



Strengthening Refugee Participation in the Global Compact on Refugees: Some Thoughts from the Social Change Initiative

The Social Change Initiative (SCI) is an international NGO based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Its work is focused on improving the effectiveness of activism for progressive social change and influencing how such work is funded by donors.

Migration is a priority issue for SCI. We have been supporting a series of discussions and exchanges with key actors in the field on a wide range of issues. We have been particularly active in trying to influence the public narrative and supporting civil society to more effectively influence the political and policy debate.

We believe that the ongoing UNHCR consultation process around the Global Compact on Refugees should offer a real opportunity to ensure the meaningful participation of refugees.

We have set out below some amendments for consideration by UNHCR on draft 1 of the Compact dated 9th March. We believe that the amendments below would help to strengthen the participation dimension of the draft Global Compact and provide greater clarity and certainty about a voice for refugees in the arrangements which the Compact will introduce.

Refugee Participation

In the New York Declaration of 2016, Heads of State and Government invited refugee organisations to participate in multi-stakeholder alliances to support efforts to implement the commitments which they were making in that Declaration. They also agreed that refugees themselves must be part of the multi-stakeholder approach which would be needed for the comprehensive refugee response which they were asking UNHCR to develop. In the same spirit, a representative of refugee groups was invited by all UN member States to speak in the opening plenary of the High-Level Meeting held in September 2016 to launch the New York Declaration.

Refugees themselves are the people who will be most directly and profoundly affected by the decisions taken in the Global Compact on Refugees. Accountability to them, as well as to donor states and other key players, must be clearly provided for in the Compact. Their voice must be heard at all stages: in the consultations which are shaping the content of the Compact, in the institutional arrangements to be made by the Compact and on all issues relating to implementation and evaluation of progress. The question of refugee participation and what form this should take at the various stages deserves greater attention than it has had to date.

While the references to this dimension in the latest draft of the Compact ("Draft One") are welcome, these should be strengthened and expanded.

In particular, we would like to see clearer recognition of the role which refugee representatives would play in the Global Support Platform, in the Global Refugee Summits, in solidarity conferences and in national and regional mechanisms.

We propose, therefore, the following modifications.

Proposed additional sentence to Paragraph 19

19. Based on good practices, national arrangements established by host countries play a key role in coordinating and facilitating the efforts of national and local authorities, UNHCR, other international organizations, non-governmental entities, and refugees to achieve a comprehensive response. These arrangements could take the form of a steering group to provide policy direction at the national level, supported by a secretariat. The composition and working methods of national arrangements would be determined by host States: **best international practice, however, would favour a steering group comprising representatives of national and local authorities, UNHCR, other international organisations, non-governmental entities and refugees.** Capacity development for relevant national authorities to undertake such work would be provided by UNHCR and other stakeholders, at the request of the host country.

Amend paragraph 31 as follows

Current Text

31. In recognition of the fact that responses are most effective when they actively engage those they are intended to protect and assist, national authorities, UNHCR, and other relevant stakeholders will continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable **refugees and host communities** to assess and express their needs and to help to design appropriate responses. **States, UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders will ensure, in consultation with refugee organisations, that there is adequate refugee participation in key fora, institutions and decision-making**

processes. These will include the Global Support Platform and possible solidarity conferences as well as national and regional consultative mechanisms. How refugees choose to fill the seats allocated to them in these fora will be a matter for themselves. Their participation should reflect gender balance and provide also for adequate representation of girls and boys and of refugees living with disabilities. It will be for refugees to decide whether they wish to be represented directly in a given forum or to associate themselves with civil society participants. States, UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders will consider practical support for refugee participation which they can provide, including by facilitating language learning and access to information, for instance through low-cost mobile phone and internet technologies.

~~their needs and help to design appropriate responses. States and relevant stakeholders will explore how best to include refugees, particularly women and youth, in key fora, institutions, and decision-making processes, including by facilitating language learning, as well as access to information, for instance through low-cost mobile phone and internet subscriptions.~~

Add new final sentence to paragraph 91

Current Text

91. In consultation with States and relevant stakeholders, UNHCR will develop a set of key indicators ahead of the first global refugee summit in 2019, in order to monitor and evaluate progress and outcomes of the global compact. These indicators will be measurable against the goals set out in para 5 above. They will complement efforts to ensure disaggregated data necessary for States to report progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and to meet the commitment to leave no-one behind.

Add new final sentence: "Refugee representatives will be invited to contribute to the work of developing these indicators".

Add new final sentence to paragraph 93

Current Text

93. As set out in para 18, starting in 2021 and every three years thereafter, ministerial-level global refugee summits will provide an opportunity not only to make new pledges, but also to take stock of the implementation of previous pledges, progress towards the achievement of the goals of the global compact, and ongoing opportunities and challenges. In addition, global refugee summits will allow for review of efforts in relation to specific country or regional situations, including through the Global Support Platform.

Add new final sentence: "States, UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders will ensure that there is adequate participation of refugees in the Global Refugee Summits so that they may provide their expertise, assist with analysis and policy formulation and contribute to ongoing monitoring of progress and evaluation of the Global Compact and its implementation".