

Nothing About Them Without Them

Refugee Participation in the International Refugee Regime

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Major Research Paper (MRP) Final Draft submitted
to the Graduate School of Public and International
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Ottawa

July 2022

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor Professor Christina Clark-Kazak for her invaluable patience and feedback and her prompt replies to my many many emails. Thank you so much Mark Bennett, Alexander Heath, Kimberly Heath, and Laura Silva Glasser. Many thanks to my professors and my classmates for their support. Thank you also Dr. James Milner for your advice and encouragement. Finally, I would like to thank my second reader and the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

Abstract / Résumé

The international refugee regime has seen significant changes since 2015, which have had an impact on refugee participation within it. I argue that that the level of meaningful participation of refugees has progressed to some extent in the international refugee regime since 2015. I demonstrate this by using Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation framework to determine the level of refugee participation in the New York Declaration in 2016, the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018, and the Global Refugee Forum in 2019. I also propose four recommendations to continue this progression: the inclusion of a refugee in State delegations, the creation of a refugee delegation, UNHCR-refugee partnership in the planning and organising of the Global Refugee Forum 2023, and hosting future Global Refugee Forums in refugee host countries.

Le régime international des réfugiés a connu des changements importants depuis 2015, qui ont eu un impact sur la participation des réfugiés en son sein. Je soutiens que le niveau de participation significative des réfugiés a progressé dans une certaine mesure dans le régime international des réfugiés depuis 2015. Je le démontre en utilisant l'échelle de participation citoyenne d'Arnstein pour déterminer le niveau de participation des réfugiés de la Déclaration de New York en 2016, du Pacte mondial pour les réfugiés en 2018 et du Forum mondial des réfugiés en 2019. Je propose également quatre recommandations, pour poursuivre cette progression: l'inclusion d'un réfugié dans les délégations des États, la création d'une délégation de réfugiés, un partenariat HCR-réfugiés dans la planification et l'organisation du Forum mondial sur les réfugiés 2023 et l'accueil de futurs Forums mondiaux des réfugiés dans les pays d'accueil des réfugiés.

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1 Introduction

In the last decade there have been significant changes to the international refugee regime. Chief among them have been the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants by the United Nations General Assembly in 2016, the endorsement of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, and the creation of the Global Refugee Forum in 2019. These changes have opened many opportunities for meaningful participation of refugees in decision-making at the global level (Domicelj & Gottardo, 2019; Milner et al., 2022). This paper seeks to determine the extent to which the level of meaningful participation of refugees has progressed in the international refugee regime since 2015. To make this determination, I will use the Ladder of Citizen Participation developed by Arnstein to review information on refugee participation from academic articles and analyse primary sources such reports and documents produced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Arnstein, 2019).

I argue that the level of refugee participation, according to Arnstein's framework, is Level 1: *Manipulation* in the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants 2016; Level 4: *Consultation* in the Global Compact on Refugees 2018; and Level 5: *Placation* in the Global Forum on Refugees 2019. Therefore, refugee participation in the international refugee regime has progressed since 2015 to some extent. However, much more remains to be done to obtain meaningful refugee participation within it.

My Major Research Paper (MRP) will analyse refugee participation by examining whether refugees participated and if so, then to what degree in the New York Declaration, the GCR and

the 2019 Forum, and the degree to which their level of participation has progressed since 2015 (Section 7 Analysis). Prior to this, I will outline the foundations of my research including the current global context (Section 2 Context), a review of the literature (Section 3 Literature Review), the definitions of key concepts (Section 4 Concepts), my theoretical framework (Section 5 Framework) and research methodology (Section 6 Methodology). Finally, I aim to not only assess the progression of refugee participation but to propose ways that increase the level of refugee participation. As such, I recommend: the inclusion of a refugee in State delegations, the creation of a refugee delegation, UNHCR-refugee partnership in planning and organising of the Global Refugee Forum 2023, and hosting future Global Refugee Forums in refugee host countries.

2 Context

In 2001, the total number of refugees of concern to UNHCR was 12 million (del Mundo, 2002). Two decades later, there are 27.1 million refugees worldwide who have been displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order. 69% of refugees originate from just five states: Syrian Arab Republic (6.8 million), Venezuela (4.6 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.4 million), and Myanmar (1.2 million). 38% of refugees are hosted in just five states: Türkiye (3.8 million), Colombia (1.8 million), Uganda (1.5 million), Pakistan (1.5 million), and Germany (1.3 million). Further, 83% of refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income states and the Least Developed Countries provide asylum to 27% of the total (UNHCR, 2022).

Pro-democracy protests in Syria erupted in 2011 and by 2012 the conflict had become a civil war (Britannica, n.d.). Between 2011 and 2014, some 3 million Syrian refugees fled to Lebanon, Jordan, and Türkiye (UNHCR, 2014; Spindler, 2015). States and media labelled it a refugee “crisis” in spring of 2015, as thousands of refugees attempted the dangerous journey from the Middle East into Europe (Sigona, 2018). In the fall, the desperation of refugees fleeing to Europe garnered international attention because of a photo of three-year old Alan Kurdi’s body washed up on shore. The Syrian boy of Kurdish origins and his family fled the war, hoping to join relatives in the safety of Canada. Alan, his older brother, Ghalib, and his mother, Rihanna, all drowned after their small inflatable boat capsized a few minutes into the journey to Greece. They were among the more than 3,600 other refugees who died in the eastern Mediterranean in 2015 (Walsh, 2015).

States and the international community were forced to recognise the failures and limitations of the international refugee regime (Milner et al., 2022, p.13). In response, a year after Alan Kurdi’s death, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016 to strengthen and enhance mechanisms to protect people on the move. The Declaration launched the development of two Global Compacts: The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (UNHCR, n.d.-c). The GCR is a framework and provides a blueprint to governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders “to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them” (UNHCR, n.d.-d). It subsequently led to the creation of the Global Refugee Forum, a place where relevant States and other stakeholders can come together to share best practices, and contribute support, expertise

and policy changes aimed towards furthering the commitments and goals outlined in GCR (UNHCR, n.d.-b).

Refugees have been excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lives and wellbeing, and they are demanding change (Milner et al.,2022). During the foundational years of the regime, “persons with lived refugee experience exercised significant influence and thought-leadership in the development of international refugee law and policymaking” (Harley, 2021, p.72). For example, “the first high commissioner of UNHCR, Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart, had lived experience of being forcibly displaced” (Harley, 2021, p.72). However, UNHCR shifted over time and became increasingly paternalistic (Milner et al., 2022, p.13). Through the 1990s and early 2000s, refugees played differentiated roles in decision-making in local and refugee camp contexts and employed tactics such as protest to seek access to decision-making processes that affected them. The interventions of refugees in global decision-making spaces “were tightly scripted and focused on sharing their experience of displacement, not as substantive contributors to the governance process” (Milner et al., 2022, p.13).

While the recent additions to the regime have created opportunities for more meaningful refugee participation, refugees remain largely excluded from decision-making at the global level. My MRP research is important because with the increase in the number of refugees worldwide it is more critical now than ever that they are given a voice and the capacity to make decisions over their lives. To achieve meaningful participation in the international refugee regime, we must determine whether the recent additions to the regime have led to progress. My research will help

determine how far meaningful participation has come and to what extent more progress is required for participation to be meaningful and to reach the topmost levels of participation.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Participation Literature

Public participation is an area of research that has been studied for centuries by the likes of Plato and Aristotle (Cherry, 2009). Following World War II, the role of government in democracies expanded dramatically, providing services to the public such as health care, educational programs, transportation networks, etc. As such, it led to the growth of a large and “expert” public decision-making process at all levels of government that served to set public standards, organised public health care, education, allocated public finances, and planned for future public programs. Traditionally, these decisions were made by high level civil servants with “expert” knowledge but who were not directly accountable to citizens. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, citizen groups expressed dissatisfaction with this process and called for more public accountability through the inclusion of citizens in the process (DeSario et al., 1987, p.ix). As result of this shift, research and studies on citizen participation also expanded (Google Books Ngram Viewer, n.d.).

Research on participation has focused on areas such as environmental policy (Merino, 2018; Simpson & Clifton, 2014; Wesselink et al., 2011), diaspora studies (Norglo et al., 2016) and healthcare (Narayanan et al., 2015). In studying the effects of citizen participation on democracy, researchers observed that it deepens understanding of issues, encourages citizen support of

decisions and contributes to a higher degree of legitimacy of decisions (Michels, 2011; Michels & De Graaf, 2010). The advantages of citizen participation are found in better decision processes and outcomes for both government and participants. For example, implementation of a policy might be smoother and less costly when it is well grounded in citizen preferences because of citizen cooperation (Thomas, 1995).

However, some studies have also found negative effects of participation that challenge the narrative of community participation as an effective, more democratic policy-making tool (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Webler & Tuler, 2021). For example, some argue citizen participation is costly, not only financially for governments, but also time consuming for both participants and government. As a result, fewer decisions are made, and less money is budgeted for implementation (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004, p.59). Further, there is the argument that citizen participation does not guarantee a good policy decision especially when there are opposing interest groups (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004, p.60).

Despite the limitations of public participation, many continue to advocate for it in decision-making forums. This is especially the case for marginalised and minority peoples who lack representation (Bleich et al., 2015; Smart & Harrison, 2017; Yue et al., 2019). For example, the slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us” emerged from the disability rights movement in South Africa. The slogan proclaims that they know what is best for themselves and their community and that no policy should be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy (Charlton, 1998). Today, this slogan is used around the world not only by disability advocates, but also indigenous peoples

(Weber, 2016), autism advocates (ASAN, 2021) and refugees (Mustafa, 2018). Research on this subject has also increased as evidenced by the many articles titled “Nothing About Us Without Us” (Bryden, 2016; Mountjoy et al., 2022). Studies have found that meaningful participation can be empowering and it can build trust between marginalized people and institutions and authorities (Dreu & West, 2001; Haugen, 2016; Horwath et al., 2012). Within this area of research, studies on refugee participation have emerged.

3.2 Refugee Participation

The participation of refugees has especially been a topic of interest in research since the turn of the century (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). It has focused on topics such as the participation of resettled refugees in their new communities (Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002; Noyman et al., 2017; Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006), in humanitarian efforts and local host community initiatives (Gidron & Carver, 2022; Olivius, 2014a, 2014b) and in peace processes (Asaf, 2017; Davis, 2016). Some have argued that participation is empowering for refugees who have been displaced and marginalised and that it challenges the narrative of refugees as victims (Asaf, 2017; Milner, 2011; Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006). Further, refugees themselves are demanding and advocating for participation and leadership (Alio et al., 2020; Lenette et al., 2019). In a recent paper, Alio, Alrihawi, Noor, Wazefadost, and Zigashane, refugee leaders, called for refugee participation in the response to Covid-19 in its implemented, in policy and in research (Alio et al., 2020, p.373).

Studies have also been conducted on refugee participation in decision-making at the global level (Harley, 2021; Harley & Hobbs, 2020; Milner et al., 2022). People with lived refugee experience contributed to the development of international refugee law and policy-making in the

foundational years of the international refugee regime. The meaningful participation of refugees is also an emerging norm in the regime (Harley, 2021). Further, as will be discussed in the analysis of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the non-binding UN declaration details the importance of meaningful refugee participation (Harley, 2021; Milner et al., 2022). However, the meaningful participation of refugees in decision-making processes is not codified in international law and is not standard practice in the international refugee regime (Harley & Hobbs, 2020).

I aim to contribute to this existing body of literature by examining the progress of refugee participation at the state decision-making level of the international refugee regime. I will accomplish this by analysing the recent additions to the regime.

3.3 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants Literature

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants on September 19, 2016. The New York Declaration reaffirmed the importance of the international refugee regime; in adopting it, Member States agreed “that protecting refugees and supporting the countries that shelter them are shared international responsibilities and must be borne more equitably and predictably” (UNHCR, n.d.-c). They also pledged “robust support to those countries affected by large movements of refugees and migrants” and agreed “to work towards the adoption of a global compact on refugees and a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration” (UNHCR, n.d.-c).

The existing literature on the Declaration mainly focuses on the Declaration’s commitments for refugees and migrants, especially the initiation of the negotiation and drafting process of the

Global Compact on Refugees and a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Acosta, 2017; Mathew, 2021). While scholars agree that it is a significant addition to the international refugee regime, the Declaration has been critiqued and challenged for its assumptions of migration and the causes of unsafe, disorderly migration and lack of consultation with refugees and migrants (Guild, 2018; Milner et al., 2022). However, there is limited research on refugee participation in the Declaration and the negotiation and drafting process. As such, I aim to contribute to this research by analysing the level of refugee participation of the New York Declaration.

3.4 Global Compact on Refugees Literature

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is a non-binding framework developed over two years that serves as a blueprint for governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders “to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them” (UNHCR, n.d.-d). The GCR was affirmed December 17, 2018, by the United Nations General Assembly and endorsed with 181 votes in favor, 2 opposed (Hungary and the US) and 3 abstentions (Ferris & Donato, 2019, p.101). Its four key objectives are: “Ease the pressures on host countries; Enhance refugee self-reliance; Expand access to third-country solutions; and Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity” (United Nations General Assembly, 2018). From this, a broad spectrum of literature has arisen as experts discuss their impressions of the GCR and assess its impact, its potential for success and its shortcomings.

Research affirms that the GCR is a significant addition to the refugee regime and the protection of refugees (Akram, 2019; Cantor, 2019; Gilbert, 2019; McAdam, 2019; Sharpe, 2019; Türk, 2019). Further, it was argued that the GCR addresses some of the gaps in the 1951 Refugee Convention, especially in regard to sharing the burden and responsibility of refugees with host-countries; and, may also help to re-energize local and regional initiatives and strategies (Akram, 2019; Aleinikoff, 2019; Doyle, 2019). It was also agreed that the GCR is a great example of multilateral cooperation and increased engagement of development actors (Grandi, 2019; Miller, 2019).

However, researchers also criticized the GCR for being a non-binding agreement because as a result, its impact and success depend on the cooperation and resources of individual States (Carciotto & Ferraro, 2020; McAdam, 2019). Further, it does not “solve” the issues that plague the regime and more work needs to be done to address them (Sharpe, 2019; Triggs & Wall, 2020). It was also highlighted that it does not address the problem of the large flow of refugees arriving in the Global North (Aleinikoff, 2019).

Lastly, there is some research on refugee participation within this literature and I will examine it in my analysis of refugee participation in the GCR (Domicelj & Gottardo, 2019; Ferris & Donato, 2019; Harley & Hobbs, 2020). I aim to expand upon it by analysing the level of participation of refugees in its negotiation and drafting process.

3.5 Global Refugee Forum Literature

The Global Refugee Forum was put in place by GCR's affirmation to ensure both refugees and their host communities benefit from efforts to implement the GCR's four key objectives. The Forum occurs every four years and States and other actors come together "to share good practices and contribute with financial support, technical expertise and policy changes to help reach the goals of the Global Compact" (UNHCR, n.d.-b).

The first Global Refugee Forum occurred in 2019; therefore, there is currently little scholarly research on the Forum. Current literature focuses on its creation as a result of the Global Compact on Refugees (Triggs & Wall, 2020). As such, my research on the level of participation of refugees at the Forum will principally use primary sources such as UNHCR documents. Thus, I aim to expand the literature on the Global Refugee Forum by examining the level of refugee participation at the 2019 Forum.

4 Concepts

4.1 Refugee Participation

Participation is a complex concept and can mean economic participation, public participation or simply the act of participating. Arnstein's framework discusses citizen participation i.e., public participation, as does the literature on participation in relation to decision-making and governance. While refugees are not citizens of a refugee state, they are to some extent citizens of the international refugee regime. They are governed by powerholders of the regime—States, UNHCR—and they rely on services and aid provided by those powerholders.

Arnstein refers to citizen participation as “the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future” (Arnstein, 2019, p.24). Power is central to Arnstein’s definition whereas Webler and Tuler, and Baum center the definition on decision-making. Webler and Tuler define citizen participation as “engagement by many types of people and groups in decision-making processes on issues of common concern” (Webler & Tuler, 2021, p.504). In the Encyclopedia of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Baum defines citizen participation as citizen involvement in public decision-making in which the term ‘citizens’ “may be either individuals or organized communities, and ‘participation’ may involve either observation or power” (Smelser & Baltes, 2001).

In this paper, I refer to refugee participation as refugee engagement, involvement or a refugee(s) taking part in decision-making. Further, I define meaningful refugee participation as situations in which “refugees from diverse backgrounds have sustained influence in all fora where decisions, policies, and responses that impact their lives are being designed, implemented, and measured in a manner that is accessible, broad, informed, safe, free, and supported” (Milner, 2021, p.13). Finally, as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UNHCR, n.d.-a).

4.2 International Refugee Regime

The international refugee regime is a set of laws, institutions, decision-making procedures and norms relating to the protection and solutions for refugees. Within the regime is the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that is mandated to work with States to realise these norms. Many of these norms and practices were codified following World War II with the signing of the 1951 Refugee Convention and later its 1967 Protocol. The legal documents define the term ‘refugee’ and outline the rights of refugees, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them (UNHCR, n.d.-f). The governance of the regime remains diffused as States retain ultimate control over the implementation of global norms, institutions, laws, and decision-making procedures on their territory. Further, there is no binding obligation for States to cooperate on the protection and creation of solutions for refugees despite long-standing recognition that such collaboration is essential to ensuring the functioning of the regime (Betts & Milner, 2019, p.1).

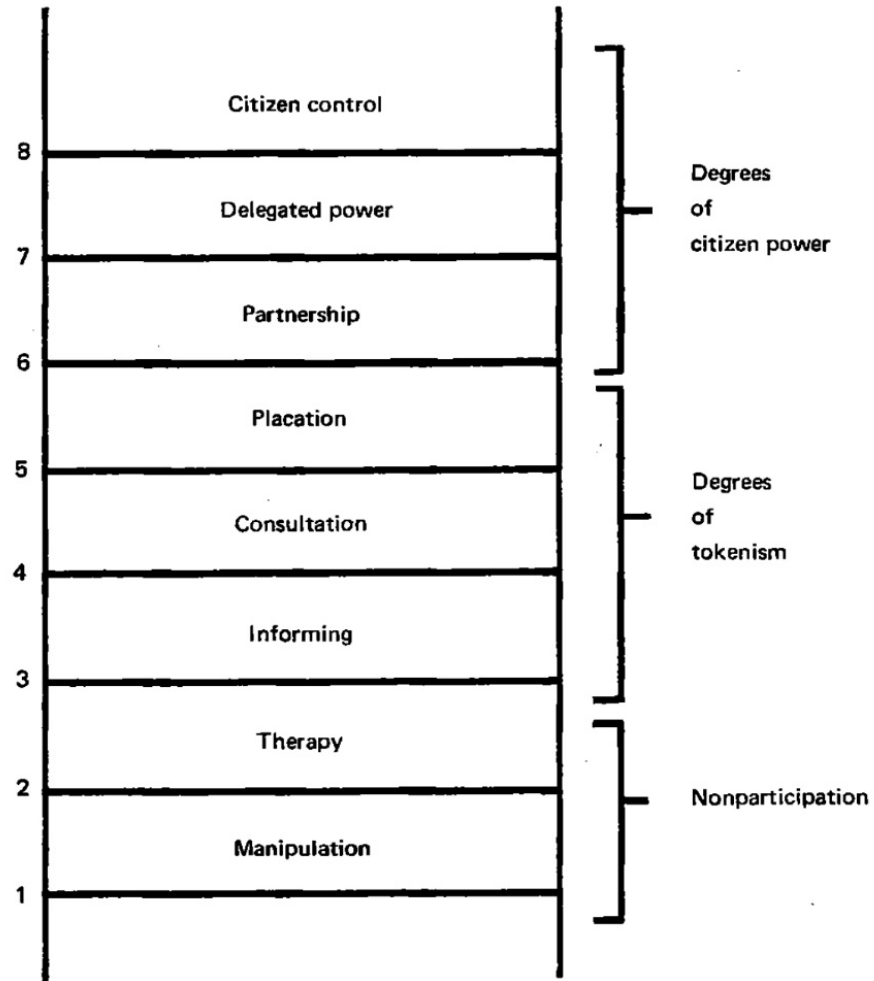
Recently, a set of documents and agreements have been added to the regime: The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants and the Global Compact on Refugees. While they are non-binding additions, they set new norms, practices and a framework related to the protection, and solutions for refugees (UNHCR, n.d.-c). As discussed, the GCR also established the Global Refugee Forum—a quadrennial meeting of States, NGOs and other relevant regime stakeholders—to share best practices and to work towards the implementation of the goals set out by the GCR (UNHCR, n.d.-b).

5 Theoretical Framework

5.1 Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

My paper uses the theoretical framework developed by Sherry A. Arnstein in 1969 for the purpose of analysing the level of refugee participation. The citizen participation typology arranges levels of participation in a ladder pattern seen in Image 1 below “with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens’ power in determining the end product” (Arnstein, 2019, p.25). In addition to the eight rungs of the ladder, Arnstein outlines the progress of participation from ‘Nonparticipation’ to ‘Degrees of tokenism’ to ‘Degrees of citizen power’ (Arnstein, 2019, p.25). Refugee participation is difficult to measure so there is no consensus on how it should be measured. As such, I am using the Ladder of Participation as my framework for analysis because it is an accessible, well-known typology, and despite its limitations, it will help to determine the level of refugee participation in the international refugee regime and to what degree it has progressed.

Image 1: Ladder of Citizen Participation



Source: Arnstein, 2019, p.26.

5.1.1 Degrees of Nonparticipation

The first two rungs, (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy, are levels of Nonparticipation.

(1) Manipulation

The first level of participation describes illusory participation contrived by powerholders to be a substitute for genuine participation. Those in power mislead citizens into believing that they have

been given power when instead the purpose of their participation is to ‘educate’ them or to engineer their support (Arnstein, 2019, p.26).

(2) Therapy

The second level of participation describes group therapy contrived as citizen participation in which those in power assume that powerless is synonymous with mental illness. The powerholders invite to citizens to participate but for the purpose of curing them of their ‘pathology’ rather than changing the systems that create their ‘pathologies’. Citizens are thus led to believe that they are the problem rather than powerholders and the established institutions and policies (Arnstein, 2019, p.27).

5.1.2 Degrees of Tokenism

The middle rungs of the ladder, (3) Informing, (4) Consultation, and (5) Placation, are degrees of Tokenism. Tokenism is the policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort such as including a small number of minorities to give the appearance of equality (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

(3) Informing

The third level of participation describes a one-way flow of information from powerholders to citizens. Citizens are informed of their rights, responsibilities, and options, but they have little opportunity to influence the end product ostensibly ‘designed for their benefit’ (Arnstein, 2019, p.28).

(4) Consultation

The fourth level of participation describes situations in which citizens' opinions are solicited through surveys, neighbourhood meetings, public hearings, etc. However, this participation is meaningless if powerholders restrict the input of citizens' ideas solely to this level (Arnstein, 2019, p.28).

(5) Placation

The fifth level of participation describes situations in which citizens begin to have some degree of influence, but tokenism is still apparent. It occurs when a few "worthy" citizens are picked to participate on boards, committees, or other decision-making bodies. However, these citizens can easily be outvoted and outmaneuvered "if they are not accountable to a constituency in the community and if the traditional power elite hold the majority of seats" (Arnstein, 2019, p.29).

The degree to which citizens are placated depends on two factors: "the quality of technical assistance they have in articulating their priorities; and the extent to which the community has been organized to press for those priorities" (Arnstein, 2019, p.29). Citizens may realise that once again they are the subject of powerholder planning and have "extensively 'participated' but have not profited beyond the extent the powerholders decide to placate them" (Arnstein, 2019, p.29).

5.1.3 Degrees of Citizen Power

The top rungs of the ladder are (6) Partnership, (7) Delegated Power, and (8) Citizen Control and are Degrees of citizen power.

(6) Partnership

The sixth level of participation describes situations in which a degree of power has been redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders (Arnstein, 2019, p.30). For example, “they agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees, and mechanisms for resolving impasses” (Arnstein, 2019, p.31). However, after the ground rules have been established through some form of compromise, they are not subject to unilateral change. Partnership is most effective when citizen leaders are accountable to an organised power-base in the community; when these leaders are paid by the communities for their time-consuming efforts; and, when the community power-base has the resources to hire (and fire) its own technicians, lawyers, and community organizers. “With these ingredients, citizens have some genuine bargaining influence over the outcome of the plan (as long as both parties find it useful to maintain the partnership)” (Arnstein, 2019, p.31). However, “in most cases where power has come to be shared it was taken by the citizens, not given by the [powerholders]” (Arnstein, 2019, p.31).

(7) Delegated Power

The seventh level of participation describes situations in which negotiations between citizens and powerholders result in citizens achieving “dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or program” (Arnstein, 2019, p.31). For example, boards, committees, and agencies in which citizens have a clear majority of seats and genuine specified powers (Arnstein, 2019, p.31). It can also describe when parallel decision-making groups of citizens and powerholders are created “with provision for citizen veto if differences of opinion cannot be resolved through negotiation” (Arnstein, 2019, p.32). At this level, citizens have the power to ensure

accountability of the program and to resolve differences, and powerholders need to start the bargaining process rather than respond to pressure from citizens (Arnstein, 2019, p.31).

(8) Citizen Control

The final level of participation describes when citizens have complete power over public funds, and can “govern the program, institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which ‘outsiders’ may change them” (Arnstein, 2019, p.32). For example a grant was awarded to the Hough Area Development Corporation in Cleveland whose members and board were composed of leaders of major community organisations in the area, to plan local economic development programs and to develop a series of economic enterprises ranging from a housing project to a loan guarantee program for local building contractors (Arnstein, 2019, p.32).

5.2 Limitations and Critiques

Arnstein’s framework has been used by other scholars to understand participation in a variety of spaces including participation in theater experience (Afolabi, 2016), parents’ participation in school councils (Stelmach, 2016), and participation in local planning processes (Rosado, 2020). It has also inspired other frameworks such as Roger Hart’s Ladder of Children’s Participation (1992) and Elizabeth Rocha’s Ladder of Empowerment (1997). In fact, Arnstein’s article has been cited over 27,000 times as of May 2022 (Google Scholar, n.d.). This decades old framework has not only been applied in many research papers and inspired frameworks and research, but also it has been critiqued.

First, Arnstein's framework of participation is linear but citizen participation in real world situations does not start with (1) Manipulation and neatly progress to each rung only to evolve into (8) Citizen Control. The framework cannot represent the complexity and fluctuations of power dynamics in real world participatory situations. Second, the linear nature of the framework can also lead the lower rungs being interpreted as universally negative (or worse than) and higher levels as universally positive (or better than). In real world participatory situations, lower levels may be positive in some circumstances and higher levels negative in others (Organizing Engagement, n.d.). Third, Arnstein's framework does not discuss diversity in participation, or whether it is sustained, accessible, broad, informed, safe, free, supported, etc. (Arnstein, 2019; Milner, 2021).

Arnstein also highlights limitations of her framework. First, it is a simplification. "In actuality, neither the have-nots nor the powerholders are homogeneous blocs" (Arnstein, 2019, p.25). Each group has diverging values and points of view, there are competing interests, cleavages, and subgroups. Second, it does not include an analysis of the significant roadblocks to meaningful participation such as racism, paternalism, lack of education, poverty, etc. Third, Arnstein notes that "in the real world of people and programs, there might be 150 rungs with less sharp and "pure" distinctions among them" (Arnstein, 2019, p.26). Fourth, some characteristics of the eight rungs might be applicable to other rungs (Arnstein, 2019, p.26). Lastly, while (8) Citizen Control is at the top of the ladder, it offers many disadvantages as well as advantages. It promotes separatism, it is more costly and less efficient, it is incompatible with the merit system and professionalism, etc. Further, (8) Citizen Control is not the only rung with advantages and disadvantages (Arnstein, 2019, p.33)

As previously discussed, citizen participation is complex as is its measurement and Arnstein's framework is useful in its simplification of this. The goal of this research is to measure how far refugee participation has come and how far it is from being meaningful. Arnstein's well-known framework aids in attaining this goal and therefore, despite its limitations, it is still valuable for analysing this phenomenon. While I may assign the levels of refugee participation to rungs on Arnstein's ladder, my results are not a reflection of reality, but are rather simplifications meant to help determine the progress of refugee participation. Further, I believe that while (8) Citizen Participation is a worthy goal, the international refugee regime should focus on attaining meaningful refugee participation and (6) Partnership.

6 Methods

To determine the level of refugee participation and its progression, I analysed historical resources developed by UNHCR and secondary sources such as books and academic articles published after 2014. This research was conducted using the University of Ottawa library and UNHCR website. The following keywords were used in my University of Ottawa library searches: "refugee", "participation" and "international refugee regime". To refine my search, I then used "refugee participa*" and "global refugee forum" or "global compact on refugees" or "new york declaration*". I selected the sources that I deemed most relevant such as those that include the key words in the title and/or summary and analysed them using the theoretical framework discussed above to make my determination. While I found many academic articles on refugee participation and the Global Compact on Refugees and the New York Declaration, there

were few that discussed the Global Refugee Forum and other more recent events. As such, UNHCR reports will be critical in analysing more recent participation.

To determine the levels of refugee participation at the GCR and the Forum, I analysed the meeting agendas of the GCR thematic discussions, Forum preparatory meetings and the Forum itself. These agendas identified the themes of each panel and session, and the name and affiliations of the moderators, guest speakers and panellists. I highlighted all the names of people that were identified as refugees. For example: “Mr. Ahmad Sufian Bayram, Syrian Refugee and collaborative economy activist in Germany, Techstars” and “Mr. Wasim Sani, refugee athlete”. I also distinguished the genders of the refugee participants using the titles. For example: “Ms. Tina Dixon, Refugee Co-Sponsor and Phd Candidate, Australian National University”. I also included those who were identified as members of a refugee network or refugee-led organisation. For example: “Ms. Safia Ibrahimkhel, Member, Tertiary Refugee Students Network” (UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019). Using these agendas, I was able to determine the number of panels and sessions that included refugee participants and the number of refugees in each of these sessions.

However, it is important to note that some participants may be refugees or have experienced forced displacement but not be identified as such in the meeting agendas. Furthermore, there are many definitions, interpretations, and conceptualizations of the term “refugee” (Malkki, 1996; Zetter, 1991). This paper and UNHCR use the 1951 Refugee Convention definition: “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social

group, or political opinion.” (UNHCR, n.d.-a). However, there is evidence that refugees conceive of their identity in largely different terms from those who categorize and assign labels to them (Zetter, 1991). Additionally, the formation, transformation and politicization of the label ‘refugee’ affects the lives of refugees (Zetter, 2007). Therefore, it is important to note that it is the powerholders who created and set the agenda and identified and assigned the label of refugee to the participants whilst participants may label themselves differently.

Additionally, these agendas do not identify the refugee participants in the audience who may have intervened, posed questions, or commented in the sessions. These interventions, while excluded from the agendas, are critical pieces of meaningful participation.

7 Analysis

7.1 The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants on September 19, 2016. As previously discussed, the New York Declaration reaffirmed the importance of the international refugee regime and States’ commitments to refugees and migrants.

7.1.1 2016 UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs

The 2016 Annual Consultations with NGOs in Geneva occurred June 15-17 which preceded the New York Declaration by a few months (UNHCR, 2016). While these consultations did not directly inform the New York Declaration, they did affect it. The theme of the consultations was

youth, and as such, 25 young refugee women and men from around the world and from diverse backgrounds were supported to travel to Geneva to actively engage in the high-level advocacy process (Lenette et al., 2019, p.391). The Global Refugee Youth Consultations that preceded the 2016 NHCR-NGO Consultations eventually evolved into the Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC) (Rother & Steinhilper, 2019).

A study co-authored by an Australian academic and four refugee youth residing in Australia interviewed six of the youth participants on their experience at the 2016 Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultations (Lenette et al., 2019). The study found that while they were deeply appreciative of the opportunity, the youth expressed “disappointment in relation to how their and other young delegates’ perspectives and contributions were integrated (or overlooked) in discussions” (Lenette et al., 2019, p.399). The youth participants felt that their involvement was at times merely tokenistic. For example, “they were invited to co-chair or speak at some sessions as youth representatives at the last minute and were given little or no preparation time or support” (Lenette et al., 2019, p.399). They also felt that organisers’ approach was patronising, if not controlling. “One participant reported that they were asked to modify their stories to suit the theme of particular sessions” (Lenette et al., 2019, p.399). Another major failing that was eventually addressed was the lack of interpreters for attendees (especially Arabic-speaking). The organisers also failed to acknowledge the wealth of experiences, skills, and perspectives refugees brought to the consultation process. While participants chose to focus on the positive aspects of their involvement, being present was not enough, and could not compare to being genuinely engaged (Lenette et al., 2019, p.399). The study also highlighted that the refugees interviewed

who lived in refugee camps were less critical of the process than those who had been resettled in Australia (Lenette et al., 2019, p.401).

In sum, the experiences of the youth refugee delegates are indicative of (4) Consultation because they were invited to speak to UNHCR and partner NGOs and share their ideas and perspectives. However, there are also elements of (1) Manipulation because the powerholders were patronising and controlling. The powerholders negatively influenced the participation of the youth by providing limited support and time to prepare, and pressuring participants to change their stories (Lenette et al., 2019, p.399).

7.1.2 Participation in the Text of the New York Declaration

The New York Declaration contains limited references to any principle of refugee participation. Within it, Member States recognize “the significant contribution and leadership of women in refugee and migrant communities”, and commit to ensuring “their full, equal and meaningful participation in the development of local solutions and opportunities” (United Nations General Assembly, 2016). Participation is also mentioned twice in the section on durable solutions. First, it is mentioned in the commitment to supporting “efforts to foster reconciliation and dialogue, particularly with refugee communities and with the equal participation of women and youth” (United Nations General Assembly, 2016). Second, it is mentioned in the commitment to “Facilitate the participation of refugees, including women, in peace and reconciliation processes” (United Nations General Assembly, 2016).

The New York Declaration also initiated the development of the comprehensive refugee response framework that involved a multi-stakeholder approach to including all relevant stakeholders including refugees themselves (United Nations General Assembly, 2016). Additionally, the General Assembly invited “the private sector and civil society, including refugee and migrant organizations, to participate in multi-stakeholder alliances to support efforts to implement the commitments” of the New York Declaration (United Nations General Assembly, 2016).

However, there were no efforts to include refugees in the development and framing of these commitments. Nor was there a commitment to the meaningful participation of refugees in the development of global policy responses (Milner et al., 2022, p.15). The limited references and commitment to meaningful participation is indicative of the lack of refugee participation. As such, it does not fall on any rung of Arnstein’s ladder of participation and if it did it would be (0) No Participation.

7.1.3 Participation of Refugees in the United Nations General Assembly

At the United Nations General Assembly session that adopted the New York Declaration September 19th, 2016, statements were given by a refugee, Mohammed Badran, and a migrant, Eni Lestari Andayani Adi. In his statement, Badran noted that refugees had been “waiting for the day that the world would hear our voice”, noting that “I hope that day is today.” (Milner et al., 2022, p.15). However, despite Badran’s hope that his participation would be meaningful, his statement had no impact on the New York Declaration. The zero draft was circulated to States on

June 27th, 2016, and the final draft along with two annexes was completed and circulated August 5th, 2016 (Ferris & Donato, 2019, p.95).

This experience is indicative of (1) Manipulation because, while Badran was given the opportunity to participate, the powerholders manipulated him and the refugees who were watching into believing that they were being consulted and that his statement had an impact on the contents of the New York Declaration. In reality, Badran's participation had no impact on the final product.

7.1.4 The Level of Participation of the New York Declaration

The 2016 UNHCR-NGO Consultation on youth included young refugee representatives who were given opportunities to speak at the event. However, organisers were also controlling and patronising toward the youth participants (Lenette et al., 2019). Therefore, the level of participation at the event was both (4) Consultation and (1) Manipulation. There is also no mention of meaningful refugee participation and little mention of refugee participation in the New York Declaration. Further, refugees were not involved in the drafting of the document (Milner et al., 2022; United Nations General Assembly, 2016). Therefore, because there was no refugee participation: (0) No Participation. Finally, during the adoption of the New York Declaration, Badran was led to believe that he was being consulted when the final draft of the document had already been decided upon (Ferris & Donato, 2019; Milner et al.,2022). This is indicative of (1) Manipulation. Therefore, overall, the level of refugee participation in the New York Declaration is (1) Manipulation.

7.2 Global Compact on Refugees

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is a non-binding framework developed over two years of consultations that serves as a blueprint for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders “to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them” (UNHCR, n.d.-d). Its four key objectives are: “Ease the pressures on host countries; Enhance refugee self-reliance; Expand access to third-country solutions; and Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity” (United Nations General Assembly, 2018).

7.2.1 Thematic Discussion Speakers

The drafting and consultation process of the GCR occurring in Geneva was extensive, with five UNHCR-organised “thematic discussions on particular issues, followed by six rounds of consultations with Member States, and other meetings repositioned for GCR discussions, such as the High Commissioner’s Dialogue and annual UNHCR-NGO consultations” (Ferris & Donato, 2019, p.101). The GCR espoused a multi-stakeholder approach in the creation and implementation of its goals. As a result, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics, and refugees were invited to the thematic discussions. For refugees, especially, it presented an opportunity to not only meaningfully participate but also to embed the principle within the infrastructure developed for the GCR’s implementation, follow-up and review (Domicelj & Gottardo, 2019, p.79).

In reviewing UNHCR meeting agendas for the thematic discussions, I determined that only 40% of the thematic discussions included a refugee on the agenda and only nine refugees participated

as speakers. The second thematic discussion included one refugee youth delegate who spoke during the introductory remarks and one refugee youth delegate who spoke during the fourth panel. The third thematic discussion did not have refugees on the main panels; however, refugees participated as panellists in each of the side events. A refugee youth delegate was present at the side event: “Education for Refugees” and the side event: “The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in Practice”. Further, all of the panellists at the side event: “Refugee Voices” were refugees including two youth delegates and two Network for Refugee Voices (NRV) members (UNHCR, 2017 October). The final thematic discussion had one refugee youth delegate speak during the opening plenary (UNHCR, 2017 November).

While refugees were invited to speak and participate at the thematic discussions, almost all of those who spoke were youth delegates of the Global Youth Advisory Council 2018. As a result, UNHCR could claim that they invited refugees to participate without too much effort on their part. Further, only the refugee voices side event included more than one refugee. This is indicative of (4) Consultation participation as Arnstein explains, “What powerholders achieve is the evidence that they have gone through the required motions of involving “those people” ” (Arnstein, 2019, p.28). The refugee youth and the two NRV members on the other hand, have “participated in participation” rather than participating to effect change (Arnstein, 2019, p.28; UNHCR, 2017 July; UNHCR, 2017 October; UNHCR, 2017 November).

7.2.2 Uninvited Interventions of Civil Society

Despite the limited space for participation created by powerholders, refugees used the thematic discussions as an opportunity to carve out space. For example, during the first thematic

discussion, a member of NRV took the floor, and reminded attendees that refugees have agency and that their contribution are key to developing solutions that are effective and sustainable (Rother & Steinhilper, 2019, p.249). During his speech, many of the delegates in the plenary appeared puzzled and turned their heads to the back benches where civil society representatives were seated (Rother & Steinhilper, 2019, p.250). It was clear that refugees and refugee-led civil society group were invited to the thematic discussions as part of the multi-stakeholder approach consultation process but had not been expected to meaningfully participate. The speech of the awkwardly introduced “Independent Diplomat Refugee” set the tone of the discussions and made it clear that refugee participants were unwilling to deliver the ‘sad refugee stories’ but aimed instead to go beyond just sitting at the table. This message was reiterated by members of NRV at each thematic discussion (Rother & Steinhilper, 2019, p.250).

The example above demonstrates that while powerholders invited some refugees to participate in the thematic discussions, they did not invite nor welcome the interventions by refugees who sought to make their participation meaningful. This invitation to participate on the terms of the powerholders is also indicative of (4) Consultation because Arnstein outlines that at this level powerholders restrict the input of citizens’ ideas and participation remains superficial (Arnstein, 2019, p.28; Rother & Steinhilper, 2019).

7.2.3 Gender Audit of the GCR

Refugees also participated in the development of the GCR as part of the gender audit conducted on five of UNHCR-organised thematic meetings and the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges. The audit was led by two academics, Linda Bartolomei and Eileen

Pittaway, and involved five refugee community representatives: Cheery Zahau, Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Tina Dixon, Apajok Biar and Shaza Al Rihawi (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018, p.79). The purpose of the gender audit was to assess how gender equality and the protection of women and girls were addressed (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018, p.77).

The audit highlighted the role and importance of refugee participants in the thematic discussions by stating that, “were it not for interventions from refugee participants, [Gender equality] would not have been mentioned at all” (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018, p.78). Further, these interventions triggered the chairs to reflect on gender issues and the recommendations of refugee participants and the audit report (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018, p.78). The audit also determined that most panellists were men and that, “while there was strong commitment to refugee participation, there was no recognition of the additional barriers that refugee women and girls face in having their voices heard” (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018, p.78). The report highlighted the importance of meaningful participation and outlined the contributions of refugees at the thematic discussions. It also demonstrates that despite their participation being limited to (4) Consultation, the refugee participants still sought to make their participation as meaningful as possible (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018).

The report, resulting from the audit conducted in part by refugee women, prompted the increase of the gender parity on the panels of the final thematic discussion. It also led to a shift in the quality of the interventions addressing gender equality and sexual and gender-based violence from both States and other stakeholders. Further, UNHCR worked to ensure gender parity on panels at High Commissioner’s Protection Dialogue in December and added a roundtable on

gender equality to the formal meeting (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018, p.78). While the report did effect change in the thematic discussions and other consultations, it is unclear the extent to which refugees participated in the development of the gender audit and subsequent report. The gender audit team was led by non-refugee academics and only “involved” refugee women. As such, I believe the level of refugee participation in the gender audit is within the degrees of tokenism (Arnstein, 2019; Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018).

7.2.4 Drafts of the GCR

The extent to which the participation of refugees in the development of the GCR impacted the final draft is unclear. However, one of the main goals of the refugee participants and civil society groups was to introduce strong wording in the GCR on meaningful participation of refugees (Rother & Steinhilper, 2019, p.251). Table 1 below outlines the progression of a paragraph in the GCR on the engagement and consultation of refugees and host communities.

Table 1: Drafts of the GCR

| Draft Version | Content |
|--|---|
| Zero Draft (31 January 2018) Paragraph 26 | Responses are most effective when they actively engage those they are intended to protect and assist. National authorities, UNHCR, and other relevant stakeholders will continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable refugees and host communities to assess their own needs and help to design appropriate responses |
| Draft One (9 March 2018) Paragraph 31 | In recognition of the fact that responses are most effective when they actively engage those they are intended to protect and assist, national authorities, UNHCR, and other relevant stakeholders will continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable refugees and host communities to assess their needs and help to design appropriate responses |
| Draft Two (30 April 2018) Paragraph 35 | In recognition of the fact that responses are most effective when they actively engage those they are intended to protect |

| | |
|--|--|
| | and assist, relevant actors will, wherever possible, continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable refugees and host communities to help design appropriate responses |
| Final Draft (26 June 2018) Paragraph 34 | Responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist. Relevant actors will, wherever possible, continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable refugees and host community members to assist in designing appropriate, accessible and inclusive responses |

Source: Milner et al., 2022, p.18

The progression of the drafts and the inclusion of meaningful engagement in the final draft demonstrate that the interventions by refugees in the thematic discussions, despite being unwelcome, did result in advances for refugee participation (Rother & Steinhilper, 2019, p.250). The participation of refugees in the GCR reflects (4) Consultation. Furthermore, the demand by refugees for greater power in the regime and the success of the interventions in influencing the final draft is indicative of future changes in the level of participation; historically, citizens achieved (6) Partnership by wrestling power from the powerholders rather than the waiting for it to be given (Arnstein, 2019, p.31).

7.2.5 The Level of Refugee Participation at the GCR

While UNHCR committed to a multistakeholder approach in the development of the GCR, only three of the five thematic discussions included refugee representatives and only nine refugees spoke during these discussions. Furthermore, all were either members of the Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC) 2018 or the Network for Refugee Voices (NRV) (Domicelj & Gottardo, 2019; UNHCR, 2017 July; UNHCR, 2017 October; UNHCR, 2017 November). While powerholders invited some to participate, they discouraged the interventions of civil society

members (Rother & Steinhilper, 2019). Therefore, the level of participation at the thematic discussions was (4) Consultation. The GCR Gender Audit team was led by two academics and only involved five refugee women. While the gender audit report developed by the team did have some impact on the final thematic discussion, it is unclear whether that it is due to refugee involvement on the team. As such, the level of refugee participation in the gender audit was within the degrees of tokenism range (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2019). Finally, the final draft of the GCR includes a paragraph on the meaningful participation of refugees. The language of the document demonstrates that refugees had an impact on the final draft (Arnstein, 2019; Milner et al. 2022). This is indicative of (4) Consultation and future shifts in the level of refugee participation. Therefore, the overall level of participation of the GCR is (4) Consultation because powerholders—UNHCR and Member States—merely consulted refugees and gave them limited opportunities to participate and to influence the end product (Arnstein, 2019).

7.3 2019 Global Refugee Forum

The first Forum took place on December 16 (advance session), 17 and 18, 2019 in Geneva and “brought the international community together to demonstrate solidarity with the world’s refugees and the countries and communities that host them” (UNHCR, 2019-a). It was attended by some 3000 participants, including “four Heads of State or Government, more than 90 Officials at the Ministerial level, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, approximately 55 international organizations (including United Nations system entities and specialized agencies), representatives of more than 130 companies and foundations, approximately 250 civil society organizations and some 70 refugees” (UNHCR, 2019-a).

7.3.1 Refugee Participation in the Preparatory Meetings

Refugees participated in the preparatory sessions as well as the Forum itself. There were three preparatory meetings that took place between March and November 2019 and four informal briefing meetings (UNHCR, 2019-b). None of the chairs and speakers of the preparatory meetings was identified as refugees in the meeting agendas. Furthermore, none of the preparatory meetings' agenda items focused on refugee participation. However, two side events took place at the second and third preparatory meetings, respectively: "With Refugees: Inclusive Implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees" and "With Refugees: Recommendations for the Global Refugee Forum" (UNHCR, 2019-b). The former was moderated by Mohammed Badran, a representative of the Global Refugee-led Network and a member of the NRV, and of the five speakers, two were refugee women (UNHCR, 2019 June). The latter was moderated by Anila Noor, a representative of the Global Refugee-led Network and a member of the NRV, and of the six speakers, two were refugees (UNHCR, 2019 November).

The participation of refugees was also not a topic in the informal briefings. Further, the informal meetings were led by Forum organisers and UNHCR employees and consultants, none of which was identified as refugees.

In sum, at the preparatory meetings refugees were only invited to participate at the side events that focused on refugee voices. As such, the level of participation is (4) Consultation because refugees were given the opportunity to present recommendations prior to the Forum. However, their participation was limited to side events wherein they remained the minority among the speakers.

7.3.2 The Forum Gender Audit

All of the preparatory meetings of the Forum were audited by a gender audit team. The team prepared reports based on their observations and made recommendations for the Forum. The gender audit team consisted of two academics and five refugees, some of which had also been involved in the GCR gender audit. The gender audit of the first preparatory meeting was conducted by two refugee women: Shaza Al Rihawi (Syria) and Foni Joyce (South Sudan). The audit of the second preparatory meeting was conducted by three refugee women: Apajok Biar (South Sudan), Shaza Al Rihawi (Syria), and Noor Azizah (Rohingya/Burma), and three academics: Linda Bartolomei, Eileen Pittaway and Effie Mitchell (UNHCR Geneva, 2019).

The audit report for the second preparatory meeting determined that “in all meetings there was a very strong consensus on the importance of refugee participation from the local level through to decision-making at the very highest levels” (UNHCR Geneva, 2019, p.3). Further, the statements of refugee participants and refugee networks along with other NGOs “all emphasised the importance of ensuring that refugee women and girls were equally represented in all decision-making fora, however the majority of interventions by States were gender blind” (UNHCR Geneva, 2019, p.3). One of the recommendations of the gender audit was to increase the representation of women in the panels (UNHCR Geneva, 2019, p.2). This was taken into consideration and at the Forum, 58% of refugee speakers and moderators were women (UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019).

Compared to the gender audit of the GCR, the audit of the preparatory meetings not only involved refugees but also was conducted by refugees. This gender audit was indicative of (6) Partnership because the academics and the refugees worked together as a team in conducting the audit. However, this partnership is not the result of UNHCR and Member States, the major powerholders, but the academics themselves. It is also important to note that some of the recommendations of the gender audit report did lead to change, because as will be discussed further, refugee men and women were equally represented as speakers at the Forum (Arnstein, 2019; UNHCR Geneva, 2019).

7.3.3 Refugee Participation in the Forum

During the three-day Forum, fifty-three refugees participated as speakers and moderators during the sessions, three of whom were speakers at more than one of the sessions. On Monday, December 16, during the advanced sessions, 33% (17) of the speakers' corner sessions, spotlight sessions, and special events included a refugee participating as a speaker or moderator. Of those, four had more than one refugee participating as a speaker or moderator. On Tuesday, December 17, 20% (4) of the speakers' corner and spotlight sessions included refugees participating as speakers. Of the Tuesday sessions, only one had more than one refugee speaker. On Wednesday, December 18, 36% (8) of the parallel sessions, speakers' corner and spotlight sessions included refugees that participated as speakers. Four of these sessions had more than one speaker who is a refugee. Each of the four plenary sessions occurring Tuesday and Wednesday had a refugee participating as a speaker. Furthermore, during the Forum's closing remarks, five refugees spoke as part of a joint statement reflecting on outcomes of the Forum and the way forward. Non-refugees remained the majority of speakers and moderators, however, there was a noticeable

inclusion of refugees in the Forum sessions despite most only having one refugee on the panel (UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019).

Refugees were noticeably included in the sessions, meetings, events, etc. at the Global Refugee Forum. However, they remained in the minority and the panels that did include refugees rarely had more than one. This suggests (5) Placation because UNHCR responded to refugee demands for more meaningful representation by increasing the number of refugees speakers at the Forum and ensuring that refugee men and women were equally represented. However, refugees required financial support and administrative support to obtain the necessary travel documents to travel to the Forum in Geneva and return to their homebase (Harley & Hobbs, 2020, p.219). Refugees were selected and invited to attend just as the “worthy” poor are handpicked to participate on public bodies or decision-making boards. Furthermore, powerholders remain the majority on the panels, sessions, meetings, etc. and thus, just like the have-not citizen on the community boards, they can easily be outmaneuvered by the powerholders in the majority (Arnstein, 2019, p.29; UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019).

7.3.4 Member States and Refugee Delegates

During the Forum, there was greater support for meaningful refugee participation from Member States. For example, a Refugee Advisor, Mustafa Alio, was an active member of Canada’s delegation because of recommendations from refugee advocates in Canada. Alio had been granted asylum in Canada in 2014 and was granted permanent residency in 2018. He had previously attended many international refugee conferences as an observer; however, he had never been granted equal status with global policy decision-makers. At the Forum, Alio not only

accompanied the Minister of Immigration, Marco Mendicino, to deliver Canada's plenary address but also participated in strategy meetings of the delegation and bilateral meetings with other actors (Milner et al., 2022, p.23). When discussing the experience, Alio stated: "It's a huge responsibility to be representing other refugees. I didn't want to be a token" (Keung, 2020). Alio offered recommendations based on his experience and worked to be critical in a constructive way during his participation. He also stated that he hoped other Member States saw the value of his participation and would take steps to include refugees in their delegations (Keung, 2020). As a result of this successful partnership, Canada along with the other largest donors to UNHCR, the US and Germany, have committed to including refugees as members of their delegations at future UNHCR meetings (Milner et al., 2022, p.2).

The inclusion of a refugee in a Member State delegation is both suggestive of (5) Placation and of (6) Partnership. Alio remained the only refugee on the delegation, as such his suggestions and recommendations could easily be outmaneuvered by the other Canadian delegates which is indicative of (5) Placation. However, he was also seated next to Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino and Leslie Norton, the Canadian Ambassador to the UN, at the Global Refugee Forum. This is demonstrative of how he was accorded equal standing with the most important delegates of a State who that is a major donor to UNHCR which is indicative of (6) Partnership. Furthermore, he is a leader among the refugee community in Canada and had support beyond the powerholder, the Government of Canada. Lastly, as demonstrated by Canada's commitment to having a refugee delegate at all future UNHCR meetings, he had a positive and lasting impact on the Canadian delegation and other Member State delegations in attendance (Arnstein, 2019; Keung, 2020; Milner et al., 2022).

7.3.5 The Level of Participation at the Global Refugee Forum

Refugees did not participate as speakers or moderators in the main preparatory sessions and information meetings. Furthermore, while refugees were given the opportunity to participate in side-events that focused on the inclusion of refugee voices, they remained a minority at the events (UNHCR, 2019-b; UNHCR, 2019 June; UNHCR, 2019 November). Therefore, the level of participation at the preparatory meetings is (4) Consultation. The gender audit team was led by academics and the audits were conducted by academics and refugees. Further, the plenary meetings gender audit report recommended including more women on the speakers' panels and as a result at the Forum 58% of the speakers were women. This demonstrates that the recommendations of the gender audit team had an impact on the end product (UNHCR Geneva, 2019; UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019). Therefore, the level of participation in the gender audit is (6) Partnership. At the Forum itself, refugees were more visible, and this is highlighted by the fact that refugees opened and closed the Forum. Further, the discussions of meaningful participation were more prominent, as demonstrated by the spotlight session on refugee voices during the Forum. However, only 2% of Forum participants were refugees and how these refugees were selected is unclear (UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019). There is little indication that the members of the refugee communities elected and chose who would represent them at the Forum; rather it seems many of the refugees were selected by powerholders, in part because they required support to travel to Geneva (Ferris & Donato, 2019, p.101). As such, the level of refugee participation during the three-day event is (5) Placation. Finally, Mustapha Alio, a refugee, attended the Forum as a Canadian delegate which is both suggestive of (5) Placation and of (6) Partnership because he remained a minority on the

delegation, but he was also given the opportunity to meaningfully participate as a member of a significant powerholder in the regime (Keung, 2020; Milner et al., 2022). Therefore, while there were some elements of (4) Consultation and (6) Partnership, overall, I believe the level of participation at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum according to Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation is (5) Placation (Arnstein, 2019). This is a positive step forward because it demonstrates greater acceptance and recognition by powerholders of the importance of refugee participation, but more action must be taken because it remains limited and unmeaningful.

7.4 Progression of Participation

In analysing the refugee participation of the New York Declaration 2016, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) 2018 and the 2019 Global Refugee Forum using Arnstein's framework, I argue that to some extent refugee participation has progressed in the international refugee regime since 2015.

First, I believe that the level of refugee participation at the New York Declaration is (1) Manipulation. Refugees at the 2016 NGO-UNHCR Consultation were given opportunities to speak but were not given equal support and were patronised by powerholders. Refugees did not participate in the drafting of the Declaration and there is no reference to meaningful refugee participation in the Declaration. Finally, Badran, a refugee who gave a statement to the United Nations General Assembly on the day of the Declaration's adoption, was manipulated into thinking it would have an impact on the final draft (Ferris & Donato, 2019; Lenette et al., 2019; Milner et al., 2022; United Nations General Assembly, 2016).

Second, I believe that the level of participation at the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is (4) Consultation. Refugees were invited to the thematic discussions during the GCR development process because of the commitment to the multi-stakeholder approach. However, the powerholders created limited space for participation. It was the refugee participants and the refugee-led civil society groups like the NRV that carved out space for themselves and rejected being tokenised that led to more meaningful participation. As a result of their efforts, the GCR includes references to meaningful refugee participation (Domicelj & Gottardo, 2019; Milner et al., 2022; Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2019; Rother & Steinhilper, 2019; UNHCR, 2017 July; UNHCR, 2017 October; UNHCR, 2017 November).

Finally, I believe that the level of participation at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum is (5) Placation. Refugees opened and closed the Forum, and made recommendations and spoke throughout the plenary, high-level dialogues, spotlight sessions, and speakers' corner. Further, 76% of refugee attendees participated as speakers or moderators at least once during the Forum (UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019). There was also greater discussion and support for meaningful participation as demonstrated by the Canadian delegation's inclusion of a refugee delegate. However, refugees made up only 2% of the 3000 participants at the Forum and many required the support of powerholders to participate because of barriers such as inaccessibility (Keung, 2020; Milner et al., 2022; UNHCR Geneva, 2019; UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019; UNHCR, 2019-b; UNHCR, 2019 June; UNHCR, 2019 November).

Therefore, the level of refugee participation has increased to some extent but there are still steps that need to be taken by powerholders to ensure that all refugee participation is meaningful and to reach the levels of Degrees of Citizen Power.

8 Recommendations

Meaningful participation of refugees has progressed since 2015. There is still a long way to go, however, before it is fully implemented, and refugees have power in global level decision-making and planning in the international refugee regime. As such, I suggest the following to continue this progression.

8.1 Refugee Delegates on State Delegations

I recommend that all UNHCR Member States include a refugee representative within their delegation to all international refugee regime meetings. This recommendation reflects the commitments that have been made by the top UNHCR donors: Canada, the United States and Germany (Milner et al., 2022, p.2). (6) Partnership is achieved by redistributing power between citizens and powerholders (Arnstein, 2019, p.30). Therefore, by including refugees in State delegations, States and refugees can work together to make decisions in the regime. However, for this partnership to be meaningful, the refugee delegates need to not only be present at the table with the other State Delegates but also be involved in setting Member States' priorities and agendas prior to official meetings (Milner, 2021). Lastly, this partnership would work best if the refugee delegate was selected by the refugee community rather than the State to ensure that they

are representatives of the community and thus, accountable to them rather than the State (Arnstein, 2019).

8.2 Refugee Delegation

Not all State delegations are safe locations for meaningful refugee participation and refugees risk being tokenised. Therefore, I recommend that a multinational refugee delegation be established. This delegation should have the same supports and rights of a State delegation in the international refugee regime, including voting rights. For refugee participation to be meaningful, they cannot be solely relevant stakeholders, but powerholders in the international refugee regime.

8.3 UNHCR-Refugee Partnership at the Global Refugee Forum

The Global Refugee Forum presents a significant opportunity for partnership between refugees and UNHCR. Therefore, I recommend that the planning and organising of the Forum occurs in partnership with refugees. To ensure the meaningful participation of refugees at the Forum, they need to be included at all stages of planning and decision-making at both the formal and informal table. The meaningful participation of refugees would give more legitimacy to the discussions and decisions at the Forum and would help to establish meaningful refugee participation as a norm in all areas of the international refugee regime (Milner, 2021). Therefore, refugees need to not only be on the agenda but also included in the setting of the agenda.

8.4 Hosting the Global Refugee Forum in a Refugee Host Country

Finally, a significant barrier to participation is access. Therefore, I recommend that future Global Refugee Forums be hosted in a refugee host-country instead of Geneva. Refugees would be less dependent on UNHCR and other powerholders to obtain the necessary funds and documents to

travel to the Forum (Ferris & Donato, 2019, p.101). By reducing this significant barrier in addition to including refugees in the planning, decision-making and hosting of the event alongside UNHCR, the number of refugee participants and the level of the participation would increase.

9 Conclusion

This paper sought to determine the extent to which the level of refugee participation had progressed from the New York Declaration to the Global Refugee Forum. Using Arnstein's theoretical framework, I analysed academic articles and primary sources such as UNHCR documents to determine the level of refugee participation at the New York Declaration, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the 2019 Forum. As previously discussed, the level of refugee participation of the New York Declaration is (1) Manipulation, the Global Compact on Refugees is (4) Consultation and the Global Refugee Forum is (5) Placation. Therefore, I argue that the level of refugee participation in the international refugee regime has progressed to some extent since 2015.

Powerholders have increasingly become more aware of the importance of refugee participation and recognise the need to include them in decision-making. During the New York Declaration, powerholders only included a refugee when it was being adopted and manipulated refugees rather than engaging them meaningfully. Whereas, at the 2019 Forum UNHCR worked to include refugees especially in the plenary sessions and created space for refugees to offer recommendations. Furthermore, now three powerholders have pledged to include a refugee on their delegations when attending meetings and events in the international refugee regime (Milner

et al., 2022; UNHCR & Global Refugee Forum, 2019). It is important to recognise the change in the level of participation that has occurred in a short period of time. However, refugees remain excluded from important discussions and decisions regarding their wellbeing. Meaningful refugee participation can increase the legitimacy of the international refugee regime governance, diminish the gap between powerholders and refugees by empowering them, and bring expert first-hand knowledge to the decisions making table (Arnstein, 2019; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Milner, 2021). Therefore, we must work hard toward and have hope to create a future where it is the norm.

To continue this progress, I recommend that (1) all UNHCR Member States include a refugee representative within their delegations; (2) a refugee delegation be created; (3) the planning and organising of the Forum occur in partnership with refugees and; (4) hosting future Global Refugee Forum in a refugee host country.

Refugees have become recognised as relevant stakeholders in the international refugee regime. But this regime is antiquated and requires change. To bring the regime into the future, refugees must become powerholders.

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