



Towards a New Global Compact on Refugees: Early Lessons from East Africa

Hawa family - Somalia | Sinziana Demian/IRC

At the UN General Assembly in 2016, the international community united around the plight of refugees with ambitious commitments. All 193 Member States signed the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, agreeing to greater responsibility sharing in meeting the needs of refugees, migrants, and host communities. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), an annex of the Declaration, outlined a new partnership framework between donors, international organizations, and host nations to help realize these commitments. In addition, 50 countries participated in the Leaders' Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis; wealthy nations committed to a 30 percent increase in financing for host nations and a doubling of resettlement opportunities for refugees, and lower-income host nations committed to increase refugees' access to quality jobs, education, and other pathways to self-reliance.¹

Following these events, 11 countries across Africa and Central America agreed to rollout the CRRF, with support from the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), as a way to deliver on their commitments at the Leaders' Summit and better meet the needs of refugees within their borders. UNHCR intends to build lessons learned from these experiences into a new Global Compact on Refugees, to be adopted by the international community in 2018.

The one-year anniversary of these bold commitments is an important moment to reflect on both challenges and achievements to inform efforts moving forward. The displacement crisis shows no signs of slowing down—and in some cases, only worsening—as conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Nigeria and South Sudan burn on. More than 65 million people, including an unprecedented 22.5 million refugees, have been forcibly displaced. Every 20 minutes someone is forced to flee their home.² It is therefore imperative now more than ever that the international community more effectively respond to large movements of refugees. Responsibility must be shared fairly across poor and wealthy nations, with adequate support from the UN and other international bodies. It is critical that the Global Compact on Refugees becomes a game-changing approach to meet the needs and support the protection of refugees. The lives and livelihoods of millions depends on it.

Assessing progress one year on

This policy brief takes initial stock of the CRRF rollout in its first year, drawing on experiences in Uganda, Ethiopia, the Republic of Tanzania, and the Somalia region. It finds that while progress has been made in bringing diverse development and humanitarian actors together under the leadership of host governments to address the needs of refugees and host communities, policy and practice has been varied and generally too slow to meet the urgent needs of refugees and host communities. This has been, in part, a result of wealthy nations failing to meet their obligations to fairer and more equitable responsibility sharing: while lower income host countries have made

efforts to put new policies in place that enhance refugees' access to basic services like health and education as well as employment opportunities, wealthy nations have not made headway in closing the \$13.4 billion humanitarian financing gap and instead have pulled back on commitments to resettlement—which is expected to decline by 30 to 40 percent globally this year.³

Based on experiences to date, this policy brief highlights emerging best practices and challenges to rolling out the CRRF, and offers recommendations that should be included in the forthcoming Global Compact on Refugees to improve its future implementation.

Early lessons and recommendations

- 1. Adopt a common definition of collective outcomes, and define outcomes for each country-specific context.** Collective outcomes—clear, measurable, time-bound results agreed to by governments and humanitarian and development actors—are central to a more coordinated and comprehensive response to protracted displacement. However, there is currently no shared definition of these outcomes.



The current draft monitoring framework, which intends to measure the progress and impact of the CRRF at the global and country levels and align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is not specific enough and primarily measures progress against inputs rather than against impact on the lives and livelihoods of refugees and host communities. For instance, progress towards the CRRF pillar of “easing pressure on host governments” is measured by additional resources and technical support to CRRF countries, rather than whether the country has the requisite resources to support a comprehensive response. Similarly, progress towards “enhanced refugee self-reliance” is measured by access of refugees and host communities to education and employment, rather than on whether refugees and host populations are learning, employed, and earning a decent income.

Even without global collective outcomes, some countries such as Uganda and Ethiopia have started to embrace the concept and are seeking to measure their success against outcomes. For example, Uganda’s Refugee and Host Population Empowerment

Strategic (ReHOPE) strategy measures improvements in economic opportunities and sustainable livelihoods based on an increase in household assets and the percentage of people who are self-employed in refugee-hosting areas.⁴ Currently, however, outcome-driven frameworks are the exception, not the norm.

UNHCR, together with governmental and non-governmental partners, must adopt a common set of outcomes and define specific targets and indicators that can be translated to the country level to ensure accountability for results. The IRC’s Outcomes and Evidence Framework, which defines outcomes across health, education, livelihoods, safety, and empowerment provides a useful starting point for this process.

- 2. Adopt a shared methodology and standard for joint analysis and planning, and for collecting and sharing data.** Agreement on outcomes should be accompanied by the establishment of baselines and benchmarks to assess progress, as well as by the identification of policy and practical barriers that may inhibit realizing shared goals. Historically, governments, humanitarian agencies, and development actors have evaluated needs and constraints in siloes, leading to different, sometimes contradictory, policy change goals and programs.

In addition, there are no standard methodologies for data collection or sharing across governments and humanitarian and development actors, leading to a lack of high-quality data on displaced populations. Many low- and middle-income refugee-hosting nations do not include refugees in their national statistics, and in cases where international institutions collect this data, it is often not shared with other actors, including between UN agencies. Much data therefore remains inaccessible and unusable. Information gaps on the needs and wellbeing of refugees, including in comparison to host communities, will need to be filled so that decisions about policy changes and programmatic interventions can be data-driven, responding to realities on the ground.

The Global Compact on Refugees should include practical guidance on how actors should collaborate and coordinate on joint, area-based analysis and planning that accounts for both refugee and host community needs in the near and longer term. This guidance should suggest roles and responsibilities for assessments and data collection, and be explicit about including refugees in government's national development plans to ensure humanitarian and development goals are aligned and activities towards those goals reinforce one another.

3. Close the financing gaps for host nations and commit to multi-year financing.

The central premise of the CRRF is that refugee crises are protracted and therefore require different financing and partnership models to deliver benefits for both refugees and host communities. Inter-agency humanitarian appeals now last an average of seven years; however, funding is typically on one to two year grant cycles. At the same time, long-term development financing is not typically programmed to meet the needs of non-citizens.

The Uganda Solidarity Summit in June 2017 crystalizes the ongoing challenge. At the Summit, the Government of Uganda issued an appeal for \$2 billion annually for the next four years to support the immediate and longer-term needs of the 1.3 million refugees within its borders, including the more than 800,000 South Sudanese refugees who have arrived in just the last year. But when it came time to pledge new financing, the international community faltered, committing to just \$354,000.⁵

Despite bilateral donors holding back on multiyear financing, new multilateral financing mechanisms to support low- and middle-income host countries have been launched. Most notably, the World Bank raised \$2 billion for low-income refugee-hosting nations as part of its IDA18 replenishment and the Education Cannot Wait platform has raised \$113.4 million to support refugee education globally.⁶ Both mechanisms aim to help fund low-income host countries' national development and sector plans, and support their inclusion of refugee populations. These new resources could be game-changing, allowing for multi-year planning and support to host governments that can benefit refugees and host communities in the long-term.



Keyriya Yasin, age 12 – Ethiopia | Mulugeta Ayene/IRC

However, these mechanisms alone will not be a panacea. To match the protracted nature of displacement and the long-term needs of refugees and host communities, a broader range of donors will need to commit sufficient, predictable, multiyear financing that can support sustainable solutions.

4. Establish host government-led secretariats, with multistakeholder participation.

Responding to protracted displacement with policies and interventions that allow refugee and host communities to thrive together requires the participation of a range of actors that have not

traditionally been part of refugee response. Representatives across the government, including at national (e.g., relevant line ministries) and local levels, from UNHCR and other UN bodies, international and local NGOs, donors, and civil society should be included in this process.

This is the area where countries have made the biggest strides over the last year; all CRRF rollout countries have taken steps towards establishing government-led secretariats. In September 2017, Tanzania convened the first meeting of its Secretariat and Uganda and Ethiopia are close to formalizing theirs. Building on best practice of multistakeholder engagement, these secretariats include or plan to include staff from the prime minister's office, local government, UNHCR, the UN resident coordinator's office, the World Bank and other development partners, and an NGO.⁷

Progress has been less evident in the Somalia region, the one regional response where the CRRF is being implemented. This is partly due to uncertainty over government ownership in responding to the refugee crisis. While the International Authority on Development (IGAD) has taken some leadership over the CRRF process for the region, it is not a formal undertaking and government ownership will need to be defined. A more creative structure and clearer guidance from UNHCR through the Global Compact on Refugees will be needed for regional crises.

- 5. Engage a wide range of stakeholders, beyond secretariats, in decision-making around policies and programs.** Despite progress on formalizing secretariats, the CRRF process has received criticism for a lack of meaningful engagement with a range of stakeholders. National consultations have been hosted in capital cities with little involvement of refugees and host communities, local civil society organizations, or local government entities.

UNHCR, often in collaboration with the World Bank and NGOs, has made an effort to engage with refugees directly through focus groups and interviews, but these consultations have been ad-hoc and it remains unclear how findings are feeding back to the CRRF secretariats and informing decisions about policies and programs that affect refugees. Discussions have not adequately facilitated engagement of regional, district and local authorities who directly support refugee populations and who will be responsible for implementing the CRRF. The private sector has also not had a clear forum for engagement.

CRRF secretariats should define a consultative process for regularly engaging refugee and host populations, local authorities, civil society organizations, and the private sector, such as by establishing local advisory boards and conducting consultations outside of major cities.

- 6. Focus on getting the response right in a few countries before expanding to more contexts.** The CRRF is an ambitious but much-needed and critical step-change in responding to refugee crises. It will be important to prove that this new way of working is more efficient and effective in order to gain political buy-in on the process from other refugee-hosting nations and garner further support from donors across the humanitarian-development spectrum.

The intentions of the Global Compact on Refugees and the CRRF will only be realized if there is a fundamental shift in the way refugee crises are managed, and if refugees' wellbeing—their health, safety, education, livelihoods, and empowerment—improve alongside the wellbeing of host communities. UNHCR, host countries, donors, and humanitarian and development implementers should pay careful attention to early lessons, course-correct where needed, and ensure that the Compact's practical guidance—the Program of Action—reflects the challenges and opportunities for updating refugee response to match today's realities of displacement.

¹ UNHCR. 2016. Summary Overview Document Leaders' Summit on Refugees.

² UNHCR. 2017. Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016.

³ UN OCHA Financial Tracking Services. September 2017; Human Rights First. 2017. US Leadership Forsaken: Six Months of the Trump Refugee Bans.

⁴ United Nations, Uganda, and World Bank Group. 2017. Uganda's Refugee and Host Population Empowerment Strategic Framework.

⁵ United Nations. 2017. Secretary-General's remarks at press conference with President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda.

⁶ World Bank. 2016. IDA18 Second Replenishment Meeting Co-Chair Summary; Education Cannot Wait. 2017. Frequently Asked Questions.

⁷ UNHCR CRRF Global Digital Portal. September 2017.