

# IMPLEMENTING THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES FROM A FAITH PERSPECTIVE

## POLICY NOTE - SEPTEMBER 2018

### CONTEXT

An unprecedented 68.5 million people are currently displaced globally, including 25.4 million refugees. Recognizing the need for new approaches amid the changing landscape of humanitarian assistance, the global community gathered in 2016 for a UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants which resulted in adoption of the New York Declaration. Signed by 193 countries, the Declaration set in motion a two-year consultative process to develop Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration aimed at enhancing protection for millions of people who have been forcibly displaced and are otherwise on the move around the world.



Set to be endorsed by the UN General Assembly in September 2018, the primary objective of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is to facilitate access to durable solutions for refugees with a focus on 1) easing pressures on host countries; 2) enhancing refugee self-reliance; 3) expanding access to third country solutions; and 4) supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

The GCR is comprised of two primary components, a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which was piloted by UNHCR in 12 refugee-hosting countries, and a Program of Action that outlines actions that can be taken – by UN member states or other stakeholders – to support refugees and countries particularly affected by large-scale refugee movement or protracted refugee situations.

As faith-based organizations working with refugee communities across the globe, ACT Alliance, Catholic Relief Services, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA and Islamic Relief recognize the important role that the GCR can play in building the political will to address the needs of refugees and improving current response mechanisms that can no longer support these needs. We are particularly interested in ensuring that the GCR is fully implemented, funded and monitored as it has the potential to mobilize greater action and transform the lives of refugees and host communities.

### THE POTENTIAL FOR IMPACT

Although not legally binding, the GCR is grounded in long-standing international refugee protection mechanisms, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol. The GCR provides an opportunity for countries not yet party to these mechanisms to consider acceding to these important global instruments, which are at the heart of the global refugee response system.



In addition to reinforcing these critical policies, the GCR recognizes that the current needs of refugees are not being met by the current system. By bringing together stakeholders through new mechanisms – including a Global Refugee Forum every four years and a Solidarity Conference on an as-needed basis – the GCR has the potential to mobilize support for refugee situations in a timelier manner.

The GCR prioritizes three areas of intervention including:

- humanitarian assistance
- development cooperation
- maximizing private sector contributions.

In 2017, there were 4.4 million newly displaced refugees, making the case for continued and improved access to humanitarian assistance. At the same time, two-thirds of all refugees lives in a protracted situation defined as refugees in exile from their home country for five or more years. The need to transition from an emergency response to a more development-focused approach with an eye towards durable solutions is ever-more critical.

Notably, the GCR highlights several refugee needs that require particular support. This includes access to education, jobs and livelihoods, health, food security and the special needs of vulnerable groups including women and girls, children, adolescents and youth. To prevent duplication of efforts and recognizing that the needs of individuals are complex and must take into consideration the whole person, any response effort must take a holistic approach. This starts with comprehensive needs assessments that are not sector-specific and must take into consideration the psychosocial needs of populations that have gone through trauma induced by their displacement.

To be successful, the GCR must be supported by strong partnerships and embrace a full participatory approach. The Program of Action calls for the inclusion of local and national actors, civil society, host communities and refugees themselves, but we must all be responsible for ensuring that this new approach is carried out in a consistent and meaningful way.

To do so, reliable funding will be critical alongside support for capacity-building initiatives. This must not be an afterthought, but instead investments in capacity-building and engaging with all actors must take place before an emergency, through the provision of humanitarian assistance, and into a more robust development stage. This will require adequate resources, time and partnerships among a diverse group of actors including host governments, current and new donors, and civil society including faith-based organizations.

As noted in the GCR, faith-based organizations are well-placed to engage in the areas of conflict prevention, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. But we can also play a larger role in the planning and delivery of assistance to refugees and host communities as well as in shaping public opinion, galvanizing action, generating resources, and providing the necessary expertise for these types of interventions.

faith-based organizations are well-placed to engage in the areas of

**CONFLICT PREVENTION  
RECONCILIATION  
PEACEBUILDING**

The need for data collection and evidence to inform any intervention is highlighted in the GCR and must be carried out in a meaningful way. Unfortunately, data collection is often under-prioritized and under-resourced, yet improvements in response mechanisms will not come to fruition without the necessary evaluation mechanisms.

Finally, recognizing that the journey of a person may not fit into a neat category of refugee, migrant or otherwise, we must ensure that the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Migration are aligned in taking a human-centered approach to caring for all of God's creation.

## CONCLUSION

We are at a tipping point in addressing the needs of those who are forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflict, persecution and violence. As organizations rooted in our diverse faith backgrounds, we applaud efforts to place a spotlight on these important issues and call on all decision-makers to remember the individuals, families and communities that are counting on real change so that they can plan for a better future.



*This policy note is brought to you from the interfaith partnership of ACT Alliance, Catholic Relief Services, Islamic Relief USA, and Jesuit Refugee Service/USA.*

*For more information, please contact:*

*Alison Kelly - [alison.kelly@actalliance.org](mailto:alison.kelly@actalliance.org)*

*Christina Tobias-Nahi - [cnahe@irusa.org](mailto:cnahe@irusa.org)*

*Emily Wei - [Emily.Wei@crs.org](mailto:Emily.Wei@crs.org)*

*Giulia McPherson - [giulia.mcpherson@jrsusa.org](mailto:giulia.mcpherson@jrsusa.org)*