

Perspectives on Migration: Children and the Global Compacts

On January 23, 2018 at the Danny Kaye Visitor's Center at UNICEF House, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) hosted a roundtable discussion between Faith-Based Organizations and UNICEF to explore children's rights within the framework of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration.

Global Faith-Based Partners began with opening remarks that detailed an estimate of 50 million migrant children with 28 million of those children fleeing danger and poverty. In response to these statistics, partners discussed the need of regular and safe passages for migrant children through the implementation of new solutions with a focus on education.

Ted Chaiban, the Director of Programs at UNICEF spoke of the six UNICEF priorities: 1) Protect uprooted children from exploitation and violence, 2) End the detention of refugee and migrant children by creating practical alternatives, 3) Keep families together and give children legal status, 4) Help uprooted children stay in school and stay healthy, 5) Press for action on the causes that uproot children from their homes, 6) Combat xenophobia and discrimination. These priorities became the springboard by which other organizations could relay solutions and implementation strategies.

Following the opening remarks, the discussion was open for conversations on implementation experiences, successes, and challenges related to programming and advocacy for refugee and migrant children and their families. The conversation was based on actionable commitments to be included in the Global Compacts surrounding UNICEF's six priorities.

Of these six priorities, Jonathan Duffy, of the Initiative on Faith, placed an emphasis on the importance of education in migration, as it assists in generating a sense of belonging, sense of achievement, sense of independence, and community service. All of which he says contribute to the importance of enhancing migrant self-value, self-sufficiency, and overall mental wellbeing.

Islamic Relief spoke on a project they jumpstarted in Chechnya for orphans* that provides them with free education, encourages the mothers to attend the school to teach them the importance of education, and empowers the women through craft making workshops.

The Joint Learning Initiative brings religion and development together in learning hubs within the United States. The initiatives are co-chaired by a member of an NGO and a member from an academic institution, which allows for practical discussions and mechanisms to teach and act as organizations for the protection of migrant rights.

The Lutheran Organization discussed their work in alleviating psychosocial distress through the implementation of sports games, talent shows, and cultural experiences in refugee camps. Similarly, Tzu Chi assists in the nurturing of mental health in Turkey by hiring Syrian teachers and medical professionals to work in the camps, which has allowed students and patients to feel comfortable in an unfamiliar environment.

The Greek Orthodox Church has implemented school lunch programs as well as classes for pregnant mothers on breastfeeding for migrants. In Albania they created a camp open to both

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Albanians and Kosovars. The majority of the population is children and their cross-cultural friendships assist in the dilution of pre-conceived and societally induced hostilities. Additionally, the organization turned old abandoned hotels into temporary homes for unaccompanied minors to help keep them out of detention centers.

World Vision discussed their work with local church groups in an effort to retro fit and adapt spaces to children who are detained. They believe that innovative programs are best addressed locally otherwise we run into issues of scalability.

The United Methodist Church discussed how they bring schools and health clinics to rural children instead of making the children walk to town centers where they experience xenophobic and discriminatory behavior from the locals. Additionally, they are working on a project called Schools on the Run where they will have volunteer teachers travel along the migration route to offer their services to migrant students.

Partners agreed that there is a greater need for international and regional organizations to work together on humanitarian action, ground work, and advocacy. They acknowledged that they may sometimes need influential religious leaders to assist in their initiative but that most of the times this is not a quintessential part. Local churches and organizations may be more helpful when discussing actions and programs with local leaders. However, they understand the importance of how partnership and past experiences can allow them to come together to help bring an end to the many human rights violations against migrants.

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