

British Red Cross statement for the Global Compact for Migration regional review

Roundtable 4 on policymaking and public debate, 13th November 2020

The British Red Cross provides humanitarian assistance to migrants across the UK and globally. The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) is an historic agreement that requires international cooperation between States and across borders if it is to achieve its goals. At the heart of it are peoples' lives, and it is vital that principles of humanity are put into practice.

Objective 7 of the GCM contains important steps to protecting the vulnerable. In the UK, we work with survivors of modern slavery and trafficking to help them recover and rebuild. Our research has highlighted the impact that a lack of secure immigration status has on the ability of people to recover with those impacted telling us that it is like "*living in limbo*". ([Hope for the Future: Support for survivors of trafficking after the National Referral Mechanism](#).)

In our research, mental health professionals told us of the impact this has on people. One professional told us that "*The main issue for some survivors is that they are still traumatised so mental health services can't work with them safely and effectively until they're settled and stable ... but until they have dealt with their trauma, we can't expect the rest of their life to move on.*"

Not only does this lack of status hinder the ability for people to access basic services, it also puts them at risk of re-exploitation. Therefore, we recommend that the UK Government automatically grants recognised survivors of human trafficking and exploitation a period of secure status.

Objective 7 of the GCM also describes the importance of family reunification, particularly for separated children. In 2019, the British Red Cross supported more than 1,200 families to safely reunite. The families we work with tell us how vital being together is for successful integration. But we also know that family separation leaves people living in dangerous situations, and that is why we advocate for faster and safer family reunion mechanisms. For example in our report [The Long Road to Reunion: making refugee family reunion safer](#).

As the UK completes its exit from the EU, we are especially concerned that gaps left by withdrawing from existing EU agreements will hinder the ability for families to reunite. We will continue to work with the UK Government to secure new international agreements to facilitate family reunion, as well as pushing for change to domestic rules.

Turning to objective 17 of the GCM, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in many more people attempting to reach the UK by small boat, and tragically at least 5 people have lost their lives. This has been accompanied by increasing hostility from some towards migrants and people seeking asylum.

It's vital that the political and public discourse does not fuel those activities. In our work, we are highlighting the need for treating people as human beings, abiding by humanitarian principles and protecting people's rights. Part of this is working with migrants and refugees themselves to influence our own work, and to also create opportunities for people to tell their own stories in the media and to decision makers.

We have regular dialogues with the UK government, including roundtable discussions where people with lived experience of migration share their perspectives with government officials. On behalf of the British Red Cross, we thank you for allowing us to take part in this roundtable today, and we look forward to continuing to work on the successful implementation of the Compact.

British Red Cross statement for the Multi-stakeholder consultation of the Global Compact for Migration regional review

Roundtable 1 on progress and challenges in implementation, 9th November 2020

The British Red Cross is the largest independent provider of services to refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and we are addressing the vulnerabilities of migrants in the current context of COVID-19. The British Red Cross also provides humanitarian assistance globally for migrants in their most vulnerable moments, adopting a route-based approach across borders. We coordinate closely with Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies across Europe, for example on family separation, reuniting migrant adults and children, and on anti-trafficking.

The British Red Cross played an active role in the development of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). Now, 2 years since it was adopted, the true test in the implementation is whether it can make a difference on the ground, in the lives of migrants and the communities that host them. At the heart of the GCM is the idea that migration is a global issue, requiring multilateral solutions. International cooperation is needed on migration and cross-border issues, as we've seen with COVID-19 and the impact of border closures.

A few weeks ago, a family of asylum seekers from Iran attempted to cross the English Channel from France, their boat sank and the family died, including two children. This tragic event brings to the fore the need for humanitarian solutions, with countries working together and beyond borders. And addressing the reasons why people flee their homes in their country of origin. We need to see good and humane asylum systems, including access to good quality legal advice for asylum claims. And rights for families to be reunited.

Before COVID-19, the British Red Cross convened three roundtables to discuss GCM implementation, on the themes of prioritising vulnerabilities, detention as a last resort, access to essential services, and protection along migration routes. We make 5 key recommendations in a policy report, [Policy into Practice. Implementing Humanitarian Priorities in the Global Compact for Migration](#). These recommendations are based on the roundtable discussions between UK government, migrants, civil society and think tanks:

1. A solid foundation for GCM implementation requires appropriate planning at national and local levels, including a cross-government strategy for the GCM - benchmarking existing policy and practice as the government's starting point for GCM implementation.

Currently there may be new immigration legislation coming for the UK which may have an impact on GCM commitments in terms of safe and legal routes.

2. Supporting the GCM through a 'whole of society' approach. Civil society can play a particularly important role in assessing national progress, holding governments to account and sharing best practice.
3. All organisations should make sure that migrants' own experiences and voices have a meaningful influence on GCM implementation – and on migration policymaking more broadly.
4. Political leadership is needed at all levels to build a wider base of support and momentum for the GCM, for example, by designating 'champions' for the GCM.
5. The Government should work in partnership with other organisations to build on links between different objectives of the GCM to avoid siloed approaches, as well as between the GCM and other frameworks.

For example, stronger links are needed between the GCM and the Global Compact on Refugees, and links should also be made with the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It's critical that Member States addressing the climate crisis and the increasing vulnerability of people on the move. There is an opportunity for the UK Government to foster international

cooperation to address the connections between climate change and migration, whilst hosting the UN climate change talks (COP26) next year.

On a final note, in this regional review, we should recognise that Member States are addressing migration at home and overseas. Many Member States in this region also play an important international role as major donors of international development assistance and humanitarian aid globally. They have a diplomatic role through foreign policy with other countries through bilateral and multilateral agreements. These all have an impact on GCM implementation in the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America too. The same humanitarian principles that are applied to protect people overseas also need to be put into action domestically, for example with people seeking asylum.

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Roundtable 2 on best practices for stakeholder engagement, 9th November 2020

Last year the British Red Cross helped nearly 11,000 people separated from their families to reconnect or look for their loved ones. We supported over 3000 people to be reunited by assisting with family reunion visa applications and arranging travel for those families to reach the UK safely. This year, the British Red Cross has been a key point of contact with the UK Government Home Office on COVID-19. This involved weekly phone calls with Home Office officials, feeding in and out issues and information on the impact of COVID-19 on people seeking asylum.

The whole-of-society guiding principle of the Global Compact is critical to successful implementation. The voices of migrants with lived experience and diaspora need to be heard to ground GCM principles and objectives in reality and shape migration policymaking. Their participation and leadership are crucial.

The British Red Cross works closely with networks led by and for people with lived experience of migration and seeking asylum in the UK, for example the [VOICES network](#). They have the opportunity to speak with MPs in the UK Parliament and with the UK Government Home Office. I hope that a VOICES Network Ambassador will have the opportunity to speak at the GCM review meeting on Thursday to share her own experience of migration and integration in the UK.

We have played a convening role in bringing the voices of people with lived experience into roundtable policy dialogues with UK government departments. Government officials don't always have the opportunity to interact with migrants themselves. We have found that starting with these perspectives is powerful and often leads to government officials referring back to the points that migrant representatives have made.

For example, one of the migrant representatives at the roundtable discussions told us: *"Vulnerability is feeling like I have no voice of my own. Feeling like I am not being treated like a human being. I should be protected and respected regardless of personal characteristics because I am just a human."* This led to a discussion on agreeing a definition of vulnerability for the GCM implementation.

Overall, efforts should be made to support local organisations, local government authorities, diaspora groups and migrants themselves – to address vulnerabilities, including through investment in their capacity to do this.

We see an implementation gap between GCM commitments on migrants' access to basic services and day-to-day realities. Migrants face many barriers to accessing services, from eligibility restrictions and high costs, to language barriers and fear of arrest or deportation. This can be overcome by rooting approaches in the needs and experiences of migrants, joining up national and international conversations with local investment, and linking this work in with wider efforts to reduce vulnerabilities among migrants.

On a final point, the GCM recommended that Member States develop national plans. National plans as well as stakeholder consultation mechanisms would allow civil society and migrants themselves to hold Member States accountable. We have found that not all government departments are aware of the GCM. For a whole of government approach, steps should be taken to promote awareness of the GCM among domestic facing departments and local authorities, and how it is relevant and important to their work. This is a foundation for developing a cross-government vision or strategy for implementing the GCM.

As the British Red Cross, we will continue to convene dialogues between government, migrants and civil society, in the lead up to the International Migration Review Forum in 2022, to ensure that the GCM implementation makes a difference to people's lives.
