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Niels V. S. Harild and
Svein E. Stave

How to move forward on implementing progressive refugee policies

Discussion paper

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Contents

Preface

This discussion paper assesses the development, status, and prospects of so-called 'progressive refugee policies' (i.e., policies that allow refugees to take part in the economic life in host countries) as prescribed in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), launched in 2018. We discuss some of the underlying obstacles to the implementation of such policies and examine who needs to do what to overcome these obstacles. Principally, we challenge refugee host states and donor states, as the duty bearers, to take full responsibility, to act accordingly, and to be accountable.

The paper is part of the project 'Refugees for Development' (RfD) funded by the Norwegian Research Council through the NORGLOBAL2 programme. This project covers case studies on the implementation of progressive refugee policies in Jordan, Uganda, and Ethiopia, in addition to reviewing progressive refugee policies in a historical and global perspective. The paper draws on the lessons from the RfD project, combined with insights of the lead author, Niels V.S. Harild, gained from working with refugee policies for the UNHCR and the World Bank Group over the last 40 years.

This discussion paper contains views and statements made by the authors to trigger discussion.

Bornholm and Oslo, 30 October 2023
Niels V.S. Harild and Svein Erik Stave

List of acronyms and abbreviations

CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EU	European Union
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GCM	Global Compact on Migration
GCFF	Global Concessional Financing Facility
GRF	Global Refugee Forum
HLOM	High-Level Officials Meeting
ICRC	International Committee of Red Cross
IDA	International Development Association, WBG
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
JDC	Joint Data Centre (UNHCR and WBG)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
MOL	Ministry of Labour
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RRS	Refugee & Returnee Service
RPRs	Refugee Policy Reviews
RfD	Refugees for Development (Research Project)
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine
WBG	World Bank Group

1 Introduction

Almost all the world's 35.3 million refugees live in situations of protracted displacement, with the majority (some 76 percent) residing in middle- and low-income countries. These refugee hosting countries are typically facing their own development challenges such as high unemployment rates, extensive informal employment, and stretched public services. Hence, to protect their labour markets and to secure public services for their own populations, most middle- and low-income countries have developed refugee policies that restrict refugees' access to work and public services, and their possibility to move freely and interact with host communities. Therefore, the needs of refugees have been covered primarily by humanitarian aid pending lasting solutions to their situations. However, the protracted nature of most refugee situations and the fact that many refugees seek income and dignity through work despite formal restrictions have led to the development of more inclusive – or 'progressive' refugee policies. In 2018, universal principles and pathways towards more inclusive refugee policies were outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), which has been endorsed by 181 UN member states.

When endorsed, the GCR was described as a pivotal moment for refugee policies by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, and many leading refugee management actors around the world. The Compact laid the foundations for more predictable and equitable international responsibility-sharing to support host countries and communities, to promote refugee self-reliance, and to expand access to third-country solutions, all of which are often referred to as 'progressive refugee policies'. Although strategies based on the vision of the GCR have been developed by many refugee hosting countries, their implementation nearly six years after the adoption of the GCR have been weak and practical outcomes few. Two realities in particular face refugee policymakers today: First, *the comprehensive progressive vision of the GCR is not taking systematic root.* The donor and host country intentions and commitments, although not legally binding, have not held up in practice. Second, *the traditional humanitarian-led approach to refugee situations is largely continuing. It is costly, unsustainable, and not working to inspire progressive refugee policies*. The approach is chronically underfunded and not designed for, and therefore unfit for, dealing with long-term displacement.

The need for moving forward on implementing the progressive vision of the GCR is reinforced by increasing global uncertainties and crises. This 'global polycrisis'[1], dominated by increased global security and geopolitical tensions, energy crises, economic crises, food insecurity, and climate change, affects global refugee issues in two ways: First, the global crises may push many countries towards more nationalistic,

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[1] A global polycrisis occurs when crises in multiple global systems (economics, climate, conflicts and war, energy, bipolar tensions, rise of authoritarianism, etc.) become causally entangled in ways that significantly degrade humanity's prospects. Popularised by the economic historian Adam Tooze, the term refers to 'not just a situation where you face multiple crises, [but] a situation…where the whole is even more dangerous than the sum of the parts.' The polycrisis situation the world is facing will likely increase the number and length of crises and the demand for resources to react to these will increase manifold, while available resources are at least unlikely to increase, if not decrease.

domestic, and protectionist policies, undermining implementation of more progressive refugee policies and the visions of the GCR, and second, the crises are likely to produce more refugees in the future. The number of conflict crises producing refugees are rising with no peaceful resolution to many of them in sight. The number of refugees is at its highest since 1945 and increasing, with few durable solutions to their plight on the horizon. Financial resources for refugee situations are already under strain and with dire projections for the global economy for 2024 and years beyond, national and Official Development Assistance (ODA) financing for refugees is likely to decline significantly in the years to come. So far, it is the same few donor countries providing support to hosting low- and medium-income countries, while a large number of countries in the missing middle are doing little or nothing to share the responsibility. Most of the world's refugees are unable to enjoy inclusion (economic, social, and public service delivery) and are consequently unable to generate their own income and live normal and decent lives in dignity, and therefore need costly welfare to survive until lasting solutions can be found. In view of all this, implementing the comprehensive and developmental vision of the GCR is more important than ever, even as political attention has shifted elsewhere to address the polycrisis exacerbated by the Ukraine war and the more recent Gaza war.

The main purpose of this paper is to present experiences and insights on progressive refugee policies and practice to trigger discussion on how to move forward with implementing such policies and the GCR visions. A key objective has been to identify core obstacles to the success of the Compact, including issues related to: (i) restrictive framework conditions in refugee hosting countries; (ii) the traditional humanitarian approach; (iii) leadership challenges; (iv) resistance to change; (v) weak policy commitments and lack of policy coherence; and (vi) situations with double standards. Opportunities to build on are also identified and suggestions are made for a reset on how to go forward with implementing progressive refugee policies.

To shed light on these issues, we provide a brief account of the humanitarian development divide and the historical evolution of progressive refugee policies (section 2) and draw lessons from implementing progressive refugee policies in low- and medium-income countries, where the vast majority of all refugees live (section 3). In addition, we look at experiences from the recent Ukraine refugee situation to show an example of how progressive refugee initiatives can be swiftly implemented if there is sufficient political will (section 4). At the end of the paper, we summarise some of the key obstacles and challenges of implementing progressive refugee policies (section 5) and provide ideas for further discussion on what is required by whom to see improvements in progressive refugee policies (section 6).

In this paper, *inclusion* refers to social and economic inclusion of refugees, not full legal local integration, i.e., naturalisation and citizenship. *Development* refers to how states evolve through their national policies and plans, state and private sector structures and processes, as well as how states define their development priorities. *Development cooperation* refers to how development donors support host country development priorities. *Localisation* refers to the national context, rather than the priorities of outside donors, and defines the issues within a country, as well as the planning and execution of approaches to addressing them under local leadership with the country's own resources combined with direct external financing to government institutions and civil society. Localisation is a central part of development and therefore a central part of progressive refugee policies.

The paper is based on a combination of a review of documents listed in the bibliography, consultations with select state, agency, and academic actors, and the lead

author's more than 40 years of hands-on experience with refugee policies[2]. Furthermore, the paper draws on findings and experiences obtained through the research project 'Refugees for Development' (RfD), funded by the Research Council of Norway as part of the NORGLOBAL2 program. RfD is about *progressive refugee policies* as per the vision of the GCR, and the project has examined the experiences of such policies in Jordan, Uganda, and Ethiopia. While the main outputs from RfD are academic articles based on the research carried out in the case study countries, this discussion paper takes a more applied global birds-eye view of the experiences with progressive refugee policies, with the main aim of informing policymakers and refugee policies.

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[2] The principal author, Niels V. S. Harild, has worked on the issue of refugees and development for 40 years and has been centrally involved in the many initiatives to promote progressive refugee approaches during this time span. He worked for UNHCR, civil society, governments, and the World Bank Group. Svein Erik Stave works as researcher at Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research (Fafo) and has studied impacts of refugee policies and programmes since the 2010. Since 2019 he has led the Refugees for Development (RfD) project. In addition to the two authors of this discussion paper, the RfD research team has consisted of Tewodros Kebede from Fafo, Maha Kattaa from the International Labour Organization (ILO), Sarah A. Tobin from Christian Michelsen Institute for Development Research (CMI), Sarah Khasalamva-Mwandha from Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Social Anthropologist Thera Mjaaland, and Professor Emeritus Roger Zetter.

2 The humanitarian-development divide and the evolution of progressive refugee policies

A brief review of the historic trajectory of progressive refugee policies may help set the scene for how we arrived at where we are today, and to chart a path going forward. The post-1945 political process introduced development action by establishing the Britton Woods Institutions[3], the United Nations, and the Marshall plan to seek long-term solutions to poverty reduction and social transformation. This development action was clearly distinct from the humanitarian approaches that go back to the establishment of the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and the attempt of the League of Nations. The international humanitarian architecture took form from the imperative to assist victims and refugees of the two World Wars with immediate life-saving assistance, leading to the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention[4]. Many states designed their governance and institutional structures based on these two different technical and conceptual imperatives, and the separation of humanitarian and development action became entrenched in systems, approaches, and policies. Thus, the access to work and services elements of the Convention stayed as 'a fly in the humanitarian bottle'.

Since 1951, many attempts have been made to broaden approaches to the complexities of refugee situations from the pure humanitarian to also include development aspects, up to the time of the adoption of the GCR in 2018. The evolution has been stepwise and here are some of the most important steps with key outcomes of policy relevance: The CIREFCA (Conferencia Internacional Sobre Refugiados Centroamericanos) process on finding solutions to refugee situations in Central America in the 1980s worked principally because it was led by the Central American states with the political will to make it happen. In the Brookings process in 1999-2000, donor states could not agree on the best way forward, and pilot initiatives by UNDP, the WBG, and UNHCR had no outcome, primarily because it was a top-down process that UNHCR led, albeit without involving the displacement-affected states and with no commitment from the WBG or UNDP. The three organisations tried again in 2008, with pilot initiatives through the Transition Solution Initiative, which had limited outcomes. That initiative was UN-centric, top-down, only observed by donors, and without displacement-affected states involved. The 2014 Solutions Alliance was the first initiative with global focus, including all actors involved from displacement-affected states, donor states, WBG, UNDP, UNHCR, research institutions, NGOs, and

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[3] The International Monetary Fund and the Word Bank Group.
[4] The League of Nations was created in 1920 and remained active until 1939. It included the creation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) with the objective of settling and finding employment for war-displaced persons, which can be seen as a precursor for the humanitarian development nexus. The League of Nations also adopted a series of conventions to protect specific groups of refugees, in particular Russian and Armenian refugees.

the private sector. The vision was progressive and comprehensive, focusing on a bottom-up, country-led process. UNHCR led and controlled the process. Outcomes were minimal. The Solution Alliance vision informed the design of the GCR and its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)-country-specific initiatives[5]. At the time of the Brookings process, a Swedish diplomat seconded to UNHCR observed the following on the prospects of a comprehensive humanitarian development approach to deal with refugee situations and stated: 'it is political – not technical'[6]. This claim is as correct today as it was then. At the time no one understood, but today the notion is gaining traction. While the post-1945 separation of humanitarian and development approaches may seem trivial, it is important to understand why the traditional (old) humanitarian model persists, and why the GCR and its comprehensive vision to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development approaches (so-called 'nexus approach') remains challenging.

Box 1. Historical lessons from the decades leading up to the GCR

Success with progressive refugee policies has come when host and donor states had the political will to make it happen and took charge of the process. On the other hand, top-down approaches driven from the outside have not worked, including UNHCR-led and UN-centric approaches, where affected states and donors were not sufficiently involved, and activities that focused on technical programmatic issues over the political. The limited success with nexus approaches over the decades was primarily due to the fact that the development world was not ready to include refugee situations as a core development issue and the reality that UNHCR could not drive a development agenda.

The 2018 GCR established a political consensus on what is needed, implying a political will backing the GCR approach[7]. It has a comprehensive, progressive, and development-oriented vision, introducing a focus on preparedness, prevention, localisation, and inclusion by giving a much more central role to development actors (states and multilateral agencies) than in the past, and by reinforcing the principle of responsibility sharing. The developmental approach of the GCR is a fundamental step towards addressing refugee situations in ways that consider their longevity or protractedness. Social and economic inclusion of refugees is a long-term (i.e., developmental) issue and therefore should be addressed through national and subnational structures with much more focus on domestic leadership to sustainably address needs and opportunities, i.e., through localisation. This issue was placed firmly on the development agenda in a WBG document in 2016, 'Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Their Hosts', which stipulated the importance of addressing medium- to long-term socio-economic impacts and the development dimensions of forced displacement as a core element of the work of the WBG. However, the potency of refugee issues in terms of political sensitivities will always need to be considered, since, through a development approach, the extent of inclusion and rights of refugees can be contentious.

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[5] For further details on these initiatives, see Harild, 2020, Annex I, pages 14-16
[6] Quote from a meeting attended by the lead author.
[7] The process leading up to the GCR adoption was largely driven by the Syrian crisis that began in 2011 and saw an increase in refugees moving to Europe in 2015. The 2016 Obama summit brought the issue to the fore, and then came the 2016 New York Declaration, the CRRF process, and the call for The Global Compact on Refugees.

The comprehensive vision of the GCR is understood by its signatories as a progressive refugee policy, where *progressive* refers to the centrality of addressing the development dimensions of displacement through inclusionary policies, as opposed to the traditional, often exclusionary, humanitarian approach to refugee situations. Inclusive refugee policies refer to how the host state, the country of origin, and third countries include refugees in the respective national sector plans and economic and social life, while refugees are in protracted displacement, return home, or find a solution in a third country. These national plans may, if the displacement-affected state requests it, be supported by Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). It is therefore about both governance and ODA.

In development lingo, 'localisation' is as old as the term 'development.' Development actors inherently have worked in a 'localised manner' because of the importance of strengthening systems and structures in place in-country, and to work with and through governments. In recent years, countries that access development aid advocate for a system that supports them in developing context-appropriate policies and approaches for change and progress. This should involve host country, government-led joint political economy analysis, identification of options, and shared decision-making. In humanitarian circles, one of the commitments of the 2016 Grand Bargain agreement is to provide 'more support and funding tools for local and national responders' referred to as 'localisation'. For some humanitarians, localisation is about money going directly to local NGOs and not to authorities. In both terminologies, emphasis is on the local context defining issues under local leadership, planning, and execution. Foreign financial support to top up national resources should go directly to local initiatives, institutions, and actors. Localisation emphasises the importance of country ownership and leadership for development and is thus a central part of progressive refugee policies.

While this paper looks at the prospects and needs for a GCR approach, it also recognises that in some acute phases of refugee situations where national capacity is completely absent, the traditional humanitarian approach that external actors implement directly may be the only option. However, that traditional approach should be an exception and not the norm for all refugee situations, as is the case today. In protracted situations where for political reasons development assistance is not possible, the traditional approach may also be needed for some time, but again on an exceptional basis until a more favourable outlook may emerge. It is important that development actors are engaged from the beginning even in these circumstances.

Following the GCR implementation plan, the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) was held in Geneva in December 2019 to assess the progress of the GCR rollout. Attendance was at the Head of State/Agency level and many countries and multilateral development organisations sent large delegations to the forum. The GRF demonstrated high-level political commitment to the GCR vision and was a high point for progressive refugee policies and for the issue of refugees and development. There was adrenaline, momentum, and political attention, and it was an upbeat event with unprecedented engagement from states and development organisations on how to operationalise the vision of the GCR. Many of the traditional donors had sent their development departments in addition to the humanitarian departments traditionally representing donors at refugee meetings. Never had so many development ministers and their specialists participated in a global refugee meeting in Geneva, and the multilateral development agencies spearheaded by the IFIs and OECD were present in unprecedented force. But it was unclear how deep the engagement of some of the development delegates really was.

The forum depicted the importance of burden and responsibility sharing as the overarching challenge that was central to the success of progressive refugee policies. This was underscored in the concluding remarks by Ms. Jennifer Namuyangu, Uganda's Minister of State for Local Government, at the GRF's spotlight session, 'Getting burden and responsibility sharing right for the GCR', as she summarised the key sentiments of the event (Harild, 2020):

> We have learned that as displacement always takes many years to solve – we need to look at displacement as a development issue. Achieving burden and responsibility sharing requires from host states and development partners to do the following:
>
> - Agree on a need to discuss burden and responsibility sharing based on trust and understanding.
> - Agree most displacement ends up protracted, and must be handled through development cooperation.
> - Agree on need for joint context analysis, impact assessments, and costed sector planning.
>
> So, if we are to get burden and responsibility sharing right for the GCR, it's through development collaboration in direct engagement between host states and their development partners[8].

At the time of the GRF, sporadic and isolated steps forward in progressive refugee policies had emerged as a few development actors had begun operationalising the vision of the GCR, and country pilot approaches had been initiated. At the GRF and in the weeks following, some 1,700 pledges were made and an indicator framework to measure progress was established.

As part of the GCR implementation plan, a High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM) was held in December 2021 to provide an interim review of how the GCR was faring. The key message was that the progress of the GCR had been limited. Some progress was achieved on technical pledges, but no significant progress had been achieved on the central issues of financial burden and responsibility sharing, nor had policy reforms been ratified and implemented. While there are some examples of right-to-work policies and inclusion in national systems, these are marginal with practical implementation challenges. This limited progress signified a lack of political will on the part of both host states and their donor partners. While UNHCR had made efforts to improve its capacity to engage development actors, its internal structures and operational approaches remained unchanged. The World Bank Group's (WBG) important work on displacement was only beginning to take form, with some IDA projects effective by 2021 and with more in the pipeline. The ILO had also been active in promoting employment, decent work policies and practices for refugees in several countries, such as Turkey and Jordan, but the scale remained limited. Reasons for the limited GCR progress at the time of the HLOM was partly that the deeper obstacles identified in this paper had been ignored, due to lack of political will and modalities to address them, and partly because political attention had been on pandemic and climate mitigation and intensified global insecurity impacts, diverting resources in these directions. The attention needed to effectuate change had waned, chiefly as countries faced competing priorities. As a result, progressive refugee policies, yet

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[8] See Harild, 2020, and its Annex 2 for further details on how to achieve financial burden and responsibility sharing.

again, with few exceptions, trended back towards traditional humanitarian approaches and a continuation of business as usual. Implementation of the progressive GCR vision had not yet become sufficiently resilient to withstand emerging political challenges and more immediate political priorities. Yet, the collective feeling that the GCR process in its present form was on track persisted. Ignoring the deeper reasons for why the GCR vision was not taking root hinders needed decisions for change.

As part of the GCR rollout plan, the informal High Commissioner's 'Dialogue on Protection Challenges: Development Cooperation' took place in December of 2022. The dialogue aimed at seeking answers to: (i) Early action – Enhancing development cooperation to anticipate, respond to, and foster longer-term approaches to emergencies; (ii) Inclusion – The role of development cooperation in facilitating inclusion in national systems; and (iii) Solutions – Unlocking solutions through enhanced development cooperation.

Reflecting on the proceedings, the core obstacles that we describe in chapter five of this discussion paper were either not addressed or received only peripheral attention. The dialogue is a High Commissioner-led event and orchestrated through his prism with the regular UNHCR meeting crowd and some development actors in attendance. Grandi made clear that there will be no refugee inclusion without development and no development without refugee inclusion. From the dialogue, one is left with the impression that it would be more important, interesting, and relevant if the discussion on development cooperation on refugee issues and the issue of refugee inclusion was understood through a development prism taking place where host states and development actors discuss development either internally or in development forums. There was a strong focus on funding of UNHCR operations and how much of that funding is increasingly for development, giving the impression that development approaches for refugees are a task for UNHCR. Some states made it clear that UNHCR should focus on international protection and not become a development agency, but were less clear on what then was to happen from the development side.

There was broad agreement that displacement is a protracted and long-term issue, and this fact should be considered from the beginning of a crisis, but the full implications of what such an approach implies for host states, their development partners, and humanitarian actors received little attention. While there was broad agreement that refugee inclusion must come as part of the host country social and economic development trajectory, there was very little mention of how to address non-conducive framework conditions in host countries and no indications of progress on financial burden and responsibility sharing or how to achieve it. There was some focus on what UNHCR is doing to improve its engagement in development cooperation. However, the fact that GCR progress largely depends on what host states and development actors will do received no attention. Reflecting on the proceedings underscores the importance of moving discussions on development cooperation on refugee issues to the forums where development is discussed nationally, regionally, and globally. This should be considered going forward.

IMF and OECD made clear that resource constraints across the board will be worse in the years and decades to come, but the full consequences of fewer resources for refugee situations and options for remedial action were not put on the table, other than trying to find more funds, particularly more development funding. The necessity to first ensure a development approach both in terms of policy and operational direction was not mentioned. Reflecting on the dialogue and looking toward the December 2023 GRF, this must change. The GRF should first be about ensuring refugee inclusion as a prioritised development approach, with funding then coming through

national budget procedures or external development support if needed. Asking for funding first is a traditional humanitarian approach, which is simply not how development funding works.

Box 2. Lessons since the adoption of the GCR[9]

With the GCR, the narrative of a comprehensive, more development-oriented approach to refugee situations is in place to be applied at the beginning of all refugee crises. Most refugee situations are protracted, and this longevity and the core development challenge it presents, even after some years of GCR rollout, is still not fully internalised and accepted in host- and donor-state development policies, structures, procedures, plans, and budgets. The separation of humanitarian and development action remains entrenched, and the traditional "old" humanitarian model dominates. Some limited operationalisations of the GCR is emerging and has come when national and external development actors have taken the refugee situation on as a core development issue. Political and popular resentment is widespread and often tends to be decisive for the prospects of introducing progressive refugee policies, even as evidence is growing that such policies can reduce needs, tension, and xenophobia. We have also learned that financial burden and responsibility sharing is essential to the success of progressive refugee policies and that this sharing should come through development cooperation. This requires refugee hosting countries to make refugee needs a development priority and to have a positive trajectory towards progressive refugee policies in order to achieve donor support. This would signal that the state has a favourable view towards such policies and/or that it is willing to take measures to help them succeed. More importantly, it requires donors to commit to cover the additional costs of such policies as long as needed and in such a way that host countries can count on this commitment in their planning. Overall, international policy commitments are critical to progressive refugee policy success but have proven fragile and can evaporate quickly when the global policy environment faces shocks, and the political space and will for change have narrowed in the face of such other priorities. As a case in point, the world has seen only limited progress result from the more than 1700 pledges made at the 2019 GRF.

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[9]In the Global Compact, the measuring impact effort is one of three processes designed to inform stakeholders of future progress towards greater responsibility sharing. The others are tracking of pledges and contributions made at the GRF and collection and analysis of data through the indicator framework for the GCR. In addition, the OECD's report of tracking ODA commitments to countries impacted by refugee flows is also a contribution to this.

3 Lessons from implementation of progressive refugee policies in low- and middle-income countries

Five years after the adoption of the GCR, most refugees are still unable to benefit from progressive refugee policies. Here it is important to note, again, that the majority of all refugees live in low- and middle-income countries with their own challenges. Many refugee hosting countries that have progressive refugee policies according to the WBG's Refugee Policy Review Framework (RPRF) (see World Bank Group, 2021)—or even ones that have only elements of such policies—have either not managed or not wanted to operationalise these policies in practice in a comprehensive and systematic way. Furthermore, a significant number of other countries have restrictive policies. In this part of the paper, we provide a brief global account of progressive refugee policies to date and present some key lessons from the three RfD case countries, which have yielded mixed results.

3.1 The global situation

In the '2022 Global Refugee Work Rights Report' (Ginn et. al., 2022), a consortium of researchers on the working environment for refugees across the 51 countries that host most of the world refugees concludes that more than half of the world's refugees face restrictions that inhibit their ability to benefit from progressive refugee policies that allow them to generate any significant income. As part of the refugee response window of the International Development Association (IDA), the WBG has undertaken, with support from UNHCR, a series of Refugee Policy Reviews (RPRs) of countries eligible for support from IDA. So far there are RPRs developed for 14 countries that were eligible for IDA19 resources. Kenya and South Sudan recently became eligible. The rollout of the RPRs is underway, progress is being assessed, and a new round of reviews is in the pipeline. Less than half of these countries have progressive refugee policies and most of these have not implemented them. A key point here is that RPRs provide a good overview of where things stand and are an important basis for maintaining or beginning to engage in policy dialogue with host countries on vision and next steps. This is particularly important for refugee-hosting countries where political and public resentment is widespread, with framework conditions that preclude operationalisation of progressive refugee policies. Unfortunately, most refugee-hosting countries fit this description. On the operational front, the IDA refugee window and the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) are useful instruments for WBG country offices in situations where regular WBG loans are not feasible. However, there is still scant evidence of actual and substantial refugee inclusion, though exceptions include the promising developments in Kenya. The three RfD case study countries below illustrate what happens when the ideal GCR vision meets country context realities, showing that the social, economic, and policy framework

conditions and development potential are critical for the GCR vision to be realised. Additionally, other studies from ODI and the UNHCR and WBG Joint Data Centre show that, in practice, most refugee host countries do not offer progressive refuge policy opportunities.

3.2 Ethiopia: Lack of policy coherence and ownership

Ethiopia is the second largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, with over 823,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers predominantly from South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea. Most refugees live in refugee camps established across five regional states and jointly run by UNHCR and the government refugee authority – the Refugee & Returnee Service (RRS). Over 70,000 refugees reside in the capital Addis Ababa as urban refugees. In 2021, during the conflict between Ethiopian and Eritrean government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), two refugee camps in the northern Tigray region hosting mostly Eritrean refugees were closed, and many of the refugees from these camps relocated to Addis Ababa. Access to social services for refugees in Ethiopia is only provided in the camps, and, with very few exceptions, refugees are restricted from taking up work and from moving freely.

At the September 2016 UN summit, which delivered the New York Declaration and kickstarted the GCR process, Ethiopia made nine pledges to develop a more inclusive refugee policy. The pledges outlined a progressive refugee policy with access to labour markets, free movement, and access to land and public services and this policy was later put into law. Implementation of labour market access and establishment of new economic zones was supported by substantial development funding from the WBG, the UK, and other bilateral donors. However, this refugee policy approach never really took off, partly due to design flaws, and partly because the nine pledges were not owned by the whole of government. The fact that the refugee agenda is vested in one specific government authority (the RRS) created a structural obstacle. In addition, the subnational authorities in the regions hosting the refugees were not involved in formulating the pledges, resulting in limited ownership at the local level. As a result, refugees have felt only limited impact as compared to life under the country's original restrictive refugee policy. A main finding from the RfD Ethiopia case study is that new laws introduced to allow refugees into the labour market and to promote self-sufficiency among refugees still contain restrictions that hinder these things happening in practice (Mjaaland, 2023), indicating a lack of commitment and ownership by the national authorities. Moreover, a downscaling of humanitarian aid alongside the introduction of the new laws has left refugees in a vacuum where they have less access to humanitarian aid while at the same time not having more access to work (Mjaaland, 2023). In essence, the broader framework conditions in Ethiopia were never conducive to progressive refugee policies. Since early 2021, civil war has further hampered any progress, and the future direction of the country is uncertain even as a new period of relative peace began in 2023.

3.3 Jordan: Success through contextual adaptations

Jordan hosts a total of 3 million refugees registered either with UNRWA or UNHCR (World Bank Group, 2021b). More than two-thirds are Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA (UNRWA, 2022). At the end of 2022, about 676,000 Syrian refugees were registered with UNHCR, while estimates based on the latest national census indicate that around 1.3 million Syrians live in the country. Eighty per cent of all registered Syrian refugees in Jordan live outside camps. In addition, there are still 67,000 Iraqi

refugees, from the war in Iraq between 2003 and 2011, registered with UNHCR in Jordan (UNHCR, 2019).

Although Jordan has welcomed large groups of refugees since 1948, the country has had a restrictive refugee policy with respect to including refugees in economic activities. Up until 2016, only refugees who had competence that was not available in Jordan or who could work in occupations where demand for labour was higher than the existing supply were allowed to take up work. In March 2016, this policy changed significantly when the European Union (EU) and Jordan adopted an agreement referred to as the Jordan Compact. The initial concept of the compact was that the EU provided Jordan major grants and concessional loans, in addition to exemption from EU trade barriers to stimulate investments and jobs, in exchange for Jordan providing 200,000 work permits for Syrian refugees (Barbelet, Hagen-Zanker and Mansour-Ille, 2018).

In the beginning of the Jordan Compact era, the Jordanian government limited the issuance of work permits to a small number of sectors with a need for labour and a potential for development, including manufacturing and agriculture (Stave, Kebede and Kattaa, 2021). However, the issuance of work permits to Syrians from the outset was slow, and the Jordanian government was forced to make several adjustments to the initial regulations defined by the Compact. The main adjustments up until mid-2021 are listed in the table below. As a result of these changes, a record number of 62,000 work permits were issued among the 676,000 registered Syrian refugees in the year 2021 alone (Stave, Kebede and Kattaa, 2021).

Although the many changes to the original Compact model gradually have provided work for more Syrian refugees, one of the main positive effects of the new policy for the refugees has been a formalisation of their work situations, i.e., better regulations and protection, improvements in working conditions, and, not least of all, increased dignity by being legally accepted as workers. Prior to 2016, nearly 30 per cent of all Syrian refugees in Jordan were participating in the labour market (compared to just above 40 per cent of all Jordanians) despite the restrictive policy at the time, meaning that most of the refugees were in informal and often precarious types of employment (Stave and Hillesund, 2015). While more Syrians have obtained work, and more formalised work, the feared negative impacts on Jordanians' access to work (which is a main motivation for establishing restrictive refugee policies) have been modest – and fewer than many predicted in the early stages of the Syrian refugee crisis. Although refugees compete with low-skilled Jordanian workers in some sectors, the work permit policy has contributed to a general formalisation of the large informal labour market in Jordan.

The development of work permit regulations for Syrian refugees in Jordan, 2016-2022. Chronology of main changes

February 2016	Signing of the Jordan Compact at the Supporting Syria and the Region conference in London
April 2016	Exemption of work permit fees for Syrian refugees.
October 2016	Flexible work permits (not tied to one employer) issued for the agricultural sector by agricultural cooperatives.
June 2017	Flexible work permits issued for the construction sector by the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions.
August 2017	Establishment of the Zaatari Office for Employment; refugees in Zaatari refugee camp allowed to obtain work permits and to work outside the camp.
October 2017	The Ministry of Labour waived the Recognition of Prior Learning certificate requirement for obtaining work permits through the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions for the construction sector.
February 2018	The Azraq Centre for Employment officially launched.
October 2018	Refugees with work permits allowed to move freely between industrial sectors
November 2018	Syrian refugees living outside the camps allowed to register and operate home-based businesses and small businesses in three sectors: food processing, handicrafts, and tailoring.
January 2019	Work permits held by Syrians to be automatically renewed.
September 2019	Issuing fines to non-Jordanian workers for the non-renewal of work permits.
	Issuance of two new types of work permits for non-Jordanian workers: the flexible work permit in the agricultural sector, the construction sector, and logistics enterprises; and work permits for workers with special skills.
September 2020	Imposing fines on Syrian workers for non-renewal of work permits.
December 2020	Publishing the regulations related to issuing work permits for Syrian refugees in the Ministry of Labour's Public Gazette.
	The Ministry of Labour announced the list of open occupations for Syrians.
	Legislation for covering the self-employed with flexible work permits (regardless of nationality).
March 2021	New by-law that extended the coverage of the labour law to agriculture workers
June 2021	Updated list of open occupations, which allowed refugees to move between different occupations and sectors in the same occupational group
July 2021	Extension of social security to Syrian refugees holding flexible work permits

Source: Stave, Kebede and Kattaa, 2021

The inclusion of Syrian refugees in the Jordanian labour market and the Jordan Compact in general points to a success story of a progressive refugee policy, despite relatively modest results in the initial stages of implementation. The Compact was a major policy breakthrough, as it looked at the refugee crisis as an economic opportunity, backed by the political will of the government. Framing refugees as economic assets, it aligned with Jordan's economic and trade interests. Refugees were seen as people with courage, skills, coping strategies, and capacity, rather than vulnerable passive recipients of welfare. The Compact had many implementation challenges, but the progressive vision is slowly having positive impact, despite Jordan's weak economy and private sector. Supporting development partners and the government has worked to close the gap between the original ideal and generic vision of the Compact by

adapting it more closely to the country context. Sustained external support from donors, including substantial financial contributions, is imperative for this slow process towards successful implementation. Jordan's unique geopolitical position and decades of massive budget support from a number of donors has been one of the enabling factors. The initial concerns of the government that refugees would crowd out nationals has not proven to be the case. On the contrary, refugees have filled labour market and business gaps in the local economy to the benefit of the host population. Originally, the framework conditions and refugee policy in Jordan were not conducive, but dialogue between Jordan and its donor partners opened the door for the agreement on the Compact's overall components and vision. Gradual operationalisation and policy refinements have allowed the Compact to become what it is now – a good example of the positive impact of progressive refugee policies for the host country, its people, and the refugees. A key characteristic of the implementation of the Jordan Compact has been a continuous learning and adaptation process to adjust the original and rather generic policy model to Jordanian realities, particularly with respect to local labour market conditions. This adaptation process has been key to the overall positive results achieved in the country so far.

3.4 Uganda: Decentralised progression with governance challenges

Uganda hosts more than 1.5 million refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Burundi, and is the country hosting the most refugees in sub-Saharan Africa. About 90 per cent of all refugees in the country are hosted in 13 districts in the North- and South-Western regions of the country, where they live in settlements and co-exist with the local communities. According to the 2006 National Refugee Act and the 2010 Refugee Regulation, refugees in Uganda have right to take up work, move freely and to access social services. However, social services are only provided to refugees in the settlements, which in practical terms also restricts their opportunities to move freely.

Hence, a progressive refugee policy has formally been in place in Uganda for some time already. Today, donors are supportive, and progress on operations, burden, and responsibility sharing is seen at the local level. Nonetheless, governance issues are hampering full success. Uganda has a longstanding progressive policy, fully in line with the GCR vision. Findings from RfD field research (Khasalamwa-Mwandha, 2021) indicate that the self-reliance approach has not yet yielded significant development benefits. On the other hand, the government has undertaken cost calculations in national and district plans of refugee net impact per sector, setting the stage for full financial burden and responsibility sharing through budget support. However, governance challenges remain a major obstacle due to endemic corruption. The WBG and the EU provide budget support, while the bilateral partners provide 'off budget - on plan' support, showing political will to support the progressive policy and the net fiscal refugee-hosting burden. This is parallel implementation at the local level by external agencies in direct collaboration with line ministries at the district level.

While this situation is far from perfect, it is an example towards resolving the issue of financial burden and responsibility sharing to the extent framework conditions allow. The perfect should not be the enemy of something good enough. The Uganda RfD case study (Khasalamwa-Mwandha, 2021) shows that humanitarian assistance is still primarily provided in rural settlement areas with limited economic opportunities and development, and that this situation is a major constraint for achieving self-

sufficiency of refugees, creating economic development in the host communities, as well as promoting social cohesion between refugees and host populations. However, moving from the longstanding settlement-based self-reliance approach towards one with full inclusion in the national sector development plans is slowly underway. The limited development results so far can be attributed to complicated movement procedures for refugees and the slow process of including the refugee settlements in the district sector development plans.

3.5 Overall lessons

Overall, only limited progress on progressive refugee policies has materialised in refugee hosting countries. To quote IRC, DRC, and NRC, 2021; '*If there were a scorecard against GCR progress three years on, the international community collectively would not pass*'. The RfD case study countries were selected because of positive progressive refugee policy trajectories, and they illustrate that even when the outlook is promising, various constraints have hindered policy implementation. In two of these countries, progressive refugee policies are not working at all or face important obstacles, while the experiences from Jordan show that progressive refugee models may provide successful results for both host states and refugee populations if national commitment and ownership combined with international burden, responsibility sharing and funding is in place.

Looking globally, in other countries with less positive policies, progress is even more limited or non-existent, perhaps except for the progressive response to the Venezuelan displaced and other refugees in Latin America, and recent approaches in Kenya. Overall, this underscores the centrality of host-country framework conditions for refugee policy development and of national and/or subnational leadership. In other words, the centrality of localisation and of nationally led development. The examples also illustrate how the framework conditions, and the resilient traditional approach are holding back progress and thus why so few refugees can live out the impact of progressive refugee policies in full. However, regardless of how effective the progressive refugee policies in the example countries have been or not, the very fact that they exist is of importance for the evidence base on progressive refugee policies.

Box 3. Lessons since the adoption of the GCR[10]

With the GCR, the narrative of a comprehensive, more development-oriented approach to refugee situations is in place to be applied at the beginning of all refugee crises. Most refugee situations are protracted, and this longevity and the core development challenge it presents, even after some years of GCR rollout, is still not fully internalised and accepted in host- and donor-state development policies, structures, procedures, plans, and budgets. The separation of humanitarian and development action remains entrenched, and the traditional 'old' humanitarian model dominates. Some limited operationalisation of the GCR is emerging and has come when national and external development actors have taken the refugee situation on as a core development issue. Political and popular resentment is widespread and often tends to be decisive for the prospects of introducing progressive refugee policies, even as evidence is growing that such policies can reduce needs, tension, and xenophobia. We have also learned that financial burden and responsibility sharing is essential to the success of progressive refugee policies and that this sharing should come through development cooperation. This requires refugee hosting countries to make refugee needs a development priority and to have a positive trajectory towards progressive refugee policies in order to achieve donor support. This would signal that the state has a favourable view towards such policies and/or that it is willing to take measures to help them succeed. More importantly, it requires donors to commit to cover the additional costs of such policies as long as needed and in such a way that host countries can count on this commitment in their planning. Overall, international policy commitments are critical to progressive refugee policy success but have proven fragile and can evaporate quickly when the global policy environment faces shocks, and the political space and will for change have narrowed in the face of such other priorities. As a case in point, the world has seen only limited progress result from the more than 1,700 pledges made at the 2019 GRF (Harild, 2020).

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[10] In the Global Compact, the measuring impact effort is one of three processes designed to inform stakeholders of future progress towards greater responsibility sharing. The others are tracking of pledges and contributions made at the GRF and collection and analysis of data through the indicator framework for the GCR. In addition, the OECD's report of tracking ODA commitments to countries impacted by refugee flows is also a contribution to this.

4 Lessons on implementation of progressive refugee policies derived from the Ukraine refugee situation

Since 24 February 2022, the Ukraine war has been impacting global policy priorities, including priorities regarding refugees. The priorities set by many countries in response to the Ukrainian refugee situation serve as an interesting case on many issues related to implementation of progressive refugee policies discussed in this paper. Hence, in this part we examine some of these issues in light of the Ukrainian war and refugee situation and look at what refugee-policy-relevant lessons and experiences that emerge from this expanding conflict. The focus is particularly on the early days of the war.

It is imperative to look at the Ukraine war, as it has changed the overriding global security and geopolitical dynamics, probably for many years to come, with severe impacts on all policy areas. First, in the period of slow practical progress of the GCR globally, the Ukraine war triggered exceptionally rapid implementation of progressive refugee policies in European and NATO countries. At the highest level, these countries looked at policies of the war, economics, sanctions, post-war socioeconomic and infrastructure needs, climate concerns, forced people movement, and reconstruction requirements as interconnected from day one. All aspects of policy in relation to the Ukraine war were considered simultaneously, by the same people, at the highest level.

Second, as a part of this policy-coherent approach, leaders put in place a full spectrum of progressive refugee policies in a matter of days. Lastly, despite the many similarities between the Syria and Ukraine wars, EU and NATO countries' refugee policies differ substantially in their treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees.[11]

The policy responses to the Ukraine refugee situation illustrate a political will to see and understand the refugees' predicament as part of a holistic context. Both the public and politicians have showed compassion, respect, and an open-arms approach, with spontaneous and official efforts to pick up refugees at the Ukrainian border. The refugees were given easy entrance, as the EU invoked its Temporary Protection Directive providing a maximum 3-year temporary stay permit in European countries[12]. Those who wished were invited to seek asylum. It should be noted that

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[11] To see a further exploration of concrete policy responses by OECD countries, see the OECD's report International Migration Outlook, 2022.

[12] For the first time in its history, the European Union (EU) invoked the Temporary Protection Directive, which provided Ukrainians residency and the right to work, housing, healthcare, and education throughout the EU for one year, with the possibility of renewal. The directive does not provide Ukrainians with refugee status but eliminates the need for individual asylum applications and allows Ukrainians to avoid employment and movement bans that apply to asylum seekers in many member states.

Ukrainians were already able to travel to the EU on easily available 3-month tourist visas, so they did not face initial asylum barriers like most other refugees (OECD, 2022). It was understood that the refugees would want to work, to look after themselves, and to help at home, and that most refugees would want to return home when they could, while some might want to stay and fully integrate in the refugee hosting countries. It was acknowledged that the Ukrainian refugees should have quick and easy access to the labour market and their children access to school not only to minimise welfare cost, but also so the refugees could have a decent life and be economic assets for the host countries by filling demand for labour. Indications from OECD research are that Ukrainians have had a higher degree of employment success compared to other refugees (OECD 2022). This type of response is the respectful and dignified way to treat refugees and is in line with the spirit of the refugee convention and the GCR, which has been promoted globally for years but with only limited success. Ursula van Leyen advocated shortly after the war began to promote this EU refugee policy for all refugees within an effective system of EU outer-border control. However, the increase in migration flows that see refugees mixed with other types of migrants may lead to more restrictive refugee policies as the motives for mobility are questioned and the associated willingness to protect refugees, politically and in the broader population, is waning. It will be interesting to follow how EU migration policy evolves towards the end of 2023 and beyond.

The Ukraine situation has shown that comprehensive, all-inclusive policy coherence is possible, and that progressive refugee policies can be put in place and operationalised very quickly. Of course, such an approach is easier for a group of states with relative high level of resources and capacity. The Ukraine situation holds a unique opportunity for learning on policy coherence and progressive refugee policies: it has shown that security, economic, social, and geopolitical dynamics trump refugee conventions and lead to double standards as the refugee convention and asylum regimes are applied differently depending on context. For example, the double standard for Ukrainian and Syrian refugee policies is glaring and further amplified by the plans some EU countries have explored for an asylum processing centre in Rwanda for all other refugees. None of the EU and NATO governments have come close to explaining in a credible, coherent, and decent way why this double standard exists. Arguing that the Ukraine refugee response is in order, as it follows the notion that refugees should be dealt with at the regional level, does not hold. Both Syria and Ukraine share borders with the NATO region. Taking this issue to the GCR/global refugee policy level, it's interesting to consider how the double standard or contradiction between what Global North governments say and how they act plays into political dialogue and policy-influencing efforts with other refugee hosting countries in the Global South. Countries in the Global South observe how Europe responds differently to distinct, but relevantly similar, displaced populations on its doorstep.

Box 4. Overall lesson from the Ukraine war

Particularly in the early stages of the Ukraine war, we learned that policy coherence is possible if states have the political will, and with it, progressive refugee policies can be put in place quickly. We also learned that geopolitical considerations can override refugee conventions, which leads to double standards in convention application in different regions. Ultimately, such double standards work against the vision of the GCR.

5 Key obstacles and challenges

The previous sections describe historic and more recent experiences and lessons that may inform how best to move forward with implementing progressive refugee policies. To further inform a way forward, this part of the paper takes a deeper look at what really obstructs progressive refugee policies and discusses opportunities for moving beyond these obstacles.

5.1 Host country framework conditions

A progressive refugee policy approach often runs counter to national sentiments, the political power dynamics, self-interests, and other concerns in the host country. Refugee issues can be politically explosive, particularly in discussions about rights, degrees of integration, and, perhaps most importantly, in accepting the inevitable longevity of refugee situations. Consequently, political and popular resentment and opposition to progressive refugee policies is widespread. Bad governance and rights violations including discrimination and corruption can negatively influence framework conditions. The refugee-relevant framework conditions have political, security, economic, cultural, social, ethnic, and religious aspects, and the combination of these are the determining factors for the host country refugee policies and their success. For most states, to generate genuine interest in integrating foreigners whom it did not invite to come into its already weak and overburdened national systems is a tall order. The level of host country resistance determines the possibilities for progress. Resistance to the GCR and progressive refugee policies can be overcome if the host state can be convinced of the full positive and negative impacts of refugee inclusion and that it is ultimately in its self-interest. But even then, overcoming such resistance requires the development of trust with donors that the net financial costs will be covered in full. External actors involved in the GCR process have largely failed to understand the depth of the political and popular opposition to progressive refugee policies and have tended to overplay their own role and influence. There is therefore a need for stronger focus on realities on the ground and to adapt to these in a far more strategic and contextual manner. The host country/donor dialogue should thus be underpinned by solid data, analysis, and evidence.

In short, external actors must have a much better understanding of the often unique socio-economic and political power dynamics, challenges, and opportunities in each refugee situation. This underscores the fundamental importance of always beginning by undertaking a joint host state/development partner comprehensive political economy assessment. Based on this assessment, contextually relevant strategies and policies can be developed as and when the host country takes the lead preparing well for host country/development partner dialogue. All in all, such contextually relevant approaches call for patience, perseverance, and modesty in terms of aims and objectives, even in the mid- to longer term, i.e., looking for small, incremental steps in the right direction wherever possible and accepting that it will take a long time for even modest progress to be secured, as illustrated by the examples of

Uganda, Jordan, and Ethiopia. Lessons can also be drawn from progressive regularisation efforts in Latin America and the Ukraine experience described in Chapter 4.

Finding ways to address the opposition to progressive refugee policies so that refugee policies can become more inclusive and to achieve financial burden and responsibility sharing is the paramount challenge for GCR progress. In ongoing situations with restrictive framework conditions, progress will take time; the traditional old model may be needed for some time until change can be effected, but only as long as necessary and with an eye on exit as soon as reasonably possible.

Box 5. Political concerns on implementing progressive refugee policies

The trajectory of refugee policies depends upon host state political processes, power dynamics, self-interests, and other concerns. It is political, not technical. If these framework conditions are not conducive, there will be no progressive refugee policies. Only if host states see a benefit and if their self-interests and concerns are addressed will they consider progressive refugee policies. The depth of political and popular opposition to progressive refugee policies have been ignored or underestimated by many in the international community. The growing evidence on positive impacts of the right to work and move for those who can, including socio-economic benefits to hosting communities and efficiencies from inclusion in national systems, is important for host countries to consider and for internal and external dialogue. It is uncertain to what extent such dialogue is happening other than as part of the refugee policy reviews undertaken periodically by the WBG.

Another aspect affecting the host country framework conditions is the legitimate difficulty host country policymakers have in recognising, accepting, or publicly admitting the inevitable longevity of an emerging refugee crisis, as well as in putting in place the required long-term policies on the front end. This is a hindrance to progressive refugee policies, which are essentially about inclusion and development and thus by definition require long-term approaches. These difficulties often lead to short-term approaches and structures being preferred and when the longevity is eventually accepted and realized, it is too late to change towards progressive refugee policies.

5.2 The humanitarian model

The traditional humanitarian model is based on the structure that separates humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. This includes firewalls that protect the humanitarian approach. Implementation is almost exclusively done by external agencies in parallel with local structures. The old model is too costly, difficult to fund, and unsustainable. The short-term design of the model makes it unfit to deal with protracted displacement. These factors are in opposition to the comprehensive development-oriented vision of the GCR and thus work against progressive refugee policies. Combined efforts are required to reduce needs and improve efficiency. This can be done through economic inclusion of refugees and more focus on less costly and more sustainable localisation approaches including direct funding streams to host state institutions and actors. Host states and donors may have differing views on this approach, requiring evidence-informed dialogue to secure the needed change. More funding for the old model is unlikely to improve prospects for progressive refugee policies, but a sustained effort to change it would.

5.3 Leadership of the GCR process

GCR state signatories asked UNHCR to lead the GCR process and thereby made UNHCR de facto accountable. Historic lessons indicate that when UNHCR has led comprehensive development-oriented initiatives, results have been wanting. Having a non-political humanitarian actor leading a long-term political and predominantly developmental problem is not likely to work. Nevertheless, UNHCR has done as well as one could expect under the circumstances in promoting development involvement and cannot be solely blamed for the lack of progress. Placing UNHCR in the lead has allowed states to abdicate responsibility and sit on the fence with respect to a number of key issues. With UNHCR in charge of the wording, the GCR was conceived from a protection and short-term perspective, whereas it could have benefitted from long-term developmental considerations as in the Global Compact on Migration (GCM). As states are not accountable, the GCR is not part of their policy priorities, and thus the required internal policy, structure, and approach changes and adaptations have not taken place. This leadership challenge is an important obstacle to the adoption and success of progressive refugee policy.

Success depends on what development actors do in their own right, not so much on what UNHCR does to nudge them along. In other words, success depends on how refugee issues are mainstreamed and prioritised in host state and development partners' development policies, structures, approaches, plans, and budgets. As progress has been wanting, UNHCR and its partners have been obliged to continue the traditional short-term approach in host states, often working with UNHCR-funded government outfits that are, for the most part, not funded by the states and often at the periphery of sphere of governance and national development. This structure is fundamentally in opposition to the comprehensive and inclusionary vision of the GCR.

This traditional approach to refugees is not designed for protracted displacement. The international narrative has for years promoted the need for national leadership and ownership of processes including approaches to refugee situations, and there is general agreement to support this process by beginning to shift financial resources to go directly to national structures instead of to international agencies and actors, i.e., a localisation approach. But this has not happened in any significant way. Donors' approach to refugee crises has largely remained focused on channelling funds through the hands of UNHCR, rather than working through development cooperation.

Donors' approach to refugee crises is still largely about a 'hands-off' approach that channels funds through UNHCR to run this model, e.g., by some donors in support of the progressive Turkana Kalobeyei approach in Kenya. This was done through the Kalobeyei Integrated socio-economic development plan providing funds to UNHCR to build capacity of the local government, i.e., to build national development capacity, rather than by providing support directly to the local government as part of development cooperation. UNHCR is neither capable of - nor has the mandate for - building sector capacity. Donors may do this partly by tradition or perhaps because they don't know better. It looks like misunderstood HD nexus work to ask humanitarians to do development work. This is an example of why the old model is such a poor business case. As UNHCR continues to receive more funding, there is no incentive for UNHCR to change its ways. Change can only happen if donors apply the power of the purse and if host states want it (which the local government in Turkana does). Time has come for states to decide if they want UNHCR to become a development agency or to let the national development actors deal with the long-term aspects of refugee situations with external support through development cooperation.

Ultimately, the responsibility for UNHCR's approach lies with the vision and leadership of host countries and particularly their donor partners. UNHCR should be complemented for its efforts to better understand how national planning and development works, as that is necessary for the GCR approach, but the key to success is that host states and their development partners themselves take the lead on refugee issues. Any need for lifesaving humanitarian aid should be provided within the framework of a long-term approach and not in isolation. Country-level dialogue in the framework of development cooperation on the government-led vision would be the appropriate forum for discussing alternative ways to manage refugee situations.[13]

5.4 Resistance to change

Resistance to changing the traditional humanitarian approach to refugee situations in host states and humanitarian institutions is likely to be considerable, as both have vested interests and investments in the existing structures, procedures, and resource streams. Resistance is likely to be particularly strong among international humanitarian agencies as the needed full-blown localisation and developmental approach would reduce their involvement, scope, and funding. Donors may also face resistance in their development ranks to take on refugee issues as a core development issue. The inability or unwillingness to identifying the old model as a dead end and to considering alternatives perpetuates resistance to change. Therefore, the established approach to addressing refugee situations is stuck, i.e., stuck in its old ways with too many organisations and people dependent on its continuation for their survival, thus hindering the GCR vision and the prospects for progressive refugee policies. Perhaps the time has come for a reset and to rethink the way the international community responds to refugee situations and to explore how to put development actors (host states and their external partners) in the lead from the beginning to be more efficient and effective?

5.5 Weak state policy commitments and policy coherence

Global crisis developments have seen GCR signatories' commitment evaporate, illustrating the weakness of states' policy commitments in international forums. The process host states and donors apply when making these policy commitments at international forums does not ensure that they are resilient to shocks. It is likely that most host countries merely went along with the policy recommendations, as they saw in them the possibility for financial support and, perhaps for some countries, also the opportunity to project a positive image to counter international criticism of governance failures. Many donor countries probably went along since success would promote containing refugees in the countries of first asylum and the process did not commit them to do anything. State policy commitments should be based on solid analysis and broad government understanding and ownership to be resilient to shifting priorities. There is little evidence that states signed up to the GCR after conducting a full, whole-of-government analysis of the implications of the GCR vision, hence their commitments were not policy coherent and shock resistant. The Ukraine war showed that a whole-of-government, policy-coherent approach is possible. Perhaps this was only possible because of the geopolitical, economic, and security aspects of

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[13] Inspiration for how to set up and optimise this process at the country level can be taken from Harild, 2020, annex two, and at the global level from the intergovernmental processes leading the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration.

the Ukraine war, but the peculiarities of that conflict should not preclude states from pursuing policy coherence with respect to all major conflicts and refugee situations, even if the strategic interests involved are less significant?

5.6 Double standards

As illustrated by the situation of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees, the double standards in interpretation and application of the refugee convention are glaring and create animosity and resentment among state policymakers. Recent years have seen donor states applying tougher rhetoric and policy stands, leading to a narrowing of asylum space. Many donors see the GCR as foreign policy rather than as a domestic responsibility. In this way and as another example of double standards, donors are obstructing the GCR at home while trying to be constructive abroad. The double standards in the application of the convention are increasingly evident with a negative signal value, leading to added distrust and undermining progress towards financial burden and responsibility sharing and progressive refugee policies. Perhaps the time has come to consider how to have a meaningful, consistent interpretation and application of the convention by acknowledging the current reality and its implications and then being transparent about it?

5.7 Emerging evidence

In view of the six interlinked challenges above, there is a need to look for opportunities to build on and to rethink the GCR process and revise the old ways. For this purpose, the data and analytical work on social and economic impact emerging from the WBG and the WBG/UNHCR Joint Data Centre is particularly promising. There is important evidence on the social and economic impact of refugee situations, including on the benefits of progressive refugee policies for host states, refugees, and host communities, as well as some positive impacts of a developmental approach with full focus on localisation. Other examples are important operational approaches from Latin America and by a few host states and bilateral donors, including the Government of Kenya's shift in its approach to refugee management by transforming refugee camps into integrated settlements under the multi-year 'Shirika Plan'[14]. To support the financial burden and responsibility-sharing discussions, the WBG-sector approach to measure the fiscal impact of refugee inclusion looks promising, with work that has advanced well within the education sector. Similar work has begun for the accommodation and housing sector. While it is too early to gauge the extent to which this evidence has had impact on refugee policies, it would, when available, provide a good basis for host country and development partner dialogue on prospects for progressive refugee policies.

The 2023 World Development Report (WDR) on 'Migration, Refugees and Societies' (World Bank Group, 2023b) provides policy and operational evidence and guidance on the importance of a development approach to refugee situations. The OECD common position on 'Addressing forced displacement with a comprehensive Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus approach', which is under finalisation and to be presented at the December GRF, will also be an important guidance tool for state policymakers.

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[14] See: https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/press-releases/joint-statement-government-kenya-and-un-high-commissioner-refugees-high-level

The WDR addresses governments at the center of power. With its focus on the economic and social impact of refugee policies, it will have the attention of national planners and policymakers. The WDR recommends that states take a long-term development approach to refugees from the beginning with a strong focus on prediction and preparedness as well as on economic and social refugee inclusion. The WDR suggests that states do this via dialogue based on improved data and evidence, improved design of financing instruments, and bringing in new voices, particularly those of refugees and the private sector. While this is all good, the WDR does not address how to tackle the key political challenges of restrictive framework conditions, institutional resistance to changing the traditional ways of dealing with refugees, and the need to have a leadership of the GCR process that is fit for purpose. Thus, WBG and donor partnership is crucial, as it engages their comparative advantages in dialogue with host governments so both the economic and the political can be addressed together.

To break the mold to leverage the WDR for the GCR, there is a need to unpack what 'a development approach to refugee situations from the beginning' really means for host and donor states' political, policy, and economic action (see Boxes 6 and 7). The OECD Common Position and supporting research will provide additional inspiration. As development actors begin to take on refugee issues, it is important that they do not fall into the trap of replicating the humanitarian work done by UNHCR and its partners, but rather make sure their interventions are a core part of their regular development work, with refugee issues included in their analytical work and planning.

Preparations for the December 2023 Global Refugee Forum have focused on transformative mega pledges to advance the vision of the GCR. Overall, the rhetoric and narrative are significantly improved. Some host and donor countries have progressive policies and some of these refer to refugees in their national plans, but very few have refugee issues integrated into their national plans with corresponding budget allocations. Only when refugee issues are included in national plans and budgets, can progress begin in earnest to put into place inclusive refugee policies and financial burden and responsibility sharing. The level and trajectory of economic activity and poverty alleviation will then determine how fast refugees and host communities can benefit from a livelihood perspective.

The quality and transformative nature of the mega pledges developed for the December 2023 GRF indicate how far we have come. The mega pledge on economic inclusion and social protection is of particular importance. Host and donor states, in particular, have a lot to do if the December 2023 GRF is to be successful and to project a solid, transformative and impactful way forward.

6 The way forward for refugees in a world of growing uncertainty

If the GCR with its progressive approach is to have a future, the identified and inter-linked challenges must be overcome. It is necessary to establish what needs to be changed, to consider alternatives, and to build on the opportunities. Even though the world is facing a polycrisis, it is important to bolster efforts to improve refugee management so that it becomes more cost efficient, effective, and amenable to host states, their people, and the refugees themselves. In looking at possible new approaches, it is important to bear in mind the consequences of not making any changes, i.e., continuing the unsustainable old model and a GCR process that is not working in its present form. The projected future increased competition for financial resources is likely to be significant, and for that reason alone a localisation approach will be essential.

Progress will always depend on what the host state wants based on its framework conditions and on effective leadership. To overcome the identified obstacles, strong situation-specific leadership of the GCR's whole-of-society approach needs to be centred on host and donor states as the main duty bearers, jointly responsible for policies and resourcing of approaches to refugee situations. With the 2023 World Development Report recommendation to take a development approach to refugee situations from the beginning (World Bank Group, 2023b) as inspiration, states should lead a fresh approach to the GCR with a focus on structure and behaviour change, evidence-based dialogue, localisation, and improved policy coherence. In this way, they will start a process towards addressing displacement through national structures, institutions, and development plans. UNHCR would support this process via its mandate of international protection.

With a host country-centred approach led by states and with input from other actors as needed, a development-oriented dialogue process can begin to influence and address restrictive framework conditions. This will be a difficult process where both host and donor states will need to see how they place refugee issues in the development priority ranking and with respect to other issues that are on the plate competing for political attention. This process of working through development cooperation will also encourage and promote new funding streams (and localisation) and help states improve policy coherence and more robust policy commitments both at the country and global level, and may even help avoid double standards in application of the refugee convention.

Box 6. Key message for host and donor state policymakers

Country-specific responsibility and leadership rests with host states and development donor partners. Leadership needs to shift approaches from humanitarian at the core to development at the core. Costs need to be reduced through localisation and needs reduced through inclusion. For this, four things must take place in parallel to reset the GCR approach to become more effective:

- Development donor partners need to internalise refugee situations as core development issues in their policies, structures, and approaches (as only the WBG and a few states have begun doing so far), and jointly analyse situation-specific framework conditions.
- Host countries and development partners need to take charge of the GCR process, in each refugee situation and globally.
- Host countries and their donor partners need to recognise up front the inevitable longevity of refugee displacement situations and adjust policies and approaches accordingly. This will include addressing refugee situations from a long-term productivity and capacity perspective rather than a short-term and needs-based one.
- To achieve (i), (ii) and (iii), host countries and development partners should, in each specific refugee situation on the basis of a jointly conducted political economy analysis of host country framework conditions, lead evidence-based dialogue to begin a trust-building process to achieve incremental progress on GCR implementation and financial burden and responsibility sharing through development cooperation and localisation. Such an approach will require refugee issues to be integrated into plans and budgets of both host and donor states to ensure the fiscal space needed to realise inclusion.

So far, the GCR process has not worked to achieve financial burden and responsibility sharing, which is a core precondition for progressive refugee policies. The WBG-led work on the net costing of refugee inclusion in the education sector is a step in the right direction, but actual agreement and cost covering has yet to be seen in any country. UNHCR has led, driven, and facilitated a number of regional support platforms to achieve financial burden and responsibility sharing. These have not made any significant progress. UNHCR's efforts to engage with development actors is not going to make a difference on financial burden and responsibility sharing in its own right. It will only work if the respective states and their development partners have fully internalised refugee issues as a core development issue, enabling these players to lead and drive the regional processes.

The suggested dialogue approach could, if carefully managed, start a process to enhance policy coherence, a shift in approach towards full localisation, and a shift in funding streams directly to host state actors. It is important to reduce cost and needs as a first step towards changing the old model to become more comprehensive and progressive. Traditionally, development donors collaborate in country situations, but have yet to learn to do so systematically and wholeheartedly on refugee issues. By working towards such collaboration, the WBG and other international financial institutions and bilateral donors would force themselves off the fence and prepare themselves well for host country dialogue.

The financial burden and responsibility sharing dialogue between host states and their external partners, where the development donors employ context-specific strategies with deep understanding of the framework conditions, may succeed where the GCR process so far has not, as it places host country concerns at the fore. Here it

is important to be realistic about how much influence international actors can have on host state policies and to set realistic goals, accepting that it may not work in all situations and that any progress may only come in small increments.

Notwithstanding the prevalence of restrictive framework conditions, it is essential that host states and development partners fully understand that long-term displacement is a core development issue, and they should address policies and approaches from that angle and not the humanitarian angle, as is the case today. Refugee issues would then become part of development planning and thinking, on a par with regular development issues. Host countries may still decide on an exclusionary policy, but will then do so on the basis of regular development planning modalities rather from a traditional, isolated humanitarian thinking process only. Having development planners and thinkers in host and donor governments, as supposed to those dealing with humanitarian issues, discuss refugee issues will lead to fundamentally different outcomes.

Topics for host and donor state dialogue should include the importance of policy coherence. As for policy coherence at the global level, the strength of state policy commitments in international forums depends on what the state has identified as its sacrifice to make the commitment in question. Signing up to the progressive vision of the GCR means to sacrifice the old humanitarian-led model and all it implies. It also means, for example, sacrificing large portions of the so-called humanitarian space and neutrality, including sphere standards in favour of local standards. States may not have thought this through when they signed up to and adopted the GCR. Hence, the commitment easily evaporated when other shocks emerged. Recent crises have cast doubt on the possibility that refugee conventions can be applied consistently. Policymakers should consider the pros and cons of different applications of refugee conventions and protocols as double standards create grievance and mistrust and eventually become an obstruction to progressive refugee policies.

The dialogue should also include deliberations on how to effect structural and approach changes towards full localisation. The GCR vision of refugee inclusion by definition requires a developmental approach. Development is chiefly about how social and economic issues are dealt with through national structures and processes based on a national plan. The localisation agenda is precisely that, i.e., implementation by national actors. If there is a need for external funding resources, such resources should go to these actors. For progressive refugee policies to come to fruition, full localisation is therefore an obvious way to go. This is chiefly because of financial constraints, but also to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. This shift cannot happen fast enough. To pursue a localisation model, policymakers need the right mindset (full internalisation of the implications of the inevitable longevity of displacement situations) and the political courage and will to make the necessary structural changes internally and globally.

The positive economic impact of refugee inclusion is part of a localisation approach (see Box 7). The economic impact is also part of building trust to achieve financial burden and responsibility sharing. The dialogue should pursue the principle of shifting from short-term needs and a vulnerability-based approach to one based on long-term opportunity and productivity, i.e., from looking at refugees as victims in need to survivors with capacity. Doing so implies that host and donor states and development partners must consider barriers and opportunities particular to each refugee situation from day one and base policies on those considerations. Such an approach would allow for comprehensive priority setting and sequencing from the beginning.

Box 7. The impact and benefits of a developmental and full localisation approach

As a starting point to any refugee crisis, the host country addresses the situation according to its framework conditions. Shifting refugee issues to a full localisation approach would have many benefits. Use of national systems as a default would reduce costs, build capacity, and improve sustainability. Use of local standards instead of sphere standards for both refugees and host communities would reduce costs, tension, and xenophobia. The scope and cost of international agency parallel implementation would be significantly reduced. Should external expertise be required, it can be purchased by national actors. Localisation would also require a fresh look at the issues of humanitarian principles at the local scene towards a more pragmatic application and the issue of neutrality. A localisation/development approach would look at both the development opportunities and challenges, focusing on building on the opportunities and on mitigating the challenges. This is a fundamental behavioural change compared to the traditional vulnerability- and needs-based approach.

The grand total financial cost would be significantly reduced. Yes, there may be exceptions where the traditional humanitarian-led approach is the only option. But these should remain exceptions and should only be applied after it has been clearly established that a localisation approach cannot be taken, and then only with a clear and early exit strategy. It is important to be aware that provision of external resources under any model may, if it mitigates the bad deeds of a state government or nonstate actors, help cement a hold on power, influence power dynamics, and risk becoming a tool in the armed conflict strategy. Falling into this trap should be avoided.

As a localisation model is led by the host country, it may also stimulate the host country to understand better the positive aspects of progressive refugee policies and to consider implementation. This may be so as localisation will be based on national framework conditions, in line with local priorities and addressing local concerns. A full localisation combined with inclusion would also expand the fiscal space, paving the way for host states to approach donors to build trust and reach agreement on financial burden and responsibility sharing. The direct donor funding of national actors implies that donors will need to take on the risk factor, which until now largely has been outsourced to the UN and international NGOs. Achieving financial burden and responsibility sharing will require donors to be able to fund recurrent sector cost.

This suggested reset of the GCR approach will require heavy lifting by states. Evidence-based (with emphasis on research, operational results, and advocacy) dialogue is the first step under the fresh approach to achieve incremental changes towards progressive refugee policies. Success of this process will only happen if there are host state and donor policymakers with the vision, courage, and will, to take these challenges on and lead the required system and behaviour change to ensure that global and national structures and approaches would be established as a sound and robust basis for systematic application of progressive refugee policies in the future.

For the shift to full localisation to materialise and to have real and sustained impact, states must take back full control for a shorter or longer period, probably a number of years, and take bold decisions until a new development-led approach to refugee situations is well established. A first step toward that end would be for host and donor states to take leadership of the mega pledges for the GRF. By shifting towards localisation, the refugee issue also moves from the appendix periphery to become part of the broad, interconnected national development policy arena. Responses to recent economic crises, the Ukraine war, and the pandemic have proven that policymakers can make drastic changes if they want to.

If the listed obstacles and the suggested changes are not taken into account in the preparations for the December 2023 Global Refugee Forum, the Forum risks being yet another gathering expressing what should happen rather than being something that is able to effect actual change and lead to substantial progress. *Host and donor states need to move from being involved to becoming fully committed in order to become responsible and accountable leaders.*

This will require state policymakers to promote a new structure along the following headlines:

- All GCR actors need to support the host state in the preparation of a solid joint political economy analysis.
- Host states need to lead and put in place framework conditions amenable to the localisation process and to the medium- to long-term planning process.
- Development partners need to engage from the beginning and support the localisation and planning process with direct funding.
- Humanitarian actors should focus only on life-saving and short-term issues, with UNHCR focusing on international protection.
- The UN system should consider a lesser role of OCHA and expand and develop UNDP capacities.

To ensure further progress on implementing progressive refugee policies and the visions of the GCR, policymakers should address the following questions and topics for discussion:

- Are there refugee-affected states and donor states courageous enough and willing to come off the fence and take the lead to tackle the identified challenges and obstacles? Can a workable coalition of states come together to take charge of the GCR process globally, regionally, and nationally for the suggestions in this paper to come to fruition?
- Are state policymakers considering the implications of not doing anything to change the present approach and the implications of the progressive vision of the GCR failing, i.e., a continuation of business as usual?
- Have states begun to consider how the evidence and recommendations from the WBG's 2023 World Development Report (and the OECD common position) can be leveraged for the future of the GCR and refugee policies and approaches?
- What more can be done to strengthen GCR rollout efforts so as to include refugees in national systems and how can we learn from efforts to date? Is there sufficient political will for an all-out approach to localisation?
- Are we heading towards a situation where refugee policies are decided primarily on the basis of public sentiment rather than on the basis of the refugee convention and protocols (as though the convention and protocols are things of the past)? Can this apparent policy incoherence be solved through enhanced transparency across refugee situations to ensure that decisions about all situations are in harmony and in accordance with conventions?

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How to move forward on implementing progressive refugee policies

In 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) was endorsed by 181 of UN's member states, which thereby expressed support to developing refugee policies that enables refugees to become self-reliant and that ensure equitable international responsibility-sharing to support host countries and communities. Five years later, the progressive vision of the Global Compact on Refugees has not systematically taken root. Most of the world's refugees are still living in protracted situations where they are unable to benefit from inclusion and remain dependent on indecent welfare to survive. The costly humanitarian approach prevails although it is not designed to cope with the protracted refugee situations. Financial burden and responsibility sharing has not been achieved, and the future financial resources for refugees are projected to decline making mitigation and implementation by national institutions and actors a necessity. It is time for a reset to address the main obstacles to achieving the visions of the Global Compact. This paper discusses how and by who this reset can materialize through a more central role of states.