

The Global Compact on Refugees: *Are children at the heart of your responses?*

Geneva, 15 December 2021

Distinguished delegates,

The Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts (the Initiative)* is delighted to share its updated guidance to help governments and other stakeholders to put the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) into practice for and with children.

[“A Practical Guide: Protecting and Supporting Children through the Global Compact on Refugees”](#) offers concrete advice and a planning checklist to ensure children are at the centre of GCR plans and interventions. We hope you find it useful for the 2021 High Level Officials Meeting and beyond.

As you know, children account for approximately 30 per cent of the world’s population and an estimated 42 per cent of all forcibly displaced people¹. Refugee responses must empower and protect these children, taking into account their gender, any disability they are living with, and other forms of diversity. Otherwise, they will simply fail. Children must have safe and adequate access to protection, education, health care and mental health care, asylum and sustainable solutions in their best interests.

The GCR recognizes the disproportionate and distinct challenges that forced displacement brings for children, challenges which have been dramatically exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The measures outlined in the GCR have the potential to make a positive difference – but only if we make a concerted effort and put children at the very heart of refugee responses.

Governments and other stakeholders have made a number of pledges that focus on children, particularly around education. Yet, this remains too small a proportion of GCR implementation, and much more needs to be done, particularly on improving access to and the quality of child protection systems and sustainable solutions that are child-centred.

It is imperative that governments work with children, partners and affected communities. Responses must put children at the centre and ensure the full participation of children from refugee and host communities and of diverse backgrounds, gender and abilities to ensure their specific needs, perspectives and recommendations are addressed.

Ongoing exchange, learning, cooperation, and partnerships are also crucial if we want to make the GCR work for children and ensure a continuum of protection, care and access to services.

The Initiative’s new guide offers advice on implementing the GCR measures in practice to ensure their positive impact on children.

The Initiative has also published [a collection of examples of programmes that support children](#) and earlier this year, organized a virtual [high-level stocktaking event](#) on implementing the GCR for children. It was inspiring to have over 250 representatives of governments, civil society, and UN entities, and young refugees attend and bring creative ideas for how to respond to key challenges

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/>

affecting refugee and migrant children through the GCR implementation. Some important recommendations came out of those discussions, including the need to:

- **Prioritize consultation with and the meaningful participation of children in all their diversity in the design and monitoring of responses.**
- Increase the **number of child-centered pledges** that focus on equitable access for children from refugee and host communities to key services. Include costed plans for their implementation and monitoring.
- **Include refugee, migrant and displaced children in existing national systems** by strengthening and adapting laws, policies, services, and programmes.
- Improve access of refugee children to **child protection services and strengthened national child protection systems**. Ensure refugee children access **mental health and psychological support** that respond to the common and distinct needs of refugee boys, girls, and children living with disabilities and include child-focused mechanisms for the prevention, response and mitigation of Gender-Based Violence. Increase appropriate **funding** for child protection interventions. Improve **cross-border collaboration** on child protection.
- **Strengthen national education systems** and the provision of and access to: early learning and development; and primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational education for all children. Ensure education systems have specialized resources to facilitate the integration of children into national education systems.
- Ensure refugee children can access relevant **documentation**, including birth certificates, and **tackle statelessness**.
- Expand **child-sensitive solutions** in line with the child's best interests, taking into account specific barriers based on their gender, disability and other forms of diversity. **Formalize procedures** for determination of the child's best interests in law, policy, and practice. Ensure access to an **efficient and child-friendly asylum system**.

Looking towards the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, the Initiative will continue in its mission of bringing together children, youth, government representatives, community leaders, and other stakeholders to reflect on progress made, recognize challenges for children affected by forced displacement including those posed by COVID-19, and identify what more can be done. We would be happy if you can join us in our next roundtables in 2022 so that together we can do more for and with refugee children.

The Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts.

** The Initiative is a multi-stakeholder partnership bringing together over 30 civil society, trade union, UN and philanthropic organisations around a shared agenda - to create a continuum of care, protection and support for refugee and migrant children and to ensure that children's rights are at the heart of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration.*

Further information and Contacts:

For more information about the Initiative, including a list of members, see: www.childrenonthemove.org
Contacts: Co-chairs of the Initiative, Daniela Reale (Daniela.Reale@savethechildren.org) and Caroline Horne (caroline.horne@terredeshommes.org).