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**UNHCR's coordination efforts to measure the  
impact arising from hosting, protecting and  
assisting refugees***Summary*

This paper provides an update on UNHCR's work in coordinating efforts to measure the impact arising from hosting, protecting and assisting refugees. It summarizes the progress made since the oral update presented to the Standing Committee in June 2018. The paper outlines the progress made to date, the relevance of this initiative to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and its potential contribution to improving data and evidence in refugee situations.

## Contents

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction .....	1-3	3
II. Advancing the process of measuring impact and contributions .....	4-5	3
III. Progress made to date.....	6-12	4
IV. Conclusion .....	13	5

## I. Introduction

1. The total number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons now exceeds 68 million. This figure should be seen in relation to the modest progress secured in advancing solutions for the displaced and the protracted nature of many situations. Refugee host countries have long drawn attention to the lack of recognition given to their contributions to addressing the consequences of forced displacement and to the inequitable balance of burden- and responsibility-sharing by the international community.

2. This paper highlights UNHCR's efforts to respond to the request by United Nations Member States in December 2017 to coordinate an effort to measure the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees.<sup>1</sup> It also sets out the approach being taken in the context of the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR), which was affirmed by the General Assembly in December 2018.

3. UNHCR has sought to develop an approach that is supportive of the GCR and its aim to address the gaps in international burden- and responsibility-sharing. An initial departure point was the need to inform the process and the discussion with empirical data and evidence. To that end, UNHCR sought the technical support of the World Bank Group to devise options and methodologies to capture the contributions of, and measure the impact on, refugee host countries. It also enlisted the support of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to record official development assistance (ODA) granted by donors specifically for refugees in host countries. Analysis of the resulting data was intended to inform the design of a metric that could highlight specific gaps where greater and wider international support and cooperation was required.

## II. Advancing the process of measuring impact and contributions

4. The initial conceptualization of the approach outlined above drew upon an assessment of previous analytical work undertaken of the costs and impact associated with refugee situations. It also reviewed the participation and engagement of States and international organizations and how both constituencies could be most practically engaged. From that exercise, a number of important conclusions were drawn. Firstly, data even on the key macro-variables (size of the refugee population proportionate to the demography of the host country, the socio-economic profile of the refugees, and the development trends and conditions prior to the refugee arrivals) was often partial. Secondly, most of the existing studies of costs and impact concentrated on particular sectors or refugee communities and were insufficiently comprehensive or representative. Thirdly, costs and expenditure were found to evolve over time, especially in protracted refugee situations. The high levels of expenditure experienced during the emergency phase are generally succeeded by lower costs as the situation recovers from the initial shocks and as a consequence of policy choices. Fourthly, the collection of data and evidence by national institutions and international organizations on the socio-economic impact associated with refugee situations was neither systematic nor consistent. Paragraphs 45-48 of the GCR address the importance of data and evidence.

5. Following internal reflections and exchanges with technical counterparts, UNHCR proposed that the process of assessing both the impact and costs to refugee host countries should be pursued with interested States on a voluntary basis. UNHCR outlined its recommendations for the way forward in an oral update prepared for the Standing Committee in May 2018. It presented the outcome of discussions with the OECD on the design and commissioning of a first ever survey of ODA assistance specifically for refugee situations

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<sup>1</sup> See A/RES/72/150, para 20, which requests UNHCR to “coordinate an effort to measure the impact arising from hosting, protecting and assisting refugees, with a view to assessing gaps in international cooperation and promoting burden- and- responsibility sharing that is more equitable and sustainable, and to begin reporting on the results to Member States in 2018”.

from members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). UNHCR also presented initial ideas developed with the World Bank on the holding of a series of participatory workshops to devise suitable methodologies for measuring costs and impact. More elaborated presentations of both of these initiatives, including the results of the OECD's first survey, were the subject of a joint UNHCR, World Bank and OECD briefing to States and other key stakeholders in December 2018.

### III. Progress made to-date

6. With the aim of reaching consensus on common methodologies to measure the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees, UNHCR organized two workshops in February and April 2019 with the technical support of the World Bank. Participants included representatives from a range of States (both refugee host and donor countries) drawn from Geneva-based missions and key capitals. The objective of these workshops was to develop a common approach and agree on the applicable systems for measuring impact. Particular emphasis was placed on a participatory process to jointly develop the methodologies.

7. With respect to the overall strategy underpinning the process, it was recognized that any methodology adopted would (i) rest on a set of assumptions and agreed approaches, and (ii) that it would need to use proxies and rely on incomplete data sets. It was not the intention to produce the perfect methodology, particularly in the absence of comprehensive data sets. As such, it was further acknowledged that the approach and methodology would need to be iterative, reviewed and improved over time. Nevertheless, participants committed themselves to the objective of delivering a first report before the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) on 17-18 December 2019.

8. During the first workshop held in Geneva from 12 to 13 February 2019, participants undertook a detailed review of the main identifiable contributions and impacts of host countries. The discussions determined that they could be broadly divided into the following areas: (i) service delivery, including health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene, and energy; (ii) economic activity, including economic growth, unemployment, jobs, prices of goods and housing; (iii) social cohesion, security and environmental impacts; and (iv) direct contributions of the host country, such as land donations, free electricity, etc. Participants concluded that the scope of the measuring impact exercise could comprise:

- Contributions of the host countries (excluding those supported through donor contributions), defined as additional fiscal costs (including systems to mitigate broader economic/social costs) attributable only to the presence of refugees (excluding for instance, the broader costs of a neighbouring conflict or those caused or potentially mitigated by host government policies).
- Areas/sectors of highest impact, initially focusing on service delivery sectors beginning with education and health, with the objective of informing the discussions on burden- and responsibility-sharing at the Global Refugee Forum.

9. The second workshop, which took place from 25 to 26 April 2019, focused initially on the two alternative approaches aimed at estimating the fiscal costs of refugee needs related to the delivery of services, such as health and education, and potentially water, sanitation, energy and social safety nets. The two approaches are both premised on national systems delivering service. They comprise (i) an average or per capita cost approach and (ii) a detailed or needs-based cost approach. It was noted that the average cost approach relies on the availability of budget data and has the advantage of being relatively straightforward. However, the drawback is that it may not take into account the additional needs of refugees.

10. The needs-based approach requires information from a detailed assessment to estimate the additional costs above and beyond what national systems bear for host country populations. Beyond fiscal costs, it was observed that this would also require an assessment of capital investment, impact assessments of refugees on labour, housing and other markets, the environment, social cohesion and security. Attention was also drawn to the

comprehensive nature of the data required, the timelines for such an exercise, the establishment of a counterfactual (i.e. what would have happened had there been no refugee arrivals), and a strategy to attribute cause and effect.

11. Participants concluded that in the interest of advancing the objectives for the measuring impact process as foreseen in paragraphs 48 and 103 of the GCR, it would be feasible to work on parallel tracks, with distinct purposes and timelines:

- To start informing discussions on how to improve financing the global public good, States would review fiscal costs and revenues for different sectors, following the per capita or average cost approach, identify available data and, on that basis, reconvene in September 2019 to discuss the possible implications of the findings and agree on a strategy for sharing them in the context of the Global Refugee Forum.
- To start accounting for unmet needs and to help enhance the allocation and channelling of resources, States would explore the use of the same methodological approach to assess what it would take to fully include refugee populations in national systems. The findings would be discussed in September, with careful consideration of the implications and discussions on communicating the findings.
- To start informing policy discussions at the country level, a subset of volunteer refugee-host States could decide to launch detailed impact assessments, which would likely be a multi-year effort.

12. Participants agreed to schedule a further workshop in September 2019 to review the emerging findings and determine the elements for sharing in the context of the Global Refugee Forum. Technical documents prepared by the World Bank in its support role were subsequently distributed to States to guide the costing exercise. In the interim, a brief stocktaking exercise is planned for June 2019.

## **IV. Conclusion**

13. As has been evidenced from the outset of the process, measuring the impact and costs associated with hosting, protecting and assisting refugees is a complex exercise. It is made especially challenging by the absence of accurate data and statistics capturing all contributions (humanitarian assistance, development assistance, and non-governmental and private sector contributions) to a given refugee situation. To date, UNHCR considers that useful progress has been made in (i) building a broader understanding of the technical and analytical tools and approaches required to measure the impact and costs on host countries, (ii) developing agreed methodologies that can be applied in different refugee situations to identify key areas of costs and to conduct a more detailed assessment of impact, and (iii) establishing the basis upon which a preliminary report on the exercise can be shared in the context of the Global Refugee Forum. UNHCR will continue to keep States informed of the progress being made.

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