



Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN
Geneva

Statement

Group of Friends of Burden and Responsibility Sharing

Panel Discussion II
Operationalizing Burden and Responsibility Sharing

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Ambassador Ihab,
Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to join this dialogue. Thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts on this important subject ahead of the High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM) next week.

As one of co-conveners of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) and one of the largest and longest host of refugees, this subject has special resonance and salience for Pakistan.

Let me share a few reflections on how to optimize operationalization of the principle of burden and responsibility sharing and ease burden on host countries.

First, we need to pay more attention to and invest more in addressing the drivers and finding durable solutions. This means deployment of diplomatic, political and development tools to prevent and resolve conflicts. There is no dearth of empirical evidence that it is beyond the capacities of international organizations or UNHCR to simply manage the ever increasing number of displaced people across the globe. The wide ranging economic and social effects of COVID pandemic have once again drawn home the imperative of investing in prevention and preparedness. In other words, it is necessary to address the root causes. The trillions of dollars lost in global economic outputs as a result of pandemic could have been averted if a fraction of that amount was invested in its prevention and preparedness. This analogy applies for the displacement and humanitarian landscape as well. We need to ask ourselves whether a supply side model i.e. “managing the symptoms alone” is desirable or even sustainable. Whether a demand side approach is desirable and doable.

According to the GCR Indicator report, resettlements and complementary pathways do serve the goal of operationalizing burden and responsibility sharing. In the overall scheme of things, those are modest in scale and can hardly be relied as a predictable alternative. During 2016 and 2020, only 1.4 million refugees were able to access third country solutions from a total caseload of 25 to 26.5 million during the same period. There was a decrease in number of receiving countries from 37 to 25 in 2020.

This brings us back to the “most preferred” solution of voluntary repatriation. During 2016-2020, some 2 million refugees returned to their countries of origin, despite the fact that the desirable level of stability in countries of origin did not exist. And, the ODA provided in support of refugee returnees in countries of origin decreased from USD 784 million to USD 584 million.

Pakistan as one of the top troop contributing country for six decades has observed first-hand how the UN peacebuilding can act as a catalyst to mitigate violence and restore peace and stability in conflict affected countries. The role of investments in the context of Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus (HDPN) is crucial to bringing sustainable peace. However, I wish to note that humanitarian assistance should not be added towards 0.7% GNI target for ODA. ODA constitutes for development cooperation not for Peace Keeping Operations or Peace Building.

This brings me to the *second* point, investing in countries of origin and creating conducive conditions for voluntary returns to gain traction and scale. This requires a range of coordinated actions along political, security and development tracks. This means investing in prevention and peace strategies, accompanied by DDR job creation and support to governance and judicial institutions. We see this a critical constituent of concept of optimizing ‘operationalizing’ burden and responsibility sharing.

In our neighborhood, we are witnessing a catastrophe in the making. The UN system has been sounding alarm bells: that millions could die from hunger and lack of shelter if timely humanitarian assistance does not reach them. According to WFP, around 22.8 million people – more than half the population of Afghanistan – face acute food shortages. Around 3.4 million people are internally displaced, 2.2 million are registered refugees in the neighboring countries and similar number of unregistered ones around the world. This is not simply a crisis within the country but a strong driver of displacement and a major barrier to voluntary repatriation.

In addition to hosting millions of Afghan refugees in the country, helping evacuation in the wake of developments since August and continuing our humanitarian support, we are hosting a meeting of Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of OIC, which is convened by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 19th December in Islamabad, in order to mobilize and scale up humanitarian and

economic support to prevent a calamity and meltdown of Afghanistan as a State. We look forward to support from international organizations.

Third, there are ways to help refugee host countries in fulfilling their protection responsibilities. One way of doing this has been demonstrated in the Indicator Report. ‘Accelerated progress towards inclusive education is both necessary and doable.’ For example, according to World Bank-UNHCR report on the cost of inclusive refugee education, ‘the annual cost of providing access to basic education to refugee children in low and middle-income countries is estimated at USD 4.85 billion’.¹ The report also indicates that 56 per cent of funding would have to be financed externally. That means USD 2.72 billion needs to be mobilized externally and the rest to be borne by host countries. It should not be impossible to mobilize this amount.

We also note the findings of GCR Indicators Report that ‘bilateral ODA to refugee situations in countries with low, lower-middle income and upper-middle-income countries amounted to approximately 0.1 per cent of the amount donors mobilized over the past year in economic stimulus measure to help their own societies recover from the COVID-19 crisis’.² This shows that finances are available. However, these need to be channeled for targeted purposes.

Targeted support for specific sectors of education, health, shelter, energy and infrastructure alleviates the burden on host countries. It reduces poverty among refugees as well as host communities. Therefore, investment in refugee host communities for all such purposes has great potential to ease burden and is a means to ‘operationalize’ the principle of burden and responsibility sharing. This also enhances refugees’ self-reliance. However, multiple financing models such as World Bank’s Refugee Sub-Windows, envisaging a mixture of concessional loans and grants, may appear a tool of burden and responsibility sharing but in reality they have the effect of additional financial burden especially for large refugee hosts already grappling with high debt burdens, reduced fiscal space. Therefore, this model needs revisiting especially considering the exacerbation of economic challenges arising from COVID pandemic.

I wish to conclude that operationalizing the principle of burden and responsibility sharing is possible and doable. The host countries, donors, international organizations and other partners need to pool resources to save millions of displaced people from a life of misery and hardship. It remains a shared responsibility but its optimization requires re-tooling given varied capacities needs and contexts.

I thank you all.

¹GCR Indicator Report 2021, p.29

²ibid. p.30