



Political will and leadership needed in response to unprecedented displacement

Joint Agency Briefing Note

20 June 2022

On World Refugee Day, with a record-breaking number of over 100 million people displaced across the globe¹, it is vital for states to urgently act on their legal and moral obligations to welcome and support all people fleeing from persecution, human rights violations and armed conflict. With the outpouring of support and opening of borders to those fleeing Ukraine, we have seen that it is possible to respond to a crisis of historic magnitude and scale, while still maintaining the rights of hosting communities.

All must receive equal and equitable support. As we aim to fully support Ukrainians, we see clear lessons in solidarity and a sustained responsibility sharing that must be applied in our responses to forced displacement everywhere. The Refugee Convention and the Global Compact on Refugees are essential tools that underscore the importance of protection, equality, and support for forcibly displaced people. It is important for states to reaffirm their commitments and galvanize political will to address global refugee responses with comparable urgency, coordination and resources, as witnessed at the outset of the Ukraine refugee response.

Political will is key. By activating the Temporary Protection Directive² to those fleeing Ukraine, EU Member States have clearly demonstrated that a humane response to a refugee situation is possible when the political will is there.

Committing to uphold human dignity while providing fair treatment should be extended to all people arriving at borders, regardless of their origin, nationality, or means of arrival. While treatment is not uniform, the overwhelming attitude of political decision makers to Ukrainian refugees has enabled access to support that reflects not only solidarity but also our obligations under international law.

The timely enactment of the Directive, in addition to rapid funding commitments and resolute multilateral and

diplomatic efforts, represents a clear and replicable signal by political leaders of their ability to act with urgency in a timely, comprehensive, and coordinated manner to refugee crises in keeping with the central tenets of the Refugee Convention, not least the premise of international protection and responsibility sharing.

Equitable responsibility sharing is essential.

It is inevitable that some states will host more refugees than others due to decision-making based on an individuals' needs, capabilities and access to support as they flee conflict. Family, linguistic ties, geographic proximity, educational or livelihood opportunities are essential factors everyone considers as they take new steps - forced or not - in their lives. However, an estimated 83% of refugees are currently hosted in low- and middle income states³. This

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/5/628a389e4/unhcr-ukraine-other-conflicts-push-forcibly-displaced-total-100-million.html>

² Council Directive 2001/55/EC

³ <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> (Low income – 22%; Lower-middle income – 21%; Upper middle income – 40%; High-income 17%)

situation places a disproportionate responsibility to host and assist refugees on just a handful of states.

Regardless of the context and refugee situation, equitable responsibility sharing, in line with the commitments of the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, is key. States and communities who are hosting the largest numbers of refugees require increased and sustained technical and financial assistance to provide dignified and substantive support. Other states should offer more resettlement opportunities to better share responsibility and enable refugees to move forward in their lives. Halfway through the 2022, only 15,000 people have been resettled globally, 40,000 less than at the end of 2018⁴.

Opportunities for self-reliance and pathways to all three of these Durable Solutions⁵ are vital to reversing the growing global displacement crisis.

An estimated 70% of refugees live in countries with restricted rights to work and close to 70% live in situations with limitations on freedom of movement, despite clear legal guidance and obligations.⁶ Once again, this directly contrasts with the mobilisation and support we have seen for the Ukraine crisis. For example, as we reach 12 years since the start of the Syrian conflict, more than 12 million displaced people in and from Syria require more assistance than ever due to the prolonged nature of their displacement, the unresolved conflict, as well as the effects of the global pandemic and wheat shortage. Syrians too, including the estimated 2.8 million youth among them, need to move on from the on-going effects of displacement.⁷

Beyond diplomatic solutions to conflict, any pursuit of durable solutions to displacement cannot be realized without political will and genuine commitments to promote community recovery and self-reliance, to challenge any normalization of basic survival that we increasingly see across many crises' contexts.

Access to livelihoods and income generation are core components of the Refugee Convention, other international human rights protections and most recently the Global Compact on Refugees⁸, yet persistent barriers remain with

significant consequences in the immediacy and longer-term for millions of refugees including desperate coping mechanisms and an inability to adapt to any shock or stress. Similarly access to education is outlined as a commitment not only within the Refugee Convention and recently the GCR, but also the Convention on the Rights of the Child among other legislation. Yet close to 50% of school aged refugee children are out of school with only 3% of refugee youth attending further education⁹ placing millions of refugee girls and boys at significant risk of protection threats including early, forced marriage, child labour, and mental health and psychosocial challenges¹⁰.



Photo: Martin Thaulow. Azraq refugee camp, January 2019.

As outlined in the December 2021 joint IRC-DRC-NRC report, [The Global Compact on Refugees Three Years On](#), expanding global resettlement and investing in assistance for refugees must be a priority. Those in search of protection and safety in the face of persecution, conflict, and human rights violations are entitled to equal treatment, as outlined in international protection mechanisms. The Ukraine crisis has shown that political will and solidarity can exist for refugee crises.

Political will and leadership are needed across some of the world's most complex crises to break protracted emergency cycles and ensure refugees and displacement affected communities are afforded every opportunity and indeed right to lead their own recovery and solutions

⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement-data.html>

⁵ The three durable solutions recognized under international law are: 1) Sustainable reintegration at the place of origin (return); 2) Sustainable local integration in areas where internally displaced persons take refuge (local integration); 3) Sustainable integration in a third country (relocation)

⁶ UDHR Article 23, ICESCR Article 6 and 7, International Refugee Convention Article 17,18, and 19.

⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1117932>

⁸ UDHR Article 23, ICESCR Article 6 and 7, International Refugee Convention Article 17,18, and 19.

⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/education.html#:~:text=Close%20to%20half%20of%20all,countries%20was%2068%20per%20cent.>

¹⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/education/612f85d64/unhcr-education-report-2021-staying-course-challenges-facing-refugee-education.html>

Recommendations

In the face of the staggering 100 million people displaced across the world we recommend the following action:

Promote and uphold refugee protection and international law for all regardless of nationality, country of origin or transit, or other irrelevant criteria. International law is not determined by the geographical proximity of conflict and human rights are universal.

- Political leaders must focus their discourse on our moral, political and legal obligations under the law, to protect people who flee conflict as they have done for most fleeing Ukraine. All people fleeing conflict are entitled to protection. Refugees must be understood as survivors who have been forced to flee their homes, often unsure of when they will see their family and friends again, who must be provided with protection and support.
- Facilitate access to physical security by expediting access to territory. When someone flees, they are rarely able to leave with all the right documents in hand. Providing immediate safety for people fleeing violence and persecution must be a priority.

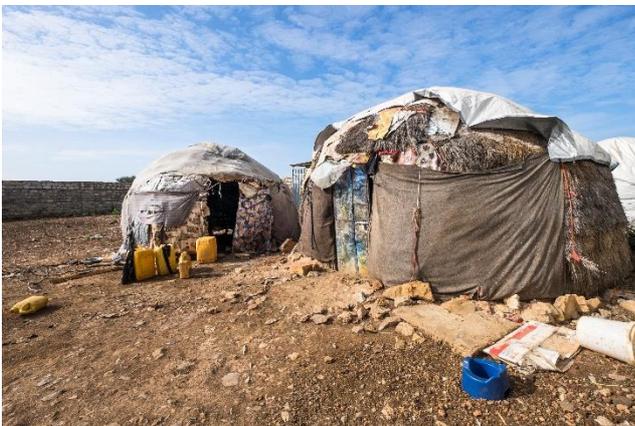


Photo: Axel Fassio / DRC, IDP settlement in Baidoa, Somalia

Afford refugees every opportunity to recover and become self-reliant.

- Governments, donors, and humanitarian actors must take dramatic steps to ensure refugees have access to family reunification, education and learning opportunities, income generation and livelihood opportunities. Refugees must be afforded every opportunity and right to lead their own recovery and support durable solutions.

Demonstrate political will through increased global responsibility sharing.

- Increase and sustain efforts toward durable solutions including resettlement and complimentary pathways, as well as family reunification. Halfway through the 2022, only 15,000 people have been resettled, 40,000 less than at the end of 2018¹¹. As a priority for 2022, governments should commit to raise their resettlement targets. UN agencies and civil society must work together to hold states accountable against a further erosion of resettlement commitments.
- Given the scale of the global displacement crisis, increase diplomatic attention, financial and technical support to ensure all global crisis received adequate engagement and support, avoiding redirection of funding from other humanitarian crises. Essential funding to the massive humanitarian needs should come from funds set aside for emergencies and/or additional funds, not taken from existing crises. Governments need to take the long view. Supporting the education, housing and other infrastructure of hosting communities and states is an essential enabling factor for responsibility sharing. States must take a more consistent approach to ensure the GCR is being applied in all refugee-hosting contexts. States can work closely with humanitarian and development partners to ensure implementation of the refugee protection is supported at the country level.

¹¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement-data.html>