



# Will it make a difference?

Towards a Global Compact on Refugees that actually works

International Rescue Committee | June 2018







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COVER: Syrian children at an IRC-run class in the Bekka in Lebanon. The IRC is helping some 2,900 Syrian refugee children with literacy, math and social and emotional skills through quality early childhood education. Kulsoom Rizvi/IRC.

BACK COVER: A food voucher recipient with her children at Angwan Abuja host community in Girei on January 27, 2016. Bryan Anselm/IRC.

*For privacy reasons, the names of individuals featured in this document may have been changed.*

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# Executive Summary

UN Member States are entering the final stages of consultations to agree on a Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Two years after the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, we fear the international community is walking away from a rare opportunity to take concrete steps to improve the lives of refugees and support the communities hosting them. As consultations reach their final stage in Geneva, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has three key recommendations on how to improve the text before the UN General Assembly endorses the GCR in New York in late 2018.

The fundamental question is: will the GCR concretely improve the lives of refugees? As the text stands, the answer is: we will never know. The current GCR text (Draft Three) is not heading in the right direction. A key gap is the fact there is no shared commitment to the progress the international community wants to achieve collectively. All we have are the four admirable objectives of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)<sup>1</sup>, the new approach launched with the New York Declaration. Committing to a multi-stakeholder process to define collective outcomes, targets and indicators, and then holding each other accountable for them, will determine the success of the Global Compact in the long run. It will determine if a refugee girl can go back to school, can learn and develop, and can play an active role in her community.

At this stage, host countries still have no indication that the adoption of the GCR will lead to more adequate support, particularly in terms of planning and funding an effective response to protracted refugee situations. It is no surprise then that many host countries see the GCR as a list of new obligations with no equivalent benefits for their citizens' well-being.

Meanwhile, conflicts around the world continue to displace evermore people, in a context where several governments are stepping back from their responsibility to protect and assist. In order to shift the paradigm of refugee response, the final draft of the GCR outcome document must clearly state that stakeholders will:

- 1) define together a set of shared outcomes, targets and indicators against which we can measure concrete improvements in the lives of refugees and their hosts, and hold each other to account;
- 2) align proposed and existing responsibility-sharing mechanisms around these collective outcomes and targets, with the CRRF as the centerpiece of an improved international refugee response; and
- 3) ensure that additional, more predictable and flexible financing is provided to help achieve collective outcomes.

Without these three fundamental steps, the GCR will miss the opportunity to make a real breakthrough in international refugee response.

# A Critical Moment for the World – and for the GCR

Today, 65.6 million people are displaced, having fled from their homes due to conflict or humanitarian crises. About one third of them—22.5 million people—crossed a border during their journey, becoming refugees.<sup>2</sup> These numbers signal a massive global displacement crisis with no end in sight. Behind these numbers is the harsh reality of disrupted lives: families without a home, children without education, and youths without a job, all struggling to survive in a new country that is often already grappling with its own poverty and lack of opportunities. With 84 percent of displaced people living in developing regions<sup>3</sup>, hosting refugees may frequently lead to overwhelmed public institutions and services.

How is the GCR addressing these challenges? Some constructive proposals have been made, such as convening regular Global Refugee Forums to catalyse pledges, take stock of the progress made and maintain political momentum; establishing an asylum capacity support group of experts to provide technical support to national authorities; and devising a three-year strategy to enlarge the pool of resettlement countries. However, nowhere in the document do we find agreement on what the Global Compact will mean for refugees, nor specific commitments that can be attributed to individual stakeholders. There are still no agreed targets that can

help translate the inspiring narrative of the New York Declaration into concrete action in support of the people who are at the heart of the GCR itself— refugees and the communities hosting them.

Without a concerted effort to agree what will improve in the daily lives of refugees –in terms of their health, education, income, safety, etc.– we will be left with a Global Compact that proposes more meetings and processes rather than substantive commitments to positive change. However, we still have time to make the GCR work, if we focus on the right priorities.



ABOVE: Silte zone, Ethiopia: Keyriya Yasin (12) writes notes as she attentively watches class instruction. Mulugeta Ayene/IRC



# Why Collective Outcomes Are Important

Collective outcomes —the results of our joint action that can be observed in the daily lives of people and can be measured by meaningful indicators and targets— are the fundamental premise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UN Secretary General's *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility* report for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit calls for “agreement on collective outcomes that are strategic, clear, quantifiable and measurable.”<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the SDGs, while outcome-driven, leave refugees behind, with only a handful of indicators calling for disaggregation by status. At the country level, refugees are usually not included in national development or sector plans. Even in program implementation, the majority of donors continue to measure the impact of resources based on outputs and activities, like the number of work permits and books distributed, rather than outcomes, like increased income and literacy rates.



ABOVE: Majdal Anjar, Lebanon: Children listen to a teacher read a 'Sesame Street' themed story in a class at an International Rescue Committee classroom in an informal tented settlement for Syrian refugees. Jacob Russell/IRC

# Defining and Measuring Success in the GCR: What Will It Take?

The international community now has the opportunity to address these shortcomings through the GCR process. The latest GCR draft does mention collective outcomes several times. In particular, it envisages that future Global Refugee Forums will be the main vehicle for, among other tasks, “taking stock, reviewing and measuring progress against the objectives of the global compact and ensuring the achievement of collective outcomes”.<sup>5</sup> However, the more concrete language on how to measure this progress has been removed. The latest GCR draft no longer mentions indicators, nor the multi-stakeholder process that had been previously proposed to develop them.<sup>6</sup> The words ‘target’ or ‘benchmark’ are not included once in the current GCR draft nor is there an explanation of what GCR outcomes should be for refugees and their host communities.

An ideal scenario would be to already agree on a broad set of outcomes and targets in the final GCR text. Table 1 in the Annex to this paper is an example of how the SDGs can inspire a set of outcomes and targets for refugees in the GCR in key outcome areas, such as health, education and gender equality. Targets may be agreed at regional and national levels, depending on the specific context of a given refugee situation, but derived from globally agreed outcomes. In practice, this approach means looking beyond and measuring more than outputs. For too long we have quantified our support for refugees in terms of schools built or teachers trained. We must shift our focus to and align support against outcomes —has a child

actually learned something while in school, and is she able to put what she has learned to good use?<sup>7</sup>

While the details can be agreed at a later stage, the final GCR draft could already mention the language above as a concrete step towards agreeing collective outcomes, targets and indicators.

A meaningful GCR outcome framework will require robust data, monitoring and accountability. One cannot happen without the other. Unless outcomes are defined and agreed collectively, the follow-up phase will have no clear sense of direction. In turn, even the best outcomes will be meaningless if there is no system in place to track progress towards them. The new World Bank-UNHCR joint Data Center for Forced Displacement, established to improve the collection, analysis and dissemination of data around refugees, is a natural institution to drive the monitoring process forward. Moreover, we will need to review both *what kind* of change is happening, through regular monitoring exercises, and *why* it is or is not happening, through periodic evaluations. Comparative analyses

At a minimum, the GCR should say that UNHCR will soon establish an inclusive follow-up process engaging humanitarian and development actors, host countries, donors, civil society and other key stakeholders to define and agree a set of outcomes, country- or context-specific targets and indicators. These outcomes, targets and indicators should be aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and become part of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.



would be useful to learn about progress across regions or funding instruments.

An inclusive, multi-stakeholder process will also be required to ensure both GCR collective outcomes and the

accountability system are credible. Unfortunately, this inclusive process is under threat in the latest GCR draft, which leaves civil society and other non-governmental stakeholders out of important discussions on impact measurement.<sup>8</sup>



ABOVE: Margaret Laker with the IRC's health team distributes oral vaccines and vitamins to displaced children near the Ocettoke transit camp in the war-torn northern province of Kitgum. Peter Biro/IRC



# Building Blocks for Success

Defining collective outcomes for refugees and host communities is essential to the success of the Global Compact. Nevertheless, it will not be enough unless it is coupled with improved mechanisms to share the responsibility for protecting, hosting and assisting refugees, which is at the core of the GCR.

Drafts of the GCR have made strides towards ensuring that responsibility-sharing is more predictable and equitable, and yet much remains uncertain. Two areas require particular attention: the refugee response architecture proposed by UNHCR and the financing that would make it work. If supported by clearer commitments and concrete actions, they could become the main avenues to make collective outcomes a reality.

## **Building block 1: aligning refugee response to shared outcomes**

Draft Three of the GCR describes the different mechanisms proposed by UNHCR to improve global responsibility-sharing. Several suggestions are promising, including the proposal to convene Global Refugee Forums or the activation of one or more Support Platforms in response to significant refugee situations.

In practice, this architecture will not essentially change the dynamics when a refugee crisis erupts, particularly in terms of planning a timely response that helps achieve agreed outcomes. We are still relying on a fundamentally reactive model that seems to ignore the central role the CRRF should play in coordinating refugee interventions at local, national, regional and global levels. Instead, the current GCR text proposes multiple structures — Global Refugee Forums, Support Platforms, national arrangements and solidarity conferences — with little information on how they are supposed to work together. There is a risk that these mechanisms will overlap and add confusion, rather than reduce it.

The final GCR text should align proposed and existing responsibility-sharing mechanisms around agreed outcomes and targets, with the CRRF as the centerpiece of an improved international refugee response. Responsibility-sharing mechanisms should also prioritise coordinating early warning, contingency planning and emergency response capacity-building, particularly at national and regional levels.

Also, the current GCR draft addresses emergency preparedness and contingency planning only as generic priorities of the reception and admission phase of forced displacement,<sup>9</sup> when in fact lessons learned by IRC on the ground tell us they should be seen as core functions of the overall responsibility-sharing architecture. Addressing refugee situations more quickly and sustainably; carrying out speedier joint needs assessments; building capacity — particularly at national and regional levels — would go a long way towards that paradigm shift the GCR is supposed to produce.

Going forward, it will be particularly important to draw on the forthcoming Year One CRRF Progress report in order to operationalise better responsibility-sharing mechanisms.

## **Building block 2: financing collective outcomes**

Refugee responses are chronically underfunded. In 2017, UNHCR reported budget needs of nearly US\$8 billion to meet the needs of the populations it serves; yet, the agency received only US\$4.5 billion in contributions.<sup>10</sup> These funding shortages exist worldwide, and span both protracted and emergency refugee crises. Even as the international community makes rhetorical commitments to greater support for protracted displacement, Uganda's Solidarity Summit in June 2017 raised just \$350 million of the \$2 billion required to meet the needs of more than a million refugees residing within the country's borders; almost all of that assistance related to emergency needs.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the joint response plan to provide life-saving support to Rohingya refugees and their local host communities is only 18 percent funded.<sup>12</sup>

Funding an effective and efficient use of resources is a key responsibility-sharing tool, as recognised in the current GCR draft<sup>13</sup>. More importantly, it is an essential prerequisite for supporting host countries in achieving collective outcomes for refugees and their host communities. On funding, too, there have been several improvements as the text has evolved, especially in highlighting the need to explore innovative financing mechanisms to expand the donor base, and in calling for additional development resources to ensure effective long-term support. At the same time, nothing in the

current draft of the GCR points to concrete new pledges by any specific stakeholder. It is no surprise that many host countries remain skeptical.

A recurring lesson from IRC's operations across regions, country programmes and intervention sectors is that an efficient and effective use of resources relies on three main factors:

- a) The funding is additional. The current GCR text only mentions additional development funding<sup>14</sup>, without considering the need for new humanitarian financing, as clearly outlined in the UN High Level Panel report on this issue.<sup>15</sup>
- b) There is more funding at the regional level. Historically, resourcing refugee responses has followed bilateral channels involving donors and host countries mostly. Funding needs to be channeled at regional level to reflect the impact of displacement across neighbouring countries.
- c) The funding is multi-year, flexible and unearmarked. The short-term nature of annual funding ignores the fact that the duration of crises and refugee interventions is becoming increasingly long-term. Donors, including UNHCR, should shift to more flexible, multi-year funding as their standard financing model to help achieve GCR objectives. Similarly, promoting more ad hoc solidarity conferences<sup>16</sup> may inadvertently lead to more funding tied to a specific

country or situation, making it challenging to ensure the kind of flexibility that is needed in fluctuating refugee situations. There is also a risk of repackaging existing commitments by announcing already allocated aid as new.

The final GCR text should clearly state that additional humanitarian and development financing will be required. Multi-year, flexible and unearmarked funding should be agreed as the standard financing mechanism to meet GCR objectives. Solidarity conferences should not result in more earmarking and thereby less flexibility.

Ultimately, the GCR should promote a more effective way of financing refugee responses, in terms of both quantity and quality of the funding provided.



# Seizing the Opportunity

Time is running out for the GCR consultation process. As the current text stands, we are moving backwards instead of ensuring the agreement delivers tangible improvements in the lives of refugees and their host communities. Now is the time for the international community to take bold action by agreeing shared outcomes, aligning our interventions around them, and holding each other accountable against our commitments. This is what will allow us to say the GCR has achieved a real breakthrough in international refugee response – and no less than a breakthrough is needed.<sup>17</sup>



ABOVE: Shops and markets in Hammam al-Alil are starting to reopen. The streets are beginning to bustle with children making their way to school. But many families are still struggling to get back on their feet and are not able to afford the basics. The IRC has provided Iqbal's family and more than 850 others here with emergency cash. Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/IRC.

# Annex

**Table 1: a proposed GCR outcome framework**

Table 1 is an example of how the SDGs can inspire a set of outcomes and targets for refugees in the GCR in select outcome areas. These demonstrative outcome areas have been selected because they are among the most critical to enhancing self-reliance among refugees, as envisaged by the GCR objectives. The table is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, it aims to provide an illustrative example of what a collective agreement might look like.

If we consider education, for example, a proposed GCR outcome would focus on children's attendance and completion of schooling, and improved learning of refugee and host community children. Learning outcomes should be defined as gains in foundational academic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, as well as social-emotional skills. Targets can be linked to children's developmental stage. For example, primary school-aged children would be expected to acquire developmentally appropriate literacy skills, such as fluency, comprehension, writing, print concepts, and ability to understand and differentiate sounds and associate them with letters. The GCR could call for these outcomes to be defined in education sector plans.

The table purposefully omits detailed targets at this stage, as they would need to be:

- Based on baseline data. Targets should seek to improve on the current situation in a given context and country.
- Time-bound. Targets should have "achieve-by" dates. These could align with 2030 Agenda deadline, as well as its periodical review process and Global Refugee Forum stock-taking exercise.
- Sensitive to length of displacement. There should be different benchmarks in each outcome area based on how long refugees have been displaced. Targets should reflect different stages of displacement, such as survival (e.g. first 6 months), recovery (e.g. 6 months to 1 year), thriving (e.g. 2 to 5 years) and regaining control (e.g. more than 5 years).
- Consistent with targets set for host populations. For example, if a country's national plan includes a commitment to halve poverty among its citizens by 2030, it should also set a target to halve poverty among the refugees it hosts by 2030.



Sustainable Development Goal	SDG Target (by 2030)	SDG Indicator(s)	Proposed GCR Outcome	Proposed GCR Target (consistent with those set for host populations; time-bound; based on baseline data)	Proposed GCR Indicator(s)
<b>1. NO POVERTY</b>	Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day	Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)	People in displacement contexts generate sufficient income to meet basic needs	Reduction in poverty rates	% of households with income below national poverty lines;
	Reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women, children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex, age;  Proportion of men, women, children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to the national definition			% of households receiving livelihoods support within 2 weeks of a crisis
<b>8. DECENT WORK &amp; ECONOMIC WELLBEING</b>	Achieve full, productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value	Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age, persons with disabilities;  Unemployment rate, by sex, age, persons with disabilities	Women, men and youth in displacement contexts can access local labor markets and obtain safe and decent work (equal pay for work of equal value)	Increase in available jobs;  Increase in employment, including self-employment	% of people with legal right to work, able to realize it;
	Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment	Frequency rates of fatal/non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex, migrant status;  Level of national compliance with labor rights based on ILO and national legislation, by sex, migrant status			Unemployment rate by sex, age, status, disability;
					Avg. hourly earnings by job, sex, age, status, disability
<b>4. QUALITY EDUCATION</b>	Ensure all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	Proportion of children and young people: in grades 2/3; at the end of primary; and at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading and math, by sex	Girls & boys in displacement contexts enroll in and attend safe, functioning and responsive education services	Increase in enrollment and attendance	% of children between ages 6-18 in conflict settings who participate in 25 hours per week, 32 weeks per year of structured and safe learning
	Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations	Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated			
	Ensure all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills, by sex	Girls & boys in displacement contexts demonstrate literacy, numeracy, SEL skills according to development potential	Improved learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional (SEL) skills	% of students with developmentally appropriate literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional (SEL) skills

Sustainable Development Goal	SDG Target (by 2030)	SDG Indicator(s)	Proposed GCR Outcome	Proposed GCR Target (consistent with those set for host populations; time-bound; based on baseline data)	Proposed GCR Indicator(s)
<b>2. END HUNGER</b>	End all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age	Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age;  Prevalence of malnutrition among children under 5 years of age, by type	Children in displacement contexts have optimal age-appropriate dietary intake	Reduced malnutrition rates	% of children under 5 years of age with moderate and severe acute malnutrition
<b>5. GENDER EQUALITY</b>	Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age % of women and girls who report an ability to make decisions about their safety;  Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence	Women and girls in displacement contexts are protected from and treated for the consequences of GBV	Reduced incidence of GBV;  Increase in availability, speed of services for survivors of GBV	% of women and girls who experience GBV, who receive at least 1 supportive service within 48 hours of reporting their experience;  % of women and girls who report an ability to make decisions about their safety
<b>11. SUSTAINABLE CITIES &amp; COMMUNITIES</b>	Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums	Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing	People in displacement contexts exercise free, informed choices about where and how to live	Increased freedom of movement, access to work, school	# of laws, policies, practices developed, changed, or adopted to facilitate people's choices of where and how to live (e.g. freedom of movement)



# References

- <sup>1</sup> See *The global compact on refugees*, Draft Three (as at 4 June 2018), para. 7.
- <sup>2</sup> UNHCR Figures at a Glance. <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html#>
- <sup>3</sup> UNHCR. Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016, 21 June 2017. <http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/>
- <sup>4</sup> *One humanity: shared responsibility*. Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2 February 2016, p. 33.
- <sup>5</sup> *The global compact on refugees*, Draft Three (as at 4 June 2018), para. 102.
- <sup>6</sup> Draft Three, section IV. Follow-up and review.
- <sup>7</sup> See illustrative example on education in the Annex for more details.
- <sup>8</sup> Draft Three, para. 48.
- <sup>9</sup> Draft Three, paras. 52-53.
- <sup>10</sup> UNHCR Financials. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/financial#tabs-financial-budget>
- <sup>11</sup> UN News. "More than \$350 million pledged for refugees in Uganda; 'A good start, we cannot stop,' says UN chief." 23 June 2017 <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/more-350-million-pledged-refugees-uganda-good-start-we-cannot-stop-says-un-chief>.
- <sup>12</sup> UNOCHA Rohingya Refugee Crisis. <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>
- <sup>13</sup> Draft Three, paras. 31-32.
- <sup>14</sup> Draft Three, para. 32, first bullet point.
- <sup>15</sup> UN High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing. Report to the Secretary-General. *Too important to fail – addressing the humanitarian financing gap*, January 2016.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 28.



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**The International Rescue Committee** (IRC) responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein, the IRC offers life-saving care and life-changing assistance to refugees forced to flee from war, persecution or natural disaster. At work today in over 40 countries and 29 cities in the United States, we restore safety, dignity and hope to millions who are uprooted and struggling to endure. The IRC leads the way from harm to home.

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