Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Report

Towards the Global Refugee Forum 2023

Monday 10 July – Wednesday 12 July 2023 | WP3275

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In association with the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Introduction

The Global Refugee Forum (GRF) seeks to produce pledges and action that furthers the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). These are to ease pressure on refugee host communities, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

Participants at this Wilton Park dialogue explored the challenges and opportunities of harnessing the second GRF to meaningfully progress these GCR objectives. Grounding this discussion was an acknowledgement that delivering on the promise and commitments of the 2019 GRF has been complicated by global headwinds, including the Covid-19 pandemic. In response, they agreed there should be a shift in emphasis from quantity to quality of pledges at the second GRF to ensure tangible impact. This requires increased sustainability and partnership between donor and refugee host countries through joint or 'matched' pledges. Participants also emphasised that inclusive policies and development-based approaches that facilitate refugee contribution are important to easing pressure on host communities in protracted contexts.

Education

1. Discussion was grounded in the scale of demand and challenges refugee children face in accessing education. Participants argued that given approximately half of all refugee children are out of school – with less than 40% enrolling in secondary education – education must be a central consideration in the support refugee communities receive, and therefore a priority at the GRF.

Supply-side issues

2. Due to capacity constraints and political considerations, many host countries rely on parallel systems for the provision of refugee education, often supported by donors and multilaterals. These tend to be poor substitutes for inclusive education systems, lacking the economies of scale to make them cost effective and having insufficient recognition of qualifications or accreditation to enable access to further educational or labour pathways.
3. However, there are obstacles to integrating refugees into national education systems. Host countries face upfront investment costs at the same time as concerns about losing humanitarian resources provided for the supply of parallel systems. This can spark concerns over initial trade-offs between provision of services for host communities and for refugees. Political questions exist for host countries over whether to prioritise long-term investment for populations who might not stay, and cultural resistance can arise over issues of language, identity, and the implications for return. The inclusion of refugees in national systems also requires freedom of movement which is difficult where host countries have policies of encampment.

4. The many examples of good practice from host countries illustrate that the international community are not starting from zero with inclusive education. Equally, we need critical self-reflection on what needs to change in our systems, mechanisms, and instruments to make sure that those countries willing to enrol refugees in national education systems get the adequate levels of support they need to enable this.

5. An aspect of this support is financing, as we know that quality, consistent education enabled by multi-year funding is crucial to keeping children in school. The World Bank has estimated the average annual cost of providing education to all refugee students in low, lower-middle, and upper-middle income countries to be $4.85 billion[1]. However, without a baseline on finance allocated to refugee education from domestic, international, and household financing, the international community doesn't have a clear picture of the funding gap that exists.

6. Alongside financing, there is also a need for technical assistance to share best practices for refugee integration and academic success. Global and regional advocacy is required to encourage greater host country investment in inclusive education. Also important is the need to drive improvements in the quality and transparency of financing data, and tracking policies to better understand the global state of refugee inclusion in education systems.

Demand-side issues

7. Improving education supply alone is insufficient to drive enrolment; attention must also be given to demand-side barriers. The opportunity cost perceived by parents and youth of attending school can lead them to be put into more immediately 'productive' pathways such as work or supporting their families. Interventions outside the classroom that facilitate children's capacity to learn attend school by tackling GBV and food insecurity should also be considered.

8. To be an attractive prospect, education provision must resonate with the cost/benefit decisions that young people and their parents take about their current and future livelihoods. To maximise benefits, education should be linked to self-reliance, including by considering onwards pathways for vocational or tertiary education.

Recommendations

9. There was strong support amongst participants for a multi-stakeholder pledge on education at the GRF, with several suggesting that a GRF without an education mega-pledge would not be a full success. It was suggested that this pledge should:

    a. Be simple, measurable and outcome oriented. A measurable outcome could be the overall percentage of refugee children enrolled in primary and secondary education, with a focus on achieving parity with host country enrolment rates.

    b. Be context sensitive, employing a "development where possible, humanitarian where not" approach where provision of education services through national education systems is prioritised and resorting to emergency/parallel structures is only done where necessary. Wherever possible, host countries should be supported to transition from parallel provision to inclusion in national services.

    c. Incorporate refugee youth voices in its design to help to identify and overcome the issue of aspirational barriers.

    d. Support refugees to productively return to education after time away by incorporating consideration of catch-up education.

    e. Make specific provision to address the distinct barriers to access facing the most

[1] Assuming education for refugee children that is 'no better, no worse' than for host-country students. Calculated with public unit costs of education in each country, plus costs of essential services for integration (accelerated learning programmes, psychosocial support, language support). Methodology developed by consensus.

marginalised groups, including girls, children with disabilities, and children with special learning needs.

f. Consider how to leverage pledges focused on services that increase education access and attainment, including health care, social protection, and economic inclusion.

g. Link to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – and the third GRF in 2027 as a moment to stocktake on progress on the road to the SDG 2030 target date.

Refugee Women Led Organisations (RWLOs)

1. Participants recognised the diverse and cross cutting ways that RWLOs provide meaningful support in refugee responses and crisis situations. Not only do they act as bridges between formal agencies and their communities, but they work across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus in their role as first responders and their work on peacebuilding, access to education, and women's economic inclusion. Although they are leading actors on gender equality, the role and impact of RWLOs should not be limited to their work to prevent GBV. This siloing undermines recognition of the broader ways refugee communities regard their provision of assistance.

Improving RWLO access to resources

2. RWLOs exist at the intersection of refugee-based and gender-based discrimination and thereby face both systemic and social barriers that undercut their ability to be more effective:

    - Participants suggested that meaningful and broad participation of RWLOs is impeded by inertia in the humanitarian system. Some pointed out that donors and intermediaries are slow to change partners; where there is engagement this tends to be limited to just a few organisations with the rest neglected.
    - RWLOs are often unable to become registered or open bank accounts in hosting countries. This precludes them from accessing funding opportunities and prevents them from being seen as legitimate delivery partners for donors. There is a need for innovation to identify how to de-risk RWLOs to unlock donor finance.
    - Small RWLOs can struggle to meet donor reporting requirements. If they do secure funding, this tends not to be flexible and ties them into work on donor priorities, which may not mirror the needs on the ground. RWLOs report insufficient support from UN agencies, including UN Women.

3. There is a lack of visibility of RWLO efforts; this understates their impact and in turn reduces their demonstrable policy influence. Accordingly, RWLO inclusion is seen as a 'nice to have' rather than critical, and as a result attracts a particular and narrow group of donors.

Localisation

4. RWLOs would benefit from reforms to the formal, top-down structures of humanitarian governance and have strong interests in the localisation agenda. However, despite this overlap, localisation pursued under the Grand Bargain has to date not effectively reflected or met the needs of RWLOs. A general pivot in modalities towards local organisations and actors is likely not sufficient, as RWLOs can be crowded out due to social barriers even as more pooled funding reaches Refugee Led Organisations (RLOs). There is therefore a need to make specific provision within the commitments of the Grand Bargain if we are to meaningfully empower RWLOs.

Recommendations

5. Host and donor governments and the private sector should work together to reduce the practical barriers to RWLOs accessing funding, including:
    - Supporting the in-progress multi-stakeholder legal pledge with a focus on improving RWLO access to banking systems and registration in host countries to reduce barriers to bidding for funding.
    - Donors should develop mechanisms to improve the tracking of funding for local organisations, allowing them to establish a baseline from which to advance. They could build on this to set and measure progress against a target of localisation funding that should go to RWLOs.
    - Donors should also consider setting targets on their intermediary delivery partners for the level of funding to go through RWLOs. They should also support a reversal in power dynamics between intermediary delivery partners and RWLOs by supporting RWLOs to have an active role in identifying appropriate intermediary delivery partners in their specific context.
6. The international community should develop pledges to address donor and agency induced system barriers that can undercut commitments to the broader localisation agenda, including:
    - Donors should develop localisation policies and pledges including specific provision for RWLOs that actively mitigates against the additional challenges they face for access, visibility, and funding.
    - Humanitarian and development agencies should diversify and deepen partnerships with RWLOs, including by supporting skills and capacity building to enable their meaningful participation.
    - The international community should use this GRF as a platform to give RWLOs visibility and enable them to interact with decision-makers. However, this should not be limited to the issue of GBV.

Preventing gender-based violence

7. Women refugees face interconnected and compounding obstacles to being empowered and enabled as humanitarian and development actors or protected from GBV.
8. Girls' education is an important enabler of refugee women's self-reliance as it enables women's long-term labour market access. Increasing women's economic resources improves their power within social structures, reducing the prevalence of GBV. Economic self-reliance among women also promotes their agency, enabling them to change the social norms needed for RWLOs to be taken seriously as humanitarian and development partners/actors.

Recommendations

9. Economic empowerment and the inclusion of men and boys in solutions should be identified as key enablers for the prevention of GBV within GRF pledges.
10. Cash based assistance to women should be promoted as an enabler of agency and self-reliance.
11. The international community should employ a systems approach to tackling GBV. Member states with feminist foreign policy should look to provide leadership on tackling GBV. The international community should explore empowering a body/organisation to examine government policies related to tackling GBV and then investigate if and where these policies are enforced, including in refugee settings.

Overcoming barriers to voluntary return

12. Participants recognised the voluntary return of forcibly displaced people in safety and dignity as potentially the most impactful of the durable solutions, but also the most challenging to realise. The primary barriers are ongoing conflict and crises making return unsafe and challenges preventing reintegration.

13. Data on the volume of returns, alongside examples from hosting countries including Uganda, are suggestive of pendular movements, as refugees attempt to return and remain in their origin country, are unable to do so, and come back to where they are hosted as refugees. This phenomenon highlights the need for increased emphasis on not just return but sustainable return.

14. Sustainable return is dependent on successful reintegration into countries of origin, which is difficult to achieve for multiple reasons. It relies on the existence of livelihoods, yet this is often not the case if return takes place in a challenging economic context where unemployment is already high, and opportunities are limited. It also depends on returnees being able to access opportunities and rights in the face of potential political exclusion. In practice this is further complicated by inadequate access to legal identities and the non-recognition of old qualifications or of new ones acquired abroad.

Recommendations

15. The issue of return cannot be separated from issues of peace and security. A greater emphasis could be put on peacebuilding going forwards within the GRF; this would also realise the full HDP nexus – with the first GRF focused on humanitarian response and the second GRF on development, the third GRF should emphasise peacebuilding.

16. A longer term, development-based approach to return and reintegration is needed.

    - Successful return starts in hosting settings. Refugees should be able to acquire or at least sustain existing skills to prevent them experiencing the obstacles of skills atrophy that face the long-term unemployed.

    - Host and origin countries must collaborate better in identifying tools to facilitate return; this can be followed up by incorporating a focus on skills portability into the design of economic and livelihoods programmes for refugees.

    - Creating an economic and structural environment conducive to return requires bringing in more actors; in particular, the private sector must be harnessed to create jobs for returnees.

    - Returnees should be incorporated into development planning frameworks in origin countries so that services exist for them upon return. As they are not a standard element of the development financing system, consideration should be given to where support is needed.

    - Lessons should be learned from similar initiatives, such as the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement's approach to building a model for solutions to Internally Displaced People.

Refugee resettlement

17. Resettlement met less than 1% of the 1.47 million resettlement need estimated by UNHCR in 2022. With this figure expected to increase to more than 2 million in 2023, we need to think more ambitiously in terms of scale and innovation if third country solutions are to play a meaningful role in responding to global displacement. In the absence of sufficient possibilities for resettlement, dangerous journeys and border pressures are likely to increase.

International cooperation

18. Deepening the international architecture enables the building of a shared solution. The Resettlement Diplomacy Network (RDN), led by the US, is a positive example of improved international coordination around protection pathways and offers opportunities to share best practice amongst resettlement countries.

Complementary pathways

19. Community sponsorship programmes mobilise international solidarity and illustrate the willingness of communities and private citizens to play a direct role in responding to displacement when empowered to do so. Examples include the UK's Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme and the United States' Welcome Corps private sponsorship pathway. These sponsorship schemes provide a viable option for resettlement countries to further innovation and upscale complementary pathways going forward.

Labour mobility schemes

20. Labour mobility pathways are an example of a complementary pathway that raise questions of scale, with the number of countries involved and the number of people on pathways both small. Pilots do important work in demonstrating viability and testing approaches, but they tend to be small and fragmented. Barriers to bringing these approaches to scale include political will, visas, costs, and the challenge of finding refugees with the right skills.
21. Participants emphasised the need to shift the paradigm to view displaced people as positive contributors and recognise the human capital they represent. In the context of challenging demographic dynamics and labour market skills gaps in receiving countries, reframing the narrative in this way would build their interest in resettlement and align with the findings of the World Development Report on Refugees and Migrants.
22. Whilst labour mobility pathways usefully recognise the skills of refugees and help to enable their self-reliance, problems arise if the people on them are viewed solely as labour. A lack of robust routes to naturalisation or citizenship for those on pathways hampers refugees' ability to integrate and fully contribute to society.
23. Developments in labour mobility schemes should not mean that access to resettlement is reserved for those with economically sought after skills; humanitarian need and vulnerability should continue to be the principal factor in providing protection to forcibly displaced people.

Recommendations

24. Expand the vision for labour mobility pathways to one that is longer term and strategic.
    - Rather than only taking refugees who already possess the required skills or qualifications, donors and host governments should support the delivery of training to fill skills gaps in their economies. This training should tie into programmes that development actors are already delivering to displaced populations.
    - Most labour mobility pathways target highly skilled refugees. Responding to gaps in other sectors of global labour markets, pathways should be considered that target lower-skilled workers where economic demand for these skills exists.
25. Private sector companies or INGOs with offices in countries where certain characteristics are illegal or penalised could come together to pledge to resettle at-risk employees in safe third countries.

26. Resettlement countries should consider developing or upscaling pathways in areas other than labour mobility, including:

    - Education pathways that complement early education provision in situ should be considered and could be transformative.
    - Improve the effective implementation of family reunification by broadening eligibility and reducing administrative or documentation hurdles. Linking up family reunion pathways to community sponsorship frameworks.

Climate change and displaced populations

27. It is useful to distinguish the distinct conversations that exist within the climate displacement discourse, including 1) how to tap into financing that exists to tackling climate change, 2) how to integrate climate change risks and factors into refugee programming and 3) if international protection should be extended to those moving due to climate. The third is particularly politically difficult.

Climate finance

28. In the context of stretched humanitarian and development budgets there is significant competition for climate finance. However, the right incentives may not exist for green climate funds to prioritise countries that have both climate vulnerabilities and large forcibly displaced populations, given the large number of places facing significant climate risk.
29. Fragile and Conflict Affected State (FCAS) governments may lack the capacity to receive funding from International Finance Institutions (IFIs). In this instance funds can be channelled through other agencies or actors, yet it is difficult and time-consuming for humanitarian organisations to become accredited. The UK is co-chairing the humanitarian donor initiative with Estonia and will use this opportunity to consider coordination with climate finance.
30. Whilst there is a strong case for action on climate risks facing forcibly displaced people, identifying the channel for delivery can be complex, with responsibility and management split between climate, development or humanitarian funds. Emphasis should be given to anticipatory action as a life-saving aspect of climate finance.
31. We must consider how to crowd in investors on this issue. One approach is to use data on climate risks and the locations of forcibly displaced populations to draw connections between possible climate impacts on them and their livelihoods.

Recommendations

32. Integrate a refugee lens into climate action instruments, including by looking for links between GRF and COP28, and by supporting host countries to include refugees in their national adaptation plans. Encouraging Member State engagement and leadership as part of the multistakeholder climate pledge UNHCR is developing for the GRF.
33. Improve the quality and quantity of data on the cost of inaction on climate in relation to potential impacts on displaced populations and use this to make the case for anticipatory action and crowd in investors.
34. Support access to climate finance in climate vulnerable states hosting significant forcibly displaced populations and build partnerships across climate, food security, humanitarian, and displacement sectors.

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