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UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# Research Report

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Topic 3: Establishing a Legislative Framework for Responsibility-Sharing in Terms of  
Refugee Hosting



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## Introduction

Responsibility-sharing in refugee hosting describes how the international community or more precisely, organisations like the UN and the European commission distributes the burden of protecting, hosting, and supporting refugees. Traditionally, the majority of refugees are hosted by countries neighbouring conflict zones, many of which are low- or middle-income and lack resources for prolonged humanitarian responses. This has led to imbalanced responsibility, with some nations hosting large populations and others contributing little — creating humanitarian strain and political tensions. In response, the United Nations and regional bodies have pursued frameworks designed to make responsibility-sharing predictable, equitable, and legally grounded, moving beyond ad hoc arrangements toward formalised legislative and policy mechanisms.<sup>1</sup>

## Definition of Key Terms

**Refugee:** A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons such as race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion, is outside their country and cannot avail themselves of its protection. This definition comes from the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.<sup>2</sup>

**Responsibility-sharing:** The equitable distribution of obligations and costs associated with refugee protection among states and relevant actors, including financial support, resettlement, legal pathways, and inclusion policies.<sup>3</sup>

**Legislative framework:** A system of laws, regulations, and standards established by international or regional bodies, or adopted nationally, that governs how responsibility is shared and enforced. This includes binding treaties, agreements, and domestic laws.<sup>4</sup>

**Global Compact on Refugees:** A political framework adopted by the UN in 2018 aimed at enhancing responsibility-sharing and cooperation on refugee issues, without being legally binding.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Cahn-Gambino, 2021)

<sup>2</sup> (UNHCR, USA for UNHCR, n.d.)

<sup>3</sup> (Schmalz, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> (Comission, n.d.)

<sup>5</sup> (UNHCR, UNHCR, n.d.)

## Background Information

Because of major conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia, refugee populations have grown substantially over the last decade. Refugees are predominantly hosted in neighbouring states, with over three-quarters living in low, or middle-income countries.<sup>6</sup> This uneven distribution highlights the need for institutional responsibility-sharing mechanisms rather than temporary, crisis-driven responses. Formal responsibility-sharing discussions gained momentum with the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention, but the treaty itself does not create binding burden-sharing obligations; instead, it sets protection standards and voluntary expectations for states.<sup>7</sup>

In 2018, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees to strengthen cooperation. While not legally binding, the more predictable and equitable targeting pressures on host states facilitate refugee self-reliance.<sup>8</sup>

## Major Countries and Organisations Involved

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:** Lead agency advocating responsibility-sharing principles and supporting GCR<sup>9</sup> implementation. The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is an international framework promoting predictable and fair responsibility-sharing, supporting both refugees and host communities through coordinated global cooperation.<sup>10</sup> UNHCR facilitates the Global Refugee Forum and reviews progress indicators.<sup>11</sup>

**Turkey:** Turkey hosts by far the largest refugee population in the world, primarily people fleeing the conflict in Syria, receiving millions of refugees over the past decade.<sup>12</sup> International frameworks such as the Global Compact on Refugees emphasise the need for cooperation among states to support countries hosting large numbers of refugees, including predictable burden-sharing mechanisms.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> (Sciences, 2021)

<sup>7</sup> (UNHCR, Concept Paper, Thematic discussion 1, 2017)

<sup>8</sup> (Forum, 2018)

<sup>9</sup> GCR: Global Compact on Refugees

<sup>10</sup> (Global Compact on Refugees, n.d.)

<sup>11</sup> (UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, 2018)

<sup>12</sup> (Dr. Olaf Wientzek, 2020)

<sup>13</sup> (Parliament, Solidarity in EU asylum policy, 2023)

**Uganda:** Uganda's refugee policy is widely recognised as highly progressive, granting refugees freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to basic services under its legal framework.<sup>14</sup> Refugees in Uganda are often allocated plots of land for housing and cultivation as part of the government's "self-reliance" strategy, although continued international financial support is critical to sustain this model.<sup>15</sup>

**Pakistan:** Pakistan hosts large numbers of Afghan refugees—many for decades—though their legal status has been insecure, and recent moves toward removal have drawn concern from the UNHCR regarding compliance with international obligations.<sup>16</sup> UNHCR has urged Pakistan to ensure returns are voluntary and dignified, flagging risks to refugee protection when status documentation (such as PoR cards) is not renewed.<sup>17</sup>

**Regional bodies:** The European Union has developed legislative frameworks to share responsibility among member states, including resettlement schemes and solidarity mechanisms within its Common European Asylum System reforms and the recent Asylum and Migration Pact.<sup>18</sup>

**Civil society and NGOs:** Institutions like Amnesty International highlight fair and proportionate contributions from states based on objective criteria and push for accountability mechanisms within frameworks like the GCR.<sup>19</sup>

## Relevant UN Resolutions

### 1951 Refugee Convention & 1967 Protocol

- The foundational legal treaty defining refugee status and core protections sets out the principle of asylum but does not bind states to specific responsibility-sharing commitments. Global Compact on Refugees.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> (Agency, n.d.)

<sup>15</sup> (Protection, 2024)

<sup>16</sup> (Khan, 2025)

<sup>17</sup> (Khan, 2025)

<sup>18</sup> (Comission, n.d.)

<sup>19</sup> (International, 2016)

<sup>20</sup> (UNHCR, The 1951 Refugee Convention , n.d.)

- Aims to bring predictability and equity to responsibility-sharing through cooperation, eased pressure on host countries, enhanced self-reliance, expanded third-country solutions, and support for return conditions.
- Contains arrangements for burden-sharing at global, regional and country levels and encourages partnerships in funding and asylum pathways. These agreements remain largely political and voluntary, not legally binding, but they create frameworks for states to cooperate and develop national legislative measures reflecting shared commitments.<sup>21</sup>

## Proposed Solutions

### 1. Strengthen the Global Compact Implementation.

Translate GCR<sup>22</sup> objectives into legally codified commitments at regional and national levels, including binding responsibilities for financial contributions, resettlement quotas, and legal pathways.

- Develop monitoring and accountability mechanisms within the UN system to evaluate compliance and equitable burden distribution. This could mirror frameworks in other global public goods agreements.<sup>23</sup>

### 2. Expand Legal and Safe Pathways

- Increase resettlement slots and humanitarian admissions in national law, reducing pressure on frontline host countries and tackling irregular migration.
- For example, the EU has adopted a resettlement regulation framework set to take effect in 2026 to align procedures across member states.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Regional Legislative Frameworks

- The European Union's Asylum and Migration Pact integrate responsibility-sharing principles into EU law, though implementation varies by state. This framework aims

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<sup>21</sup> (UNHCR, Convention and Protocol , 1967)

<sup>22</sup> GCR: Global Compact on Refugees

<sup>23</sup> (International, 2016)

<sup>24</sup> (Parliament, EU Legislation in Progress , 2024)

to balance solidarity with effective border management, setting a model for regional cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Global Refugee Forums as a Platform to make commitments

- Since December 2019, there are Refugee Forums held by the UNHCR for international commitments toward the objectives of the compact of refugees.<sup>26</sup>

#### 5. Strengthen Domestic Legislation

- Encourage states to adopt or amend national asylum and immigration laws to codify responsibilities consistent with international commitments, including access to asylum procedures and rights protections.



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<sup>25</sup> (Palrliment, 2025)

<sup>26</sup> (UNHCR, UNHCR, n.d.)



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