



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the
3rd Thematic Discussion towards a Global Compact on Refugees
Panel 2: *“How can we support the inclusion of refugees in national systems and services?”*
18 October 2017

Mr. Moderator,

While it is important to share the responsibility and burden of refugee reception and resettlement and to rightly stress what States are doing for refugees, it is also fair to ask ourselves: what are refugees doing for the host communities?

Despite the tragedy and gravity of their situations, refugees bring their talents through knowledge, practical skills, experience, culture and spirituality that can enrich the receiving countries. The Delegation of the Holy See draws attention to the fact that so many are placed “on hold”, often at significant expense to host and donor countries, and wishes to elaborate briefly on two particular aspects that have been raised in the present panel discussion: education and health.

Today, over half of the refugees under UNHCR’s mandate are children, including a staggering 3.5 million refugee children aged 5 to 17 who did not have the chance to attend school last year.¹ My Delegation wishes to highlight the critical importance of adopting policies that allow refugee children to access quality education from the early stages of their displacement, in order to protect them from human trafficking, forced labor and other forms of slavery.

Schools are a form of protection where the safety of children can be monitored and fostered. It is important to enact policies which ensure that the primary and secondary education to which refugees have access meets the same standards of education received by citizens.²

Mr. Moderator,

The importance of granting access to healthcare is self-explanatory. It is encouraging to hear that legislation is being passed to allow refugees to work, and to access national healthcare and education systems. The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health should be exercised through non-discriminatory, comprehensive laws, policies and practices firmly rooted in the centrality of the human person and founded on the right to life.

In this regard, the health and well-being of refugees should not be considered as a separate variable from the health of the host population. The fear that refugees spread infectious diseases finds no evidence and ignores the tragedy of their situation. The integration of refugees into existing

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/9/59b6a3ec4/unhcr-report-highlights-education-crisis-refugee-children.html>

² *Responding to Refugees and Migrants: Twenty Action Points*, Migrants and Refugees Section, Holy See’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

national health systems, plans and policies, could also help alleviate certain logistical barriers which have been too often experienced.

Mr. Moderator,

Access to education and healthcare inspires hope among refugees and greatly contributes to restoring their dignity. The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to encourage donor States to tailor aid and assistance to include the development of medical, educational, and social services infrastructure in hosting areas. A percentage of such assistance, as well as access to programs and services provided to refugees, could be also set aside for the benefit of local populations experiencing similar disadvantages.

Let us keep in mind that, after all, the decision of our brothers and sisters to flee their home out of fear and desperation is a leap of faith in the solidarity and unity of the human family.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.