

# Implementing the Global Compacts: the importance of a whole-of-society approach

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**The global community must now take incisive, coordinated action through a whole-of-society approach to push forward the effective implementation of the two Global Compacts.**

Both the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) espouse a ‘whole-of-society approach’.<sup>1</sup> Such an approach presents important opportunities to embed the meaningful participation and leadership of refugees, migrants and host community members within the infrastructure developed for the Compacts’ implementation, follow-up and review. This applies both to operational and to policy contexts in local, national, regional and global arenas.

Achieving this will require the engagement of all actors in creating enabling environments that are safe, inclusive and

sustainable. This will involve upholding all age-, gender- and diversity-related commitments and the adoption of measures that will support refugee- and migrant-led organisations (including those led by women, young people and others who may face significant barriers to participation) in planning and discussing policies and proposals without fear of discrimination, political interference, detention, deportation or jeopardising protection claims. Fostering conditions for enhanced self-reliance – such as access to work rights, decent work, labour markets and justice – will further support the amplification of refugees’ and migrants’

voices, agency and leadership, particularly for those in vulnerable situations.

Pursuing a whole-of-society approach is in keeping with broader calls for improved engagement among UN and other actors. Strengthening collaboration and coordination between mandated leads and responsible agencies within the UN system and elsewhere will be crucial to the effective implementation of the Compacts and to ensuring that their respective processes are complementary.<sup>2</sup> A whole-of-society approach also envisages a 'whole-of-government' approach, which includes cities and municipal authorities in frontline roles.

Although welcome, precisely how this approach will be applied still requires clarification, as do the opportunities and challenges arising. It will be critical, for instance, to ensure that the humanitarian character and leadership of refugee protection are maintained when diverse actors – including those without a protection or humanitarian mandate – become involved. Ongoing engagement of migrants, refugees and other civil society actors in discussions regarding how the approach will be implemented is vital.

### Implementation, follow-up and review

**The Global Compact on Refugees:** The decisive adoption of the GCR is a clarion call for an improved response to refugee situations on the part of the entire global community, involving more equitable and predictable responsibility sharing among a broader range of actors. Although developed in response to the challenges of large-scale and protracted situations, the GCR is applicable to refugee situations more generally, and points to interconnections between different types of displacement and the factors that must be considered in order to ensure responses are well managed and strengthen protection. The GCR incorporates the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which has been progressively rolled out in a range of country and sub-regional contexts.<sup>3</sup> The roll-outs have generated positive initiatives,

involving diverse actors, and these can inform the Compact's broader implementation. These include the adoption of sub-regional declarations with corresponding national action plans, involving countries of origin, transit and destination, supported by multi-year funding and technical assistance, and initiatives at the country level and within certain sectors, such as the passing of national refugee laws and the inclusion of refugee children and refugee teachers within national school systems. Some roll-outs have also pointed to areas requiring further development, such as ensuring the robust and consistent engagement of civil society actors. Since the adoption of the 2016 New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants there have also been significant financing developments, such as the World Bank's establishment of a US\$2 billion fund to support low-income, high refugee-hosting countries in making medium- to long-term investments to address the impacts of displacement on refugee and host communities. Eligibility depends on countries having an adequate refugee protection framework and corresponding action plan, potentially including policy reforms.

A Global Refugee Forum (GRF) will take place every four years, with mid-point interim ministerial-level review forums. The first GRF (December 2019) will focus on announcing pledges in support of all GCR objectives, encouraging multi-actor and paired initiatives, sharing positive practices to inform future pledges, and providing updates on the development of mechanisms such as those relating to impact measurement and indicators, the asylum capacity support group and the proposed GCR academic network. The first GRF must function as a 'proof of concept' for strengthened responsibility sharing and for a multi-actor partnership approach which places refugees at the centre – both of which are essential elements of the Compact's successful implementation. And although it appears that the GRF will be Geneva-based, implementation will need to be driven at local and national levels and have strong regional ownership. The development of national action plans and the creation of

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environments that enable multi-actor initiatives to flourish will be key to this.

**The Global Compact for Migration:** As the first global instrument to provide common frameworks and guiding principles that cover all dimensions of international migration, the adoption of the GCM is a pioneering achievement in international cooperation. The Compact restates a commitment to international law, reaffirming that the human rights of migrants must be upheld, irrespective of their status and location, and emphasises the importance of aligning Compact implementation with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda.

Its implementation is to be supported by, among other mechanisms, the newly created UN Network on Migration, which has an executive committee comprising several UN agencies and IOM as its secretariat. With the remit to “ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support to Member States”, it will report every two years to the UN Secretary-General. Its ‘capacity-building mechanism’ will include a connection hub (facilitating connections between countries, implementing partners and funders), a start-up fund and a knowledge platform through which different stakeholders can contribute technical, financial and human resources. The Network appears to have significant potential but to be effective it needs to overcome key challenges such as securing adequate funding, combating mistrust between UN agencies, meaningfully involving other stakeholders (including migrants and civil society), and the need to go beyond the remit and outcomes of its predecessor, the Global Migration Group. Its achievements will depend on political commitment and the effectiveness of its structure. It is also essential that IOM, the Network’s secretariat, develops an effective and robust human rights-based approach.

States will lead the follow-up and review of the GCM through the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF). Consultations will be held in 2019 on its methods and processes and the forum will then be held every four years from 2022.

Such limited frequency is disappointing and could jeopardise momentum and affect commitments from States and other actors; encouragingly, however, UN-led interim regional reviews will also take place from 2020 (among others).<sup>4</sup> The degree to which GCM commitments filter to national and regional levels will be a key test of the success or otherwise of these mechanisms.

The GCM has created strong initial momentum in particular areas which have clear potential to change migrants’ lives. These include a specific recognition that climate change, disasters and environmental degradation can lead to displacement and the suggestion of new pathways and support for people affected by climate-induced displacement. Member States, UN agencies and civil society are already planning joint initiatives in this area. Other such areas relate to the commitment to pursue a human rights-based approach to detention of migrants and therefore to work to end the practice of child detention in the context of international immigration. Efforts to implement this commitment are already underway in Mexico, Thailand and Ecuador through government and civil society collaboration.<sup>5</sup> This includes the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in January 2019 by the Royal Thai Government to stop holding children in immigration detention and to engage to explore alternatives to detention. The Compact also addresses migrants in vulnerable situations, making commitments that include reviewing related policies and practices, introducing specific measures for children in vulnerable situations, using a gender-responsive approach, promoting key policies and partnerships, and facilitating access to justice and to individual assessments.

Crucially, the GCM prompts States to build on or create national implementation plans. Some governments in Latin America, like that of Costa Rica, plan to review existing legislation in light of the GCM, while South Korea is producing a new manual analysing the shortcomings of its law and practice in relation to the GCM. Bangladesh is pursuing complementary

implementation of the two Compacts and is developing a draft national strategy to do so. In El Salvador, the government has linked GCM implementation to the formal implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and is working to pursue a whole-of-society approach. This promising progress needs to spread across national and continental boundaries.

The potential barriers to implementation of these and other promising initiatives include the lack of full complementarity between the two Compacts, the political will and extent of specific commitments made by Member States, and the effective operation of a whole-of-society approach.

### The Compacts in the Asia-Pacific region

Many Asia-Pacific States and civil society actors engaged consistently in both Compact preparation processes and there was near total adoption of both Compacts by Asia-Pacific States. The complementarity of the Compacts is of particular concern across the Asia-Pacific since the region consistently produces and hosts large numbers of refugees (including in significant protracted situations) and also has the largest number of international migrants (predominantly South–South) of any region. Mixed migration is prevalent, and refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants often endure extremely precarious conditions and may face significant and common barriers to accessing their rights. Many Asia-Pacific States are not parties to the Refugee Convention, and there is no comprehensive regional refugee protection framework. The region is also highly affected by climate-induced disasters, environmental degradation and associated displacement.

Within this challenging context a number of promising multi-actor initiatives have emerged over recent years at local, national, sub-regional and regional levels. These include the development of domestic legal and policy infrastructure for refugee protection and alternatives to immigration detention in countries both party and non-party to the Refugee Convention, with sustained cross-sector collaboration, and the development of a sub-regional framework to combat trafficking

in persons, including through the creation of integrated national plans, with international cooperation. Civil society collaboration has also strengthened considerably with the emergence of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), with over 350 members including refugee leaders, community-based organisations, national NGOs, faith-based organisations, advocates and researchers from 28 countries working to advance the rights of refugees and other displaced persons.

If implemented effectively, the Compacts could deliver sustainable benefits for refugees, migrants, their hosts and the global community at large, including by strengthening existing regional leadership and momentum, through provision of resources, new actors and improved responsibility sharing. Civil society, including refugees, migrants and host communities, bring vital expertise and experience and will have a critical role to play in the Asia-Pacific region, as elsewhere.

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1. The GCR refers to a ‘multi-stakeholder and partnership approach’; we use the GCM term ‘whole-of-society approach’ since it is inherently fully inclusive. The underpinning concept derives from the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants.
2. See for example UNHCR (2019) *Joint Letter from IOM and UNHCR on the Collaboration Between the two Organizations*, 25 January 2019 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5c519a614.html>
3. The CRRF was annexed to the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, which was adopted in 2016. Operational updates can be found at [www.globalcrf.org](http://www.globalcrf.org).
4. To be conducted by the UN’s Regional Economic Commissions or Regional Consultative Processes and the IMRF in an alternating process that will take place every two years, beginning in 2020.
5. The International Detention Coalition is leading most of these efforts, as for example in Mexico, where it is working with the government on a roadmap to end child immigration detention. Cross-regional work is also taking place and a peer-learning platform is being established. <https://idcoalition.org>