

The background of the top half of the page features a collage of data visualizations. At the top left, there is a pie chart with several segments. Below it, a bar chart shows data for 'May', 'June', and 'July' with bars for 'Asia' and 'Europe'. Further down, a line graph tracks data for 'Japan' and 'Germany' over time. The entire background is a muted blue-grey color.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION WORKING GROUP

MAY 2018



Report and Recommendations of the Representation and Participation Working Group

May 2018

Introduction

Global displacement is currently at record levels, with 65.6 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, including 22.5 million refugees.¹ The global distribution of the world's refugee population is highly uneven. Overall, 84% of the global refugee population resides in low- and middle-income countries, while the six wealthiest countries, which represent half of the world's economy, host less than 9% of the total.² Refugees and the communities and countries that host them are the groups most affected by forced displacement across borders, and thus, their experiences and perspectives should play a leading role in shaping policy and programmes designed to support them. Currently, however, these groups are systematically under-represented at all levels of policy making and programme design. For instance, only 4% of the organisations³ that participated in the Summit on Refugees and Migrants in New York in September 2016 were from the top five countries hosting refugees.⁴

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)⁵ is a response to the need for the international community to come together and finds ways to equitably share responsibility for meeting the needs of refugees. It offers an opportunity not only to create a more comprehensive approach to responding to large-scale refugee movements and protracted situations. It also represents a chance to fundamentally strengthen the international refugee regime and the mechanisms through which refugees, host communities, and their organisations participate in the response, including in formulating and implementing policies, programmes and actions.

In response to this opportunity, a group of refugee-led organisations, national civil society organisations from some of the world's major refugee-hosting countries⁶, and allies from around the world came together in late 2017 to build a joint platform to provide input to the GCR and other refugee-related policy-making processes. The first step was a participatory and inclusive international civil society consultation and policy development process that has engaged nearly 500 organisations and academics from 47 countries.⁷ From among these participants, the following five working groups were formed to develop concrete policy recommendations: Durable Solutions and Responsibility Sharing, Women and Displacement, Legal Rights and Asylum, Access to Services, and Representation and Participation.

This paper puts forward a set of initial policy recommendations drafted by the Representation and Participation Working Group. It reflects inputs from 12 organisations, including three refugee-led organisations, six national organisations, and three international organisations from Argentina, the US, Lebanon, Jordan, Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Macedonia, and Turkey. These recommendations will be further developed at the International Refugee Congress 2018.⁸



Background

Refugee policy and programme formulation, implementation and monitoring at the international, regional and national levels should be informed by the perspectives, experiences, and priorities of those most affected by forced displacement - refugees and host countries and communities. Efforts undertaken by various institutions, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and international civil society organisations among others, to enhance participation of these groups in policy making have yet to yield significant results. Generally, policy makers and development and humanitarian practitioners view refugees as targets for development programmes or recipients of aid rather than active and capable agents of change with the right to shape their own future. While this problem is acute for refugee-led organisations, there is some evidence to suggest that, in certain contexts, civil society organisations of host communities have even less access to decision-making spaces than refugee-led organisations.⁹ Where consultation does occur, the scope is often limited to identifying immediate needs. A meaningful participation that would permit the experiences of host communities and refugees to shape the content of policies and courses of action for the implementation of those policies is absent.

The New York Declaration and the GCR recognise refugees and host communities as key stakeholders in the formulation, execution, and follow-up of comprehensive response plans and programmes. However, the role assigned to refugees has not been well-defined, is generally consigned to operational spaces, and is subject to the discretionary power of member states. There is a growing interest in and a movement toward greater refugee and host community participation and representation. However, significant political and financial resources and expertise are needed if this nascent movement for participation is to gain ground.

Justification

The question of representation – who speaks for whom, how, and when regarding refugee matters – is critical. Without clarity, direction, or supporting processes, refugees and host communities are routinely sidestepped or left out of processes all together.

Permission to attend, observe, or speak does not guarantee that refugees and host community representatives can participate or engage effectively in local, national, or international forums. Effective participation and representation requires time to allow inclusive social dialogues to take place and to produce institutional commitments that can facilitate transformation in decision-making systems and dynamics. Awareness of the political context; time and space to prepare; use of communication, persuasion, and negotiation skills; and communication of ideas about how problems can be addressed are elements that help increase the meaningful participation of refugees and host community representatives. The capability of refugee and host communities and their leaders to utilise these elements depend on their systematic, consistent, and equal participation in national, regional, and international processes that facilitate decision making on matters that impact their lives.

The degree to which there is an enabling environment to support participation is a key factor. Formal and informal spaces must be created for meaningful participation where refugee and host community organisations and leaders can speak freely, be heard, exert influence, and have an equal opportunity to shape policy and programme decisions, and to



monitor policy outcomes and programme impacts. Inclusion in decision-making processes should be seen as a standard practice not an afterthought or exception. Barriers preventing refugee-led and host community organisations' participation need to be addressed in a transparent and mutually supportive manner, including implicit institutional biases and financial, political, social, and relational transactions that have bearing on the power dynamics between and within institutions. A determined effort is needed to design and lead processes that encourage listening, foster a real exchange of views, and include representatives of relevant stakeholder groups, above all women. Finally, refugee leaders and organisations need to be supported in their quest to be heard and to represent their communities, their persistent and resilient endeavours to rebuild their lives in the country of asylum, and their rebuilding of their countries of origin.

Recommendations

The Participation and Representation Working Group identifies the following priorities for policy development and action planning. As follow-up to the International Refugee Congress in Istanbul, this working group will collaborate with experts and officials to create the necessary policies and instruments for their implementation.

1. Support existing refugee-led and host community organisations and create structures for self-representation in decision-making processes.

- a. A broad range of expertise, experience and guidance should be called upon by the UN system, civil society organisations and states to develop organisational and institutional processes and systems, including resource allocation plans that can facilitate the effective and meaningful participation of refugee-led and host community organisations.
- b. All institutions including the UN, states, refugee-led and host community organisations and other civil society should promote gender equality in their systems, processes and institutional culture and providing the political and moral leadership that is needed for the elimination gender exclusion.
- c. Models of organisation should be developed and pilot-tested such as community-based focal-point teams, councils and/or other types of representative bodies as a way of increasing public participation in policy and programme formulation and implementation. Global forums such as UN Commission on the Status of Women and Universal Periodic Review can provide good entry points for mobilising such public participation and inclusion in decision making processes.
- d. Existing fellowship, mentorship, internship and leadership opportunities should be made available and accessible to refugee and host community groups and leaders. Their equal access to opportunities, which can help them expand their experiences and explore new ideas and approaches in a nurturing environment, should be promoted and supported.



- 2. Establish an international platform for refugee participation and self-representation made up of refugee community organisations and leaders from around the world.**
 - a. This platform could be designed through facilitating the exchange of ideas, experiences and capacities, developing strategies for representation, and strengthening relations between refugee communities and existing networks across geographies. Such a platform could eventually lead to the development of a formally recognised international network of local, regional and national refugee-led organisations. The forthcoming Global Summit of Refugees may provide a platform for galvanising such a network.
 - b. NGOs, donors, states, and UN agencies should provide dedicated and long-term political and financial support for such mechanism that can facilitate equal participation of refugee-led organisations in policy and programme formulation forums that have impact on their rights, including through structures and mechanisms that can enable refugee-led organisations to ensure permanency of their networks and participation.
- 3. Assure refugees a formal seat at the table at all levels of policy and decision making, including national, regional, and international governing bodies; civil society organisations; NGOs; and donor organisations**
 - a. The UNHCR should provide refugee representatives the opportunity to directly address the UNHCR Executive Committee and Standing Committee meetings. This could build upon and complement the role currently played by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).
 - b. A refugee-led platform or network should be given “standing invitee” status at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), along with a network representing women’s organisations, as a way of addressing the persistent exclusion of these organisations in planning and delivery of policies and programmes. This will enable IASC to better fulfil its overall objective of inclusive coordination in the context of humanitarian assistance in response to major emergencies.
 - c. Participation of refugee-led and host community organisations within national and regional levels humanitarian coordination systems should be adopted as a standard practice.
 - d. National authorities should involve refugee and host community representatives in the preparation of refugee response and development plans, from design to execution to evaluation. Refugee- and host community-led organisations and leaders should also be involved at every stage of the programme management cycle by all humanitarian and development actors.
 - e. Refugee-led and host-community-based organisations should be guaranteed a substantive role in the World Refugee Summits, global support platforms, and solidarity conferences proposed within the current draft of the GCR. The extent to which refugee-led and host community-based organisations are included in decision-making mechanisms, and the role they play, should become one of the



measures against which the progress of the implementation of the GCR is monitored and evaluated.

- f. Refugee-led and national civil society organisations in major host countries should identify and create opportunities to collaborate in shared initiatives and projects at national and international levels as a means of building synergies between refugee and host populations, as well as supporting social inclusion and cohesion.

4. Create and support pathways for political, social, and economic participation and representation of refugees

- a. Legal experts, civil society organisations, and academia should collaborate with the governments of first-asylum countries to develop long term solutions for determining status such as short or long term and permanent residency, as well as citizenship, with corresponding rights to work and vote. Such measures should seek to go beyond currently existing legal frameworks for refugees to fit within a wider framework of local integration.
- b. Municipalities and national governments should be encouraged to establish mechanisms for inclusion of the refugee-led organisations, including NGOs, academia, business representatives and community. This can take the form of municipal councils specifically representing refugees and/or permanent consultative bodies that could lead dialogues with the state institutions on behalf of refugees in the asylum countries.
- c. Refugee-led media initiatives and other social, cultural, and academic means should be supported and should enable refugees and host communities to narrate their own perspectives, experiences, and conceptualisations, allowing them to become equal partners in setting the discourse on refugee matters. This could be done in multiple ways, such as increased inclusion of refugees in the media sector.



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References

¹ UNCHR 'Figures at a Glance', at: <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>

² UNHCR (2017) *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016*, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf>

³ Based on the published list of NGOs who have been approved to participate in the High-Level Meeting, available at: https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/20160823173049_0.pdf.

⁴ The top five refugee-hosting countries based on the total number of refugees hosted are: Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran and Uganda. UNHCR (2017), op. cit.

⁵ The GCR is one of the two new global 'compacts' aimed at improving the way in which the international community responds to large movements of refugees and migrants, as well as protracted refugee situations. The New York Declaration of 2016 calls for development in response to the need for the international community to come together and agree ways to share responsibility in responding to large-scale displacement, and help countries most affected by it. UNHCR defines it as 'an agreement that is not legally binding but that captures, by consensus, political commitment both to principles and to concrete action by Member States'. See 'New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants', at <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html>

⁶ Some of the world's major refugee-hosting countries include Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Iran, Uganda, Ethiopia, Jordan, Germany, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, and Kenya, according to the UNHCR publication "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016," 2017, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html>.

⁷ International Refugee Congress 2018: Consultation Report (March 2018), available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ADCDeyJfiETtL_7Gh2AKw_IM5nc1pTa/view

⁸ 10-11 May 2018, Istanbul, Turkey.

⁹ International Refugee Congress 2018: Consultation Report (March 2018), op. cit.



