

ROOM DOCUMENT FOR THE POLICY DEBATE SESSION OF THE 8TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC POVERTY ALLEVIATION WORKING GROUP

A policy debate session was held during the 8th Meeting of the Poverty Alleviation Working Group to come up with some policy recommendations for developing sound policies towards forced migrants and approximating policies among the Member Countries in this important field. The policy advices given below have been identified in light of the main findings of the analytical study titled “*Forced Migration in the OIC Member Countries: Policy Framework Adopted by Host Countries*” and the responses of the Member Countries to the policy questions which were sent by the COMCEC Coordination Office. **Recognizing the unique and peculiar circumstances with regards to various forms of forced migration, the Working Group has come up with the following non-binding policy recommendations.**

Policy Advice I: Developing a sound policy framework at the national level coherent with legislations and mechanisms in the host countries and strengthening their institutional and human capacity in order to manage diverse set of forced migration flows and address the needs of migrants

Rationale:

Forced migration has serious social and economic impacts on migrants, the country of origin and the host countries. Immigrants create heavy demands on local infrastructure and public services in host countries, especially in housing, health and education sectors. An efficient response to displacement and complex migration flows require a sound policy framework at the national level for host countries. In this respect, developing a policy framework to determine the needs of the migrants and to assign legal/temporary status may be considered, where required, as per the national legislations and mechanisms.

In addition, existence of a policy framework may not be sufficient to cope with the forced migration due to inadequate institutional capacity. In some cases implementation can lag behind the policy design. In this case, extensive investments in staff and infrastructure may be needed to carry out the policies and regulations efficiently, particularly in the host countries receiving mass influx.

Policy Advice II: Facilitating access to safe and affordable housing with a view to decreasing housing shortages and the economic burden on both migrants and host communities and allowing them to actively participate in daily life in the host country

Rationale:

Accommodation in a host country is the most basic need of forced migrants. However, access to safe and affordable housing in some member countries is a major challenge due to the huge number of migrants as well as resource constraints. Most refugees in the host countries reside in urban areas instead of camps. For instance, over 90 percent of Syrians currently being sheltered in Turkey and 80 percent of Syrians in Jordan live outside the camps provided. Similarly, almost 90 percent of Iraqi refugees hosted by Jordan live in urban areas.

Influx of high number of migrants results in a housing shortage and high pressure on the housing market in the host countries. Hence, housing for forced migrants needs to be taken into consideration while designing national poverty alleviation strategies in the host countries and required financial resources, where possible, need to be allocated in order to provide liveable sheltering. In particular it is imperative for the international community, including the relevant international institutions, to share economic burden of the host countries with regards to refugees.

Policy Advice III: Increasing the forced migrants' access to labour market through providing work permits and developing programs for upgrading their skills with a view to enhancing self-sustainability

Rationale:

Lack of the necessary means to earn a living is one of the key challenges faced by refugees and has implications on their vulnerability in other areas, including access to housing and education. Labour market participation is therefore critical for displaced populations to sustain their livelihoods and for their integration with the host societies. Providing work permits may facilitate their access to labour market but it does not always enable them to easily find a job. Language differences, mismatches between their skills and the needs of the labour market as well as cost of obtaining documentation can be obstacles in their access to labour market. In this respect, providing programs for the forced migrants to learn the local language and to update their skills, such as vocational training, would facilitate their labour market access.

Policy Advice IV: Ensuring forced migrants' access to health and education services through eliminating the practical barriers including linguistic disparities and service fees

Rationale:

Access to basic services such as education and health is a significant challenge for the forced migrants. Although provisions exist in most countries to provide refugees and asylum seekers with access to basic services, practical barriers may prevent their use. Enrolment or service fees may be unaffordable for refugees without a reliable source of income, and service providers may lack of the knowledge or capacity to serve a population with unique needs, such as diverse linguistic background. In this respect, lack of access to education and medical care can be particularly problematic for refugees who are children and at a critical stage in their physical and mental development.

Regarding education, all children at school age need to have an access to education and some necessary measures such as preparatory language classes and counselling and guiding services should be taken. Concerning health sector, all migrants should be allowed to access primary and secondary medical services with free of charge. In this framework, host communities may benefit from the high skilled migrants such as doctors and teachers.

Policy Advice V: Collecting reliable data on forced migrant population with a view to increasing the efficiency of policy making and monitoring as well as evaluation processes

Rationale:

Having reliable data is the first and most critical step to design and implement effective policies to serve both host communities and forced migrants. It is also necessary in the monitoring process to understand if the implemented policies are leading to desired outcomes and to decide whether there is a need to further intervention. However, data collection on forced migration remains a challenge for host countries. Determination of the exact numbers of forced migrants in a particular country as well as their demographic and other socio-economic characteristics can be difficult, especially where the refugees do not register to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Moreover, detailed information on the living conditions or socioeconomic challenges of forced migrant communities can be even more difficult to obtain. Therefore, detailed data on forced migrants should be collected by new surveys or by extending the coverage of the existing ones.

Policy Advice VI: Mobilising the international and OIC support and resources for alleviating poverty among the forced migrants

Rationale:

The scale of forced migration and frequent flows make it impossible for any country to meet the needs of forced migrants by themselves. Therefore, host countries require sustainable and holistic international support, which goes beyond the traditional humanitarian approach, which only focus on humanitarian aid. In this respect, receiving more funding from international donors should be achieved through advocating campaigns for high level of commitment from global community. The OIC community should not only advocate for facilitating this global commitment but also effectively mobilize its own institutions and resources.

Instruments to Realize the Policy Advices:

COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group: In its subsequent meetings, the Working Group may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner.

COMCEC Project Funding: Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office calls for projects each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the member countries participating in the Working Groups can submit multilateral cooperation projects to be financed through grants by the COMCEC Coordination Office. For the above-mentioned policy areas, the member countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding and the COMCEC Coordination Office may finance the successful projects in this regard. These projects may include organization of seminars, training programs, study visits, exchange of experts, workshops and preparing of analytical studies, needs assessments and training materials/documents, etc.