Joint GRN-MENA and TMK Statement on the GRF

The Global Refugee Forum (GRF) was born out of the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in 2018 by Member States to bolster international cooperation and provide a blueprint framework for more equitable and predictable responsibility sharing for supporting refugees and their access to sustainable solutions. The GCR seeks to ease pressures on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third-country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. The first GRF was held in 2019 to take stock of progress and share best practices in implementing the GCR, and over 1,700 pledges have been announced since then, including by States and non-State actors.[1]

While progress has been made in supporting refugees and in implementing the GCR, barriers still remain. Continually rising numbers of refugees and protracted displacement situations has outpaced the availability of solutions, and there is a continued erosion in responsibility sharing, with low- and middle-income countries neighboring countries of origin continue to host approximately 75% of the refugee population, resulting in continuing inequities.[2] These trends particularly impact refugees in the Middle East and North Africa region[3], where close to a fifth of the global refugee population[4] resides. Türkiye on its own hosts 4 million refugees, the highest number hosted by any country globally, while Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita, where 1 in 4 persons in Lebanon is a refugee. While several states have made commitments to supporting refugees in their borders through the expansion of education and health services, the sheer scale of displacement in a number of countries in the MENA region have also exhausted their capacity to respond to the needs of refugees within their borders, rendering existing pledges insufficient.

Against this context, the Global Refugee-Led Network's Middle East and North Africa Chapter (GRN MENA) and the Refugee Council of Türkiye (TMK) carried out a comprehensive consultation and policy development process with refugee-led organizations and local and national civil society organizations based in the MENA region in the lead-up to the 2nd Global Refugee Forum, through the organization of a National Refugee Summit in Türkiye in June 2023 involving over 50 RLOs and local and national CSOs, and a regional consultation process conducted in October-November 2023 with over 70 RLOs and local and national CSOs. The GRN MENA Chapter and the TMK thus call for the following steps to enhance the refugee response in the region:

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[1] https://www.unhcr.org/media/2023-global-compact-refugees-indicator-report

[2] https://www.unhcr.org/media/2023-global-compact-refugees-indicator-report

[3] For the purpose of this joint statement, the Middle East and North Africa region includes the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

[4] This figure includes 2.4 million refugees as defined by the UNHCR, as well as 4 million refugees in Türkiye. https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa#:~:text=Executive%20summary,seekers%20and%20370%2C300%20stateless%20persons.

Access to Sustainable Solutions for Refugees

- **Existing resettlement quotas and other alternative pathways (including but not limited to private or community sponsorship and family reunification) must be expanded significantly.** States with existing resettlement programs should consider increasing their quotas, while countries without such programs should be provided support in creating similar resettlement initiatives. Resettlement applications must be processed in a timely manner to enable refugees to have agency over their lives so that they can plan for their futures.

- **Pathways to long-term forms of regularized status in countries of asylum must be developed immediately by hosting States.** Refugees must not be left in protracted situations of legal limbo, and where relevant, measures should seek to go beyond currently existing legal frameworks so that refugees and asylum seekers can access their full political, social, and economic rights within a wider framework of local integration.

- **State institutions in the region that do carry out refugee status determination processes under national frameworks must rely upon up-to-date information about countries of origin when adjudicating asylum claims and/or granting refugee status.** Such efforts are critical for upholding the principle of *non-refoulement* and protecting refugees against involuntary return.

- **At the international level, national legislation which seeks to criminalize an individual's right to seek asylum are contradictory to the spirit of easing pressures on major refugee-hosting countries and ensuring international responsibility sharing for refugees.** State actors at the international level must review existing national asylum frameworks and proposed revisions to these frameworks so that they are grounded in international human rights law.

- **All actors must meaningfully include refugees, host communities, and their organizations and initiatives in peace-building and local integration efforts**. The international community must recognize and support existing efforts by State institutions in major refugee-hosting countries in the MENA region to include refugees in their respective refugee response and national development plans; as well as complement the efforts of refugee-led and local/national civil society in supporting the establishment of long-term political solutions that enable refugees to return to their countries of origin in safety and dignity, as well as their role in fostering social cohesion in hosting countries. The role of women-led organizations representing both refugee and host communities in particular must not be overlooked.

- **All actors in the international community must uphold basic human rights of all individuals and refrain from supporting policies and measures that have the potential to expand conflict in the MENA region.**

Protection for Refugees

- **All State actors in the international community must take collective responsibility to ensure that returns to countries of origin are always voluntary and are conducted in a safe and dignified manner.** To ensure that returns are voluntary, all states must commit to protecting the principle of non-refoulement in conducting returns from their respective countries. To complement these

commitments. States in the wider international community must invest in the development of long-term solutions that afford refugees with pathways to voluntarily return to their countries of origin in safety and dignity and measures which address the root causes of displacement, such as investments that improve the social and economic conditions in countries of origin.

- **Pathways to long-term solutions in countries of asylum must be developed immediately by hosting States.** Refugees must not be left in protracted situations of legal limbo, and where relevant, measures should seek to go beyond currently existing legal frameworks so that refugees and asylum seekers can access their full political, social, and economic rights within a wider framework of local integration and national development plans.

Access to Social and Economic Rights

- **The international community must support efforts by States to incorporate refugees into national development systems and frameworks.** This includes targeting investments into ensuring the inclusion of refugees in national statistical systems and surveys, as well as in national development plans.
- **State actors and the wider international community must review and implement changes in existing restrictions on domestic and international mobility that are hampering refugee self-reliance.** Restrictions on both domestic and international travel that hinder refugees' mobility are counter-intuitive to the GCR's objectives to enhancing refugee self-reliance, and the removal and/or easing of these restrictions will enable refugees to access a wider range of job opportunities that allow them to become self-sufficient.
- **Refugees must not be excluded from accessing basic social rights and services, including education and health.** The international community must target investments to States hosting high numbers of refugees so that they can enhance existing national health and education systems, while States must ensure access to registration and legal status for refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Refugees must be included and accounted for in national disaster and emergency responses.** Considering the pre-existing social and economic inequalities that refugees in the region already experience, States must ensure that emergency action plans include refugees in response planning, such as in the allocation of temporary housing.
- **The international community must target investments in the development and maintenance of infrastructure and services which ensure the full inclusion of all groups,** including women, children, older persons, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ and other gender-diverse persons, and other vulnerable and/or marginalized groups in refugee host communities.

Challenging Discrimination and Xenophobia Against Refugees

- **All political actors, including politicians and parties across the political spectrum, must immediately halt the use of hate speech and discuss refugees and migration in a humane and dignified manner.** Refugees must be recognized as humans and rights-bearers, and not be used as a tool for bolstering a political actor's standing.

- **Investments must increase the availability of resources to refugees and their organizations and initiatives to shape public narratives about themselves.** This can include the bolstering of partnerships between refugee and media actors, the expansion of their role in digital protection (such as through fostering their inclusion in shaping and developing social media content moderation systems) and targeting investments supporting multi-stakeholder initiatives which seek to mitigate mis/disinformation about refugees in digital platforms.