



HPG Working Paper

The Rohingya response in Bangladesh and the Global Compact on Refugees

Lessons, challenges and opportunities

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Acronyms

BDRCS	Bangladesh Red Crescent Society
CCNF	Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum
CRRF	Common Refugee Response Framework
DMB	Disaster Management Bureau
DRR	Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
FFM	Fact Finding Mission
FTS	Financial Tracking System
GCM	Global Compact on Migration
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICOE	Independent Commission of Inquiry
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISCG	Inter-Sectoral Coordination Group
JRP	joint response plan

MoDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PDD	Platform on Disaster Displacement
RAPID	Research and Policy Integration for Development
RRRC	Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission
RRRP	Regional Refugee Response Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene

Executive summary

Between August and October 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya people fled from Rakhine State, Myanmar to Bangladesh. This was the latest of several instances of Rohingya displacement from Myanmar since the late 1970s. Almost in parallel, in mid-2017, consultations were underway in Geneva towards a long-awaited Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). This report explores how far the GCR – adopted by 181 UN Member States, including Bangladesh, in December 2018 – has informed the response to the Rohingya crisis. It does so by exploring the extent to which the GCR has explicitly been used in the context, alongside how far its principles have been applied ‘in spirit’, in a less direct de facto sense. The sheer complexity of the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh – although not unlike other large-scale displacements – provides an opportunity to stress test some of the GCR’s objectives and assumptions, while also exploring what these principles might look like in practice.

The research was conducted in collaboration between HPG at ODI, the British Red Cross, the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), a think tank in Bangladesh. The research used qualitative methods, with almost 60 semi-structured interviews carried out between August and November 2019 at global, regional, national and subnational levels. The research was subject to a number of limitations, mainly that, by nature, the research provides only a point-in-time assessment of the GCR’s use in relation to the Rohingya crisis during the research period. A number of developments took place after this time, which are mentioned where relevant, but could not be fully explored in the analysis. It is also acknowledged that this represents an early phase of the GCR’s implementation, with research beginning just eight months after the GCR’s formal adoption.

Overall, the research found that the proactive or explicit use of the GCR in relation to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh has been very limited thus far – although not completely absent – due to significant constraints. Yet, many of its objectives and cross-cutting principles have nonetheless been pursued in a less direct de facto sense. The research found that more proactive use of the GCR in relation to the Rohingya crisis, in line with recommendations outlined in this report, could add considerable value. In particular, more strategic and proactive use of the GCR by all actors could help avoid critical missed opportunities, resulting in better support to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and to their host communities.

Explicit use of the GCR in Bangladesh and constraining factors

A number of stakeholders in Bangladesh, including the government, engaged with the GCR throughout its consultation and adoption process. The most explicit reference to the GCR continues to be at the international level, although this does not yet appear to have translated into direct outcomes at the country level. References have also been made to the GCR as part of regional efforts to support solutions and responsibility-sharing for the Rohingya crisis, including through a proposed ‘Solidarity Approach’. However, to date this has gained little traction as a platform for responding to the crisis. More widely, while some conversations have taken place on the GCR among humanitarian stakeholders in Bangladesh, these are not yet directly driving decision-making or programmatic outcomes.

The limited explicit use of the GCR in relation to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh thus far can be explained by several constraining factors linked to the specific dynamics of the context. Overall, there

has been a lack of buy-in from all stakeholders in Bangladesh including the government. Context-specific constraining factors include:

- The lack of recognition of Rohingya individuals as ‘refugees’ under national frameworks, creating a lack of clarity over whether the GCR should be applied.
- Wider misalignment between the GCR and the government’s policy approach, particularly in terms of the GCR’s focus on long-term approaches and measures to support refugees’ self-reliance.
- A commonly held belief that the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh is ‘one of the hardest cases’ challenging donor appetite to engage with the GCR in this context, while creating a perceived tension between the GCR’s aspirational principles and realities on the ground.
- A complex humanitarian landscape in relation to UNHCR’s position, with coordination and strategic approaches inhibited by ad hoc systems and a lack of clear leadership or accountability.

The GCR’s use in the Rohingya response is also constrained by unresolved issues with the GCR at the global level, including: challenges in applying a global document of this kind to the complexities of a live humanitarian response; limited global awareness of the GCR as a new framework; and diverging understandings of the GCR’s nature and what implementing it would look like in practice. Finally, prospects for the GCR’s use in Bangladesh are impacted by its voluntary nature. Ultimately, whether or not the GCR is implemented in a context depends on whether host governments perceive doing so to be in their interests. In Bangladesh, such incentives appear to have been insufficient.

Implementing the GCR in spirit, if not in name

Although the GCR is not systematically referred to in Bangladesh, its objectives and cross-cutting principles have, in one way or another, been pursued in a broader de facto sense. This is useful to consider when evaluating where progress has

already been made and to understand where challenges and opportunities may lie if the GCR were to be applied more intentionally. However, the fact that many of the GCR’s principles are being applied in the response as a set of ‘common sense’ principles, regardless of the GCR, does call into question the extent to which the GCR can be considered new or ‘game changing’.

The research considered the following elements of the GCR in relation to the Rohingya response in Bangladesh:

- **Easing pressure on the host country** (GCR Objective 1): This is the one component of the GCR that both the Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian community most readily agree is worth pursuing. However, different stakeholders’ understandings of ‘pressure’ have led to a range of perceptions on how successfully pressures have been eased.
- **Enhancing refugee self-reliance** (GCR Objective 2): This was considered relevant but challenging. While there have been some positive steps towards supporting self-reliance in the Rohingya response, overall progress has been limited by government policy approaches.
- **Expanding access to third-country solutions** (GCR Objective 3): Most respondents did not see this as a viable solution, due to refugees’ own preferences; government reluctance to permit third-country solutions; the low number of resettlement places on offer globally; and a lack of clarity on what options are realistically being offered at scale.
- **Supporting conditions for return in safety and dignity** (GCR Objective 4): While the Government of Bangladesh continues to uphold the principle of voluntary return, respondents almost unanimously agreed that very little progress has been made towards supporting refugees’ return. This is largely due to the complexity of root causes and conditions in Myanmar. Given the importance of this objective for all stakeholders in Bangladesh, strikingly, the GCR offers few concrete tools in this area.
- **A multi-stakeholder or ‘whole-of-society’ approach** (a cross-cutting principle of the GCR): The context in Bangladesh demonstrates that a successful multi-stakeholder approach is not measured simply by the number of actors

involved, but the dynamics between them, modalities for working together, consensus-building and the extent to which various actors work together towards shared goals. In a context dominated by competing interests and perspectives, this has proved challenging.

Learnings from the GCR's de facto implementation in Bangladesh

The fact that elements of the GCR are already being implemented 'in spirit' in Bangladesh – to varying degrees of success – calls into question whether or not a more systematic and intentional implementation of the GCR would improve outcomes. However, the research identified various ways in which it *could* add value. First, the GCR could be a useful tool to mobilise political will and financial resources at international and regional levels towards key principles and objectives, including those already operational in the response.

Beyond this, the GCR could be a useful tool within Bangladesh to inform policy engagement with the government and the strategic direction of the response. Its potential added value in this sense is best understood in terms of several perceived missed opportunities to date. The GCR's greatest value is that it represents a collective framework consolidating good practices in refugee response. In a context that is seen by many as difficult, an opportunity was missed to use the GCR as a tool to hold all actors to account on best practices, for example the early inclusion of host communities in the response. Other missed opportunities include using the GCR to inform responsibility-sharing with the Government of Bangladesh and considering what the catalytic role put forward for UNHCR might mean in Bangladesh.

Harnessing future opportunities in Bangladesh

Exploring the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh presents opportunities to improve the GCR at the global level by building a global framework

that is fit for purpose (see Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019). Various opportunities are also identified within Bangladesh, to harness the possibilities presented by the GCR to improve outcomes in the Rohingya response:

1. Use the GCR more explicitly as an overarching framework at regional and international levels, to mobilise increased funding and political commitment towards pre-existing strategies in the Rohingya response.
2. Strengthen leadership for the GCR in Bangladesh based on complementary roles and responsibilities, exploring possibilities for UNHCR or alternatively a coalition of national actors to take a leading role in advancing the GCR.
3. Contextualising the GCR to the realities of Bangladesh, developing a plan of action based on an understanding of how key stakeholders (particularly the government) interpret and prioritise the GCR's objectives, supplemented by country-level indicators.
4. Using evidence to support the contextualisation of the GCR and engagement with the government, including ongoing cost–benefit analyses of refugees' presence, detailed mapping of public attitudes and exploring ways to document the costs of *not* applying the GCR's principles in this context.
5. Continuing engagement with the Government of Bangladesh in their own language, including by substantiating links between the GCR and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
6. Focusing on regional, political and diplomatic solutions, in particular improving conditions in Myanmar, through existing global mechanisms and a possible role for regional solidarity platforms.
7. Putting the GCR's multi-stakeholder approach into practice by improving partnership and leadership among humanitarian actors.
8. Raising awareness of the GCR among national and international actors, alongside refugees and host communities.

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview and rationale

From August to October 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh.¹ This was the latest of several instances of Rohingya displacement from Myanmar since the late 1970s.² As outlined by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFM) on Myanmar, the displacement of August 2017 was triggered by a specific escalation of extreme violence, marginalisation and the limitation of the Rohingyas' basic rights over a sustained period (UN Human Rights Council, 2018: 6–11). At the time of writing, a case brought to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by the Gambia under the Genocide Convention remains ongoing.³

On this occasion, the scale and speed of displacement were unprecedented in both Bangladesh and the wider region, creating significant humanitarian needs and impacting host communities (UNDP, 2019). Throughout this mass displacement the Bangladeshi government kept its borders open. Today, Bangladesh hosts

around 850,000 Rohingya refugees, the majority of whom are settled in densely populated camps in Cox's Bazar (UNHCR and Government of Bangladesh, 2019).⁴

This report explores how far the GCR has informed the response to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, with a focus on both its explicit and de facto use. The report also analyses the factors that constrain the GCR's implementation in this context and the opportunities for further harnessing its possibilities. The GCR, endorsed in December 2018 by 181 UN Member States – including Bangladesh – was the culmination of a process set in motion by the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The GCR is a non-binding, voluntary framework and aims to 'provide a basis for predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing among all UN Member States, together with other relevant stakeholders' in responding to large-scale displacement (UNGA, 2018: 1).

As the first large-scale displacement since the New York Declaration was endorsed, the Rohingya crisis serves as a test case for the GCR.

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- 1 For the purposes of this report, co-authored by British Red Cross, HPG and RAPID, the term 'Rohingya' is used in reference to individuals self-identifying as Rohingya, noting that this is not the terminology of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which ordinarily uses the term 'people from Rakhine' as an element in maintaining safety and operational access to provide vital humanitarian assistance to those in need wherever they are.
 - 2 A more detailed overview of the root causes of the Rohingya's displacement is detailed in the successive reports of the IFFM. Other sources include Haque (2019) and Wade (2019).
 - 3 In January 2020, the ICJ ruled for Myanmar to enact provisional measures aimed at protecting Rohingya individuals still in Myanmar from acts of genocide, following the case brought by the Gambia (International Court of Justice, 2020). A 2019 report from the IFFM concluded that the events of August 2017 'gave rise to an inference of genocidal intent, and that those attacks ... reflected a well-developed and State-endorsed policy aimed at the Rohingya', with ethnic Rohingya remaining in Myanmar subject to 'chronic persecution' (UN Human Rights Council, 2019: 6, 13). The Government of Myanmar has disputed claims of genocide, based on the findings of its own Independent Commission of Inquiry (ICOI) (Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).
 - 4 The term 'refugee' is used here to refer to the Rohingya population in Bangladesh in line with applicable international frameworks. However, the authors acknowledge that the Government of Bangladesh has not formally designated the current Rohingya population as 'refugees' under national frameworks, instead referring to Rohingya people in Bangladesh as either forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals or as undocumented migrants from Myanmar. Only 30,000 Rohingya and their children (estimated to total 34,000) are officially registered as refugees in Bangladesh from the 1990s. For a comprehensive overview of the Rohingya's displacement in Bangladesh – today and historically – see ACAPS (2017); Human Rights Watch (2018); Wake and Bryant (2018); Post et al. (2019).

The sheer complexity of the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh – although not entirely unlike other large-scale displacements – provides an opportunity to stress test some of the GCR’s objectives and assumptions, exploring what these look like in practice in an undeniably challenging context. As one interviewee outlined, the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh presents a ‘textbook example of why we needed a GCR’ and ‘an opportunity for the Compact to show its relevance’. However, there are questions around how far links between the Rohingya crisis and the GCR have been made, and the use of the GCR to support a more coordinated and effective response.

1.2 Methodology

The research aimed to answer three main questions:

1. Has there been any progress in Bangladesh towards implementing the responsibility-sharing and operational principles of the GCR – either in an explicit or de facto sense?
2. Could the responsibility-sharing and operational principles of the GCR be more fully implemented in Bangladesh and if so, what are the opportunities?
3. What does exploring implementation of the GCR in Bangladesh tell us about the GCR at regional and global levels?

Research was conducted in collaboration between HPG at ODI, the British Red Cross, the IFRC, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and RAPID, a Bangladeshi think tank. The research used qualitative methods, with almost 60 semi-structured interviews carried out between August and November 2019 at global, regional, national and subnational levels. Interviews were conducted through a combination of remote and in-person interviews, including a field visit to Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar in October 2019. Respondents included representatives from local and national sections of the Bangladeshi government, national Bangladeshi think tanks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donor governments, international actors (including international non-governmental

organisations (INGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies, international financial institutions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement) and leading global and regional experts/researchers (see Table 1). Interviews were supplemented by a literature review linked both to the Rohingya crisis and the GCR.

The research was subject to several limitations:

- Many respondents – particularly those working at the field level and in an operational capacity – were either unaware of the GCR altogether, or indicated that they were aware of the GCR but unfamiliar with its details.
- By nature, the research provides only a point-in-time assessment of perceptions of the GCR’s use, relevance and application during the research period of August–November 2019. There were a number of developments following this period, which are mentioned where relevant but could not be fully explored in the analysis. It is also acknowledged that this represents an early phase of the GCR’s implementation, with research beginning just eight months after the GCR’s formal adoption.
- Due to a rapidly shifting environment at the time of the research visit, the research team was unable to conduct interviews directly with refugees. The visit took place shortly after new restrictions were imposed on humanitarian activities in Cox’s Bazar. Similarly, due to time constraints and sensitivities, beyond interviews with local NGOs and Bangladeshi think tanks the research team was unable to conduct discussions directly with members of host communities. However, where possible their perspectives are taken into account through secondary analysis.
- In order to limit the scope, the research did not include interviews with stakeholders in Myanmar. Findings therefore primarily represent perspectives on the use and opportunities for the GCR in relation to the crisis in Bangladesh, reflecting the GCR’s primary focus on responses to displacement in host countries. In interviews respondents did, however, reflect on factors relevant to the wider situation in Myanmar, which where possible are included in this report.

Table 1: Interviews with key stakeholders

Stakeholder	Interviews
Stakeholders outside Bangladesh (working at global or regional levels)	
Donors	1
International actors (INGOs, UN agencies, international financial institutions, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement)	7
Regional/global experts	5
Dhaka	
Donors	2
Government of Bangladesh	2
International actors (INGOs, UN agencies, international financial institutions, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement)	15
National actors (NGOs, think tanks)	5
Cox's Bazar	
Donors	1
Government of Bangladesh	2
International actors (INGOs, UN agencies, International Financial Institutions, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement)	14
National actors (NGOs, think tanks)	2
Total	56

1.3 Outline of paper

Chapter 2 explores the extent to which the GCR has explicitly been used or discussed in relation to the Rohingya crisis, and examines constraining factors linked with the GCR's design as well as those linked with the crisis in Bangladesh. Chapter 3 addresses the extent to which the GCR's

objectives and key principles have been applied in response to the crisis in a less direct de facto sense. Chapter 4 outlines future opportunities for further harnessing the possibilities presented in the GCR. Chapter 5 concludes the report and provides recommendations to support the opportunities the GCR offers for advancing responses – and solutions – to the Rohingya displacement.

2 Explicit use of the Global Compact on Refugees in Bangladesh

This chapter explores how and to what extent the GCR has explicitly been used or referred to in relation to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh. Overall, the research found that proactive or explicit discussion and use of the GCR in Bangladesh has been, as one respondent put it, ‘limited, but not absent’. From 56 interviewees, just over half (29) indicated either that they had used or referred to the GCR in relation to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, or they were aware of others doing so. However, despite some surface-level use, the GCR has not been explicitly used as part of the Rohingya response in a meaningful way, although, as discussed in Chapter 3, its principles have been applied in a less direct de facto sense. This limited explicit use can be attributed to a number of interlinked factors relating to the context and the GCR itself.

2.1 Engagement in Bangladesh leading up to the GCR’s adoption

A number of stakeholders in Bangladesh, including the government, engaged with the GCR throughout its consultation and adoption process. In September 2018, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina welcomed the GCR at the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly, and in December 2019 Bangladesh voted in favour of the GCR at its final UN General Assembly vote (Dhaka Tribune, 2018).

One regional civil society representative explained that during the consultation phase: ‘When [the Government of Bangladesh] spoke from the floor compared to other governments it

Box 1: An overview of the Global Compact on Refugees

The GCR has four broad objectives:

1. Ease the pressure on host countries.
2. Enhance refugee self-reliance.
3. Expand access to third-country solutions.
4. Support conditions for return in safety and dignity.

The Compact is formed of two interlinked components:

1. the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) – a country-level framework and plan of action laid out in the 2016 New York Declaration primarily for refugee self-reliance and local integration; and
2. a broader Programme of Action adopted in 2018, which outlines principles for responsibility-sharing and areas in need of support. Included within the Programme of Action are arrangements for a Global Refugee Forum to be held every two years to announce concrete funding pledges and contributions towards supporting the objectives of the GCR. The first Forum was held in December 2019.

was generally positive’. However, compared to the government’s much more enthusiastic engagement with the parallel Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) (see Box 2), its engagement with the GCR was comparatively subdued. During these stages, the Bangladeshi

Box 2: The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) was a parallel process to the GCR, also originating from the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Like the GCR, the GCM is a non-binding voluntary framework, intended to support more effective international cooperation in response to migration. In theory the GCM and GCR are intended as complementary frameworks, although in practice the processes towards them and follow-up discussions on implementation have remained largely separate.

The Government of Bangladesh has been an enthusiastic champion within the region and globally of the GCM, primarily focusing on its benefits for Bangladeshi nationals migrating to other countries. In 2019, following on from the adoption of the GCM, regional stakeholders met in Bangladesh to affirm the Dhaka Declaration, which, though focusing on voluntary migration, recognises that ‘the plight of millions of people in different parts of the world who, for reasons beyond their control, are forced to uproot themselves and their families from their homes’ must be addressed (Multi-stakeholder Consultation, 2019). Interviews suggested that in 2019 UN agencies in country were working with the Government of Bangladesh to develop a national-level implementation plan for the GCM, becoming one of the first countries to do so.

government’s engagement was largely focused on elements reflecting its pre-existing policy priorities and approaches, in particular ensuring that the topics of return and addressing the root causes of displacement were reflected in the text, as well as a focus on responsibility-sharing and the GCR’s ‘whole-of society-approach’.⁵

Interviews also revealed contributions made by humanitarian stakeholders in Bangladesh throughout the GCR’s consultation stages. For example, one interviewee highlighted how feedback had been provided on the GCR’s content through the Strategic Executive Group (SEG), a Dhaka-level decision-making forum (see Box 3). In particular, this focused on the inclusion in the GCR of national early warning systems for refugees in the context of disasters.

2.2 Use of the GCR in relation to Bangladesh at international, regional and national levels

2.2.1 Use of the GCR at the international level

Following on from global consultations on the GCR, the most explicit reference to the GCR in relation to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh

continues to be at the international level. The Government of Bangladesh was represented by then Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, considered a primary mechanism for global implementation of the GCR (see Box 1). While the Bangladeshi government did not itself make a pledge at the Forum, its statement given as part of the main plenary was positive:

The two Global Compacts ... one on refugees and the other one on migration, made a global call to build an inclusive structure to comprehensively deal with population movement. We believe ... this is the beginning of ... a long journey to ensure rights of people who are on the move (Government of Bangladesh, 2019).

Mirroring its approach during consultations, the Government of Bangladesh highlighted in their statement that successful implementation of the GCR depends on equal emphasis on all of its four pillars, including return.

Beyond the Government of Bangladesh, various other stakeholders have invoked the GCR as part of global-level advocacy in support of strengthened responsibility-sharing.

5 Return and addressing root causes of displacement were the focus of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s 2018 remarks at the UN General Assembly (Mehroze, 2018) and a written contribution given as part of the 5th Thematic Session of GCR consultations, which focused on addressing root causes of displacement.

Box 3: The Rohingya crisis response system

The Bangladeshi government has taken responsibility for the camps in Cox's Bazar District – the largest of which, Kutupalong-Balukhali, has become the largest refugee camp in the world – through extension of civil administration systems. There, the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC) leads the Rohingya response on the ground in connection with the Deputy Commissioner's Office, who has the primary responsibility of the impact of the refugee response on the host community (Grand Bargain Localization Workstream, 2018; UNDP, 2018; Wake and Bryant, 2018). In Dhaka, the Rohingya crisis is overseen by the Prime Minister's Office and various government ministries and authorities such as the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MODMR), the Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) and the Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation (DRR), coordinated through a National Task Force chaired by the Foreign Secretary.

Government administration systems are supported by a large, multi-sector humanitarian response that is operational in Cox's Bazar, which involves various local, national and international humanitarian responders, as well as additional interventions by development actors. The overall humanitarian response is facilitated by a sector-based coordination mechanism, the Inter Sectoral Coordination Group (ISCG), which is accountable to a Strategic Executive Group in Dhaka, a decision-making forum consisting of heads of international humanitarian organisations, donors and a national NGO representative, co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR.

Unusually for a refugee response of this nature, UNHCR was not initially designated as the lead UN agency for the response, with IOM taking on a prominent role. Prior to the large influx of refugees in August 2017, the government had designated IOM the lead agency for responding to what had been known as 'undocumented Myanmar nationals' (i.e. Rohingya not registered in the two refugee camps remaining from the 1990s). This resulted in ad hoc coordination approaches and later a hybrid leadership structure between IOM and UNHCR. At the time of conducting this research, however, these dynamics had shifted substantially, with UNHCR taking on a clearer leadership role.

For instance, a 2018 press statement issued by UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi called on governments to put the commitments of the New York Declaration into practice and 'share Bangladesh's refugee burden' (UN News, 2018). An inter-agency NGO statement signed by 61 organisations, two years on from the mass displacement of August 2017, made a similar point (ACTED et al., 2019).

However, to date, use of the GCR to strengthen responsibility-sharing around the Rohingya crisis at the international level has not translated into direct outcomes, perhaps reflecting these efforts' limited scope. This was particularly evident in terms of the crisis's place at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum,

where 'spotlight sessions' were convened, new initiatives announced and substantive pledges made relating to various displacement contexts, including Syria, Afghanistan, in the Americas and East Africa. Despite some references to the Rohingya crisis and humanitarian response in Bangladesh, substantive discussions on the context were noticeably absent at the Forum in contrast to other large-scale refugee crises.⁶

2.2.2 Use of the GCR at the regional level

Some reference has been made to the GCR as part of regional efforts to support solutions and responsibility-sharing for the Rohingya crisis. In 2018, UNHCR put forward a proposed 'Solidarity Approach', which aims to 'galvanize

6 At the time of writing, UNHCR's online portal for tracking pledges lists 25 pledges made at the Forum either solely or partly relevant to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh. However, in contrast to other crises, these are relatively limited in depth and scope, largely referring to pre-existing efforts rather than putting forward substantive new commitments (see UNHCR, 2020). Perhaps the most substantive pledge put forward was a joint pledge from IRC, NRC and Save the Children Bangladesh to initiate an education working group bringing together stakeholders in Cox's Bazar and Rakhine State, in partnership with UNICEF, UNHCR, the Government of Myanmar and Government of Bangladesh.

solidarity for an approach to improve the situation for the people of Rakhine State, wherever they may be’ (UNHCR, 2018a: 1). A July 2018 concept note explicitly linked the Solidarity Approach to the GCR, explaining that ‘In line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework approach, it will... encourage timely, adequate and needs-driven funding for the response’; and ‘In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, the approach would include tangible responsibility-sharing and longer-term commitments to foster inclusive growth and opportunities for refugees and host communities’ (UNHCR, 2018b: 2). The pillars of this approach are similar to those of the GCR:

1. supporting refugees and host communities in Bangladesh;
2. enabling Myanmar to create conditions for sustainable voluntary repatriation;
3. encouraging inclusive development, resilience and livelihood opportunities for all of Rakhine State’s communities, globally and regionally (UNHCR, 2018b: 1).

The Solidarity Approach mirrors the idea put forward in the GCR of developing ‘Support Platforms’ to facilitate more coherent support between different stakeholders to specific crises. However, the Solidarity Approach has not explicitly been presented as a GCR support platform. One interviewee – who referred to the Solidarity Approach as a ‘fake GCR’ – raised the question of why the approach had not been more explicitly framed at this regional level as an effort to implement the GCR, but rather something simply considered ‘in line’ with its principles.

It was broadly considered that to date the idea of the Solidarity Approach as a platform has gained little traction.⁷ Some interviewees said that initial in-country engagement with the Government of Bangladesh – and with

international community stakeholders – on the Solidarity Approach had been insufficient. This led to a poor reception by the government at a meeting convened by UNHCR in Bangkok in late 2018 aiming to drive forwards the approach. One interviewee referred to the meeting as a ‘perfect storm’, resulting in key stakeholders feeling blindsided in a public forum due to lack of prior engagement. The draft concept note was since revised to reflect the Government of Bangladesh’s specific concern at the 2018 meeting: a greater focus on engagement in Myanmar to support refugees’ repatriation. However, interviews suggested that this did not gain particular traction. Whether or not linked to the GCR, interviews did not evidence optimism that the Solidarity Approach – at least in its current iteration – might be picked up as an overarching framework.

2.2.3 Use of the GCR in Bangladesh

Explicit use of the GCR was found to be most limited at the country level. Despite the Government of Bangladesh’s support for the GCR at the international level, interviews suggested that this has not yet translated into proactive efforts on its part to explicitly apply the GCR to its response to the Rohingya crisis. Government stakeholders in Bangladesh, including from departments with a leading role in the Rohingya response (see Box 3), were largely unaware of the GCR and even questioned whether it had been adopted by the government. One global expert who had been party to discussions with the government outlined greater familiarity and interest, if not strategic planning or use, of the GCR at higher levels of government: ‘The Foreign Secretary he is more familiar on the [GCM] but he knows about the GCR. There are well-placed people for whom it is something of a hook’. However, it is notable that this example relates to parts of government engaged in international discussions.⁸

⁷ While the Solidarity Approach has not gained traction as a platform, to the extent that its aspirations mirror those of the GCR, there are ways in which these are less explicitly reflected in the overall response – as outlined in Chapter 3.

⁸ Bangladesh is by no means unique in terms of limited familiarity among government stakeholders with the GCR and similar international frameworks. For example, a similar observation has been made in the UK context in relation to the GCM, in terms of limited familiarity and the need for further national dissemination of the framework among government and civil society actors (British Red Cross and ICRC, 2020).

From the side of the humanitarian community, one interviewee, also party to strategic discussions with the government, explained that UNHCR had approached the Government of Bangladesh early in the crisis with the idea of implementing the CRRF in Bangladesh. However, this proposal was understood to have been declined and there was no further evidence of subsequent efforts to explicitly broach the topic with the government. While the SEG played a role in shaping the GCR text during consultations, interviews suggested that the GCR's implementation had not been discussed within the SEG after this point. Similarly, despite playing a key operational role in the response, there is no note of the IOM having raised or made efforts to explicitly advance the GCR as part of national inter-agency coordination efforts. According to interviews, for some stakeholders, the limited use of the GCR as part of engagement with the government was a missed opportunity. As one INGO representative explained, 'There is a lot of this that has been relevant that could have been or should be discussed at the level of UN with the government. And certainly, at the RRRC and the DC [District Commissioner] level'.

In this context, the GCR is not explicitly referenced in inter-agency operational planning for the response. The first four iterations of the Joint Response Plan (JRP) – the main operational plan agreed between humanitarian agencies and the Government of Bangladesh on an annual basis – do not refer to the New York declaration or the GCR. While multiple respondents reported that the GCR was raised at a JRP consultation in late 2019, it is not mentioned in the final draft of the 2020 JRP. Although, as discussed in Chapter 3, while the GCR is not explicitly referenced in the JRP many of its principles are less directly reflected in the response.

This limited explicit uptake comes despite several humanitarian stakeholders within Bangladesh being familiar with the GCR at a basic level, if not its core details. Several instances

were noted where the GCR had been discussed between humanitarian stakeholders, although this was far from prevalent. Unsurprisingly, this was most widespread among UNHCR representatives, who interviewees reported as referring to the GCR in humanitarian coordination meetings, during high-level visits and on one occasion during a meeting of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD).

Yet instances where the GCR had been discussed among humanitarian stakeholders in both Dhaka and Cox's Bazar also spanned representatives from other UN agencies, INGOs, national NGOs, donor governments and even in one case refugees themselves.⁹ One INGO representative in Dhaka explained that this wider interest and use was perhaps a surprise to UNHCR:

Since they [senior UNHCR representatives] started coming [to Bangladesh] there was more and more mention of it ... like a magic wand. We will have solutions. [It was] coming up in discussions with UNHCR senior people who were visiting. I talked to Filippo Grandi on one of his visits. He was surprised that someone in Bangladesh would want to talk to him about the GCR. ... My question was: how does it affect, or how will it change things here? He acknowledged that UNHCR were still in [a difficult position] here, so it [the question] was rhetorical.

As this quote reflects, overall where conversations are taking place on the GCR these are not yet directly driving decision-making or programmatic outcomes. As one INGO representative expressed, 'it gets mentioned from time to time ... But it is quite wishy washy and top level'. Interestingly, however, one donor representative indicated that they had recently discussed the GCR in the context of developing a business case for future funding to the response; this suggests a possible route towards greater

9 While not necessarily representative of the wider Rohingya refugee population and its use or familiarity with the GCR, one INGO representative based in Cox's Bazar shared an example from a recent piece of research, collecting Rohingya respondent's perspectives on education, where a refugee interviewee had referenced GCR as part of their own advocacy on this issue.

explicit uptake for GCR if it is included as part of funding strategies for operational agencies.

2.3 Contextual constraining factors

The limited explicit or proactive use of the GCR in relation to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh can be explained by several constraining factors linked to the specific dynamics of the context. In brief, there has been a lack of buy-in in Bangladesh – from the government as well as other stakeholders – that has constrained the implementation of the GCR as well as less ambitious programmes such as the Solidarity Approach.

2.3.1 Lack of recognition of Rohingya individuals as ‘refugees’ under national frameworks in Bangladesh

Perhaps the most widely cited constraining factor was the fact that the Government of Bangladesh has not endorsed international legal frameworks relating to the status of refugees (in particular the 1951 Refugee Convention) and does not recognise the majority of Rohingya individuals as ‘refugees’ under national frameworks. Because of this, many respondents believed that the government would be unlikely to endorse the use of a framework like the GCR, which uses the terminology of ‘refugee’ crises, as an applicable guiding framework for the Rohingya response.

Fundamentally, the significance of this constraint in the Rohingya context points to a critical lack of clarity within the GCR itself, in terms of whether it can be applied in a context where the host government has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and, perhaps more significantly, does not recognise a population which has been forcibly displaced across an international border as refugees (see Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019). Close reading of the Compact suggests that it may have been designed to be applied more broadly, including in countries that are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention. For example, the Compact refers to ‘a number of States not parties to the international refugee instruments [who] have shown a generous approach to hosting refugees’

(UNGA, 2018: 2). While this is specifically in the context of encouraging these states to consider acceding to these instruments, the wording suggests a wider use of the term ‘refugee’ consistent with other international instruments, such as UN General Assembly resolutions. Indeed, the very fact the government endorsed the GCR suggests that it can and should apply. However, in the absence of clear guidance, contrasting opinions around the GCR’s applicability in Bangladesh pose a significant constraint for all actors.

Despite this, the government has shown willingness to engage with the crisis under a ‘refugee’ framing in some instances. For example, the Bangladeshi government referred to the Rohingya crisis as part of contributions towards the GCR and at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum. Equally, despite being established after previous Rohingya arrivals, the government authority working on the Rohingya response in Cox’s Bazar, the RRRC, still includes the word ‘refugee’ in its name. However, although these factors suggest a slightly less clear-cut approach, the government’s overarching position undoubtedly creates a space where, as one national actor put it, ‘the government can say to the organisations [in relation to implementing the GCR], sorry, it is not a refugee crisis’, particularly where incentives to apply the GCR are insufficient.

2.3.2 Wider misalignment of the GCR with the Bangladeshi government’s policy approach

Beyond the use of the term ‘refugee’, interviewees indicated other components of the GCR that appear misaligned with the government’s approach to the Rohingya crisis. In the context of a non-binding framework like the GCR, a misalignment in approach points to a deeper problem: from the perspective of the host country, incentives to apply the GCR are unlikely to be seen as sufficient where it does not offer opportunities to support existing strategic approaches, and in some respects may undermine them.

In particular, respondents pointed to a mismatch between the GCR’s focus on long-term thinking and sustainable approaches, and the government’s insistence at the time of the research that responses to the crisis remain

focused on short-term, immediate lifesaving support; although there have subsequently been some indications that this approach may gradually be shifting.¹⁰ Indeed, in the past the government has seen some resolution of the Rohingya's displacement quickly through return (although, as discussed later, this has not always been safe or voluntary, nor did all Rohingya return in these instances). At the time the research was conducted, the government was yet to acknowledge the protracted nature of the current Rohingya displacement and the resulting need to adopt sustainable policies towards managing it. Broadly speaking, this mirrors wider regional approaches, arguably entrenched by approaches to the Indochinese refugee crisis in the 1970s and 80s (Wake, unpublished; McConnachie, 2014), whereby regional host governments view themselves, as one interviewee put it: 'as a temporary host until solutions are found elsewhere'. According to respondents, the government feared that any shifts towards a long- or medium-term approach would reduce the pressure on Myanmar to change conditions for the Rohingya and facilitate return. One donor representative explained, 'the CRRF [has been] delivered where there was a recognition of the long-term nature of displacement and degree of willingness of government to recognise this and make it more manageable, to recognise steps that needed taking and support linked to progress'. However, this approach was considered 'a non-starter in Bangladesh', at least publicly.

Another challenge is that the Compact and accompanying CRRF focus heavily on refugee self-reliance and livelihoods (Objective 2); the proposed steps under this GCR objective are perhaps the most concrete and substantively developed (Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019). However – as outlined in Chapter 3 – despite some signs of progress many such measures have, broadly speaking, been opposed by the government. While for various interviewees the self-reliance element of the GCR posed a challenge to the wider use of the Compact in the

Rohingya context, one UN agency representative in Cox's Bazar was more optimistic, explaining '[The GCR] shouldn't actually be controversial, except for the self-reliance [objective]. The other objectives [of the GCR] are what they talk about. It's only [self-reliance] which is controversial'. Indeed, there is a strong alignment between the GCR's focus on supporting safe, voluntary and dignified return (Objective 4) and addressing root causes, and the Bangladeshi government's policy priorities. However, the fact that this has not yet facilitated substantive use or discussion of the GCR in Bangladesh in relation to the Rohingya crisis reflects a further misalignment discussed in Chapter 3; despite the Bangladeshi government's priorities, the GCR lacks practical ideas or tools connected to facilitating return or addressing root causes.

2.3.3 'One of the hardest cases': challenges with donor appetite and aspirational principles

Prospects for the GCR's use have been impacted by the seemingly intractable nature of the crisis's root causes in Myanmar, as well as the complex nature of the response and policy space in Bangladesh. One global expert felt that the Rohingya crisis presented 'one of the hardest, if not the hardest, refugee cases on our hands at the moment'. Interviewees referred to the case of Palestinian refugees as the closest parallel to the Rohingya crisis in recent history in terms of complexity.

This sense of the Rohingya crisis being 'too difficult' to address has impacted the GCR's use in two ways. First, its complexity impacts donor governments' appetite to encourage – and finance – the use of the GCR in the Rohingya crisis. Research suggests that some donor governments have consciously decided to focus their efforts regarding implementation of the GCR outside Bangladesh, in contexts where the return on financial and diplomatic investment would potentially be higher in terms of outcomes. One donor representative related the dilemma they faced: 'Do you support those that are progressive because that's where

10 At the time of the study, medium- to long-term solutions were not being considered by the government. However, in a newspaper article on 2 January 2020, the new foreign secretary Masud Bin Momen stated 'We may require considering medium to long term solutions', suggesting a possible future shift in approach (NewAge Bangladesh, 2020: 1). This is also reflected in recent shifts in terms of education, outlined in Chapter 2.

you can enact change, or do you focus on Bangladesh where there is very little chance to get anything done? With huge cash input you might shift the scale a little, but what would that money do elsewhere?’

Interviews also revealed an overall feeling among humanitarian actors that, in an undeniably challenging context like Bangladesh, the GCR’s principles – and in parallel its indicators for measuring progress – appear too aspirational. There is a sense that the GCR’s aspirations feel too far out of reach, which may be discouraging efforts to make progress towards more transitional or incremental steps. Reviewing the GCR’s proposed indicator framework, one UN agency respondent remarked, ‘There’s nothing wrong having ambitious objectives but it is unrealistic ... Access to employment? Really? Straight away?’ Certainly, while likely to grow protracted, this specific large-scale instance of Rohingya displacement in Bangladesh remains at a relatively early phase.¹¹ While the CRRF and GCR have to date been applied primarily to significantly more protracted crises, for example in East Africa or Afghanistan, in a context still at an earlier phase it was felt that more pragmatic transitional indicators might be more conducive overall to progress.

2.3.4 A complex humanitarian landscape: UNHCR’s position and ad hoc coordination systems

Complexities within the humanitarian landscape in Bangladesh are also likely to have played a role in the GCR’s limited impact. In particular, the government’s decision in 2017 not to designate UNHCR as lead agency for the response (see Box 3), which resulted in ad hoc coordination approaches, a hybrid leadership structure between IOM and UNHCR, and a struggle for UNHCR to establish a clearer leadership role in the response. While various interviewees indicated that UNHCR’s position in country had improved significantly following the appointment of a long-term Head of Mission, many felt that the previous lack of steady

leadership within UNHCR in Bangladesh over an 18-month period, described by one donor representative as a ‘leadership vacuum’, had compounded their difficult position in country.

While many respondents perceived UNHCR as the institutional lead on the GCR at the global level, it was observed that in Bangladesh UNHCR ended up in difficult position. As one respondent argued: ‘UNHCR may have had some more intellectual discussions around [the GCR], but politically it is not something they are willing to take on’. Overall, this has left the GCR without its most obvious champion in terms of building support for its use among national and international stakeholders. One INGO representative commented, ‘Who will champion the GCR if not UNHCR?’

Beyond putting forward a ‘catalytic role’ for UNHCR, the GCR does not make clear what roles and responsibilities other actors are envisioned to play in advancing its implementation (see Barbelet and Hargrave, 2019). Without UNHCR’s clear leadership in this crisis, and in the absence of well-defined roles for other stakeholders, it is in many ways unsurprising that the GCR has so far failed to be picked up explicitly in Bangladesh in a meaningful sense. Further, ad hoc coordination structures and divided leadership over the response are also likely to have impacted the wider humanitarian community’s ability to set a strategic direction, in turn impacting prospects to engage with the GCR. Some interviewees felt that, particularly in the early stages, a great deal of the humanitarian sector’s energy went into establishing and navigating complex systems in order to deliver basic assistance at sudden and massive scale. This was compounded by confusion regarding the division of responsibilities between coordinating bodies in Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar (the SEG and ISCG respectively) and which body is ultimately accountable for setting a vision. In this context, it had proved challenging for humanitarian stakeholders to set a coherent vision for the response as a whole, let alone engage with a tool like the GCR.

11 While the Rohingya experiences of displacement from Myanmar span decades, those displaced from Myanmar in August 2017 do not yet meet UNHCR’s definition of a protracted refugee situation, where 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given host country (UNHCR, 2019a).

Box 4: How has the Global Compact on Refugees fared to date?

The GCR has been subject to two overarching critiques. The first is in terms of its non-binding nature, lack of robust focus on rights and protection and relatively weak follow-up and accountability framework, which are seen by some to undermine its application and effectiveness (Huang et al., 2018; ICVA, 2018; IRC, 2018). Second, few of the GCR proposals are genuinely new, rendering claims that the GCR is a ‘game changer’ greatly overstated. With regards to the latter critique, certainly all of the components of both the New York Declaration (including the CRRF) and the GCR (including the Programme of Action) have been discussed and agreed to before – including working with development actors, focusing on durable solutions such as livelihoods and self-reliance, providing support to host communities and responsibility-sharing. Indeed, as discussed in this report, many interviewees felt that, even if not being explicitly discussed in Bangladesh in terms of the GCR, the objectives and principles of the Compact can be considered a ‘common sense’ approach to dealing with large-scale refugee crises.

What is new is that suggestions for a more comprehensive solution to large-scale refugee movements are coalesced in one place, with aspirational targets and steps for both host and supporting countries. Moreover, 181 UN Member States including Bangladesh signed on to the GCR, with only two countries voting against endorsing it (Hungary and the United States) and three abstaining (Eritrea, Liberia and Libya). Areas where the GCR more substantively advances existing discussions include through proposals for the wider involvement of country-level ministries and a suggestion that UNHCR step back to play a ‘catalytic role’ in refugee management.

Since the adoption of the New York Declaration, relative success is most clearly seen in the number of countries where the CRRF has been implemented – including Afghanistan, the first Asian country and the first country of origin (ICVA, 2018) – and the increased and sustained recognition of the pressure that large refugee populations have placed on host communities (UNHCR, 2018c). Yet, although the CRRF has been embraced more fully in Africa and Central America, other regions, such as Asia and the Middle East, are less widely represented. Challenges to implementation observed so far include:

- critiques that host communities and local authorities have not been sufficiently involved or updated in the design and creation phase (ICVA, 2018; see also Montemurro and Wendt, 2017; Thomas, 2017);
- insufficient international funding and unfulfilled pledges (Crawford et al., 2019; ICVA, 2018);
- insufficient focus on urban environments (Crawford et al., 2019); and
- an unfavourable global political environment for progress on refugee protection and durable solutions (Angenendt and Biehler, 2018).

2.4 The GCR: unresolved issues at the global level

At the global level, many have pointed to weaknesses in the GCR itself (see Box 4), some of which pose constraints for its use in Bangladesh. First, there is a challenge inherent in applying a global document like the GCR to the complexities of a live humanitarian response. Explaining this challenge, one interviewee referred to the ‘impossible test of

writing the Compact. Trying to write something which applies equally in Italy or Venezuela’. Similarly a national actor explained, ‘Many of these [parts of the GCR] I may feel this is not applicable for us. Contextualisation is very important. Through one global document you cannot do everything’.

As a relatively new document, there is also limited awareness of the GCR globally (both within and outside the refugee sphere).¹² One INGO representative explained, ‘If you’re not dealing with refugee issues on a regular basis it’s not on your radar’. Another related how

12 This constraint is by no means limited to Bangladesh, nor indeed the GCR. For example, a similar lack of familiarity has been noted of the GCR’s counterpart, the GCM, in the UK context (British Red Cross and ICRC, 2020). To a large degree this is unsurprising given these are relatively new frameworks.

‘when the CRRF was rolled out in Afghanistan I spoke to our country director and mentioned it and he wasn’t aware of what this was, and this was a country director for a major INGO’. In Bangladesh, interviews suggested some level of confusion between the 1951 Refugee Convention, the GCR, the GCM, and country-level compacts such as those that have been advanced in Jordan or Ethiopia.

Interviews also revealed that opportunities for applying the GCR in Bangladesh are impacted by varying understandings of the GCR’s nature and what implementing it would look like in practice: whether the GCR would need to be implemented as a whole, or if stakeholders could pick and choose elements of it; whether it was simply a tool for resource mobilisation, a diplomatic tool, a normative framework, an operational blueprint or a tool for accountability. The lack of common understanding on this point demonstrates the need for further clarification particularly since the government has not opted to become a CRRF pilot county. While the CRRF has a very

clear process, it is not clear what applying or implementing the GCR looks like beyond this, limiting possibilities for stakeholders to do so in Bangladesh.

Finally, interviews suggested that use of the GCR is naturally constrained because, as one national think tank representative explained, ‘it is a voluntary framework and no one is obliged to follow it’. In the absence of robust accountability mechanisms, uptake of the GCR at the national level effectively relies on whether host governments perceive doing so to be in their interests. As discussed above, the GCR’s limited use and uptake in Bangladesh suggests that to date such incentives have been insufficient, due to a misalignment between the GCR’s approach, what the GCR is concretely offering, and the government’s strategic approach. In the context of a divided humanitarian landscape, lack of clear UNHCR leadership and a challenging crisis overall, efforts have not been made to address this misalignment or explore how the necessary incentives could be created to support greater uptake.

3 Implementing the Global Compact on Refugees in spirit, if not in name

At the time of this study, the GCR was not explicitly being used as an overarching framework for the Rohingya response in Bangladesh. However, respondents in this study repeatedly stated that the GCR remained relevant. In fact, although the GCR is not systematically referred to in Bangladesh, the research found that its objectives and cross-cutting principles had – in one way or another – been pursued in a broader de facto sense. As one INGO worker stated, ‘Technically we do not need to use the words, but the principles’.

This study demonstrates that the GCR’s aims to ease the pressure on the host country, to support refugee self-reliance, to seek third-country solutions and work towards improving conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return are all part of the current response in Bangladesh. Cross-cutting principles including a whole-of-society approach, a developmental approach, national leadership, responsibility-sharing and other good practices such as the use of cash are all being discussed, considered and in some cases implemented. The section below explores how these objectives and cross-cutting principles have been pursued and examines the progress made. Through analysis, this section identifies what the objectives and principles mean in reality in Bangladesh, what stumbling blocks remain and further questions for consideration.

3.1 Objective 1: easing the pressure on host countries

3.1.1 Differing interpretations of ‘pressure’ in Bangladesh

The first objective of the GCR – easing the pressure on the host country – is the one component of the GCR that both the Government of Bangladesh and the humanitarian community most readily agree is worth pursuing, or as one INGO worker noted, Objective 1 is the ‘least contentious issue’.

However, pressures are understood differently by various stakeholders in Bangladesh and not always in line with the concept of ‘pressure’ found in the GCR. Arguably, the GCR conceives of pressure mainly in financial terms, that is, the cost of hosting refugees, as it states: ‘a key objective of the Global Compact is to ease pressures, particularly for low- and middle-income countries, through contributions from other States and relevant stakeholders’ (UNGA, 2018: 9). The proposed indicator framework confirms the interpretation of ‘contributions’ as primarily financial, focusing on volume of official development assistance (indicator 1.1.1), number of donors providing official development assistance (indicator 1.1.2), and proportion of official development assistance (indicator 1.2.1) (UNHCR, 2019b: 10). Bangladesh however has experienced several other pressures linked to the Rohingya’s displacement, which go far beyond the financial costs of hosting.

In particular, some respondents commented that, while the Government of Bangladesh

acknowledged that they faced financial pressures (in the sense of the costs of hosting and the budget implications), they also emphasised security, administrative and environmental challenges, especially in terms of the demographic pressure resulting from hosting such a large population of refugees. A former government official in Dhaka outlined these pressures – from the diversion of resources from local administrations and the clearing of land for camps and for firewood – and noted that ‘nobody has calculated the non-economic cost, which has made Bangladesh very worried’. Government respondents confirmed this view, mentioning the financial, demographic, security, administrative and environmental pressures of hosting during their interviews. Additionally, respondents said that the government was increasingly concerned that their response to the Rohingya crisis could set a precedent, leading to them being asked or forced to accept populations not wanted by other regional countries (such as the Bengali population in Assam, India). While not expressed in the language of ‘pressure’, non-government respondents also highlighted that the government felt increasingly concerned about shifting public attitudes (see Box 5), leading to the development of new restrictions.

3.1.2 How far has ‘easing pressure’ been successful?

These different understandings of pressure in Bangladesh have led to a range of perceptions on whether it has been eased. On the one hand, the international community tends to measure success in terms of how well-funded the response is. The 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan was funded at 73%, the 2018 JRP was funded at 71% and the 2019 JRP was funded at 75% (ISCG, 2019a, b; FTS, 2020). In comparison, the South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan was only 50% funded in 2018 (RRRP, 2019). In addition, funds channelled to the crisis through development actors include \$200 million from the Asian Development Bank and two sets of funding streams from the World Bank (\$240 million and an additional \$350 million) (Huang and Gough, 2019). In terms of funding, international actors may view the pressure on the Bangladeshi government as being eased somewhat.

Yet overall, responsibility-sharing efforts to date were not considered to have successfully eased the multi-faceted pressures the government is experiencing, particularly from the government’s own perspective. Speaking about the international community’s efforts to give assistance, one official commented, ‘it is like a cancer patient when an external relation came with the basket of fruits’: while a friendly gesture, the international community’s efforts to ease pressures are seen as palling in comparison to the scale of pressures being experienced, and ultimately are not considered as addressing the root causes of the crisis.

Even within a purely financial sense, some respondents questioned the real impact of funding on easing pressures for Bangladesh. Interlocutors, particularly from government and other national stakeholders, were on the whole more sceptical as to whether these funds had genuinely relieved pressures. This was partly because of a perception that, while significant, the funds committed do not fully meet the costs of the crisis, and there is a fear that current levels of funding will not be sustained over time. A former government official reflected that the level of funding and financial contribution to the response may seem significant in comparison to the size of the economy in some countries, but in the case of the Bangladeshi economy was as a drop in the ocean.

Yet the context in Bangladesh reveals a deeper weakness in the GCR – and wider international approaches – namely an over-reliance on financial interpretations of ‘easing pressure’, as opposed to a wider package of responsibility-sharing tools based on a deeper understanding of host government perspectives and priorities (for further discussion see Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019). For example, efforts to address pressures on Bangladesh’s economy have so far been limited to funding. Though not mentioning the GCR directly, UNDP continues to call for a ‘Solidarity Approach’ that is based on responsibility-sharing by the international community, as well as other options to help support the economy through the ‘crisis’, such as trade concessions, preferential access for exports, labour mobility opportunities and foreign direct investment (UNDP, 2018). This call has been reiterated in other studies (see for instance Sun

Box 5: A shifting policy landscape in Bangladesh from August 2019

Interviewees almost unanimously outlined a sense that the policy environment in Bangladesh had been significantly impacted by a series of events in August 2019, which were perceived as creating domestic pressures to institute more restrictions on the Rohingya. In late August 2019, a second unsuccessful repatriation effort was followed by the killing of a host community political leader (allegedly by Rohingya refugees). Just days later, this was followed by a peaceful gathering of refugees in the Kutupalong camp – perceived to be supported by the humanitarian community – on the two-year anniversary of the Rohingya exodus, which received substantial and largely negative attention in national media (Al Jazeera, 2019a; ECHO, 2019; Petersen and Rahman, 2019).

Interviews suggested this compounded a shift over time in popular opinion in Bangladesh towards the Rohingya crisis, which is likely to be a significant factor in government decision-making. A receptive initial response towards the Rohingya has gradually shifted towards increasing concerns, both among immediate host communities and at the national level. This is reflected in available evidence and mapping of host community perspectives (Xchange, 2018b; BDRCS and IFRC, 2020). That said, in-depth analysis of public opinion within Bangladesh on the Rohingya crisis remains relatively limited compared to studies conducted in other contexts, particularly in high-income countries (see Dempster and Hargrave, 2017).

Key shifts in the months following August 2019 included:

- changes in key government personnel working in Cox's Bazar and a transfer of power over operational decision-making from Cox's Bazar to Dhaka;
- restrictions on mobile phone usage by Rohingya in the camps, including the blocking of phone networks and confiscation of phones and SIM cards possessed by refugees;
- plans to install barbed wire fencing and CCTV equipment in the camps; and
- a new regulatory framework restricting the activities of NGOs working in the camps, including restrictions on direct cash distribution to refugees and interruptions to 'cash for work' programmes.¹

These dynamics were extremely prominent at the time of research (August–November 2019), although some restrictions have since been lessened.

¹ The interruption of cash for work programmes was allegedly due to perceptions on the government's side that NGOs had flouted previous regulations. The authors acknowledge that since the study in August–November 2019, new developments indicate that further progress may have been made to reinstate cash programming impacted by these restrictions.

and Huang, 2019); however, despite explorations on how trade could potentially be harnessed to mobilise responsibility-sharing in Bangladesh (Huang, 2018; UNHCR, 2018a; Elliott and Arroyo, 2019; Huang and Gough, 2019), little is happening on the ground. This is linked to reservations already discussed on the side of the government, concerning efforts which might signal acceptance of refugees' long- or medium-term presence in Bangladesh.

Likewise, while the GCR refers to national security concerns, which are a significant

pressure from the government's perspective, humanitarian and development actors were not considered to have substantively focused their attention on addressing these, nor was there agreement between stakeholders on the best way to do so.¹³ At the time of this study, the government had proposed fencing off the camps to ensure the security of the host community (see Box 5). However, this raised concerns among international actors in terms of the rights and dignity of Rohingya refugees as well as scepticism about the impact of fencing

¹³ The GCR addresses security and 'the legitimate security concerns of host States are fully recognized', with proposed support extending to screening new arrivals, developing capacity of community-oriented policing and separating fighters and combatants at border entry points (UNGA, 2018: 10).

on security. According to one UN actor, '[This] is not going to improve peaceful relations or security. It serves a function as a fence, but is it really going to address the security concern?'

Ultimately for government respondents, the most effective solution to easing pressures was reducing numbers of refugees in Cox's Bazar, either through relocation or return. Plans for refugees' relocation to Bashan Char¹⁴ as well as return to Myanmar were perceived by government respondents as solutions. One government official in Dhaka asked rhetorically, 'How can we ease the pressure because existing Rohingya people are there? Ultimately, if they go then the pressure will ease. That is the first priority'. Government respondents also mentioned third-country solutions as an option (Objective 3 of the GCR), while saying they would be more than happy to see donor countries take on the full number of refugees. As a government official in Cox's Bazar said, 'If other countries want to take them it would be a solution'. However, as outlined below, discussions around third-country solutions in Bangladesh have stalled and are considered by multiple stakeholders, including refugees, as unappealing or indeed unrealistic. Whereas interviews with government officials made clear that, while appreciating existing international community efforts to support conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return, to date these were deemed insufficient.

3.1.3 Support to host communities and the role of development actors

In a refugee crisis like the one in Bangladesh the host government is not the only national stakeholder experiencing pressures. Many stakeholders in the country, when approached with the GCR's objective to 'ease pressures' reflected instead on the position of host communities, defined by respondents in different

ways, either as communities in immediate proximity to the Cox's Bazar camps, the wider district or region, or even communities in the country as a whole. In 2018, UNDP released a study analysing the impact of the Rohingya refugees on host communities – focusing on communities in Cox's Bazar district – which aims to inform the goal of easing pressures in Bangladesh while informing a more developmental approach to the refugee crisis (UNDP, 2018): both key components of the GCR, although not discussed explicitly in these terms.

Interviews highlighted a perception that the humanitarian community had been too slow to enact support to the host community early in the crisis. Although many humanitarian organisations, UN agencies and donors include host communities in their programming as the default, in Bangladesh, the size of the Rohingya population coming into the camps – and the speed at which the displacement occurred – meant that including the host community was, according to one donor, 'an area that has not accelerated as fast as it might have done'. While there are certainly exceptions, on the whole, as one INGO worker explained, 'the level of support to affected Bangladeshis has been insufficient and has belatedly been added on as a priority'. One respondent wondered whether a more explicit use of the GCR operationally would have informed the response differently from the beginning, in reminding the humanitarian community of well-known good practices, such as including the host community throughout the response. Despite overall progress, it was perceived that these efforts still felt piecemeal, lacking clear direction and had not yet demonstrated results.

The GCR's approach to supporting host communities foregrounds the role of development actors. However, respondents spoke about how development aid for the host community had

14 The government has proposed to relocate 100,000 individuals from the camps in Cox's Bazar to Bashan Char, a silt island in the Bay of Bengal. Over past years, large-scale construction has been ongoing on the island at a reported cost of \$300 million and numerous announcements have been made indicating imminent plans for relocation (Refugees International, 2019). However, while the government continues to push for progress, plans have stalled in the face of the Rohingya communities' reported reluctance to be relocated (Antara, 2019), as well as concerns from the humanitarian community of potential operational and protection risks, and calls for a full site assessment before relocation begins (Illius, 2019).

sometimes been resisted by the government for various reasons¹⁵ – one regional civil society actor noted, ‘Bangladesh is being a bit of a road-block to easing the pressure on themselves’. Development actors and International Financial Institutions, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, are looking to support a new District Development Plan for Cox’s Bazar. However, while referring to the impact of the refugee presence, this focuses solely on supporting host communities, in contrast with the approach envisioned by the GCR whereby development assistance benefits both refugee and host communities.

Regardless, many interviewees indicated the hope that new development funds would help ease some of the pressures felt within host communities in Cox’s Bazar, which were considered to be contributing to tensions with refugee communities. Yet, it was also noted that the relatively long-term horizon for development funding would mean an extended period before host communities would witness impacts, compared to the immediacy of tensions being experienced. While the involvement of development actors in support of host communities was widely welcomed, it was clear that this was not considered an inherent good in itself but should be measured by its results. In terms of easing pressure on host communities, success is currently to be determined.

For its part, the government has requested that all NGOs and UN agencies working in the response dedicate 25% of all assistance to host communities. However, while in line with the GCR’s call for humanitarian assistance to consider both refugees and host communities, as many respondents pointed out, this rigid measure may often be inappropriate in terms of what host communities really need (which often differs from

refugees). This is particularly true since the 25% is at the project level, rather than the level of the overall response.

3.2 Objective 2: enhance refugee self-reliance

The second objective of the GCR – to increase refugees’ self-reliance – is relevant, though challenging. Self-reliance and access to education are important in terms of Rohingya refugees’ aspirations (Wake and Bryant, 2018). The Rohingya prioritise self-reliance, both in terms of how they conceptualise dignity and in terms of medium- and long-term planning for their future (Holloway and Fan, 2018; Wake et al., 2019).

There have been some signs of progress on self-reliance. Interviewees gave examples of self-reliance that have appeared the camps, as well as programming supporting self-reliance, including:

- refugees working in shops, hairdressing and other small businesses within the camps;
- WASH committees;
- small-scale community governance programmes;
- cyclone preparedness and training – including programming which aims to strengthen refugees’ capacities to take appropriate pre-emptive actions to reduce loss and damage;¹⁶
- small-scale skills training and new education pilots (discussed in further detail below);
- community gardening programmes; and
- cash for work.

However, overall progress towards enhancing refugee self-reliance has been challenging. In particular, due to the Government of

15 Reasons given included not wanting to appear to be profiting from the Rohingya displacement and a perceived unwillingness to develop an area that has traditionally been an opposition stronghold.

16 The importance of integrating refugees into local and national disaster management systems is highlighted in Paragraphs 52–3 of the GCR. A Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) is operational in the Rohingya camps, as a joint initiative of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, in partnership with the RRRRC, ISCG, UNHCR, IOM and UNDP. The programme is an extension of a national CPP, and as part of it ‘refugees are recognised not as passive victims but rather as the main agents in strengthening their own resilience to natural hazards’ (American Red Cross, 2020). As part of the programme refugees are trained and appointed as CPP Volunteers, being trained to respond within the Bangladesh National Early Warning System, which was extended across all 34 refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar district.

Bangladesh's reluctance to integrate the Rohingya into labour markets and national education and health care systems, as well as restrictions on Rohingya refugees' freedom of movement. Many respondents (particularly INGO and UN agency actors) highlighted that government restrictions were perceived as limiting opportunities for self-reliance, including by supporting refugees' own strategies. For example, at the time of this research, the introduction of cash-based interventions had not been approved beyond a few small-scale pilots. One INGO worker described cash as 'a strong red line from the authorities'.

It was highlighted, however, that for national actors – and to an extent international actors who had been in the country for a long time and were perceived to have greater acceptance among government and host communities alike – there was greater freedom experienced with regard to restrictions and a greater willingness among authorities to allow exceptions.

The study indicated various factors likely to be driving the Bangladeshi government's approach towards interventions supporting self-reliance. First was in terms of prevailing attitudes towards the Rohingya. At the time of research, attitudes towards the Rohingya among government officials had clearly shifted from initial feelings of welcoming and solidarity to a language of burden. As one government official noted, 'We defer from the concept [of self-reliance] because the refugees are a burden over us. We have given them shelter'. Attitudes among the wider population in Bangladesh also affect the political equation around government decision-making on self-reliance for refugees (see Box 5): as a national NGO worker stated, 'Local people do not want self-reliance for refugees.'

Another oft-cited reason given by several INGO and UN workers, as well as some from national think tanks, is the belief that if their lives are made too comfortable, the Rohingya will not want to return to Myanmar – the government's overarching strategic priority – or perhaps it would even draw more Rohingya to Bangladesh. According to one INGO actor,

the government views livelihoods projects as a red line 'because they do not want to make the conditions for people to settle'. At the time of research, the government's reluctance to accept the long-term nature of the crisis, as discussed above, was also noted as a major impediment to discussions around the necessity for interventions supporting refugees' self-reliance.

Interestingly, where donor governments have made efforts to engage the government on interventions supporting refugees' self-reliance, multiple interviewees outlined a perception of a 'double standard' at play. Namely, donor governments are seen to be pushing the Government of Bangladesh on significant policy reforms, particularly on self-reliance, while implementing restrictive policies in their own countries.¹⁷ One donor representative outlined that they had heard that the Bangladeshi government's recent plans to erect fencing around the Cox's Bazar camps may have been sparked by a recent visit to refugee camps in another refugee hosting country. They went on to explain, 'I am not sure, but the fencing in [this country] might have been funded by [the donor government]. We are losing credibility [to object in Bangladesh] in terms of double standards'. While an international humanitarian actor explained:

Everyone globally is freaking out about migration. In Europe they are freaking out, in the US with Trump. ... [Bangladesh is saying] 'Yes, we have accepted one million. You can't talk to us, we have been generous ... For you to tell us anything ... We have already accepted [people] and you are refusing them ... don't tell us what to do'.

At the time of the study, education continued to prove a difficult but ongoing topic for discussion between humanitarian actors and the government, although significant shifts have taken place following the research period. Many respondents recognised a growing need to prevent an entire generation of children from growing up uneducated, with some framing this

17 For an exploration of similar trends in Kenya, Jordan and Indonesia see Hargrave et al. (2016).

more from a principled, dignity- or rights-based perspective, and others making the argument in terms of impacts on security and radicalisation of youth. Although one government official interviewed for this research was personally in favour of education in Bangla, the Government of Bangladesh has consistently resisted attempts to introduce its national curriculum or any teaching in Bangla, perceiving it as unnecessary given their position that refugees are soon to return home.

Many interviewees spoke about efforts to negotiate the complex political landscape and the government's clearly stated parameters and priorities. Such efforts included advocating for the introduction of the Myanmar curriculum, arguing that this would help prepare Rohingya students for their return; however, there were also fears expressed at the time of research that Myanmar would not accredit education provided outside of its borders and that, as another respondent pointed out, the Myanmar curriculum is 'not useful if they stay in Bangladesh because it will not be accepted by Bangladesh'. Some argued that development partners, particularly the World Bank and their funding to Bangladesh, may have helped facilitate discussions on education, although others were more critical in terms of whether enough had been done to leverage the World Bank funding to support an opening of the policy environment for refugees in this and other areas.

Developments in January 2020 showed results as the Government of Bangladesh took a positive step towards refugee self-reliance by allowing a Myanmar curriculum pilot starting with middle school (grades 6–9) – the group perceived as most in need of education (UN, 2020).¹⁸ According to interviews for this study, however, the GCR could not be attributed as a direct causal factor behind this shift: humanitarians and human rights advocates were at the time using the framework of Bangladesh's own national law and endorsement of international conventions rather than the GCR as a basis for engaging the government on refugee education.

3.3 Objective 3: expanding access to third-country solutions

The majority of respondents did not see third-country solutions (Objective 3 of the GCR) as a viable solution to the Rohingya crisis. As one INGO worker put it, 'Is there an option for third-country solutions for one million people? It's not on anyone's radar'. Because of this, several INGO workers interviewed for this study labelled this objective 'impossible', 'not viable', 'a dead end' and 'not a solution'. The other main stakeholder in this objective is the Rohingya themselves. Whereas some NGO workers interviewed for this study noted that the Rohingya preferred to return to Myanmar rather than resettle in another country, their preference, if return to Myanmar is not an option, is overwhelmingly to remain in the camps (79%) rather than be resettled in a third country with their family (3%) (Wake et al., 2019).

Interviewees reported that initially the Government of Bangladesh had been reluctant to consider third-country solutions, reportedly due to concerns that it could become a pull factor as well as a disincentive to return. It was also suggested that the government's perspective is impacted by historical experiences, where past promises of resettlement made by international actors were slow to materialise. In the current crisis, early attempts to resettle small numbers of the most vulnerable women and girls in Canada, provide pathways for university students in Egypt or enable refugees to join family members via reunification in the United States were reportedly rejected.

Some analysts have hypothesised that Bangladesh does not want to resettle a small number of Rohingya because of worries that it will be seen as 'offering a highly prized opportunity to migrate to Rohingya (versus Bangladeshis) without alleviating pressures on host communities' (Huang and Gough, 2019: 8). Similarly, one respondent noted a concern that Bangladeshis might potentially present themselves as Rohingya in order to migrate.

18 This development took place following the research period and therefore is not discussed in further detail here, beyond noting the significance of this shift in terms of possible future approaches to self-reliance.

At the time of this research, non-government respondents highlighted an increased willingness among government counterparts to consider resettlement outside Bangladesh, but only if implemented at scale and in a way that would significantly reduce numbers of refugees. However, the main challenge here is the low number of resettlement places put on the table by high-income countries (for example in the case of the Government of Canada's offer, which remains at 10,000–20,000 rather than the 100,000–200,000 the Bangladeshi government feels is necessary – see Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Mir, 2019). In the context of shrinking resettlement places globally, the prospect of higher offers materialising was considered unlikely (Angenendt and Biehler, 2018; Hansen, 2018).

Beyond resettlement, the Compact points to wider third-country solutions. However, apart from some mentions of family reunification and student visas as possible pathways – which have to date been rejected by the government – it remains unclear what options are realistically being offered, at what scale, and how the situation in Bangladesh may benefit from these. Indeed, the context in Bangladesh provides a very clear example in which significant actions – and political will – would first be needed to realise the Compact's stated ambition to increase third-country pathways, for this to be perceived as a realistic solution.

3.4 Objective 4: supporting conditions for return in safety and dignity

While the Government of Bangladesh continues to uphold the principle of voluntary return, respondents almost unanimously agreed that very little progress seems to have been made to support conditions for return in safety and dignity as per Objective 4 of the GCR. All

respondents interviewed supported the objective of return, on the condition that this was indeed voluntary, in safety and in dignity. Rohingya refugees also tend to favour return as a solution as long as certain conditions are met. Surveys have found that 79% of Rohingya wanted to return to Myanmar as soon as possible (Habib et al., 2018: 81), and 97.5% would return to Myanmar under the right conditions (Xchange, 2018a: 33). When asked what return with dignity would look like, the majority of Rohingya interviewees stated that it would require them to gain citizenship as well as freedom and rights, land and safety or monetary compensation (Holloway and Fan, 2018) – conditions also confirmed by other studies (see, for example, Wake et al., 2019).

Return is also high on the Bangladeshi government's agenda. In November 2017, only three months after the start of displacement in August, the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar signed the first repatriation agreement (ISCG, 2018). Past Rohingya displacement in Bangladesh has ended in large-scale repatriation but questions have been raised around the voluntary nature of these returns (see Crisp, 2018). The current position of the Government of Bangladesh is that repatriation is the only durable solution for the Rohingya, though they continue to avow that conditions must be appropriate and return voluntary rather than forced (International Crisis Group, 2019). Government officials interviewed for this report were firm in their opinion that repatriation was necessary, and that, as discussed above, the international community and in particular regional powers should be putting more pressure on Myanmar to support conditions to facilitate return.¹⁹ NGO workers agreed with this sentiment, but noted likely difficulties in terms of avenues for the international community to do so.

Indeed, for Rohingya refugees to go back to Myanmar, the root causes of displacement need

19 Progress since conducting the research in Bangladesh may have somewhat lessened these demands. Indeed, the ICJ, ICC and Argentinian courts' announcements have made some progress towards justice for the Rohingya and holding Myanmar accountable (see Al Jazeera, 2019b).

to be addressed. Ongoing developments as part of the ICJ case under the Genocide Convention²⁰ may open up new possibilities for addressing root causes of the Rohingya's displacement. However, progress on the case is likely to be slow, and the extent to which provisional measures granted by the court will be implemented remains to be seen. Seeking accountability and justice for crimes committed in Myanmar may also make immediate progress on conditions for return more challenging, even if leading to a more sustainable outcome in the future.

Regional dynamics have also hindered diplomatic and political engagement to improve conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return (Huang, 2018; Huang and Gough, 2019; Gorlick, 2019). Government officials and national and international actors saw China and India as key regional actors that could help encourage Myanmar to create conditions for return. Although China and India have been somewhat engaged in finding a solution for the Rohingya displacement, their relationships and interests in Myanmar as well as regional competition between the two countries have limited stronger diplomatic and political engagement.²¹ Respondents were divided as to what role China and India would be willing to take, with some pointing to China's economic interests in Myanmar and a lack of desire to antagonise the government for fear of losing out on economic projects (see Gorlick, 2019). At a more global level, respondents also spoke about how the UN Security Council seemed to be stalling in terms of their engagement in this area, with non-regional actors such as the UK appearing unwilling to push China on the issue of return.

Given the importance all stakeholders have placed on the GCR's Objective 4 of return, it is striking that, in comparison to other objectives, the Compact does not offer many concrete tools linked to Objective 4. While Objectives 1 and 2 each effectively have a whole dedicated programme of work in the form of the CRRF, no such concrete roadmap is outlined for how

different stakeholders might advance conditions for return in safety and dignity. Little is proposed in this area, beyond a few broad principles and proposals in terms of support to returnees. Ultimately, while the Compact focuses on a comprehensive plan of action in host countries, it offers few concrete tools in terms of engagement with countries of origin (beyond support once return has begun). Nor does the GCR offer practical tools for situations, like the Rohingya crisis, where countries of origin have not requested support from international communities 'to address root causes, to remove obstacles to return and to enable conditions favourable to voluntary repatriation' (UNGA, 2018: 17). Without this kind of request or commitment from countries of origin, Objective 4 as outlined in the GCR effectively becomes redundant.

Finally, the GCR does not outline whose responsibility it is to support conditions for return. While UNHCR has a clear mandate to support return and reintegration when conditions are in place, it is less clear what happens before this point. The Compact refers in general to fully leveraging the UN system, as well as key roles to be played by regional actors. However, further elaboration is needed in terms of different actors' roles and responsibilities, and what this could look like in practice.

3.5 The cross-cutting principle of a multi-stakeholder approach

The GCR hinges on a multi-stakeholder, or 'whole-of-society', approach to achieve success. It defines a multi-stakeholder approach as involving 'national and local authorities, international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, regional coordination and partnership mechanisms, civil society partners, including faith-based organizations and academia, the private sector, media and the refugees themselves' (UNGA, 2016: 16). However, the

20 See Footnote 3.

21 This is based on analysis by HPG researchers from a roundtable under Chatham House Rule with global and regional experts and the internal background paper developed for it.

context in Bangladesh starkly demonstrates that a successful multi-stakeholder approach is not measured simply by the number of actors involved, but the dynamics between them, modalities for working together, consensus-building and the extent to which various actors are successfully working together towards shared goals.

In any refugee crisis, stakeholders will inevitably approach the situation from different – and sometimes competing – interests and perspectives in line with their responsibilities. For example, a host government's first responsibility will always be primarily to its citizens, whereas international and national organisations will approach a situation in line with their own mandates, and often myriad institutional interests. In Bangladesh, international, national and local stakeholders have struggled to work towards shared goals regarding the Rohingya crisis (see Wake and Bryant, 2018). While there are examples of positive collaboration, interviews indicated that working relationships had been at times fraught between UN agencies, between INGOs and UN agencies, between international actors and the Government of Bangladesh, and between international and national responders. In addition, while significant development funding was being mobilised it was not sufficiently understood nor coordinated with humanitarian response planning. As one interviewee working in Bangladesh put it, 'We are not riding the horse in one direction'.

In a context dominated by competing interests and perspectives, research demonstrated the importance of a neutral convenor to get different actors on the same page. While the GCR puts forward a 'catalytic role' for UNHCR, due to UNHCR's historically challenging position in Bangladesh and significant efforts to establish its operational mandate regarding the crisis (outlined in Chapter 2), to date it has been difficult for them to play this role. One respondent commented, they have not been in the right position to 'bring the right people to the table'. Yet, the study also called into question whether UNHCR could have more effectively fulfilled a 'catalytic role' by taking a different approach. Recognising its

challenging position in the country, UNHCR could have decoupled the idea of a 'catalytic role' from operational leadership, taking advantage of the fact it was not leading the response to instead adopt a more proactive advocacy and convening role. This would sit squarely within its core refugee protection mandate, without fearing consequences of losing operational access.

Equally, exploring the context of Bangladesh made clear that an effective multi-stakeholder approach relies, at a basic level, on effective and inclusive coordination systems, as well as clear leadership. As already discussed, the creation of a new ad hoc coordination model was widely considered to have created confusion and inefficient ways of working. Instead, leadership and accountability have been dispersed within the UN system, resulting in a lack of clear leadership and no one organisation having responsibility for bringing actors together – including to develop a vision for the response.

In parallel, concerns have also been raised about the inclusion of national NGOs and government authorities in these systems, with basic steps such as translation of meetings and key documents into Bangla still not being implemented more than two years into the response. Local humanitarian organisations have played a prominent, though restricted, role in overall humanitarian coordination, with one INGO worker noting that their work is very good and that 'there is no option to work separately'. Yet, there was a perception that they have been side-lined in the official sectoral coordination structure and used as implementing rather than strategic partners (see also COAST, 2018; Wake and Bryant, 2018). Other local institutions, such as civil society organisations, could and should also be more involved in the response, as they will remain in country and in the area after humanitarian organisations cease their work. Further, in contrast to commitments outlined in the GCR, in Bangladesh host communities and refugees have often had insufficient opportunity to participate in decisions or programme design (COAST, 2018; Holloway and Fan, 2018).

3.6 The cross-cutting principle of national leadership

The GCR argues that a cross-cutting principle of an effective refugee response relies on national leadership, which it mainly refers to as government leadership. In the Rohingya response, the government has played an assertive role when navigating humanitarian actors, showing leadership in managing the response and defining the parameters of other partners, including the respective roles of UNHCR and IOM. It exerts its influence particularly at the level of the Prime Minister's Office, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, maintaining sovereignty over decision-making at the national level.

However, interestingly, while this in many ways reflects the model put forward by the GCR, respondents did not interpret 'national leadership' in this way. Whereas in East Africa the concept of national leadership is strongly linked in the CRRF's implementation to the national government and national social services (Crawford et al., 2019), in Bangladesh, respondents interpreted the GCR's emphasis on national leadership in terms of ongoing debates around localisation and the role that national and local NGOs should play. While the role of local actors is highlighted in the GCR, local organisations were not yet seen to be framing their arguments for inclusion in terms of the GCR, but instead focused on other relevant frameworks, including the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change (COAST, 2018; CCNF, 2019).

3.7 Questions raised by the GCR's de facto implementation

Considering the de facto implementation of the GCR is helpful in terms of understanding where challenges and opportunities may lie if the GCR were one day applied more intentionally as an overarching framework for the response. However, it also raises further questions. First and foremost, this less direct implementation calls into question the extent to which the GCR's principles are new or 'game changing' as billed by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2019c). For some respondents, the fact that the GCR was being implemented 'in spirit' in Bangladesh demonstrates how these objectives and cross-cutting principles are simply 'common sense' and already being pursued in refugee responses, regardless of whether the GCR is invoked.

Second, exploring the de facto implementation of the GCR in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh sheds light on a number of further challenges in terms of the GCR's interpretation and underlying assumptions, which impact possibilities for taking it forward in specific national contexts, including but not limited to Bangladesh (see Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019). For example, one issue has been the overly financial interpretation of the idea of 'easing pressures on host countries'. It also highlights gaps – and misaligned prioritisation – in the GCR around third-country solutions and conditions for return, as well as insufficient practical tools on either front.

Finally, the fact that elements of the GCR are already being implemented 'in spirit' in Bangladesh – to varying degrees of success – calls into question whether the GCR would strengthen the humanitarian response if it were implemented more systematically and intentionally. Would it contribute towards improved outcomes for stakeholders on the ground, including refugees, host communities and a host government that continues to face various and overlapping pressures? Or, is an 'in spirit' application of the GCR sufficient? This final question, which is perhaps the most critical, is addressed in the following chapter.

4 Opportunities for harnessing the GCR further in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh

This chapter explores two questions, first highlighting the possible added value of a more intentional use of the GCR in the Rohingya context, and second outlining opportunities to achieve this.

4.1 Implementing the GCR in Bangladesh: what is the value of a more explicit use?

Promisingly for the GCR, interviews showed two ways in which stakeholders felt that its more explicit implementation could add value in the Rohingya response. First, the GCR could be a useful tool to mobilise political will and financial resources at international and regional levels towards its key principles and objectives. In this sense, the GCR's value lies not in its ability to influence policy and practice in a host country like Bangladesh, but as a common framework to mobilise increased, coordinated international responsibility-sharing in support of pre-existing goals. While many of the GCR's pillars are already being pursued 'in spirit' in the Rohingya response, progress towards them could be bolstered through more strategic international support under the banner of the GCR.

However, some interviewees also felt that the GCR's added value went beyond this, suggesting that the GCR could be a useful tool within Bangladesh to inform policy engagement with

the government and the strategic direction of the response. This was argued by not only respondents at global and regional levels but also, perhaps more surprisingly, at national and Cox's Bazar levels. Certainly, the potential added value of the GCR in this sense could only fully be tested if it were in fact more systematically and strategically used. However, to date, its potential value is best understood in terms of a number of perceived missed opportunities. While not a silver bullet, the GCR, if more intentionally used, could have provided additional tools to address these gaps.

While the GCR has been billed as a 'game changer', perhaps its greatest value is the fact that it represents a collective framework consolidating good practices in refugee response. As outlined above, at the operational level, respondents highlighted how key good practices, for example inclusion of the host community in the response, were not implemented in the early phase of the response in Bangladesh. Other good practices, for instance efforts to support refugees' self-reliance, have proved challenging to navigate politically. In a context that is seen by donors and responders alike as 'too difficult', an opportunity has to date been missed to use the GCR as a tool to hold all actors to account on best practices and encourage their wider use.

A missed opportunity is also evident in terms of using the GCR to inform responsibility-sharing and support more strategic engagement with the Government of Bangladesh on

understanding – from its perspective – the support it needs as a host. Likewise, there was a missed opportunity on the side of UNHCR to consider what the ‘catalytic role’ put forward in the GCR might mean for the agency in a context like the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh and the unique position in which the agency found itself. While UNHCR has arguably been successful in reasserting its operational leadership and role in the response, navigating this difficult position has hampered its ability to engage strategically on difficult policy questions. Paradoxically, this includes its ability to champion and encourage more strategic use of the GCR. While these missed opportunities are not exhaustive, they provide an illustration of the GCR’s possible value as part of the national-level response.

With this in mind, there are a number of opportunities to improve the GCR at the global level (see Box 6 and Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019), which should be harnessed as part of the Rohingya response in Bangladesh. There are also various opportunities in Bangladesh to promote its more systematic and strategic use.

4.2 Strengthen leadership for the GCR based on complementary roles and responsibilities

A more systematic and strategic implementation of the GCR in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh requires someone to take leadership. At the global level there needs to be a wider discussion on who the GCR is addressed to, who has responsibility for implementing it and accountability for failing to do so, and wider roles and responsibilities confirmed. However, a decision also needs to be made in the Rohingya response. As outlined earlier, UNHCR could take on this role and position itself within a less operational, more fully ‘catalytic’ role as outlined in the GCR, more reminiscent of the agency’s core protection mandate.

However, if UNHCR feels unable take on that role – either because it is not well placed to do so in Bangladesh or cannot define its added value clearly – a gap will remain. Some respondents raised the need to identify

a neutral convenor, trusted by government and humanitarian stakeholders alike, to move forward a national conversation on the GCR. One could look at a coalition of national stakeholders who may be well-positioned to take on this role and are informed by their distinct understanding of the national context and constraints. Such a coalition could be a mix of think tanks, academics and civil society leaders, while UNHCR, international organisations and donors should consider their role in supporting such a coalition.

4.3 Contextualise the GCR to the realities of Bangladesh

The study raised two core issues: the limits of the GCR as a global-level agreement and a lack of clarity around what implementing the GCR would mean in the absence of a CRRF. If a ‘CRRF approach’ is not considered feasible in the context of Bangladesh, stakeholders should consider other ways in which the opportunities presented by the GCR could be contextualised to the realities of Bangladesh. As a senior manager of a national organisation argued, the GCR ‘needs to be translated in our version considering our contexts, our challenges’. According to this respondent, the global document ‘is talking about our problem but [we need] a contextualised or customised version’.

Without abandoning the GCR’s aspirations entirely, it is important to find a way to ‘contextualise the GCR’, understanding the policy space around its different elements, perspectives from different stakeholders, and what would be realistic and achievable in a specific context. As a global set of principles, the GCR does not deal with geopolitics, political economy and incentives for different stakeholders; nor does it deal with specific concerns of host governments. While this is not in itself necessarily a weakness, these factors must be considered if the principles of the GCR are to be translated into something meaningful – and useful – at the country level.

For example, one national actor reflected that even the order of the GCR’s objectives

Box 6: Making the Global Compact on Refugees a reality in Bangladesh by building a global framework fit for purpose

Harnessing the potential of the GCR in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh could address key missed opportunities. However, a major impediment to doing so is the current gaps and lack of clarity that exist in the GCR itself as a framework at the global level. These must be addressed before it can be a more useful tool at the country level.

In an earlier briefing note, the authors identified several lessons for future, global-level implementation of the GCR that emerged from the Rohingya displacement in Bangladesh (Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019):

- Clarify key questions around global implementation of the GCR, particularly its scope for application, overarching purpose and the role of different actors.
- Develop an approach to deploy national-level implementation strategies beyond the CRRF.
- Amend the global indicator framework.
- Develop new tools for expanding third-country solutions.
- Develop innovative approaches to responsibility-sharing beyond financial contributions.
- Encourage recognition among high-income donor countries that the success of policy approaches in the GCR depend on these countries' ability to demonstrate commitment domestically.
- Ensure efforts to build a global evidence base to support the implementation of the GCR.

would be a barrier to gaining any traction in Bangladesh. Indeed, while 'supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity' is the clear overriding policy priority from the perspective of the Government of Bangladesh – and the preferred solution for Rohingya refugees – in the Compact it is listed last as Objective 4. Re-prioritising this as the first objective for the situation in Bangladesh would most likely ensure a better reception for the Compact among government stakeholders as well as other local actors.

Understanding different stakeholders' perspectives on the Compact's objectives in a given context also helps to grasp the interlinkages between these objectives and how these may be interpreted as supporting or conflicting with each other. For example, as outlined above, in Bangladesh Objective 1 (easing pressure) should be understood in a way that links to non-financial contributions, such as Objectives 3 (third-country solutions) and 4 (return). However, this needs to be balanced with the Bangladeshi government's perspective that Objective 1 (easing pressure), Objective 2 (self-reliance) and Objective 3 (third-country solutions) could undermine their policy commitment to Objective 4 (safe and dignified return). In that sense, resolving the

discrepancy between different understandings and perspectives of the objectives and how they interlink can address tensions and support prospects for progress.

Equally, respondents highlighted the need to develop more appropriate country-level indicators (for further details see Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019). More aspirational global indicators, such as those contained in the proposed GCR indicator framework, can help to provide a measure of the state of play globally (UNHCR, 2019b). However, in the context of Bangladesh, the proposed GCR indicator framework does not provide a fair measure of progress towards the GCR's objectives, failing to capture incremental progress at the country level.

For example, under GCR Objective 2, to 'enhance refugee self-reliance', some of the proposed global indicators put forward include 'proportion of refugees who have access to decent work', 'proportion of refugees who are able to move freely within the host country' and 'proportion of refugee children enrolled in the national education system'. Given the current policy stance of the Government of Bangladesh on each of these issues, the proposed global indicators would indicate an absence of progress in these areas. However, this would fail to account for the incremental ways in which self-reliance

has been supported within the response, including recent progress on education. Without losing sight of aspirational indicators, more can be done to recognise and welcome these kinds of incremental steps towards larger, aspirational goals.

4.4 Use evidence to support the contextualisation of the GCR and engagement with government

Contextualising the objectives, broad principles and indicators of the GCR would be facilitated by developing an evidence base under the GCR's pillars to support and inform policy-level dialogue with the government and programmatic priorities. The GCR already calls for this (UNGA, 2018: 8–9), but further discussion is needed to elaborate exactly where the evidence gaps lie. The UNDP's (2018) study on the costs of hosting refugees was repeatedly mentioned by stakeholders interviewed in Bangladesh as a critical resource for understanding the pressures experienced by the population and the government as well as how best to ease them. One respondent argued that not only was the UNDP study important, but also that as the dynamics of the context change, so data collection and analysis should also be dynamic. Rather than one-off studies, tracking change would provide better evidence to inform policy dialogue around the objectives of the Compact.

However, evidence to inform policy dialogue with the government should go beyond understanding economic pressures, looking at other forms of pressure as well as possible benefits linked to the refugee population's presence. Mapping out who wins and who loses from hosting refugees and the perceptions (as opposed to objective indicators) of these costs and benefits could help inform a wider engagement strategy. In that sense, the country-level implementation of the GCR could also be supported by more detailed analysis of public attitudes and what helps shift them at the local and national level. Further evidence on skills mapping and demographic indicators for both host and refugee populations could also inform policy around self-reliance and development approaches.

Finally, reflecting findings around missed opportunities, the study found that the Bangladesh case raises questions concerning the global evidence base around the costs of not applying the GCR, including the costs (financial, human or otherwise) of delayed attention to host communities or restrictions on education, cash or livelihoods for refugees (Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019: 9). In particular, an important role for evidence would be to support any shift of the current in-country policy approach from the short term to longer term, which could be informed by evidence from other large-scale crises. In discussions with some of the national think tanks in Dhaka, interlocutors expressed concern that the government was unaware of the possible costs of not allowing more inclusion of refugees and, in particular, supporting their livelihoods. While methodologically such costs may be difficult to quantify precisely, even a broad understanding of them in the context of Bangladesh could demonstrate the potential value of the GCR and its principles, and help define how far its application would be in the interests of different stakeholders.

4.5 Continue engaging with the Government of Bangladesh in their own language

There is also an opportunity to frame engagement with the GCR with the Government of Bangladesh in their own language and priorities. This could be led by whichever actor is determined to take the lead in the GCR's implementation, whether a re-positioned UNHCR or, if more suited to the context, a coalition of national actors as outlined above.

Respondents felt that it was critical to continue engaging with the Government of Bangladesh on the aspirations and the principles within the GCR. However, they also emphasised that continued engagement needed to happen primarily in the government's language, rather than the language of the Compact, in order to identify critical framings and entry points. For one respondent, a key entry point was using more economic language as 'the Government of Bangladesh understands the language of

economics'. The same respondent pointed to the government's enthusiasm towards the SDGs, highlighting that framing the GCR in terms of contributions to the SDGs could present a point of entry to build traction for the GCR within Bangladesh; while the connection to the SDGs is mentioned the GCR, this could be more fully fleshed out.

Equally, in understanding the government's own language and priorities and where the GCR can be applied, it is important to be aware of where the GCR does not add value as an overarching framework. In such cases other framings may be more useful in directly engaging the government, yet it is also critical to situate this within a strategic understanding of how this may contribute towards the GCR's aims.

4.6 Focus on regional, political and diplomatic solutions, in particular improving conditions in Myanmar

Given the priority of the government to focus on return, one opportunity to implement the GCR in the Rohingya response would be through beginning discussions that focus on the GCR's last objective, namely facilitating conditions for return in Myanmar. However, as outlined above, this would equally require a fundamental rethinking on the GCR's emphasis at the global level, alongside the development of appropriate 'GCR tools' to support safe, voluntary and dignified return. It is suggested by some that the GCR should invoke the range of mechanisms and laws that could support addressing the root causes of displacement in Myanmar, including Security Council resolutions relating to civilian protection, international and global sanctions, multinational support missions, the international human rights protection system and international humanitarian law (see Bellamy, 2012).

Two respondents suggested that such efforts could be supported for the Rohingya crisis either at the global level through the UN or by bringing regional governments together. However, as highlighted above, the current regional dynamics make this

challenging. Nevertheless, one regional civil society organisation argued that the way forward would be through a coalition of regional governments that come together to find a regional solution, stating: '[as] hinted earlier, ultimately the only potential future solutions I can see would be through regional governments starting to feel the pressure and demanding a solidarity conference'. While the GCR calls for regional solidarity platforms, it has not clearly defined roles and responsibilities around these.

4.7 Putting the GCR's multi-stakeholder approach into practice

With clearer leadership around the GCR in place, there would be an opportunity for the humanitarian and development community in Bangladesh to support further implementation of the objectives and principles of the GCR, through a more concerted effort to build a truly multi-stakeholder approach. Indeed, the independent evaluation of UNHCR's first year of the response noted several lessons the wider UNHCR community can learn from the Rohingya response:

- the success of the GCR will depend on UNHCR's ability to share space, build partnerships and encourage others to contribute to a comprehensive response;
- there is a need to cultivate a broad alliance of partners with a durable understanding of how to achieve protection outcomes;
- the Refugee Coordination Model should be re-examined to ensure applicability in new contexts and the balancing of UNHCR's mandate with other organisations' contributions (including revisiting the cluster/sectoral system and entire UN framework) (Sida et al., 2018).

Efforts have been made in the last year to solve some of the challenges around coordination and participation in formal humanitarian coordination systems. However, further collaboration and coordination across the

humanitarian and development community, whether local, national or international, would support the whole-of-society approach advocated for in the GCR.

4.8 Raise awareness of the GCR among national and international actors

Finally, as highlighted previously, the study also found there was little awareness or consistent use of the GCR among humanitarian actors in Bangladesh. Disseminating the GCR and providing guidance on how to use it as part of advocacy and operational planning would be another way to harness the opportunities it presents. As one respondent from an INGO said, ‘the fact that the Bangladesh government has voted for it ... I did not realise that. That potentially is a useful leverage’. This would need to include internal awareness-raising within organisations from headquarters to field level, which could be supported by UNHCR.

One respondent from a UN agency argued that awareness raising should go a step further and involve conveying the GCR to refugees:

Rohingya communities have a basic understanding of their rights. But [it takes] a long time to get messages out. ... Translating the objectives of the GCR through BBC Media Action and say what does that mean for me and getting that from the Rohingya communities itself and take a more rights-based approach.

Alongside refugees, engagement with Bangladeshi communities on the GCR could also add considerable value. This should include raising awareness about the government’s endorsement of the GCR within both civil society and among government actors at different levels. More national and local actors being aware of the GCR would enable a better and more informed contextualisation of it, empowering national actors to play a leadership role.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

Exploring the explicit and de facto implementation of the GCR in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh yields a number of conclusions. The study found that the GCR has not explicitly been used in the context of the Rohingya response, due to contextual constraints and wider global issues with the GCR. The responsibility for this gap lies with no one actor, but can be attributed to a lack of buy-in from all sides.

On the one hand, as a voluntary framework, whether or not the GCR is directly implemented depends on whether host governments perceive doing so to be in their interests. In Bangladesh, such incentives appear to have been insufficient, in a context where the GCR's priorities and the more concrete tools it offers – which are skewed towards self-reliance and integration – appear misaligned with the government's own priorities and concerns. Equally, no other actor has to date stepped forwards to take leadership of and consistently promote the GCR's use. This can be attributed to a lack of clarity over whether the GCR can be applied in a context where individuals are not recognised as 'refugees', a complex humanitarian landscape and challenging position for UNHCR, and an overall lack of familiarity with the GCR's principles. As 'one of the hardest cases', donor appetite to advance the GCR's use in this context has likewise been limited.

However, while the GCR is yet to directly demonstrate its influence on policy and practice in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh, its objectives and cross-cutting principles have – in one way or another – been pursued in a

broader de facto sense. Our examination of its de facto implementation raises a number of considerations, including the extent to which the GCR represents something definitively 'new', further gaps and issues with the GCR itself and the question of what value a more explicit use would bring.

Promisingly for the GCR, however, there are various avenues identified where a more strategic use of the GCR could in fact add value in the Rohingya response. This includes using the GCR as a framework to mobilise funding and wider international responsibility-sharing around pre-existing goals, as well to inform national operational and strategic engagement. Without a more systematic and strategic use of the Compact in action, the GCR's value in the latter sense is best seen in terms of missed opportunities. This includes missed opportunities to ensure best practices were being implemented fully and swiftly, for example providing support to host communities. Also identified were missed opportunities to advance a deeper dialogue with the government around 'easing pressures' and to reconsider how UNHCR could best play a 'catalytic role'.

Systematically and strategically harnessing the potential of the GCR in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh could help prevent such missed opportunities. However, a number of issues need to be resolved first at the global level for it to be useful as a framework (outlined in Hargrave and Barbelet, 2019). As explored in the previous section, there are several opportunities to harness the possibilities presented by the GCR for responding to the Rohingya displacement in Bangladesh:

1. Use the GCR more explicitly as an overarching framework at regional and international levels, to mobilise increased funding and political commitment towards pre-existing strategies in the Rohingya response.
2. Strengthen leadership for the GCR in Bangladesh based on complementary roles and responsibilities, exploring possibilities for UNHCR or alternatively a coalition of national actors to take a leading role advancing the GCR.
3. Contextualising the GCR to the realities of Bangladesh, developing a plan of action based on an understanding of how key stakeholders (in particular the government) interpret and prioritise the GCR's objectives, supplemented by country-level indicators.
4. Using evidence to support the contextualisation of the GCR and engagement with the government, including ongoing cost–benefit analyses of refugees' presence, detailed mapping of public attitudes and exploring ways to document the costs of *not* applying the GCR's principles in this context.
5. Continuing engagement with the Government of Bangladesh in their own language, including by substantiating links between the GCR and SDGs.
6. Focusing on regional, political and diplomatic solutions, in particular improving conditions in Myanmar, through existing global mechanisms and a possible role for regional solidarity platforms.
7. Putting the GCR's multi-stakeholder approach into practice by improving partnership and leadership among humanitarian actors.
8. Raising awareness of the GCR among national and international actors, alongside refugees and host communities.

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