

THE WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE SUMMIT FOR ADDRESSING LARGE MOVEMENTS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

On September 19th, 2016, the UN General Assembly will host a high-level summit to address large movements of refugees and migrants, with the aim of bringing countries together to create a blueprint for a more robust international response.

The mission of the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) is to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crises. WRC views the upcoming summit as a defining moment for Member States to create a more responsible, equitable, and predictable system for responding to refugees and migrants. Any humane and coordinated approach to addressing refugees and migrants must include concrete and targeted action to protect the human rights and support the well-being and empowerment of all women, children, and youth, including those with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities.

We urge Member States to address the following priorities in the outcome document and the Global Compact:

Advance effective asylum and legal protection mechanisms in domestic migration management policies and in international fora. End arbitrary detention for asylum seekers.

Too many States currently seek to deter refugees from reaching their border, including by working with neighboring States to limit migration and refugee flows. Even in States where asylum processes are in place, refugees may have great difficulty pursuing their rights in a safe, timely and informed manner. Some asylum seekers are subjected to punitive measures such as detention. These actions are contrary to human rights and international law.

The misguided focus on deterrence also ignores root causes, puts women and girls at greater risk of trafficking and gender-based violence, and diverts resources from efforts to appropriately strengthen protection systems at home and abroad. States must prioritize the strengthening of legal frameworks and processes that are compliant with obligations under the Refugee Convention and Protocol.

Encourage reform of gender discriminatory nationality laws to ensure that women and men have equal rights to confer nationality on their children and spouses.

Gender discrimination in nationality laws is a leading cause of statelessness and has been recognized by the Security Council as a factor that exacerbates the vulnerability of displaced women and children. Further, forced displacement and migration from countries with gender-discriminatory nationality laws threatens to create a new generation of stateless children. These discriminatory laws also contravene Articles 2 and 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child articles 2, 7 and 8.

Integrate gender-specific considerations throughout the outcome document and Global Compact

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the World Humanitarian Summit emphasized the importance of incorporating a gender perspective throughout humanitarian and development policies and programs. The outcome document and Global Compact should reflect a similar approach by

including specific references and commitments to gender equality and women's rights, the promotion of women's participation in political, social and economic decision making processes, and gender-responsive policies, strategies and programs.

Emphasize the life-saving importance of access to comprehensive reproductive health services

During migration and displacement, women and adolescent girls face high risks to their reproductive health, including risks resulting from sexual exploitation, abuse and complications during pregnancy and childbirth. At the time reproductive health needs are greatest, access to safe health services for women is most challenging. The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for Reproductive Health, comprised of priority life-saving reproductive health services, is the established standard of care for new emergencies. Yet, there are still significant gaps in MISP implementation and in the provision of comprehensive reproductive health services as soon as conditions allow. The price is paid in the lost lives and health of women and girls. States should highlight the importance of providing sexual and reproductive health care to all refugees and migrants.

Make an explicit, detailed commitment to protect all displaced women and girls from gender-based violence, while in transit and upon reaching their destinations.

The threat of gender-based violence is pervasive for women and girls in crises and often especially high for those with disabilities and sexual minorities. All women and girls have the right to live free from the constant threat of violence and exploitation, and survivors of gender-based violence must have access to essential services. States should demand that implementation of established inter-agency guidelines on GBV prevention and response become standard operating procedure at every stage of humanitarian response—as automatic as the provision of shelter or food.¹

Support expansion of legal and safe employment opportunities that leverage the capacity of refugee women and youth to sustain and protect themselves and their families.

Refugees have the will and potential to become self-reliant in their places of refuge. Inclusive national development strategies can promote economic growth, social cohesion, and gender equality, and are in the interest of all concerned. Expanding access to formal employment, including for displaced women and youth, must be an identified priority at this Summit. To advance the priority, States should adopt right to work legislation and support collaborative processes that allow refugees and host communities to safely meet their basic needs, build resilience and lay the foundation for stabilization and development.

Affirm the importance of working with and for refugee and host community youth

Fifty percent of the more than 1 billion people living in fragile and crisis affected countries are under the age of 20. States should make clear their commitment to promote the rights and address the needs and capitalize on the potential of refugee and host community youth in full partnership with them.

¹ See www.gbvguidelines.org