

## **70 Year Protecting People Forced to Flee**

### **Short regional panel reports**

**Region:** West and Central Africa

**Hosting/Organising institution:** Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana

**Session Title:** Partnership for Managing Protracted Displacement in West and Central Africa

#### **Context/Background of the panel:**

With nearly 5million refugees and displacement in the West and Central African region, governments and other social partners have partnered to support forcibly displaced persons in the region. The GCR recommends a sustainable partnership approach as States, multi-stakeholders and other social partners pick up responsibilities to ensure sustainable protection of forcibly displaced persons. However, the implementation of such partnership approaches for the management of forcibly displaced persons is still at its early stages in the West and Central African regions. How prepared have the regions been in managing protracted displacement through partnership approach?

Panelists discussed the international and regional cooperation as well as national level collaboration among various stakeholders for dealing with protracted displacement in West and Central Africa. The panel reflected on past and present cases, lessons learnt, best practices, and challenges of working with local and whole-of-society actors to protect refugees and other forcibly displaced persons in West and Central Africa. In particular, the discussions focused also on ways in which development actors, the ECOWAS and humanitarian actors such as UNCHR, International Organisation for Migration (IOM) could strengthen partnership to implement refugee management strategies to benefit both refugees and host communities.

The panelists were Usman Adamu Obeche, ECOWAS Commission; Mr. Patrice Dossou Ahouansou, UNHCR Regional Office, Dakar; Philippe Branchat, IOM Regional Office, Dakar; and Tetteh Padi, Ghana Refugee Board. The moderator was Dr. Mary Setrana, Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana.

#### **Major points arising from speakers and discussions:**

As this session adopted a ‘question and answer’ mode of engagement, the key issues discussed during this session have been summarized under the following themes: nature of partnership between and among key actors; relevance of the Global Compact for managing displacement; best practices and lessons for managing forcibly displaced persons in COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *Nature of partnership with other actors for managing protracted displacement*

Usman Adamu Obeche described ECOWAS partnership with other actors for managing protracted displacement. He noted that ECOWAS, since its establishment in 1975, has been at the forefront of collaborating with governments and other agencies in Africa for designing and implementing programmes aimed at protecting Internally Displaced Persons and refugees. For example, ECOWAS had a strong influence on the adoption and coming into force of the Kampala convention; with each ECOWAS member state ratifying and implementing the convention. ECOWAS has, over the years, been working with UNCHR to implement programs aimed at eliminating stateless in the sub-region. ECOWAS also

partners with IOM in implementing solutions to improve the situation of refugees and stranded migrants. He cited an example in 2011 when ECOWAS partnered with IOM to repatriate West African citizens who were caught up in Libyan crisis. ECOWAS also collaborates with the European Union which has been providing funds and technical support for refugee management programs.

Mr. Patrice Dossou Ahouansou highlighted the role of UNHCR in partnering with other stakeholders for the management of forcibly displaced persons. He explained that UNCHR partners with a wide range of actors including governments that host UNCHR, the host communities, development actors (eg. World Bank, AfDB) and the regional economic community (ECOWAS) to implement durable solutions to improve the lives of refugees and displaced populations. He further acknowledged that the joint partnership between UNHCR, ECOWAS and individual ECOWAS members has brought improvement in refugee law and reforms in asylum, particularly in countries such as Sierra Leone, Senegal, Niger, and Liberia. UNCHR's Partnership with states has enhanced local integration for refugees in the region. As an example, Mr. Ahouansou shared one of the success stories of such partnerships. He said, in the last two years, about 6000 Senegal refugees in Guinea Bissau were granted citizenship through naturalisation mainly through UNCHR partnership with the state. Other examples include refugees in Ghana, and Sierra Leone and Liberian refugees have all enjoyed local integration through UNHCR.

Mr. Philippe Branchat noted that, at the global level, IOM partners with UNCHR in ensuring coordination and management of refugee camps. At the country or national level, all the UN agencies also coordinate with local actors such as NGOs in implementing humanitarian response plans and programmes when it comes to refugees. At the regional level, IOM has a strong partnership with ECOWAS on various issues particularly in ensuring freedom of movement of migrants throughout the region.

Mr. Tetteh Padi, in his submission, noted that the Ghana Refugee Board has formal partnership and arrangement particularly with UNCHR in implementing durable solutions to protect refugees in Ghana. Other partners include government agencies (eg. Ministry of Interior, Police Service, Ghana Immigration Service, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign) which help with protection of refugees; local district authorities, private sector, and academia support with drafting and formulating refugee protection policies. He further indicated that other agencies such as NGOs (eg. Legal Aid Scheme, International Red Cross) and individuals mostly support on ad hoc basis. He also noted that they actively work with host communities to provide support to forcibly displaced persons.

#### *Relevance of the Global Compact for Refugees for partnership for managing forced displacement*

When participants were asked to present their views on the relevance of GCR for partnership, Mr. Patrice Dossou Ahouansou demonstrated how the GCR provides unique opportunity for different actors to engage more and to strengthen multilateralism. He noted that an important aspect of the GCR is that it provides opportunity to strengthen partnership with academia to conduct evidenced-based research on the situation of refugees and displaced populations, moving away from dominant discourses of refugees as problems to countries to analysing how refugees may form an important asset for countries to improve socio-economic development. The GCR has also strengthened partnership between UNCHR and host countries where asylum seekers and refugees are seeking protection to provide conditionalities for better protection but also to allow States to do more in terms of responsibility sharing in protection of refugees. He cited examples in Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger, Cameroon to buttress his arguments. Mr. Ahouansou further explained that the GCR also allows for complementary pathways allowing faith-based organisations, academia, NGOs and other agencies to provide local integration support for refugees in the area of education scholarship and labour mobility which were not sufficiently explored previously.

Usman Adamu Obeche in his submission, on this issue, noted that refugees have inherent potential and resources. The GCR provides unique opportunity for states to strengthen refugee integration policies through employment creation and capacity building of refugees in the ECOWAS region.

Mr. Philippe Branchat concurred that the GCR presents a huge opportunity for strengthening refugee protection; and ensures that refugees are better integrated in economic and social landscape of host communities.

Mr. Tetteh Padi, in his submission, also noted that the guidelines provided by GCR are useful. However, Ghana does not meet the criteria for it to gain GCR support because it only host 13700 refugees from 38 from different countries. According to him, this figure does not meet the GCR criteria. He noted that the criterion is that the refugee population of the host country ought to be 1% of the entire country's population before a country could benefit from GCR support. This notwithstanding, he narrated that the GCR framework has allowed the Ghana Refugee Board to develop a job solutions strategy which allows the Board to engage the private sector in establishing businesses that can employ refugees. He reported that the Board's strategy is to convince development partners (eg. World Bank) to assist the institution financially to implement local integration strategies for refugees in Ghana as stipulated in the GCR.

#### *Best Practices and lessons on partnership during COVID-19 in managing and protecting forcibly displaced persons*

Mr. Tetteh Padi submitted that Ghana has done well by implementing the inclusion of refugees in national programmes. For example, refugees have the right to education and have recently been included in the Free Senior High School Education Policy of Ghana. At the tertiary level, refugees are treated as part of locals and are made to pay the same tuition fee that Ghanaians pay. In addition, refugees have been included in the National Health Insurance Scheme Policy of Ghana.

On this subject, Mr. Patrice Dossou Ahouansou noted that partnership with refugees and host communities is key in protecting refugees from COVID-19 infections. However, COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in inaccessibility of remote communities because of economic lockdowns, travel restrictions and border closures. Growing insecurity and COVID-19 restrictions have hindered partnership efforts in the implementation of strategies to protect refugees; this calls for strengthening the capacity of displaced populations to better protect themselves against health crisis like COVID-19. The inclusion of refugees in public health awareness and campaigns is key to protecting refugees as evident in the case of Cameroun.

Usman Adamu Obeche further highlighted that ECOWAS in collaboration with National Red Cross of Nigeria educate and provide sanitary equipment for refugees. ECOWAS has been working with UNCHR and the office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to implement durable solutions to also protect refugees from COVID-19. COVID-19 pandemic has also fostered the need for localisation efforts and the restrictions to movement has changed for how camps ought to be managed. There has been growing emphasis on capacity building for refugees in camps to become actors in communication and information among camp dwellers on safety protocols associated with COVID-19 prevention.

#### **Recommendations for Enhancing Effective Partnerships**

- Organisations responsible for displaced population (eg. UNCHR) and host country governments ought to engage host communities right from the beginning in planning for forced displacement and refugee integration. This is because host communities have resources (eg. material, symbolic, cultural, financial, human) that can be tapped into in planning and designing interventions to promote and protect refugees. Engagement of host communities right from the

beginning has the potential to reduce the tension that normally exists between host communities and refugee populations

- Given that some host country governments are yet to integrate refugee protection issues into their national development planning and policy development, it is recommended that governments in West and Central African countries that host refugees should endeavour to work towards integrating refugee protection in national level policy and planning, as this has the potential to improve refugee protection in the sub-region.
- Based on the recognition that lack of accurate and reliable data on the flow of refugees affects effective planning, coordination and implementation of comprehensive emergency response to improve the situation of refugees, it is recommended that reliable data on trends, flow dynamics, socio-economic challenges and emerging opportunities and challenges confronting displaced populations in the context of the on-going pandemic is needed to facilitate effective partnership to ensure adequate planning of programme response. This action is directed towards researchers and academics working on migration issues in the sub-region as well as organisations that are responsible for migrants and refugees in the sub-region (ECOWAS, IOM, UNHCR).
- Actors (eg. government departments, Humanitarian agencies, NGOs, private sector, civil society and individuals) who are implementing solutions must work hand-in-hand, prioritising the provision of information on programmes being implemented in each setting to ensure coordination, avoid duplication and ensure value for money.
- In order to address the funding issues, the private sector, including companies, businesses, faith based organisations and NGOs should be encouraged to take active part in the protection of refugees, as recommended in the GCR.

#### **Top two quotations from the session:**

**Mr. Patrice Dossou Ahouansou:** *“Partnership with refugees and host communities is key in protecting refugees from COVID-19 infections”*

Usman Adamu Obeche, *“Data and Information sharing among the different actors is the way to strengthen partnership for comprehensive refugee response”*

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