

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

12 & 13 December 2017

## Thematic session 1: Reception and admission

### Summary

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The New York Declaration and the global compact on refugees provide important opportunities to improve the international community's response to large movements of refugees by extending greater solidarity and timely support to affected countries.

Participants recognized the importance and complexity of this subject, and reiterated strong support for the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the international refugee protection regime as the framework for early, comprehensive and well-coordinated support to countries faced with large-scale arrivals of refugees. The importance of "whole-of-government", "whole-of-society" and even "whole-of-region" approaches were reiterated, particularly in light of polarized public debate around the reception and admission of refugees. Sharing information in a proactive and transparent way – for instance by using social media tools – was raised by participants as a valuable way of building public confidence and improving relations between host and refugee communities.

Participants emphasized the importance that all measures be complementary and non-duplicative of existing mechanisms. The participation of refugees and affected host communities was highlighted as fundamental, as well as the need to tailor response to the diverse needs of refugee women, girls, men and boys.

A number of concrete proposals were proposed for the programme of action:

#### **Global response group or platform**

- The idea of an "engine" (group or platform) was generally welcomed. The group/platform would not duplicate existing mechanisms but be complementary to these. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of having a nimble, agile, flexible, lean and responsive platform.
- The platform's purpose would be to help solve problems, addressing gaps in the current humanitarian and development responses, and to ensure that a wide range of relevant stakeholders would be brought in early to provide material, technical, standby and/or political support and commitment, as necessary.
- The active participation of regional organizations and platforms was underscored, as was refugee and host community engagement, with an emphasis on gender parity.
- Fundamentally, this platform would support governments with whole-of-government, whole-of-society and even whole-of-region approaches.

#### **Solidarity conferences**

- Participants endorsed the inclusion of solidarity conferences in the programme of action on an ad hoc basis.
- Solidarity conferences could help provide time-critical support, as well as ensure that major refugee situations would not be forgotten in the mid- to long-term.
- Pledging at such conferences could go beyond traditional donor pledging to include pledges made by the host countries themselves (e.g. committing to policy or legislative reform in favour of refugee inclusion into national systems), as well as development agencies, civil societies, local communities and the private sector.
- True additionality is required, commensurate with and tailored to refugees' needs. Specifically, greater support for resettlement, complementary pathways and the establishment of mechanisms to support humanitarian evacuation, such as the UNHCR Evacuation Transit Mechanism that has been established in Niger for the Libya situation, could be included in the programme of action.

- Participants recalled that lessons could be drawn from the many solidarity conferences held in the past, including the Brussels, Kuwait and London conferences which were convened to generate support for the Syria situation.

### **Security of refugees and host communities**

- Participants noted the importance of maintaining the safety and security of refugees, including by preserving the civilian character of refugee sites and settlements. Mechanisms for improving the identification of armed elements and combatants will need to be anchored in the programme of action, as well as measures to address early on child exploitation, forced recruitment and sexual violence (including through programmes such as the “Safe from the Start” initiative).

### **Collaboration on registration, documentation and vital statistics systems**

- Better cooperation is needed to improve relevant data sharing – within the boundaries of data protection policies – to foster exchange of good practices, and promote capacity-building. Participants noted the importance of age-, sex- and disability-disaggregated data collection during registration exercises, which would allow for the early identification of specific needs.
- Additional resources and capacities may be needed to boost existing (national) response structures, especially in the context of large-scale arrivals. Partnerships, including with the World Bank Group and non-governmental organizations, can help bridge gaps.

### **Specific needs**

- Participants strongly underlined the importance of the participation of refugees (women, girls, men and boys) and age, gender and diversity sensitivity as core considerations in the planning of any refugee response. The global compact and the programme of action need to reflect the diversity of needs and their evolutionary nature.
- Delegations suggested that the early and effective registration of individuals (ensuring individual access to documentation) would entitle individuals to protection and assistance, thereby reducing possible exposure to risk.
- Community-based, non-custodial alternatives to detention were proposed for inclusion in the programme of action.

### **Asylum capacity support group**

- This proposal was widely endorsed by participants, who noted that a “pool” of resources needed to be made available to States faced with large-scale influxes. Specifically, this pool could consist of a “surge capacity” and other standby arrangements, which States could then rely on for additional capacity; such measures could be either regional or international in scope and be hosted by UNHCR. These would need to be set against a broader recognition and maintenance of the rule of law.
- Innovative partnerships could be sought, such as the secondment of corporate lawyers.

### *Additional suggestions for the programme of action*

- An early warning and risk analysis system, which would help better predict refugee crises and flows, was suggested.
- Participants noted that a solutions dialogue platform, which would involve a wide range of stakeholders, including countries of origin and asylum, international organizations, civil society and others, could be established.
- The global compact on refugees could also be used as a tool to rebuild the confidence of populations and constituencies after having been overwhelmed by large-scale refugee arrivals, or their negative portrayals in the media and divisive rhetoric.