attention to the centrality of education in the COVID-19 response, particularly for displaced and refugee populations. A call for action was launched on June 18th, highlighting necessary measures to ensure the required attention in fragile and crisis-affected contexts, including displacement situations.

Briefing on the Global Compact on Refugees in Action

Gillian Triggs, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection

UNHCR is pleased to note the significant progress made towards burden and responsibility sharing for refugees since the adoption in 2016 of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the affirmation in 2018 of the Global Compact on Refugees. The objectives of the GCR remain more relevant than ever in light of the growing number of refugees and displaced people, and in the response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees, other people who are forcibly displaced, and their host communities.

- In the face of the pandemic, we must be pragmatic, practical, and forward-leaning in deciding how best to take forward the commitments made at the GRF.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge, and over the last months we have seen the need for solidarity and inclusion, principles that are at the heart of the GCR.
- It is important to step up implementation, not only in order to operationalize the GCR, but also to achieve the sustainable development goals for refugees and their host communities [see recent paper published by UNHCR [here](#)].
- The GCR gives us the tools to both respond in the emergency phase and to address the longer-term consequences of COVID-19. UNHCR has published a [paper](#) on the role of the GCR in the response, which includes pledges that could be accelerated for action to support the response.

- The first Global Refugee Forum generated historic commitments that have the potential to transform the lives of tens of millions of refugees and their host communities – building self-reliance, promoting socio-economic inclusion, and paving the way to solutions.
- Progress has been made in tracking the pledges. A [dashboard](#) is now available online. A small number of pledges have been realized and the majority are in progress. As a result of COVID-19, the implementation of some pledges has been accelerated, particularly those relevant to the response, while others have been adapted and redirected to reflect new realities. We will take stock of all pledges at the High-Level Official Meeting in 2021.
- The [outcome document](#) of the Forum provides a breakdown of the pledges by areas of focus and by regions. More than half of pledges have been made by non-State actors, including the private sector, development actors, and new partners. In addition, more than 250 financial pledges were made by Member States, development actors, and the private sector.
- Some 280 policy pledges were made by host countries towards enhanced refugee policies and greater inclusion. There is a strong opportunity for matching these policy pledges with pledges of donor support for their implementation, which we are ready to facilitate.
- We are seeing strong examples on how progress is being made by governments and other stakeholders to implement their pledges, including in important areas related to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and different sectors such as health and livelihoods. Some examples:
 - Contributions in support of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus were made in the context of the Sahel, Niger, the Syria situation, and in the OECD's adoption of a Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus Recommendation and its common Position on financing comprehensive solutions in refugee situations.
 - A pledge by Rwanda to promote refugee self-reliance and resilience, matched by a pledge of financial support from Denmark, is an example of the transformative potential of pledge matching and innovative partnership.
 - The Poverty Alleviation Coalition pledged to alleviate the extreme poverty of 160,000 households of refugees and host communities across 26 countries by 2023, using the Graduation Approach to create self-reliance.
 - There was a pledge towards the inclusion of Syrian refugees in the Kingdom of Jordan's national health services using global concessional financing and a whole-of-society approach.

- UNICEF and UNHCR’s Blueprint for Joint Action is one of the concrete flagships initiatives that is driven by the principles of the GCR and UN reform, and was one of the UNICEF’s GRF pledges.
- The demonstration of solidarity in translating pledges into action is all the more critical as we work together to strengthen our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it has on refugees, displaced, and stateless people. The GCR provides us the tools to achieve this.
- A digital platform is established under the GCR to illustrate good practices and inspire future pledges. This helps to underline the objectives of the GCR and the solidarity. For example, UNHCR, IOM, WHO, and UNFPA have engaged with Peru, which has agreed to include temporarily refugees and migrants who are diagnosed or suspected of having COVID-19 in the public health system as of April 2020.
- Over the last few months, refugees, IDPs, asylum-seekers, and stateless people have stepped up and contributed to local economies, labour forces, and the frontline healthcare response. They want to and must be part of the solution. For example, refugees are working in health systems or even developing masks.
- Three Support Platforms were launched at the Forum for the East and Horn of Africa (IGAD), Afghanistan situation (SSAR), and Central America and Mexico (MIRPS), that show the continued willingness of the international community to respond to these situations and share responsibilities. They are amongst the new tools the GCR provides and are in many ways a litmus test of its successful implementation, as they are critical for burden and responsibility sharing.
- While the GCR applies to refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) applies to migrants, if properly implemented, the GCM has the potential to also open up asylum space for refugees. Some common goals across both compacts include, for instance, the collection and utilization of accurate and disaggregated data to inform evidence-based policies.
- The High Commissioner’s Dialogue this year will be another opportunity to talk about the GCR in the context of protection during this pandemic and will share and showcase relevant good practices and pledges at the GRF that enable protection, resilience, and solutions.

Discussion

The discussion that ensued was both concrete and diverse with interventions from different actors, as a tribute to the GCR bringing together both the whole of government and the whole of society.

- The interventions were a reaffirmation of both the relevance of the GCR as a blueprint for action and the strong support for the realization of the ambitious pledges made at the GRF, sharing concrete examples of how Member States and others are implementing the pledges made.
- Many referenced the context of COVID-19 as further demonstrating the importance of the GCR, citing the need to adapt and accelerate the implementation of the pledges to meet the challenges.
- Almost all interventions had a strong focus on health, social protection, education, jobs and livelihoods, water, and sanitation. Donor countries emphasized efforts made to ensure adequate funds are being mobilized to meet the needs of the forcibly displaced both through the humanitarian and development streams.
- Examples were provided of multi-stakeholder approaches being implemented at the national and municipal levels. Broader partnerships and solidarity were noted as critical for greater inclusion of refugees and building resilience against the pandemic. The role of the private sector was underlined in the recovery efforts.
- Others noted specific challenges and efforts made to redress the impacts of the pandemic, in terms of mental health, education in emergencies, tertiary education opportunities, self-reliance, search-and-rescue efforts, discrimination, and exclusion.
- The role of parliaments in achieving rights, accountability, and public awareness was highlighted as well as the need for women's economic and political participation.
- The need to find avenues to enhance resettlement was also called for by some.
- From an integrated UN perspective, the GCR was also noted as a tool to operationalize the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, which is useful in the context of the response to the pandemic. Many focused on the need for prevention, addressing root causes, and socio-economic recovery.
- On the development reform, it was recognized that the new Resident Coordinator system could use relevant parts of the GCR to trigger engagement by the UNCT in support of governments.