

# RESPONSIBILITY SHARING FOR REFUGEES: LESSONS FROM CLIMATE CHANGE COOPERATION

**IN BRIEF** The Global Compact on Refugees provides an opportunity to ensure stronger state responsibility sharing for refugees. What can we learn from other global processes on responsibility sharing to support the Compact? This research looks at the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the role of non-state actors in its success.



## RESPONSIBILITY SHARING FOR REFUGEES

With low and middle income countries currently hosting 86% of the world's refugees (UNHCR, 2015), a better way is needed to respond to refugee crises and share responsibility for refugee protection. The cornerstone of refugee law, the 1951 Refugee Convention, calls for international cooperation to share responsibility for refugees. Further legal obligations on states to cooperate with each other to protect refugees can be found in the United Nations Charter, UNHCR's Statute, and other UN General Assembly resolutions (Turk & Garlick, 2016). However, despite these various legal foundations for responsibility sharing, there is no indication as to how this should be put into practice, let alone how to calculate contributions and ensure compliance. The few efforts to redistribute the 'burden' of refugees barely scratch the surface of what is needed, for example, with only 107'100 refugees resettled globally in 2015 (UNHCR, 2015).

The Global Compact on Refugees, currently being developed for adoption in 2018, is the prime opportunity to push states to share responsibility for the millions of people seeking safety and a stable future. The New York Declaration, adopted in September 2016 and launching the process for the Global Compact, underlined the 'centrality of international cooperation' and committed states to 'a more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting the world's refugees, while taking account of existing contributions and the differing capacities and resources among States' (New York Declaration, 2016). The Global Compact on Refugees should create the framework to ensure States take responsibility for large movements of people. However, in the current political climate, with many states prioritising security and border control, there is limited hope for a successful Compact.



Zaatari camp for Syrian refugees, Jordan. NRC/Christian Jepsen, 2012.



## LESSONS FROM CLIMATE CHANGE COOPERATION

Yet this is not the first time that states have come together to negotiate an agreement on global responsibility sharing. In 2015, over twenty years of negotiations led to the adoption of the Paris Agreement: a global accord in which states agreed to take collective action to combat climate change. There is much to learn from global efforts to tackle climate change, where responsibility lies on the shoulders of all states to reduce emissions and the impact of rising global temperatures.



Success of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, 2015.

The journey to Paris was marked by several failed attempts: the Kyoto Protocol failed to gather the support necessary from key parties such as the United States, and the different levels of responsibilities that were placed on different states created tensions. The Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC in Copenhagen in 2009 was categorised as a failure as it ended without an outcome. Yet in late 2015, an agreement was reached in Paris that was lauded by states, the United Nations, and the majority of environmental organisations as ground-breaking.

In the build-up to the Paris conference, momentum and support for state action was created through private sector engagement, civil society advocacy and international media attention. While previous attempts to reach consensus had failed, this momentum was instrumental in encouraging states to sign up to the historic agreement. **What can we learn from this process about creating support for global responsibility sharing? What happened in the build-up to Paris, what was new? What was the role of non-state actors? Were their strategies different from before?**

## REFERENCES

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This research looks at the momentum created by civil society, business leaders and other actors in the build-up to the Paris Agreement. This analysis can be useful for non-governmental organisations working to ensure the success of the Global Compact for Refugees, to improve their capacity to support strong state responsibility sharing.

## METHODS

In order to understand the build-up to the Paris Agreement and the engagement of non-state actors, the research will involve content analysis of NGO policy, advocacy and communications documents and other relevant literature. This will be complemented by semi-structured interviews with experts from NGOs and companies implicated in the process. Theoretical literature informing assumptions on concepts such as 'responsibility sharing' and 'global public goods' will frame the research. This will start from the theoretical approach of the English School, where state practice is shaped and guided by norms, international institutions and interactions with non-state actors and their political claims.



Displaced people in South Sudan. NRC/Christian Jepsen, 2014.

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