

Factsheet

THE GLOBAL COMPACTS ON REFUGEES AND MIGRATION

Last updated: January 2019

Two new, non-binding international agreements set out improvements for enhancing international cooperation and better managing the movement and safety of refugees and migrants. Both were adopted by the UN in December 2018, although their impact will depend on how governments choose to act on their commitments.

What are the Global Compacts?

On 19 September 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#), a set of commitments designed to enhance the protection of refugees and migrants. The Declaration reaffirmed the importance of the international protection regime and committed governments to strengthening and enhancing mechanisms to protect people on the move. In it, governments committed to work towards the adoption of two new agreements: a [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and a [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#). While neither Compact is legally binding, they contain important political commitments and signal an opportunity to improve the international community's response to refugees and migrants.

The Refugee Compact was developed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in consultation with governments and other actors; a [roadmap](#) and the [Compact website](#) detail the steps taken in the process. An [initial draft](#) of the Compact was released in January 2018 and the [final draft](#) in July 2018. It was presented to the UN General Assembly in September 2018 in the UN High Commissioner's [annual report](#) and adopted by the General Assembly in December 2018. 181 countries voted for its adoption, three abstained (Eritrea, Liberia and Libya), and two voted against it (Hungary and the United States).

The Migration Compact has been developed through a [process](#) of intergovernmental negotiations. A ['zero draft'](#) of the Compact was released in February 2018, and a [final agreed text](#) in July 2018. The Compact was formally adopted at a special summit in Morocco in December 2018. 152 countries voted for its adoption, 12 countries abstained from the vote (Algeria, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, Italy, Latvia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Romania, Singapore, Switzerland), and five countries voted against it (Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Poland, United States).

What is in the Refugee Compact?

The Refugee Compact has four objectives, which are to: (i) ease pressures on host countries; (ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; (iii) expand access to third country solutions; and (iv) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

The Compact is comprised of two main substantive parts: a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and a Programme of Action. The CRRF was already adopted as an annex to the New York Declaration. It has four main areas of focus: rapid and well-supported reception and admissions; support for immediate and ongoing needs (eg. protection, health, education); assistance for local and national institutions and communities receiving refugees; and expanded opportunities for solutions.

The Programme of Action has two main parts. The first outlines ways to achieve more equitable and predictable responsibility-sharing amongst governments. New proposals include the convening of a Global Refugee Forum every four years to encourage countries to pledge various forms of support, and a Support Platform to mobilise support and solutions for specific refugee situations. The second part sets out specific areas to which governments and other stakeholders are called to contribute, particularly in relation to reception and admission; meeting the needs of refugees and supporting host communities; and solutions.

What is in the Migration Compact?

The Migration Compact expresses States' 'collective commitment to improving cooperation on international migration'. The objectives of the Compact are summarised in [paragraph 16](#) and comprise 23 areas. These include opening up more regular migration pathways; reducing vulnerabilities; providing migrants with access to basic services; using detention only as a measure of last resort; promoting inclusion and social cohesion; and strengthening international cooperation for safe, regular and orderly migration. The Compact proposes mechanisms for review, including a new International Migration Review Forum, which will meet every four years.

Will the Compacts make a difference?

Ultimately, whether the Compacts make a difference to the lives of refugees and migrants will depend on the political will of governments to develop and implement their commitments. Amongst the gaps that have been noted are the omission of internally displaced persons from the Migration Compact and a lack of clarity about how to respond to those in need who fall outside the refugee definition.

What is Australia's response to the Compacts?

In July 2018, Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton [announced that Australia would not adopt](#) the Migration Compact, objecting to its provision that detention should only be used as a measure of last resort and encouraging states to adopt alternatives. Prime Minister Scott Morrison [confirmed](#) in November 2018 that Australia would not sign the Migration Compact, which he [stated](#) 'would risk encouraging illegal entry to Australia and reverse Australia's hard-won successes in combating the people smuggling trade'. As noted above, Australia

abstained from the vote. Australia did, however, vote for the [adoption of the Refugee Compact](#).

See our Policy Briefs on related topics: T Alexander Aleinikoff and Susan Martin, [Making the Global Compacts Work: What future for refugees and migrants?](#) (April 2018) and Elizabeth Ferris, [In Search of Commitments: The 2016 Refugee Summits](#) (November 2016)