Regional solidarity with displaced populations and host communities: the three Support Platforms

Summary of high-level event hosted by Spain and UNHCR on the margins of the 81st meeting of the Standing Committee of UNHCR’s Executive Committee, 6 July 2021

Three [Support Platforms](https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/support-platforms)—as provided for in the [Global Compact on Refugees](https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/global-compact-refugees)—were launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019 with the aim of enabling context-specific support for refugees and concerned host countries and communities, namely:

* the Support Platform for the Regional Comprehensive Framework for Protection and Solutions (known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS) for the forced displacement situation affecting Central America and Mexico;
* the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) Support Platform; and
* the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Support Platform in East and Horn of Africa.

During the 81st meeting of the Standing Committee of UNHCR’s Executive Committee, Spain—in coordination with UNHCR—organized a high-level side event to foster the exchange of experiences and lessons learned between the Platforms, to identify common challenges and ways in which they can be addressed, and to reinforce progress towards achieving the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees.

In opening the exchange, Ms Gillian Triggs, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, situated the three Platforms within the Global Compact on Refugees. She noted that the Support Platforms had been conceived of as ‘groups of friends’ that would exist as a concrete expression of solidarity. Whilst the three exiting platforms have each evolved in a manner that responds to their regional contexts, they retain a common core of State leadership, solidarity with refugees and their hosts, and actions across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Ms Triggs paid tribute to host countries and communities, whose global citizenship is a model to be followed, but who also face their own challenges. Under the Global Compact on Refugees, the international community commits to standing ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with them, and the Support Platforms are a key arrangement for achieving this. To ensure their ongoing success, it will be essential to exchange experiences, discuss lessons learned, and identify remaining gaps and challenges. To this end, early reflections on lessons learned within UNHCR have focused on:

***The Support Platforms
are proving to be one of the most successful elements of the Global Compact on Refugees***

Ms. Gillian Triggs, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection

* The need for concrete outcomes through actions and activities at the country level;
* The importance of obtaining and maintaining buy-in from countries of origin, countries of asylum, regional organisations, and the international community as a whole; and
* The value of having each Support Platform evolve according to its own logic and the relevant regional dynamics.

# MIRPS Support Platform

Ms Triggs concluded her remarks by paying tribute to the leadership of Spain in initiating this exchange between Support Platforms in its capacity as Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform, and by introducing Ms Cristina Gallach, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and for Ibero-America and the Caribbean.

Ms Gallach noted the objectives that Spain had set for its year as Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform and the progress that had been made:

* To expand the visibility of the displacement crisis in Central America and Mexico, a series of high-level events had taken place, including at the United Nations General Assembly;
* To expand the support available to the affected countries, a number of new partners, in particular development banks and private sector actors, have been mobilised in the response with the support of the Organisation of American States. Of particular note is the 10 June solidarity event hosted with UNHCR, the Organisation of American States, Guatemala and Costa Rica, which attracted a very high level of participation and mobilised more than USD110 million for the region; and
* Through the facilitation of training at a technical level in relation to asylum and integration.

Ms Gallach noted that the success of the Platform to date had been built on a solid foundation of technical support from OAS and UNHCR, the engagement with MIRPS States (in particular through their national plans) and the MIRPS *pro tempore* presidencies of El Salvador and Guatemala, and the in-depth interactions between Platform members at many levels, including in capitals, in Geneva and New York. In closing, Ms Gallach hoped that the MIRPS Support Platform could serve as an example for other regional solidarity processes ’to provide support in a novel manner’ and congratulated Canada on having assumed the Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform.

***…a novel mechanism for international cooperation***

Ms Cristina Gallach, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and for Ibero-America and the Caribbean of Spain

Ms Caroline Xavier, Associate Deputy Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship in Canada, thanked Spain for its leadership and expressed Canada’s desire to follow in its footsteps. She also thanked the MIRPS countries for their solidarity and their determination to continue to support the displaced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted that Canada is honored to assume the Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform and lead the international community’s support for the region in a time of troubling levels of displacement, compounded by the pandemic. Noting that the Support Platform harnesses a new momentum to address forced displacement at the regional level, Ms Xavier outlined Canada’s objectives to:

* Continue to focus attention on the displacement situation in the region;
* Reinforce the structure of the Platform to ensure its sustainability and reinforce its responsibility-sharing potential;
* Expand the Platform’s membership and learn from the experiences of other Platforms; and
* To broaden the base of multi-stakeholder support for the region.

***Together,
through this dynamic, regionally-led approach, we can effectively address the needs of the forcibly displaced and the communities that so generously host them***

Ms. Caroline Xavier, Associate Deputy Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

A key focus of Canada’s term as Chair will be to advance the empowerment and protection of women and girls on the move, and it will press for enhanced and focused international cooperation through a series of high-level events and thematic workshops on key issues identified in the MIRPS national action plans, including a further MIRPS solidarity event.

H.E. Ambassador Eduardo Hernández, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, noted the high priority that the Government of Guatemala gives to refugee issues, and the value that it places on achieving integrated comprehensive responses through solidarity; it was for this reason that it assumed the challenge of leading the MIRPS. MIRPS is a key tool in reaching the aspirations of the Global Compact on Refugees for enhanced regional cooperation, and a symbol of the political will of the participating States for protection and solutions. Ambassador Hernández expressed his appreciation for the close relationship between the MIRPS *pro tempore* presidency and the Support Platform, which provides concrete support in the implementation of MIRPS commitments. He noted that this support is financial in nature, and noted the success of the recent solidarity conference, but also comes about through dialogue and technical assistance, such as the Platform’s working group to strengthen asylum systems. He argued for further strengthened cooperation through MIRPS and its Support Platform, noting that the current displacement dynamic in the region would not effectively be addressed by any single nation working alone, in particular in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ambassador Hernández concluded by thanking Spain for its leadership as Chair of the Support Platform and welcomed Canada as its successor.

***Through these mechanisms,
we have built strategic synergies
that have made significant progress in consolidating the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees***

H.E. Ambassador Eduardo Hernández, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala

# SSAR Support Platform

H.E. Ambassador Nasir Andisha, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Geneva, situated the SSAR Support Platform in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Solutions Strategy for Agfhan Refugees, which has served for nine years as the basis for quadripartite cooperation between the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan and UNHCR towards the facilitation of voluntary repatriation, reintegration, and assistance to host communities. He noted that, insofar as Afghanistan is concerned, the international community finds itself at a critical juncture, with the Government of Afghanistan cautiously hopeful for intra-Afghan peace talks that will stabilize the country and enable refugees to return home. He noted we are currently witnessing a rise in security incidents, however, increasing internal displacement, severe drought, and the effects of the pandemic, all of which make the SSAR, its Support Platform, and the promise of the Global Compact on Refugees more important than ever. The needs of Afghan refugees and their hosts are vast but, under the EU Chair, ‘the Support Platform is starting to play a transformative role: galvanizing new partnerships and enabling complementary action to serve the needs of refugees and communities aligned with government priorities’. The Support Platform’s Local Core Group in Kabul is pursuing a conflict-sensitive and community- and area-based approach to invest in health, education, and livelihoods in 40 identified ‘priority areas for return and reintegration’ (PARRs); a recent evaluation found 70 per cent of households in these areas reporting an overall improvement in wellbeing. In Pakistan, work focuses on expanded registration and access to rights and financial inclusion. In Iran, refugees continue to be generously included in universal education and national health insurance schemes. Ambassador Andisha thanked both host countries for their ‘unflinching solidarity’, as well as the members of the Support Platform (in particular the EU Chair) for playing a pivotal role in driving forward the policy and operational activities under the SSAR.

***The SSAR Support Platform is
enabling us to take our cooperation to another level as a central framework and action-oriented partnership for responsibility sharing and solutions for Afghan refugees***

H.E. Ambassador Nasir Andisha, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Ms. Paola Pampaloni, Deputy Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific of the European External Action Service, spoke of the European Union’s pleasure in assuming the Chair of the Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform and of its active engagement in the work of all three Support Platforms, which have been designed in line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and are well aligned with the EU’s policy approach to forced displacement. She noted the European Union’s determination to search for sustainable long-term solutions in solidarity and partnership with the affected countries amidst new displacement of Afghanistan and invited all interested States to join ‘this very unique set-up’. She noted that the Core Group had adopted a work programme, largely to be implemented at the local level and supported by country core groups, to promote inclusion, civil documentation, and investment in the PARRs. This involves financial support, but also political support for key policy developments. She noted the European’s Union’s ongoing eagerness to interact with the Platform as a donor and strategic partner, in particular in light of the of the current circumstances and the risks of additional forced displacement.

***For the European Union,
support to the Platforms
represents a concrete step towards making the Global Compact on Refugees a reality in the spirit of burden and responsibility sharing with refugee-hosting countries***

Ms. Paola Pampaloni, Deputy Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific of the European External Action Service

# IGAD Support Platform

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), highlighted the long-standing challenges of forced displacement in the IGAD region, the burdens that they have placed on host communities, and the ongoing open-door policies that the countries in the region have maintained. He recalled the 2019 summit meeting that adopted the Nairobi Declaration and the commitment of States in the region collectively to pursue a regional approach to finding durable solutions for displaced populations and support for their host communities. The accompanying Plan of Action sets out key measures towards five important outcomes:

* The creation of an enabling environment for voluntary repatriation;

***We have witnessed
a considerable increase in international solidarity and responsibility sharing***

Mr.Workneh Gebeyehu, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development

* The maintenance of asylum space;
* The promotion of socioeconomic inclusion for refugees and their hosts;
* Regional cooperation through a whole-of-society approach; and
* Working in solidarity with the international community to expand burden and responsibility sharing for refugees and their hosts.

Considerable progress in specific sectors has been galvanized by the Djibouti Declaration (education), the Kampala Declaration (livelihoods), and by efforts to integrate refugees in national health systems. Moving forward, ‘the major challenge remaining is how to cascade its implementation to sub-national and community levels’. A wide range of partners—including civil society, academia, the private sector and development actors—have been attracted to the region’s inclusive policies and initiatives; the International University of Africa in Sudan, for example, is providing 1,000 scholarships to refugees in the IGAD region. The Support Platform was launched to sustain the momentum of this process by mobilizing support for refugees, returnees, and their hosts. A key focus at present for the Platform is the displacement situation in Sudan and South Sudan, where the Support Platform is working with others to harness the ‘peace dividend’ brought about by recent negotiations to find lasting solutions for displaced persons.

H.E. Ambassador Osman Abufatima Adam Mohammed, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sudan (which is the current Chair of IGAD), noted that the IGAD process is driven by the high levels if displacement in the region, which accounts for 70 per cent of forced displacement in Africa and 20 per cent worldwide, and the commitment of States in the region to refugee inclusion. Established under the Global Compact on Refugees, the Support Platform is led by a group of States who are committed to providing support in solving the complex and protracted refugee situations in the region. It aims to enhance political commitment and mobilize resources to ease the pressure on host States and build self-reliance amongst refugees and their hosts. It holds the promise of a range of benefits, including to increase the visibility of displacement challenges in the region. H.E. Ambassador Mohammed also referred to the initiative for durable solutions in Sudan and South Sudan and noted that Sudan was looking forward to the forthcoming Heads of State Summit that would adopt a comprehensive regional strategy.

Throughout the event, all speakers referred to the importance of ongoing exchange between the Platforms to share experiences and learn from one another so that each Platform is as effective as possible in supporting refugees and their hosts, and they noted the importance of this event as the first step in such a process.

# Contributions from participants

Ms Virginie Baikoua, Minister for Humanitarian Action and National Reconciliation of the Central African Republic, thanked the panellists for the inspiring meeting and noted that, in view of the displacement crisis facing the country with about 20% of its population displaced internally and to neighbouring countries, and after consulting a wide range of stakeholders, the President of the Central African Republic recently confirmed his support for the establishment of a Support Platform for the CAR situation and hopes that it can be launched soon and that the necessary assistance from the international community could be mobilised for the sustainable reintegration of returnees. It was highlighted that despite ongoing challenges, the security situation is improving, and an increasing number of refugees want to return home. 21,000 Central African refugees have returned since 2018 and the recorded intentions to voluntarily return are increasing towards areas that are already stabilised. At the Global Forum for Refugees CAR has committed to working with its partners to strengthen basic social services to enable the return of refugees in dignity and security. The government is eager to eradicate insecurity and promote resilience and asks the international community for continued assistance through the Support Platform.

Due to a lack of time, the following contributions were received after the formal closure of the event:

Patience Kiara of the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat made note of the essential role being played by IGAD in convening States and other stakeholders to create a common agenda on durable solutions in the region. She noted the potential to use financing tactically to create an enabling environment for solutions to displacement, in particular by calibrating financing instruments to support solutions-oriented outcomes.

In its intervention relating to solutions during the meeting of the Standing Committee, the United States of America observed that, given the state of forced displacement worldwide, new approaches that move beyond the *status quo* are required; it described the three existing Support Platforms as ‘the kind of innovation forcibly displaced populations need’, noted the United States’ active and ongoing engagement with the Platforms and asked about UNHCR’s plans for applying lessons learned to other situations around the world.

Ms Caroline Mary Verney Sergeant of the World Bank, thanked and acknowledged the efforts and commitment of hosting countries to mitigate the social and economic impacts of displacement in the context of operating throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and recognized their efforts and those of regional organizations to find regional solutions. She highlighted the critical part that the support platforms play in the global solidarity efforts in support of implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and of facilitating more equitable responsibility sharing. Ms. Sergeant particularly underlined the significance of the Sudan – South Sudan Solutions initiative, very much highlighted during a recent joint mission to Sudan with UNHCR and the Government of Sudan on their eligibility to access the IDA 19 Window for Host communities and Refugees, where it was clear that refugees and host communities are seeking to be self-sufficient and are eager for the resolution of the fragility and conflict in their home countries and within the regions.