REFUGEE COORDINATION MODEL

UPDATED GUIDANCE

October 2024

Guidance for joined-up action for refugees and their hosts

This 2024 guidance contains updated information regarding the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) and ways to forge complementary partnerships in refugee responses based on capacity, expertise and predictability. It also includes links to tools and additional resources to assist operations – the complete repository is available on the

RCM guidance website

Cover photograph:

Relief item kits are distributed to newly arrived Sudanese refugees at the Madjigilta site in Chad's Ouaddaï region, on the border with Sudan.
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https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/rcm/

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FOREWORD

What does accountable, inclusive, and transparent coordination look like?

That was the animating question for UNHCR and all our partners as we worked, together, to update our guidance on how to respond to refugee emergencies, in an effective and collaborative manner. This Refugee Coordination Model guidance is the product of that work.

The humanitarian landscape has changed considerably since 2019. Forced displacement has increased in scale – more people are displaced than ever – and in complexity: conflicts last longer, the effects of climate change have become more pronounced, and solutions to displacement are few and far between.

How we respond to humanitarian crises has also changed – it is no longer the remit of humanitarian actors alone. To respond effectively today means bringing together all stakeholders – national and local authorities, donor partners, civil society, the private sector, development and peace actors, academia, the UN, refugees, everyone – and recognizing their distinct though complementary roles.

Only by acting in concert can we ensure that collective efforts not only meet the most urgent needs, but that these efforts are sustainable and serve to build refugees' self-reliance so they can contribute to the communities that host them. Effective coordination requires that refugees, and their hosts, play an integral part in the process, and that they be empowered to make decisions that shape their lives.

This updated coordination model enables us to achieve that, from the initial phases of a refugee emergency to longer-term, solutions-oriented programming. This update was guided by the need to strike a balance between predictability and flexibility. Coordination cannot be one-size-fits-all. It must take into account local needs and allow for context-specific responses that respect and strengthen local coordination mechanisms.

The Refugee Coordination Model also aligns with and complements broader UN reforms. It will strengthen the coherence between development coordination and refugee response, including by ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities.

As we move forward, let us remain committed to upholding the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people. Together, we will continue to build a more inclusive and resilient future for all.

Filippo Grandi
UN High Commissioner for Refugees

October 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Updated RCM guidance: a comprehensive approach to refugee coordination

Coordination is at the heart of UNHCR's mandate and key to mobilizing support in pursuit of protection and solutions for refugees. For over a decade, the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) has provided the blueprint for UNHCR and inter-agency partners to support governments in protecting and assisting refugees worldwide. The 2024 updated RCM guidance builds on previous iterations and addresses recent developments in the inter-agency landscape.

UNHCR has exercised leadership and coordination responsibilities in refugee situations for decades. However, it was not until 2013, with the introduction of the RCM, that the organization developed a model ensuring accountable, inclusive, predictable and transparent coordination in responding to refugee situations. The RCM articulates the standard elements of coordination within these settings and underscores the importance of inclusive and transparent leadership.

In 2019, several developments warranted the issuance of further guidance. Amongst these developments were the General Assembly's affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in 2018 and the positive experiences in adapting the RCM to a range of situations, including mixed refugee and IDP emergencies, and movements involving refugees and migrants.

The 2024 update comes at a time of profound transformation affecting not only UNHCR but also the landscape in which we operate. It builds upon over 10 years of lessons learned from RCM implementation, which has emphasized that when approached correctly, coordination can significantly contribute to better outcomes for refugees and the communities hosting them.

The updated guidance highlights and speaks to key GCR principles, including the primacy of government leadership and the importance of promoting a whole-of-society approach. It also underscores the centrality of protection to the RCM. It emphasizes the importance of coherent humanitarian-development-peace approaches and sustainable programming, with UN agencies and partners working together to avert conflict, sustain peace, and foster development, ensuring that refugees are meaningfully engaged in all phases.
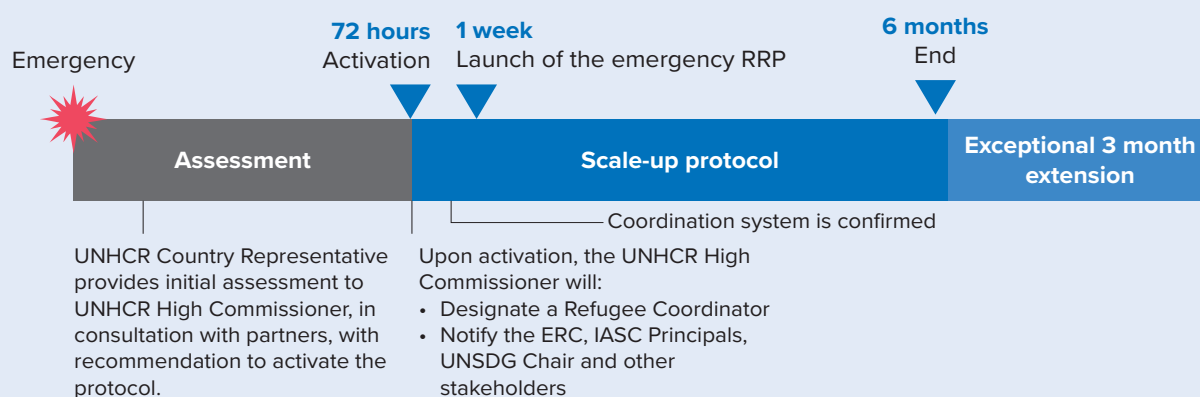
Jordan: Tawjihi (end of high school) students in Zaatari Camp. © UNHCR/Shawkat Alharfoush

2024 RCM guidance – what has changed?

1. It includes a new Refugee Emergency Response Scale-up Protocol

Emergencies demand swift action. The newly developed refugee protocol sets clear timelines and critical steps to develop a collective response from the outset of a refugee emergency. From appointing a Refugee Coordinator to establishing coordination structures within days, it streamlines the response and makes it more inclusive and predictable.

REFUGEE PROTOCOL TIMELINE

	72 hours Activation	**1 week** Launch of the emergency RRP		**6 months** End
Emergency				

Assessment	Scale-up protocol	Exceptional 3 month extension

Coordination system is confirmed

UNHCR Country Representative provides initial assessment to UNHCR High Commissioner, in consultation with partners, with recommendation to activate the protocol.

Upon activation, the UNHCR High Commissioner will:
- Designate a Refugee Coordinator
- Notify the ERC, IASC Principals, UNSDG Chair and other stakeholders

Response to the emergency starts immediately and does not wait for Protocol activation and, likewise, the response does not end with the Protocol expiration but rather continues as the context requires.

2. It strikes a better balance between predictability and flexibility

The 2024 RCM guidance still embraces adaptability and flexibility of the coordination mechanism to support the host government and host communities to respond to the refugee emergency. But it now does so within an explicit set of parameters, strengthening predictability and expanding inclusivity. Recognizing that no two crises are identical, it encourages leadership that responds contextually. Whether in sudden emergencies or protracted situations, the RCM provides thorough guidance that allows for nuanced, context-responsive approaches. This flexibility ensures that coordination remains effective, even as circumstances shift. For example, the guidance now includes a maximalist sample structure of the coordination architecture, a description of each sector working group, and suggested entities in order of preference for leading each group. Yet each operation is free to select and adapt among these options according to the needs, capacities, and medium- to long-term strategic plans in their context.

3. It encourages thinking about solutions from the start & sustainable programming

The updated guidance is aligned with the sustainable programming approach and builds on experience from putting the Global Compact on Refugees into operation. It promotes resilience, solutions from the start of an emergency, and inclusion, and it outlines steps to ensure that the coordination structure remains fit for purpose as the operational response changes.

Inclusion from the start remains paramount to avoiding the creation of parallel systems and subsistence programmes that foster dependency. The updated RCM guidance also promotes investments in emergency preparedness and early engagement with development actors, which results in better allocation of resources and better coordination of inter-agency efforts, helping with a smoother transition to a post-emergency programme.

4. It embraces more stakeholders, especially local ones

In the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees, the RCM guidance highlights the benefits of engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders beyond the traditional actors, including local governments, civil society, and private sector. It promotes the meaningful participation of refugees and host communities at all stages of the programme cycle, to collectively play pivotal roles to safeguard that no one is left behind. It supports the establishment of RCM local platforms, giving more space to municipalities, local communities, and refugee-led organizations to coordinate and optimize the local resources for a better and more localized refugee response.

5. It strengthens the humanitarian-development-peace connection

The updated guidance explains in more detail how the RCM interacts and works in complementarity with other coordination mechanisms. These include mixed IDP and refugee situations, mixed movements of refugees and migrants, and the Resident Coordinator and Development Coordination Office coordination structures. The RCM aligns with broader UN reforms. As the development landscape evolves, the RCM adapts to bridge the humanitarian-development divide, recognizing that sustainable solutions require holistic approaches. By integrating peace efforts, the RCM becomes a catalyst for positive change.

6. It includes a new curated website for practitioners with tools and resources

A publicly available RCM guidance website complements the updated guidance document. The website serves as a one-stop-shop for practical tools and templates for setting up and running a coordination system, including sample working group terms of reference and sector-specific technical guidance. As an inter-agency resource, the website is open to contributions from other agencies and future inter-agency-developed products that further detail best practices and agreed ways of working.

Conclusion

The 2024 RCM guidance reaffirms government leadership in refugee responses and UNHCR's mandated accountability for refugee coordination. We do so collaboratively—with governments, partners, RCs/HCs, refugees, host communities, and donors. Advocacy and resource mobilization are our tools through joint launches, improved funding tracking, and transparent reporting.

The 2024 RCM guidance is more than ink on paper. It sets out a recalibrated framework that is fit for purpose, agile and strategic, ensuring that the protection and assistance of refugees and the communities hosting them remain at the forefront of our collective efforts. As we navigate crises, adapt to climate realities, and engage diverse partners, the RCM remains our guide to coordinate refugee responses worldwide.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

Since its establishment, UNHCR has led and coordinated responses to refugee situations, in line with its mandate. This responsibility and related accountabilities were later reflected in the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), introduced in 2013 and updated in 2019 following the UN General Assembly adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in 2018. The GCR presents a comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) and programme of action for protection, solutions, meeting needs and supporting communities. Likewise, the RCM builds on governments' central role in leading refugee responses and provides UNHCR and partners with the blueprint to support government response coordination and implementation. It sets out partners' shared duty to protect and assist refugees within an integrated protection and solutions vision and it outlines roles and responsibilities to deliver collective results. The RCM allows for adaptation of leadership, coordination and planning approaches to various contexts.

Since the formalization of the RCM, refugee crises have become more multidimensional and protracted. They often overlap or occur simultaneously in contexts involving internally displaced people ('mixed situations'), host communities and refugee returnees, or can take place within mixed movements of refugees and migrants. Moreover, the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation have emerged as factors that exacerbate refugee needs and complicate return conditions. Addressing these impacts through investment in climate resilience, community-based preparedness measures and environmentally sustainable responses are increasingly crucial in managing refugee crises.

The inter-agency landscape has also been evolving, with reforms to the UN Development System, including the reinvigorated, empowered and impartial RC system, and to the UN peace and security pillar. These reforms seek coherent action across the system, with UN agencies and partners working through humanitarian-development-peace coopera-

tion to avert conflict, sustain peace and foster development. UN entity representatives, including UNHCR's, are expected to work towards the common goals articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and through UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (Cooperation Frameworks).

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) has given new impetus to the global search for solutions for refugees and bolstered national ownership. The GCR recognizes the leadership of the host government and the work of local authorities, community leaders and traditional community governance institutions, who are often the first responders to large-scale refugee situations and will be in place over the long-term. The GCR recognizes the critical role of civil society organizations, including those that are led by refugees, women, youth or persons with disabilities, in assessing community strengths and needs, inclusive and accessible planning and programme implementation, and capacity development, as applicable.

The GCR has also highlighted UNHCR's catalytic and supportive role in contributing to the task of all States and other stakeholders to mobilize support for more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. The international community has accrued experience and examples of good practice applying the GCR over the years, including through pledges aimed at advancing the GCR objectives. Refugee response interventions are increasingly extending beyond humanitarian action to foster resilience and engagement that delivers sustainable solutions, prompting the early involvement of development actors and the broader array of stakeholders committed to the GCR. This includes but is not limited to international organizations within and outside the UN system, as well as local and national actors.[1]

Within this context, a recalibrated RCM will ensure it remains fit for purpose, agile and strategic in its approach to protect and assist refugees. This updated guidance:

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1.   As per the GCR, stakeholders include: the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; other humanitarian and development actors; international and regional financial institutions; regional organizations; local authorities; civil society, faith-based, and refugee-led organizations; academics and other experts; the private sector; host community members and refugees themselves. See: UNHCR, Global Compact on Refugees Booklet, December 2018.

- reaffirms government leadership in refugee responses, as well as UNHCR's accountability and responsibility for refugee coordination, as defined in the UNHCR Statute and subsequent General Assembly Resolutions;
- recalls principles and approaches underpinning refugee responses, including the meaningful participation of refugees and host communities in all aspects of the response;
- introduces the Refugee Emergency Response Scale-up Protocol, which establishes high-level roles and procedures for a more predictable and inclusive collective emergency response from the outset of a refugee emergency;
- explains in more detail how the RCM interacts and works in complementarity with other coordination mechanisms and systems (including the IASC/cluste, development, mixed movements, etc.);
- incorporates IASC/cluster information on building resilience and solutions from the start for refugees, refugee returnees and their hosts, as well as outlines considerations for transitioning into other coordination and response models to support mid to longer-term responses; and
- includes links to a new **RCM guidance website** with detailed guidelines, templates and other resources to support UNHCR, inter-agency partners and others in implementing the RCM and refugee response planning, coordination and resource mobilization.

Uganda: WASH in Nakivale
© UNHCR/Esther Ruth Mbabazi

LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION ACCOUNTABILITIES

This section lays out the fundamental aspects of leadership and accountabilities in the RCM. It considers the evolution of the response from the emergency or scale-up phase to transition arrangements, while noting that every response is context-specific and can vary in duration. For this reason, associated coordination structures need to be flexible and fit for purpose.

State responsibility

States have the primary responsibility for: ensuring access to their territory for people fleeing conflict and persecution; protecting and assisting refugees; extending relevant rights to refugees in accordance with international human rights obligations; and creating conditions for refugees to attain a durable solution. While responsibilities lie with the central government, regional and local authorities have an important role to play as well. International cooperation in support of States receiving refugees is at the heart of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This has been reaffirmed in regional instruments and its importance is underscored in the GCR, which acknowledges the need for more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing for hosting and supporting the world's refugees, considering existing contributions and the differing capacities and resources among States.

The GCR calls for a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach to ensure that refugee and host communities are not left behind,[2] and for UNHCR to play a supportive and catalytic role.[3] This role includes increasing support to national systems and for the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees as well as engaging development actors in support of host governments from the onset of an emergency response. The specific refugee response leadership and coordination arrangements are determined with national ownership as the point of departure and in consultation with UN entities and international, national and local organizations. UNHCR and partners will work with national and local authorities to bolster their operational capacity and link up with State coordination mechanisms to avoid creating parallel systems for refugee assistance and service provision.

UNHCR will take an operational leadership role only when State authorities lack the capacity to lead the refugee response, and will mobilize support to develop the host State's capacity.

UNHCR's accountabilities and role in inter-agency refugee responses

UNHCR's mandate for refugees: Within the UN system[4] and governed by the General Assembly, UNHCR is the UN entity accountable for providing protection and assistance to, and seeking solutions for, refugees. This accountability begins from the time an individual needs international protection and lasts until they find a durable solution. UNHCR works with an array of stakeholders to protect and assist refugees, whether they live in urban or rural settings with host communities, in sites and settlements with IDPs and other populations affected by humanitarian crises, or in non-emergency situations. In its supervisory role, UNHCR is accountable for ensuring States' adherence to international instruments and standards for the protection of refugees and for strengthening State protection capacities and asylum systems.[5]

UNHCR's mandate includes leadership responsibilities in a refugee response. Based on the RCM, this leadership role is part of the responsibilities of the (Regional) Refugee Coordinator[6] who speaks on behalf of the High Commissioner for Refugees on matters pertaining to UNHCR's refugee mandate and leads the response coordination in support of State authorities of the refugee-hosting country or countries. The Refugee Coordinator for a specific refugee-hosting country is typically the UNHCR country representative, who closely engages with the Resident Coordinator (RC) or Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), when present, on

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2. The commitment to leaving no one behind is a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda.
3. UNHCR, Global Compact on Refugees Booklet, December 2018, paragraph 33.
4. UN General Assembly, "Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees", 14 December 1950, A/RES/428(V).
5. UNHCR, "UNHCR's supervisory responsibility", October 2002, ISSN 1020-7473.
6. For details on the distinct roles and responsibilities of a Regional Refugee Coordinator vs. a country-level Refugee Coordinator, please refer to their respective terms of reference on the RCM guidance website.

The Refugee Coordinator's responsibilities

Lead and coordinate all stages of a refugee response, from preparedness to solutions, in support of host governments and in accordance with nationally owned plans, in cooperation with inter-agency partners and the RC/HC, where present.

Lead advocacy on international refugee protection matters.

Widen the support base for refugees and host countries in line with the GCR and UN reforms.

Encourage co-coordination of sectors by partners, particularly local partners, that have the necessary capacity, expertise, and experience.

Ensure refugees (and other affected communities) are meaningfully participating at all stages of the response.

Ensure cross-cutting priorities and principled response approaches: Accountability to Affected People, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, localization, and more.

Plan and implement Refugee Response Plans (RRPs) with partners.

Contribute to mobilizing funds for the overall refugee response.

Regularly brief the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, UN Country Team / Humanitarian Country Team, donors and other refugee response plan stakeholders on progress and challenges.

overall refugee issues. In situations which include multiple refugee-hosting countries, the High Commissioner for Refugees designates a Regional Refugee Coordinator. This is generally the Director of the UNHCR Regional Bureau overseeing the affected countries; however, the High Commissioner can also make an ad hoc designation.

UNHCR and response partners will support national arrangements for the coordination of comprehensive refugee responses.[7] At the outset of a refugee emergency, including when the Refugee Emergency Response Scale-up Protocol is activated (see heading 3 below), UNHCR's expertise, multisectoral approach and operational capacity are critical in supporting governments to design and rapidly roll out the response,[8] provided the security situation permits, humanitarian access is ensured and adequate resources are available. Through the RCM, UNHCR is committed to establishing predictable, inclusive, collaborative, efficient and effective coordination grounded in partnerships that are complementary in terms of expertise and capacity and building on existing mechanisms, where appropriate. Crucially, this is informed through the meaningful engagement of refugees and host communities, to ensure partners assist them to best meet their needs.

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7. UNHCR, Global Compact on Refugees Booklet, December 2018, para. 21 on national arrangements: "Such efforts could support the development of a comprehensive plan under national leadership, in line with national policies and priorities, with the assistance of UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders as appropriate, setting out policy priorities; institutional and operational arrangements; requirements for support from the international community, including investment, financing, material and technical assistance; and solutions, including resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries, as well as voluntary repatriation."
8. In accordance with other General Assembly Resolutions and embedded in international treaty law, notably the 1951 Convention. See UNHCR, "Note on the Mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees and his Office", 2013.

Organizations representing civil society, including international and local NGOs and those led by refugees themselves, are key partners in the refugee coordination model, providing essential on-the-ground support, services, and advocacy. Their involvement ensures timely, effective responses, while amplifying refugee voices and driving community-centred approaches to protection, assistance and social inclusion.

UNHCR's accountabilities for coordinating inter-agency refugee responses, in collaboration with and in support of host governments, include[9]:

- **Preparedness:** Where there is the high risk of a refugee emergency, lead and coordinate necessary joint preparedness measures, scenario-based inter-agency contingency planning and other anticipatory actions.[10]

- **Needs assessments:** Coordinate joint participatory needs assessments and gap analyses across and within sectors, accounting for the views of people of different age, gender and diverse characteristics. These assessments should inform response strategies and priorities; targeting and prioritizing of assistance; advocacy; and fundraising for the refugee response.

- **Coordination:** Establish and co-lead coordination mechanisms with the government that are adapted to the context and required for the delivery of a response, in line with RCM structures.

- **Response planning, monitoring and resource mobilization:** Coordinate the development of a comprehensive inter-agency Refugee Response Plan (RRP) that is centred on a Protection and Solutions Strategy and objectives; monitor

progress and report on implementation and impact; raise the profile of the crisis through a common communications strategy that helps attract the necessary political, financial[11] and technical support, including through dissemination events; and track contributions to the RRP.

- **Promotion of protection mainstreaming across the refugee response:** Ensure protection remains central to the response and support all sectors to mainstream it, including by being accountable to affected people and by considering age, gender and diversity in all response activities.

- **Information management:** Establish or reinforce data and information management capacity, including through the contributions of other agencies, and anchor it in existing statistical and census mechanisms where possible. Ensure the development and dissemination of high-quality information products that use reliable data on populations, needs and the response.

- **Advocacy and information sharing:** Regularly engage, update and coordinate with the RC/HC and UNCT/HCT, where present, and ensure regular advocacy and information sharing with donors and government counterparts as well as refugees, affected host communities and the public at large – particularly regarding maintaining the protection space.

Core principles in RCM coordination

The RCM is underpinned by the following core principles:

Centrality of protection

Protection must be central to the RCM throughout all phases of the refugee response. The centrality of protection is articulated in the RCM through a comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy that underpins the Refugee Response Plan and its objectives.

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9. Where there are critical gaps in the refugee response, UNHCR will to the best of its abilities call on the government and engage relevant humanitarian partners, donors, and other stakeholders to mobilize the necessary resources and continue advocacy efforts to address these.

10. UNHCR, "Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response", 2023.

11. For new or rapidly deteriorating refugee situations, UN agencies may call upon the top UN official in the country to facilitate the release of allocations from pooled funds.

Protection mainstreaming

Protection principles must be incorporated in all aspects of the refugee response and across all sectors of intervention. Mainstreaming protection translates into reducing barriers and promoting meaningful access, also by considering the intersection of age, gender, and diversity in the design of assistance activities and services. It means to mitigate protection risks in the planning and delivery of assistance and services, to ensure safety and dignity of refugees and hosting communities of all ages, gender and diverse characteristics. It also means ensuring that the core principle of "do no harm" informs all interventions in the refugee response and that the protective impact of aid programming is maximized. Protection mainstreaming remains a shared ethical responsibility of all actors in the refugee response, in all sectors of intervention. In its role in the overall refugee response, particularly through the Protection Working Group, UNHCR can provide advice, guidance and support. See additional tools and resources on protection mainstreaming on the RCM guidance website.

Accountability to Affected People through community-based approaches and two-way communication

The RCM promotes participatory and community-based approaches to ensure that the response fully considers refugee and host communities' expressed needs and priorities, their agency and their capacity in line with accountability to affected people principles. Considering the intersection of age, gender, and diversity of affected people is critical. Meaningful participation and local leadership build a path to greater equity, effectiveness, and more sustainable and durable responses. In addition, the response should foresee systems to ensure two-way communication and modalities to gather feedback from individuals and communities. This can take multiple forms, e.g. group discussions, help desks, contact centres and digital tools, and it is key to ensuring that refugees and host communities' voices inform decision-making related to the humanitarian response. Often consultation requires adaptation or technical expertise when targeting specific groups, such as children or people with disabilities, but is nonetheless critical especially when the group represents a significant proportion of the population. See additional tools and resources on community-based approaches on the RCM guidance website.

Gender equality and women's empowerment

The RCM promotes the integration of gender equality measures across all sectors of the response, and the consistent use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data in analysis and programming. The equal participation in the response of refugee women and girls, as well as women-led organizations, including those led by refugee women, implies their inclusion in decision-making structures and is critical to building their capacity and resilience. See additional tools and resources on gender on the RCM guidance website.

Partnership

In accordance with UNHCR's commitment to the Principles of Partnership endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007, the organizations participating in the RCM should follow the principles of equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility, and complementarity.

Localization

A key feature of the RCM is to strengthen local institutional and response capacities and the meaningful, equitable and inclusive participation, representation and leadership of local actors in refugee coordination structures. National and local stakeholders,[12] including organizations led by forcibly displaced people,[13] are often the first responders in humanitarian emergencies and can provide protection, assistance and services including in areas where UNHCR and other partners have limited or no access. They are adept at working through collaborative humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) approaches and are key to promoting social support when international actors withdraw. RCM sector coordinators promote avenues for national and local stakeholders to access funding opportunities and for capacity sharing. See additional tools and resources on localization on the RCM guidance website.

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12. Including community-based organizations, civil society organizations, local authorities, municipalities, regional governments, local businesses, faith actors, and academic and philanthropic institutions.
13. UNHCR defines a refugee-led organization as an organization or group in which forcibly displaced people play a primary leadership role and whose stated objectives and activities are focused on responding to the needs of refugees and/or related communities.

Climate action

Many refugees and host communities live in situations that are exposed to hazardous weather events and harsh environmental conditions, exacerbated by changes in climate. When they lack the resources or are excluded from measures to adapt, withstand, and recover from adverse climate impacts, refugees face increased vulnerability, needs and protection concerns.

Response coordination should therefore incorporate prevention and preparedness measures to reduce and manage climate and environmental risks and the adverse effects of climate-related hazards. Considering the intersection of age, gender, and diversity of affected people is critical to assess the increased vulnerability, needs and protection concerns and to design prevention and preparedness measures as well as response accordingly.

Such disaster risk reduction measures may include strengthening community-based access to early warning systems and refugee and host communities' capacities and resilience. They also imply managing natural resources and reducing environmental pollution and impacts of humanitarian programmes, including carbon emissions.

RCM partners should advise and support governments to ensure the inclusion of refugees and host areas in climate adaptations plans, early warning systems, and early action protocols. Find more practical information in the climate action section of the toolbox and the Climate and Environmental Charter for Humanitarian Organizations.[14]

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14. Includes references and guidance on how to incorporate climate action considerations in emergency responses.

Ethiopia: Partner staff install solar streetlights donated by UNHCR © UNHCR/Diana Diaz

Whole-of-society approach

In line with the GCR, the RCM leverages a whole-of-society approach, including but not limited to:

- **promoting child and youth engagement**, fostering the agency of children and young people, including by engaging with them to design and implement their own initiatives and those led by response partners. Working with and for children and young people as agents of change and mainstreaming their meaningful engagement across the refugee response should be a commitment of all actors, in line with the GCR and other relevant guidelines;

- **working with faith-based organizations**[15] to promote peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities, given their role in addressing root causes of forced displacement, by supporting conflict prevention, reconciliation, peacebuilding and social cohesion. Faith-based organizations are often first-line responders and on site before, during and after an emergency, serving the most vulnerable in remote and hard-to-reach areas. What distinguishes them from other actors is their unique role in being rooted in and linked to faith communities and networks, locally and globally. With large and dedicated constituencies, they have the capacity to amplify key protection messages and to promote the acceptance of refugees;

- **encouraging engagement of sport-related actors and approaches**,[16] which can serve to improve meaningful participation, social cohesion, protection and development outcomes among displaced communities, with sport- and play-based activities having been used effectively to achieve outcomes in education, child protection, and psychological and social well-being. Sport actors can also be partners in advocacy, communications and fundraising, and they can be found in every country;

- **engaging with the private sector**[17] to bring a variety of resources and expertise to the table, including funding, in-kind support, technology and human capital. It can provide critical funding, through Refugee Response Plan (RRP) partners for example, to support refugee response efforts, from emergency relief to longer-term programmes that improve the livelihoods of refugees and develop markets and infrastructure in displacement-affected areas. The private sector can access cutting-edge technologies and expertise that can be applied to refugee response efforts. Technology companies can, for example, develop applications or platforms to connect refugees with critical resources, while logistics companies could help streamline aid delivery. Refugees may find private sector employment online, in the host country or in third countries, or become refugee entrepreneurs. Private sector engagement can also support refugee entrepreneurs, help strengthen the capacity of local organizations and communities to respond to the needs of refugees through training, mentorship and other forms of support. The private sector has the influence and reach to advocate policies that support refugees, raise awareness about the challenges that they face and promote solutions to address these challenges.

See additional tools and resources on the whole-of-society approach on the **RCM guidance website** .

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15. Faith-based organization (FBO) is a term used to describe a broad range of organizations influenced by faith, including religious and religion-based organizations/groups/networks; communities belonging to a place of religious worship; specialized religious institutions and religious social service agencies; and registered or unregistered non-profit institutions that have a religious character or mission.
16. UNHCR, Global Compact on Refugees Booklet, December 2018, para. 4; "the important role that sports [...] can play in social development, inclusion, cohesion, and well-being, particularly for refugee children (both boys and girls), adolescents and youth, as well as older persons and persons with disabilities".
17. This may include companies, chambers of commerce, private employment service providers, business incubators and others.

ACTIVATION OF A REFUGEE EMERGENCY RESPONSE SCALE-UP PROTOCOL

This updated RCM guidance introduces a Refugee Emergency Response Scale-up Protocol[18] (hereafter, the "Refugee Protocol"), which the High Commissioner for Refugees can activate to scale up an inter-agency response in crises that:

- are characterized by significant refugee flows to one or more hosting countries; or
- cause loss of life and/or other serious harm to, or significantly affect the rights or well-being of, refugees or refugee returnees, unless immediate action is taken; and
- where the existing capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver with relevant authorities, humanitarian and development actors, and civil society does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of a situation without contributing additional financial, human and material support.

Activation of the Refugee Protocol requires strengthening of the existing UNHCR-led coordination structures or establishing RCM mechanisms and tools where there are none, to ensure effective and partner-inclusive action in support of national authorities and current capacities. The Refugee Protocol calls for all relevant stakeholders to collectively respond, in line with the RCM and the GCR's whole-of-society approach. It is a time-bound measure that automatically expires after six months. In exceptional situations, an additional three-month extension can be considered when the gravity of the situation justifies the mobilization of system-wide capacities and resources beyond standard levels to respond to refugee and host community needs.

Upon the decision to activate the Refugee Protocol, the High Commissioner for Refugees designates a Refugee Coordinator and notifies the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), IASC Principals, the UNSDG Chair, and other relevant UN entities and stakeholders of the activation. Where multiple countries are affected, a Regional Refugee Coordinator will be designated with regional oversight.

Upon activation of the Refugee Protocol, the (Regional) Refugee Coordinator consults with relevant national authorities at the highest level, the RC/HC and with the members of the UNCT/HCT on effective ways to bolster operational capacity and build on existing coordination mechanisms, in line with the RCM. To lead the collective refugee response in support of national authorities, the (Regional) Refugee Coordinator establishes the coordination structure, including sector coordination arrangements; mobilizes partners with appropriate expertise, operational capacity and geographical presence; oversees the development of an emergency inter-agency Refugee Response Plan (RRP); and ensures meaningful participation of refugees and affected host communities in all stages of the response. Further responsibilities of the (Regional) Refugee Coordinator with regards to response principles, cross-cutting priorities, and upholding collective engagement are spelled out in the Refugee Protocol.

The expiration of the Refugee Protocol does not imply that the crisis it relates to has come to an end. It could indicate that an adequate coordination structure has been set up and that the inter-agency response has been scaled up and stabilized. The RCM and the (Regional) Refugee Response Plan (RRP) can be prolonged under the leadership of the (Regional) Refugee Coordinator, beyond the expiration of the Refugee Protocol.

The Refugee Protocol can be found on **RCM guidance website** and in Annex I below.

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18. In November 2018, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals endorsed Protocols on the Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation. The IASC Protocols underscore that agencies with a specific mandate are accountable for ensuring a robust, inclusive and effective response, and acknowledge UNHCR's mandated role to prepare, lead and coordinate refugee and returning refugee responses.

RCM COORDINATION STRUCTURE

The RCM coordination structure is flexible by design. It is intended to be adapted to the functional requirements and existing capacity of each context. The sample RCM structure below is a maximum design, with most contexts requiring far fewer working groups. Decisions to create sector working groups should be taken by the Refugee Coordinator in consultation with the Refugee Coordination Forum. The Refugee Coordinator should approach the government and other organizations to coordinate or co-coordinate the relevant sector working groups, taking capacity and impact into consideration.

The RCM structure can include regional, national and sub-national components, depending on context and needs of the response. Where a refugee emergency spans multiple countries, a regional-level forum may be appropriate to ensure overall coherence and strategic coordination. Country-level structures are put in place to work with government or line ministries to set and implement the overall country response strategy through key sectors.

REFUGEE COORDINATION MODEL SAMPLE STRUCTURE*
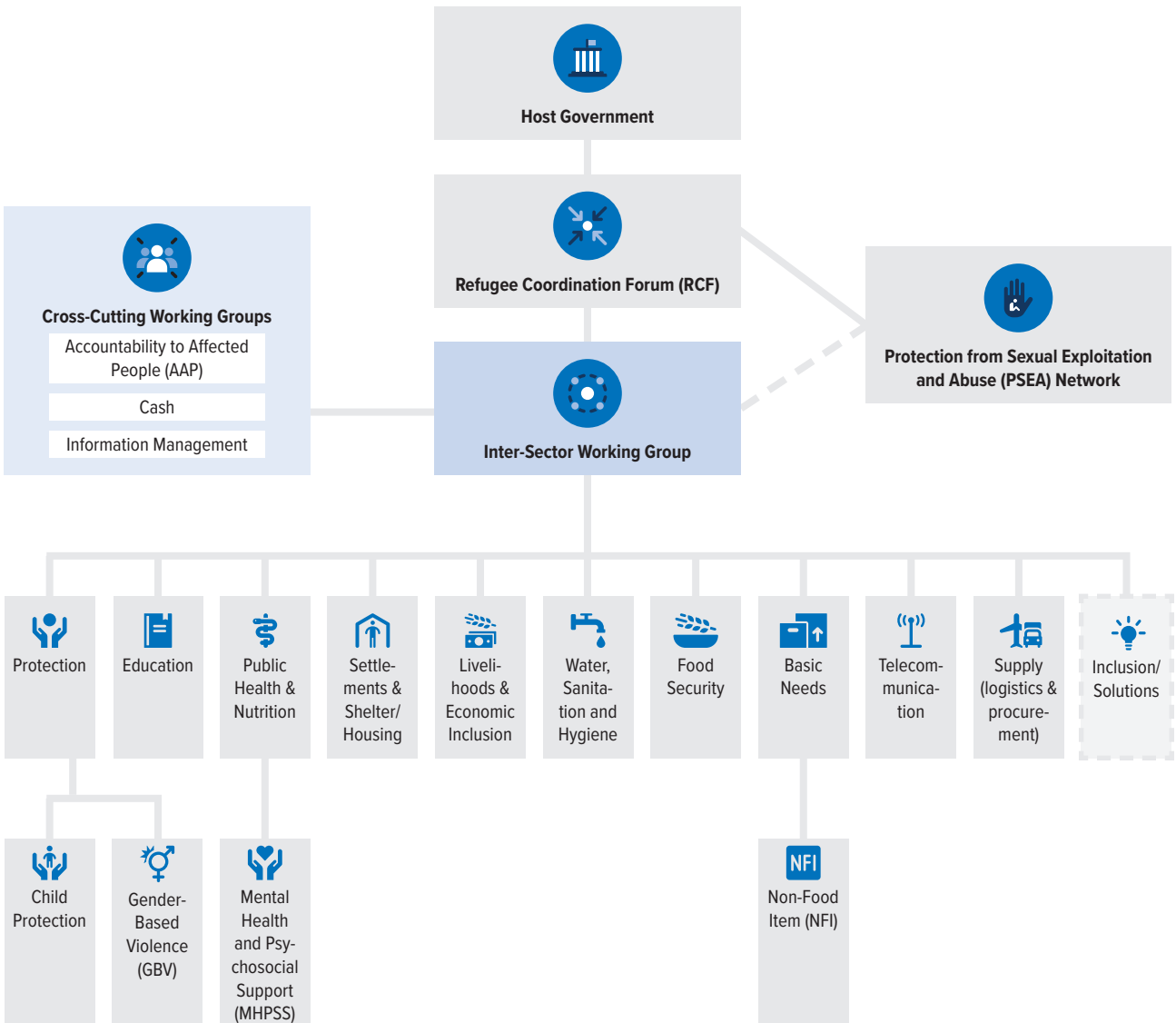
*Based on context, this structure can be expanded or streamlined to effectively address the needs of refugees.

In some situations, operations-oriented sub-national sector groups may be set up to implement the national working group strategies and to coordinate service provision close to the point of delivery. In principle, the sub-national working groups should be co-led by local authorities, engaging actors present in the area, and report to the national sector working groups. Alternatively, a geographically limited, multi-sectoral coordination group may be created that reports to the national Inter-Sector Working Group and looks to the national sector and technical working groups for guidance.

RCM working groups commit to including refugees, host communities and other relevant populations in the overall planning, coordination and implementation of the response.

Scope of the structure: The number of sector working groups created is determined by the context, refugee and host community needs, and operational priorities. The number created should be the minimum needed to ensure effective coordination, enhance complementarity and avoid duplication with existing coordination structures. The creation of working groups is needs-driven, response-oriented, firmly embedded in the Refugee Response Plan and endorsed by the Refugee Coordination Forum. Sector working groups that can be established under RCM, based on need and capacity, are: protection; public health and nutrition; education; settlement and shelter/housing; livelihoods and economic inclusion (LEI); water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); food security; basic needs; supply; and telecommunications. Carefully evaluate if there is coherence between the identified needs, response plan, coordination structure, and monitoring framework.

Working group membership: Sector working group membership is determined by operational presence (or intended presence) on the ground, complementarity of roles, comparative advantage and expertise. Members should have the technical capacity and willingness to contribute to the refugee response and activities, mainstream cross-cutting issues and commit to work cooperatively with other sectors to ensure an optimal and strategic use of available resources and share information on organizational resources.

This does not mean that participation is exclusive to large organizations with strong technical expertise. RCM sector working groups are inclusive and provide a forum where member organizations can benefit from capacity sharing, strengthening, and building.

Membership is inclusive of government representatives, specialized UN agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs and civil society organizations, including refugee-led organizations and other relevant actors as defined in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Ideally, national and international development and peace actors are involved in the RCM structure from the start of a response, as per the GCR and humanitarian-development-peace collaboration efforts.

Sector working groups provide a forum for technical experts on field-level implementation and where challenges and opportunities can be raised and addressed efficiently. While donors are not regular members of the sectoral working groups, they can be invited to dedicated sector working group meetings. Donors are also invited on an ad hoc basis to regular donor briefings organized by the Refugee Coordinator or other entities as part of the coordination structure and have access to working groups' meeting minutes and other information products. The Refugee Coordinator and the RCM structure work collaboratively with donors to find mechanisms to satisfy their information needs.

Sector working group core functions: Sector working groups provide coordination and technical guidance for operational response based on sector analysis, and they facilitate decision-making, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, and information sharing. They identify gaps and opportunities, increase operational efficiency, and build capacity, among other activities, harnessing the comparative advantage of each sector member and strengthening links with development actors. From the beginning of the response, refugees' socioeconomic inclusion and the strengthening of national systems are key considerations for all sectors. Sector functions are further elaborated on in each sector's terms of reference (ToRs) included in the tools and resources section of the **RCM guidance website**.

Working group facilitation: Where feasible, the government leads the coordination of all sector working groups through the relevant line ministry. The presence of a co-coordinating organization is envisioned for all sectors. UNHCR co-coordinates the Protection Working Group, including any sub-sector working groups in child protection or gender-based violence (GBV). The co-coordination of other sector working groups is based on partner presence and expertise on the ground, willingness to engage, and

global agreements. The government may prefer to co-coordinate the sector working groups, leaving the lead coordination role to another organization.

If coordination by the designated government authorities is not possible, the following alternative options can be considered, in order of priority, and based on expertise and capacity: a national NGO, international NGO, or UN entity. Where possible, a coordination/co-coordination team is preferred with the paired organizations selected according to the criteria above and with a view towards localization, sustainability and optimizing capacity sharing, strengthening, or building.

The national government, even if not able to take on coordination, must uphold its responsibilities towards refugees according to international law.

Sector coordinator obligations: Sector working group coordinators interact with each other through the Inter-Sector Working Group (see paragraph c below) and cross-cutting technical working groups or task forces and are accountable to the Refugee Coordinator (UNHCR Representative) and the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF). They mainstream protection, environmental considerations and address cross-cutting issues for collective benefit.

Sector structure review: Within 12 months of activating the Refugee Emergency Response Scale-up Protocol or setting up a refugee emergency response though the RCM, the Refugee Coordination Forum reassesses the overall coordination structure to ensure it remains fit for purpose i.e. coherent with the response being delivered and the remaining, or changed, needs. This may result in merging some working groups of interlinked sectors to improve overall effectiveness and speed of the response by "lightening" the structure or proposing options to responsibly transition coordination functions to other actors or structures. This assessment should include reference to progress against the objectives of the GCR, as relevant, and lessons learned and sharing of good practice among sectors. In protracted situations, the coordination structure is reassessed at regular intervals to ensure it is appropriate to the operational context and response and to avoid the proliferation of parallel systems.

Regional Refugee Coordination Forum (Regional RCF)

A regional-level coordination structure, the Regional Refugee Coordination Forum (Regional RCF), is envisaged if a refugee crisis encompasses several countries and requires a broader coordinated approach to protection, assistance and solutions. Serving as a strategic coordination and oversight forum, including for the development and review of regional RRPs, the Regional RCF provides direction, objectives and priorities for the refugee response; raises and advises on cross-country issues; and serves as an information-sharing space.

Regional RCF responsibilities include ensuring coherence and consistency of regional communications, reporting, advocacy and information management. Under the leadership of the Regional Refugee Coordinator, a Regional RCF is chaired by UNHCR and invites the participation of regional representatives of other UN agencies, including the regional DCO, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and relevant regional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society networks, associations, etc. including those led by refugees, that are involved in the refugee response in the concerned countries. As a strategic platform that takes a collaborative humanitarian-development-peace approach, it is open to donors, and development and peace actors.

Other regional sector or inter-sector working groups, or cross-cutting working groups or task forces, can also be considered by the Regional RCF on an exceptional basis, depending on the specifics of the crisis and response.

See sample terms of reference (ToRs) for the Regional Refugee Coordination Forum on the **RCM guidance website**.

Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF)

A country-level RCF is established as a high-level, national strategic coordination mechanism that provides strategic direction for the refugee response, including objectives, priorities and oversight for the refugee response, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. It advises on engagement and advocacy with relevant donors and development partners, and promotes response planning and resource mobilization efforts, including by engaging partners in the RRP development and review process and by providing guidance to the Inter-Sector Working

Group and cross-cutting technical working groups and task forces. The RCF is co-coordinated by the UNHCR Refugee Coordinator and the government and foresees the participation of other UN agencies and representatives of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, as well as relevant international and national NGOs and other civil society actors, including those led by refugees or stateless people, that are involved in the response. The RCF takes a collaborative humanitarian-development-peace approach, open to RC/RCOs, donors, development and peacebuilding actors to align actions, when feasible.

See sample ToRs for the Refugee Coordination Forum on the **RCM guidance website**.

Inter-Sector Working Group (ISWG)

The ISWG, coordinated by UNHCR with a govern-ment counterpart, ensures overall coherence of the refugee response, by creating a venue for intersec-toral coordination and enhancing intersectoral analysis and initiatives. Guided by the RCF, it consti-tutes the platform to coordinate the delivery of assistance, encourage synergies between sectors, and ensures that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. It convenes coordinators of all sectors and task forces and designated representatives from international and national NGO networks.

More concretely, the ISWG will:

- ensure protection mainstreaming by all sectors;
- ensure that cross-cutting priorities are considered by all sectors and that relevant task forces or working groups are established (see below section);
- address potential risks of sectoral duplications and gaps;
- discuss intersectoral operational challenges and ways to solve them;
- develop and implement common products, such as an RRP;
- identify advocacy areas, resource gaps and key messages and escalate critical issues to the RCF; and
- work towards durable solutions and refugee inclusion in national systems and services, in line with the GCR.

See sample ToRs for the Inter-Sector Working Group on the **RCM guidance website**.

Technical working groups and task forces for cross-cutting priorities

Technical (non-sector) working groups perform a service, such as providing technical advice and guidance, for the benefit of all sector working groups. Due to their intersectoral relevance, technical working groups sit under the ISWG.

A task force is a time-bound, task-oriented group that is created by a higher-level group to which it reports, such as a sector working group, the ISWG or RCF. Task force membership is open to those from the larger group with knowledge, experience or expertise relevant to the task force's work, and upon invitation to others based on their ability to contribute. A task force's workplan is endorsed and overseen by the higher-level group; final products are delivered to the higher-level group for endorsement or agreement by the group as a whole. Once tasks are completed, the task force dissolves.

Accountability to Affected People (AAP) Working Group

An AAP working group is often created under the ISWG to promote meaningful engagement and two-way communication with refugees and host communities with an age, gender and diversity inclusion component. It ensures mechanisms to regularly consult with and obtain feedback from refugees to include their inputs in the response strategy. The government, where possible, or a local or national partner, will co-coordi-nate with UNHCR on all AAP efforts to inform the response.

Depending on the context, AAP can be coordinated as part of the strategic Refugee Coordination Forum, or the ISWG or through a dedicated separate working group.

See sample ToRs on Accountability to Affected People Task Force and other tools and resources on the **RCM guidance website**.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Network

Humanitarian workers must uphold their responsibility to do no harm and are required to protect people affected by crises. Measures must be in place across all sectors to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse. In a refugee setting and within the RCM, UNHCR is accountable for establishing and co-coordinating a PSEA Network[19] (where one does not already exist) that will report directly to the Refugee Coordinator and Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) and closely coordinate with the ISWG to ensure that PSEA is integrated across the refugee response, taking into account existing coordination structures for PSEA in the country as applicable (please refer to Working Effectively with Existing Coordination Systems section). The PSEA Network is the primary body for technical-level coordination and oversight of PSEA activities.

> Over the past years, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) has been increasingly recognized as a priority cross-cutting issue within the humanitarian, development and peacekeeping sectors and the need for strong inter-agency coordination and clear leadership and accountability, highlighted through the UN system and IASC. These developments related to PSEA in the inter-agency landscape are important to consider, ensuring accountability and coordinated approaches to PSEA in refugee responses.

The PSEA Network will work closely with all sectors to mainstream SEA prevention, risk mitigation and response across sectors, including mapping potential SEA risk areas by sector and taking actions to mitigate those risks, integrating PSEA messages into community outreach and capacity-building sessions, and ensuring multisectoral services and referral pathways are in place for survivors to access the support that they may require. This includes safety and security measures, basic material assistance, medical care, and psychosocial support or legal services as part of (or in addition to) GBV and child protection responses.

PSEA is a cross-cutting issue requiring a range of technical expertise. Working to prevent and respond to SEA is a collective responsibility for all actors in all sectors. For this reason, the PSEA Network is an independent, stand-alone structure and not a sub-group of Protection, GBV, or AAP.

See sample ToRs for a PSEA Network and other tools and resources on the **RCM guidance website**.

Information Management Working Group

Each sector response relies on shared data, assessments and information for decision-making, implementing a response and measuring its impact. UNHCR is responsible for ensuring and reinforcing coordinated information management across the refugee response,[20] with the contributory support of other inter-agency partners. Depending on the situation, needs and capacities of the response, a stand-alone assessment working group may also be established.

The Information Management Working Group (IMWG) reports to the ISWG and will manage information to support decision-making and better identification of gaps and opportunities; facilitate the information flow among and between sectors and other fora to minimize duplication using tracking and quantifying tools; support sectors in conducting coordinated or joint assessments, monitoring and reporting on activities in line with the RRP; and enhance communication across the coordination system according to information-sharing protocols.

See sample Information Management Working Group ToRs and other tools and resources on the **RCM guidance website**.

Cash Working Group

Cash is a modality, not a sector. Cash assistance is used across sectors, and technical advice and guidance need to be coordinated at the intersectoral level

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19. The name may differ in some countries.
20. UNHCR is responsible for ensuring identity management and population data for refugee situations, see UNHCR, "Serving and Protecting Together: IOM/UNHCR Framework of Engagement", 30 June 2022.

because of the implications for all sectors. Specific programmatic objectives are set by the sectors. Following the Grand Bargain decision in March 2022 on a cash coordination model, UNHCR became officially accountable for cash coordination in refugee settings. Therefore, UNHCR normally co-chairs the Cash Working Group (CWG) with governments and local actors, where appropriate. The CWG reports to the ISWG and often works closely with the Basic Needs Working Group, when it exists and cash is used as a modality.The CWG is expected to advise on cash related issues, including the use of financial services, market assessment and information management, such as where to report multipurpose cash in the response plan's monitoring framework and alignment of cash indicators across sectors.

See sample ToRs for the Cash Working Group and the cash coordination package on the **RCM guidance website** .

RCM Sector Working Groups

The refugee response is based on a sectoral approach. Sector working groups are responsible for sector-specific strategies that are in line with the overall strategic directions from the RCF and comple-mentary to other pre-existing workplans. Environmental considerations are mainstreamed in all sectors' plans. They also ensure that refugees and host communities participate at all stages of the operations cycle.

Protection

The protection sector ensure that people from both the refugee and the host communities, including stateless persons, live in safety and dignity and can enjoy their basic rights. UNHCR co-coordinates the **Protection Working Group** with the government, which could be the refugee-mandated authority, or line ministry, depending on the context. The Protection Working Group may include technical sub-sector working groups to coordinate child protection and gender-based violence prevention, mitigation and response activities, particularly in complex refugee emergencies or at the onset of one. In those cases, at least in the initial phases of an emergency, sub-sector working groups should also be co-coordinated by UNHCR with the authorities or with NGOs that have strong technical expertise.

The Protection Working Group is the overarching coordination structure for protection, including all sub-sectors of protection. This is important to ensure coherence in strategic planning, response, and advocacy, including through the RRP.

In coordination with the ISWG, time-bound task forces may be established around specific protection concerns and topical areas, such as disability inclusion and age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. The Protection Working Group engages all actors in producing a Protection and Solutions Strategy, including refugees and host communities, and supports other sectors' capacity to mainstream protection and inclusion considerations. This helps ensure that the overall response is designed with a protection-sensitive approach, including within the ISWG.

See sample Protection Working Group and Sub-Sector Working Group ToRs, and other resources on the **RCM guidance website** .

Education

The education sector focuses on promoting access to different levels of education for refugee children and young people – from pre-school or early childhood education up to tertiary – through the national education system. The **Education Working Group** (EWG) should be co-coordinated by relevant ministries and technical experts from an RCM partner with the appropriate expertise and operational capacity. Rotating chairs and the role of local actors can be considered to allow inclusive coordination.

See sample Education Working Group ToRs and resources on the **RCM guidance website** .

Public health and nutrition

The public health and nutrition sector focuses on promoting refugees' access to quality comprehensive health and nutrition services, their inclusion in national health programmes, and host communities' equitable access to quality health services alongside refugees. A **Public Health and Nutrition Working Group** should be co-coordinated by relevant minis-tries and technical experts from an RCM partner with the appropriate expertise and operational capacity. The Public Health and Nutrition Working Group

includes nutrition, reproductive health, HIV and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) as fixed standing items in coordination meetings. Sectors involved in MHPSS should feature MHPSS as a standing item on their agendas. Depending on context, a dedicated MHPSS technical working group or task force may be established, jointly coordinated by a health and a protection organization and/or relevant line ministries, to support other sector working groups as needed.

See sample Public Health & Nutrition Working Group ToRs and resources available on the `RCM guidance website` .

Settlement and shelter/housing

The settlement and shelter/housing sector promotes access to adequate housing options for refugees, during the displacement emergency phase and beyond. The sector will advocate for adequate living conditions in safe settlements, discouraging the establishment of camps to the extent possible. The **Settlement and Shelter/Housing Working Group** should be co-coordinated by relevant ministries and technical experts from an RCM partner with the appropriate expertise and operational capacity.

In urban situations, based on the context, a multisectoral technical working group may be established considering the needs, capacities and access to services and infrastructures. Rather than establishing additional technical sector working groups and depending on context, needs and resources, sectoral areas such as WASH may be included as a sub-sector working group in the settlement and shelter/housing sector, when relevant.

Should refugee camps and/or settlements be established, a dedicated Settlement and Shelter/Housing Working Group should be set up.

The Settlement and Shelter/Housing Working Group will only exceptionally cover the coordination of activities related to household and domestic non-food items (NFIs) to meet refugees' basic needs where there is no Basic Needs Working Group. Although environmental considerations are main-

streamed in all sectors' approaches energy specifically is included under the Settlement and Shelter/Housing Working Group.[21]

See sample Settlement and Shelter/Housing Working Group ToRs and resources available on the `RCM guidance website` .

Livelihoods and economic inclusion (LEI)

The livelihoods and economic inclusion sector must be linked to relevant ministries, civil society, private sector and development actors. LEI considerations must be prioritized from the start of the emergency to ensure that processes established are not distorting local markets or creating unnecessary dependency and are in line with the humanitarian-development-peace collaborative approach. The **LEI Working Group** advocates for the inclusion of refugees in economic growth and poverty reduction efforts, and in national and local services. Helping to connect affected people to their hosts also supports their engagement in economic opportunities.

To inform planning and programming, the LEI Working Group focuses on collecting socioeconomic data, such as the socioeconomic profiling of refugees, skills mapping, market analysis and stakeholder mapping. It emphasizes interventions aimed at stabilizing refugees' livelihoods, identifying employment and self-employment opportunities, and promoting economic inclusion and social protection. The LEI sector should be jointly coordinated by relevant ministries and technical experts from an RCM partner with the appropriate expertise and operational capacity.

See sample LEI Working Group ToRs and resources available on the `RCM guidance website` .

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

The WASH sector promotes universal and equitable access to WASH for refugees and host communities, ensuring safe access to water of sufficient quantity and quality, quality sanitation and solid waste manage-

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21. There is no Camp Coordination / Camp Management (CCCM) sector in the RCM. Instead, alternatives to camps are advocated for so that refugees can enjoy freedom of movement, access to services and livelihoods, and broad inclusion. The RCM avoids treating refugee "sites" as separate from the larger ecosystem of services and administration, emphasizing inclusion from the start and empowerment of local authorities and national actors. Protection is mainstreamed throughout the response and oversight is done through the Inter-Sector Working Group.

ment. The **WASH Working Group** should be coordinated by relevant ministries and experienced technical experts. In refugee camp and settlement contexts, a separate WASH Working Group should be established for the site, working closely with the Settlement and Shelter/Housing Working Group. In urban situations, considering the needs, capacities and access to services, a WASH Working Group can be included under the Settlement and Shelter/Housing Working Group, as applicable.

See sample WASH Working Group ToRs and resources available on the RCM guidance website .

Food security

The food security sector works to ensure refugees have access to adequate nutrient-rich food and services to prevent and reduce malnutrition and undernutrition, which are essential for protecting their survival, safety, health and well-being. The **Food Security Working Group** also assesses food security needs, advocates in favour of adequate and nutritious food, promotes livelihoods and agriculture, empowers women, and improves access to financial services. In addition, the working group aims to create an environment that supports refugees' ability to provide for themselves and become more self-reliant. Food security is coordinated in support of national governments and through a working group that collaborates with other UN agencies, NGOs, and partners. A joint understanding of refugees' food and basic needs is essential to guide the response and the Food Security Working Group should link up with the Cash, Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion, and Protection Working Groups.

See sample Food Security Working Group ToRs and resources available on the RCM guidance website .

Basic needs (context-specific, optional sector)

UNHCR defines the basic needs approach as a way to enable refugees to meet their basic needs and achieve longer-term wellbeing through means and services that address their socioeconomic vulnerabilities and capacities. The **Basic Needs Working Group** facilitates the delivery of immediate life-saving assistance for refugees through in-kind or cash assistance that further refugees' access to services while avoiding duplication in assistance. Depending on the context, capacities and needs, the basic needs sector may be set up to coordinate any combination of health, food security, WASH, education, non-food items (NFIs) or other sectoral assistance, as relevant, as well as when multipurpose cash is the delivery modality[22]. Multipurpose cash assistance is particularly suited for meeting basic needs and more cost-effective than in-kind assistance; refugees prefer it because it empowers them to choose how they meet their own needs. The Basic Needs Working Group works closely with the Cash Working Group, to ensure alignment with cash assistance standards and best practices. The Basic Needs sector should be co-coordinated by relevant ministries and technical experts from an RCM partner with the appropriate expertise and operational capacity.

See sample Basic Needs Working Group ToRs and resources available on the RCM guidance website .

Supply (logistics and procurement)

The supply sector is responsible for supply chain management, operational support, and planning and reporting on resource use. This includes procuring goods and services to support programmes and activities across all sectors and all phases of the response, and providing logistical support to warehouses, stockpiles, fleets and assets.

The **Supply Working Group**, when established, should consist of two branches or teams: logistics, sometimes called the UN Common Logistics Group, and procurement, called the UN Common Procurement Team. The procurement team is primarily dedicated to UN agencies, with a view to standardizing sourcing options and vendor management. Meanwhile, the logistics team addresses challenges associated with customs clearances and international

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22. Operations should consider where to report multipurpose cash assistance in their inter-agency monitoring framework, since the activity is multisectoral and cannot be reported under a single sector. The response plan, appeal, coordination architecture, and monitoring framework must be coherent to allow for accurate analysis and accountability.

shipments with the support of the IMPACCT[23] Working Group, and oversees the entire logistics spectrum, including warehousing and transportation.

See sample Supply Working Group ToRs and resources on the **RCM guidance website** .

Telecommunications

The refugee emergency telecommunications sector (RETS) provides vital communications to the humanitarian response community, supporting their life-saving work. Information and communications technology enables better and faster humanitarian assistance and supports the safety and welfare of aid workers by providing internet connectivity, high frequency radio and satellite communications. In addition, RETS coordinates services and guidance with government, civil society and private sector stakeholders.

RETS is coordinated by UNHCR and national actors where possible. Following a needs assessment, internet connectivity and security telecommunications services can be provided in support of sector activities and humanitarian actors supporting the refugee crisis.

See RETS Working Group ToRs and resources on the **RCM guidance website** .

Other working groups

The RCM can also include coordination groups for durable solutions and inclusion and/or returnee reintegration.

Inclusion/Solutions Working Group

The strategic-level **Refugee Coordination Forum** should take the lead in overarching analysis and strategy regarding refugee inclusion and solutions, including identifying barriers and overseeing any process to overcome them. **Sector working groups** should likewise maintain inclusion as a goal in their respective sector strategies and response plans. However, in some contexts, an **Inclusion/Solutions Working**

Group is created to map all opportunities to build on existing capacities, programmes and plans. In coordination with existing sectors, the Inclusion/Solutions Working Group should undertake feasibility assessments to address needs though existing government systems, such as health, education, social protection, WASH and shelter, and map national sector plans and sub-national development plans, which could be mobilized to address needs. It should also promote economic inclusion by identifying labour market needs and mapping the locations with best job chances for refugees. The working group will include the RCO, development actors and government representatives, including municipalities and mayors' offices. Inclusion and solutions are critical approaches to support refugees in the longer term to live more dignified lives, to ensure their inclusion in the collective efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and obtain more sustainable outcomes.

See sample Inclusion/Solutions Working Group ToRs and resources on the **RCM guidance website** .

Return and Reintegration Working Group[24]

Refugee returnees are citizens of the country to which they return. Which coordination mechanism is best to respond to their situation depends on the context and requires coordination with national and local authorities, a broad range of actors, including development and peace actors, with the participation of returnees and host communities. A good practice is to adopt an area-based or vulnerability-based, rather than status-based, approach, as refugees will most likely return to the same locations to which IDPs are returning and services or infrastructure is often lacking for everyone, including those not formerly displaced. In those contexts where an RCM is in place, it is possible to establish a Return and Reintegration Working Group that can help coordinate efforts to meet the needs of returnee refugees.

See sample Return and Reintegration Working Group ToRs and guidance on the **RCM guidance website** . See Annex II for more information on returnee coordination and response.

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23. The IMPACCT (Importation and Customs Clearance Together) Working Group is a partner of the Global Logistics Cluster and was founded at the Humanitarian Networks and Partnership in 2017 to assess and review importation and customs clearance of humanitarian aid.
24. For more detail on refugee returnee coordination, see Annex II.

REFUGEE OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT CYCLE

Inter-agency needs assessments

UNHCR's accountability for coordinating a multisectoral, rights- and needs-based refugee response implies responsibility for needs assessment and analysis, response planning, and monitoring and evaluation. This requires effective data and information management that helps to make the right information available to the right people at the right time.

Needs assessment for refugee emergencies (NARE): The NARE is designed to assist UNHCR and inter-agency teams with the guidance and tools required to undertake an initial coordinated joint multisectoral needs assessment in refugee emergencies. It is easily customized and can also be used when new groups of refugees move into an existing operational area, or to strengthen response activities where adequate needs assessments have not been made.

The key objectives of an emergency needs assessment are to:

☐ ensure humanitarian aid corresponds to needs;
☐ ensure humanitarian aid promotes safe local coping mechanisms;
☐ identify and understand the unique and respective needs of different populations, according to age, gender and diversity considerations; and
☐ make sure that decisions on humanitarian aid are based on facts.

For further information, please see the NARE Guidance, alongside additional assessment resources available on the UNHCR Assessment and Monitoring Resource Centre.

Data and information management (IM)

Data and IM are cross-cutting functions that are essential for the success of all aspects of an inter-agency refugee response. They are critical to developing, supporting and monitoring Refugee Response Plans (RRPs), and a prerequisite for supporting government efforts. At sector and inter-sector level, specialists should develop and implement robust processes and systems, tailored to the specific needs of refugees and the response context.

For more information, tools and resources on information management see on the **RCM guidance website**.

Refugee Response Plan (RRP)

An RRP is an inter-agency planning, coordination and fundraising tool that supports host governments in providing protection and assistance to refugees, the communities hosting them and other relevant population groups in large and complex emergencies through international solidarity. It is designed to assist UNHCR and partners to operationalize the RCM and reflects UNHCR's facilitation and convening role, as set out in its mandate and the GCR.

RRPs build on approaches and capacities of host governments, engaging a diverse range of actors[25] including refugees and host communities. Inter-agency strategic objectives, along with comprehensive and sector-specific response strategies and activities detailed in an RRP, aim to deliver protection and multisectoral assistance. These plans also emphasize enhancing refugees' self-reliance and resilience and prioritize planning for and facilitating solutions from the onset of an emergency. This requires early collaboration with development partners, through engagement with RCs and the UN development system, to strengthen collective advocacy and support for the inclusion of refugees in national development plans, systems and labor markets. RRPs may contribute to strengthening and supporting national structures, depending on the specific context of the displacement situation and where conditions allow.

An RRP is grounded in the findings and evidence from needs assessments and protection monitoring initiatives. The process to create the RRP is managed through the in-country inter-agency coordination structure. RRPs have been created to address different types of refugee crises, including new emergencies and protracted situations, and they can also facilitate the transition from short-term plans to

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25. Including UN agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs, refugee-led organizations, sports organizations, development entities, and private sector actors, among others.

medium- or long-term resilience planning. RRPs can be developed at the country level or take a regional approach.

Country RRPs reflect the needs of all refugee populations hosted in a country. In emergency situations, a country RRP can also be developed targeting one refugee population or covering a specific geographic area, reflecting the context, the Protection and Solutions Strategy, and the inter-agency response to the new emergency. These are developed and coordinated under the leadership of the host country, where possible, and the Refugee Coordinator.

Regional RRPs are developed under the leadership of a Regional Refugee Coordinator and consist of a regional overview and country chapters summarizing the protection and solutions strategies and inter-agency responses related to a specific refugee population at the country level.

In addition, in response to the many challenges inherent in identifying and protecting refugees within broader population movements, an RRP can also be adapted and developed for mixed refugee and migrant situations, such as a **Refugee and Migrant Response Plan**, in collaboration with IOM.

Assistance to host communities

Refugee Response Plans place a particular focus on host communities. It is important that assistance to these communities is included in the plans and fully aligned with national development plans designed by the host governments. Assistance to host communities should be reflected in the plan's objectives and indicators. RRPs should also clearly demonstrate in the narrative the interaction with programmes for host communities included in national development plans, development partner plans and the Cooperation Framework.

Monitoring frameworks should be set up for each RRP, as they enable understanding of progress towards planned results and allow for corrective action to be taken, where necessary. RRP partners can thus continuously monitor the situation and the outputs of the response, reporting against indicators with common monitoring tools. Tools for monitoring can be as simple as a 3Ws (who, what, where) in Excel or more complex and built on the ActivityInfo platform.

To the extent possible, following the concept of solutions from the start and the commitment under the 2030 Agenda to ensure that refugees are not left behind, an RRP should help lay the groundwork to include a development lens through strong alignment and complementarity with Cooperation Frameworks, when they co-exist, and with national development plans.

A set of standardized RRP guidance notes, templates and tools are available on the **RCM guidance website**.

RRP fundraising

Beyond being a planning and coordination tool, the RRP also serves as a fundraising appeal for both UNHCR and operational partners and enhances the visibility of refugee needs and of the inter-agency response. While the RRP is not linked to a pooled fund, and having activities in an RRP does not guarantee receiving funding, donors favour funding activities that are part of a single vetted[26] inter-agency strategic response plan coordinated with host governments, complementing their action. The RRP provides a comprehensive overview of the needs of refugees, host communities and other relevant population groups. For new or rapidly deteriorating refugee situations, UN agencies may call on the top UN official in the country to facilitate the release of allocations from pooled funds. The RRP also includes a transparent and inclusive monitoring and accountability mechanism.

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26. To become an RRP partner and have a project budget included in the appeal, organizations must share their project proposals for review with the designated reviewing body within the RCM (ex. ISWG, RCF or specially composed panel) where the projects are evaluated for coherence with the needs, priorities, and activities as jointly determined in the RRP and complementarity with other proposals. Guidance and a window for resubmission may be provided to help strengthen proposed project design and relevance.

Therefore, organizations with activities in an RRP (appealing organizations[27]) also need to fundraise bilaterally. This is the same funding model used broadly within the humanitarian community, where agencies' needs and budgets are outlined within inter-agency plans, as well as in more elaborate single agency plans that can provide more detail on activities.

The (Regional) Refugee Coordinator, RCF and sector coordinators create opportunities to publicize the RRP and the different partners' resource requirements, contributions and impacts. They also seek to engage with donors by keeping them informed about operational and political developments related to the RRP, such as achievements, constraints, funding gaps, and ways to support advocacy efforts.

In carrying out this responsibility to mobilize resources, UNHCR remains guided by the principles of localization. Notably, as per the Grand Bargain, it will work to increase the level of funding for local partners as directly as possible. This will improve outcomes for refugees and reduce transaction costs.

Further guidance and information on resource mobilization strategies for the RRP can be found on the RCM guidance website.

Refugee Funding Tracker

The Refugee Funding Tracker (RFT) was developed by UNHCR to track financial data related to refugee programmes.[28] It covers inter-agency budgets and funding for refugee-related plans, such as country and regional RRPs. Available data includes funding received by partners involved in and appealing for funds in refugee responses.

In contexts where the RFT is used, all partners, including UN agencies, NGOs and others appealing for funds within a RRP must report the funds they receive against their requirements. Reporting on funding received is essential to portray an accurate picture of the funding gaps for the host governments, donors, and partners throughout the year.

The RFT and additional guidance can be found here.

EVALUATION

Evaluations are critical to strengthening evidence-based learning and accountability to refugees, returnees and other populations assisted through the RCM. Evaluations of a refugee response may take place at any stage – for UNHCR, such evaluations are automatically triggered by an internal L3 declaration.[29] Joint inter-agency evaluations may be organized and led by UNHCR in coordination with other humanitarian actors engaged in the refugee response. They are typically framed by the RCM and RRP. In conducting evaluations, UNHCR and all other humanitarian partners will be guided by UN evaluation norms and standards, ethical principles, human rights, gender equality and inclusion principles.

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27. Appealing partners are entities whose activities are submitted under the RRP for funding, and which will be monitored through the Plan's monitoring and reporting framework. An entity that is contracted by an appealing organization to implement that organization's activity should not submit a funding requirement to the RRP as this would lead to double counting.
28. RFT is a reporting mechanism that is a separate requirement from reporting to the OCHA-led Financial Tracking System (FTS), in agreement with OCHA.
29. UNHCR may declare one of three emergency levels, depending on the magnitude, complexity and consequences of the humanitarian crisis compared to the existing capacity of the operation(s) and bureau(x) concerned. A comparative table of the three emergency levels can be found here.

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH EXISTING COORDINATION SYSTEMS

The RCM may be implemented in countries that already have other humanitarian, development and peace or stabilization coordination structures, including a PSEA Network. In these instances, the RCM is intended to build on and complement these existing structures, maximizing efficiencies, reducing duplications, and ensuring refugee inclusion in ongoing initiatives and systems. However, UNHCR's accountability and responsibility for refugees must be maintained, in line with its mandate and Statute, as reaffirmed in the GCR. UNHCR should work with national authorities at the highest level to link up with existing coordination mechanisms and service provision, to effectively bolster operational capacity without creating parallel systems for the refugee response.

Furthermore, population movements are not necessarily homogeneous. Some may involve both refugees and migrants; others may involve refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); and, in certain situations, displacement may result from or overlap with climate-related and other natural hazard-related emergencies. These situations present complex challenges for affected States.

When responding to refugee needs within these mixed movements, UNHCR will work with RC/HCs and partners, including OCHA and IOM, to engage their mandates, roles and expertise as appropriate, and coordinate an approach. This includes determining whether current government-led or inter-agency coordination mechanisms, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster approach or development mechanisms can be adapted to address the needs arising from the refugee emergency in a way that reflects UNHCR's accountabilities and is in line with the RCM.

On PSEA, UNHCR maintains overall coordination and leadership responsibilities for PSEA in the refugee response, while the configuration of PSEA coordination structures will need to be guided by the operational context, what structures already exist, and what would be fit for purpose and optimize results (e.g. separate PSEA network for refugee response or merged PSEA network covering both refugee and IDP operations). Moreover, the UNHCR Representative, as Refugee Coordinator, actively engages in coordinating PSEA efforts with the RC/HC[30], shares updates on developments on PSEA in the refugee response with the RC/HC and UNCT/HCT and actively contributes to system-wide efforts maximizing resources, efficiency, and impact in addressing PSEA[31].

Mixed refugee and IDP situations

In situations where a complex humanitarian emergency or natural disaster is taking place and a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) has been appointed, the HC leads overall humanitarian planning, advocacy and resource mobilization. OCHA supports the HC in coordinating the humanitarian response inside the country through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster approach. Clusters focus on populations affected by a crisis, including IDPs. In situations where there is also a UNHCR-led refugee response, the Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations applies (see text box on p. 30). Refugee-only responses are not coordinated through the IASC cluster approach.

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30. Note the RC's UN system-wide responsibilities for PSEA under the Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System.
31. In accordance with the IASC Vision and Strategy: Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (PSEAH) 2022-2026 and the IASC's Generic Terms of Reference for In-Country PSEA Coordinator, in country contexts where refugee situations are the predominant humanitarian concern, the PSEA Coordinator should be situated within the UNHCR office with a shared reporting line to the UNHCR Representative / Refugee Coordinator and the (D)SRSG/RC/HC as appropriate (see the Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice). For additional information on the RCM and PSEA coordination in these settings, see UNHCR's Emergency Handbook.

The note outlines coordination when refugees and IDPs are in the same or separate geographic locations. In mixed situations where IDPs and other affected populations are geographically separate from refugees, response delivery and coordination are likewise separate. IASC Clusters coordinate the operational response for IDPs and other affected groups, and UNHCR sector working groups coordinate the operational response for refugees. Yet IASC Clusters and UNHCR sector working groups still share information at the national level.

In contexts where IDPs and other affected populations are geographically mixed with refugees, the Joint Note allows that "either IASC Clusters or UNHCR Sectors will be utilized" for response delivery, "based on which best ensures optimal efficiency and effectiveness". The best option will be identified through consultation and mutual agreement by the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

In line with UNHCR's mandate, the UNHCR country representative is accountable for coordinating the refugee response, ensuring the international protection and delivery of services to refugees. The direct communication line from the UNHCR country representative to the government on refugee issues is maintained.

The Joint Note provides an overview of the division of responsibilities between the UNHCR country representative and the Humanitarian Coordinator in these situations to ensure that coordination is streamlined, complementary and mutually reinforcing, and that avoid duplication at the delivery level. Key points include:

- UNHCR maintains responsibility for leading and coordinating the provision of international protection, humanitarian assistance and durable solutions for refugees, including leading the refugee response and engaging in advocacy with the host government. UNHCR keeps the HCT and Humanitarian Coordinator informed on these activities, but reports to the High Commissioner for Refugees and, ultimately, the UN General Assembly.
- UNHCR leads the refugee-specific strategic planning exercise and RRP (or refugee chapter in the Humanitarian Response Plan) to ensure coherence with the broader humanitarian

response. The Refugee Coordinator and the Refugee Coordination Forum/Inter-Sector Working Group will ensure effective coordination through information exchange with inter-cluster coordination forums and support for the implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.
- To streamline processes, when appropriate, a single coordination platform (RCM or IASC cluster approach) can be used to implement the humanitarian response to ensure optimal efficiency and effectiveness.

Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice (2014)

Within the framework of the IASC Transformative Agenda, UNHCR and OCHA agreed how to simplify and streamline leadership and coordination arrangements in a complex emergency or natural disaster where a Humanitarian Coordinator has been appointed and a UNHCR-led refugee operation is also underway. The resulting document, the Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice, provides guidance on how, in 'mixed' settings (where the populations of humanitarian concern include refugees, IDPs and other affected groups), the leadership and coordination mechanisms should function in practice. Using a simple table format, the document outlines the practical interaction of IASC Clusters and the RCM in two contexts: (1) where refugees are present in the country in a separate geographic area from IDPs and other affected populations; and (2) where refugees are present in the same geographic area as IDPs and other affected populations. The note covers leadership, strategic planning, operational coordination, delivery, resource mobilization and advocacy. The points on operational coordination are reiterated here for convenience. For more information refer to the Joint Note available here.

Mixed refugee and migrant movements

Through the Serving and Protecting Together: IOM/UNHCR Framework of Engagement, finalized in 2022, the two organizations committed to continuing strengthening ties and collaboration, including in responding to mixed movements of refugees and migrants, in order to enhance response predictability and impact.

Establishing adequate and stakeholder-inclusive coordination mechanisms at country, regional or route-based levels is a crucial component of an effective response to mixed movements. While several examples of such mechanisms already exist, they do not represent a standardized coordination model. Context-specific considerations, such as the profile of the affected population, the dynamic of the population movements, the position of concerned States (origin, transit and destination) and other key stakeholders, will influence the nature and scope of coordination arrangements. However, a few essential elements need to be considered whenever discussions on the establishment or strengthening of coordination mechanisms to address mixed movements take place. These include the co-leadership and shared accountability by UNHCR and IOM on mixed movements; joint and public messaging on the mixed nature of the movements; an accountability framework; and well-defined terms of reference. In circumstances where the proportion of people not in need of international protection is low in the context of a broader flow, RCM can include specific coordination arrangements to ensure that migrants receive adequate protection and assistance.

IOM and UNHCR are committed to ensuring that any coordination structure to respond to the needs of mixed movements of refugees and migrants will reflect the distinct mandates of the two organizations and their co-leading role to enable joint strategizing and planning, advocacy, programmatic interventions and coordination on data and information management.

Find additional resources on the RCM guidance website.

UN development coordination

From the start of a crisis, in line with the GCR, the Refugee Coordinator will work with the Resident Coordinator, United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and UN agencies to support refugee resilience, inclusion and longer-term solutions. Specifically, this means that the Refugee Coordinator should encourage others to contribute towards strengthening institutional capacity and helping host communities overcome shocks resulting from neighbouring conflict and/or large numbers of refugee arrivals. When context allows, links between the RCM coordination structure and the UN development system coordination can be strengthened with a view to advancing refugee rights and streamlining humanitarian-development-peace collaboration processes, while maintaining UNHCR's accountability[32] for the overall refugee response coordination (please refer to the transition section below). It also means including UNCT members in RCM coordination structures and RRPs, where appropriate.

Within the UN development system, RCs[33] lead the UNCTs on development activities within the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (Cooperation Framework), and support countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Refugee Coordinator works closely with the RC and UNCT to advance national development priorities and ensure that 'no one is left behind' by including refugees in national development plans and encouraging development actors to include refugees in their plans and programmes.

The Refugee Coordinator and partners will ensure that refugee protection and human rights issues are adequately reflected and included in the UN Common Country Analysis, and that the Cooperation Framework explicitly and systematically reflect inclusion-oriented plans and programmes.

At regional level, frameworks to engage with development actors include the comprehensive approaches proposed within the GCR "Programme of Action" and the related support platforms that encourage regional cooperation among countries of

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32. The direct communication line from the UNHCR country representative or Refugee Coordinator to the government is maintained for refugee issues, in alignment with UNHCR mandated accountabilities.[

33. Within the UN System, the Resident Coordinator (RC) is the highest-ranking representative of the UN development system at the country level and (s)he is the designated representative of – and reports to – the Secretary-General; (s)he is responsible for the coordination of operational activities for development of the UN and leads the UN Country Teams (UNCTs) on the development, monitoring and reporting of the UN Cooperation Frameworks.

origin, transit and destination for greater responsibility-sharing in prevention, protection and solutions. These mechanisms integrate cooperating States in the platforms and work alongside regional and international organizations committed to the humanitarian and development agenda.

Find more information on UN development coordination on the **RCM guidance website**.

UN peacekeeping and integrated peacekeeping missions

The RCM can also be implemented in contexts where a UN peacekeeping or integrated peacekeeping mission is present. UN peacekeepers provide security as well as the political and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult early transition from conflict to peace. As a result, many peacekeeping activities overlap with refugee protection, particularly in relation to the protection of civilians and maintaining the civilian and humanitarian nature of asylum and of refugee-hosting sites.

Peacekeepers are frequently engaged to enhance the physical security of refugees, especially in and around camp settings.

RCM cooperation with peacekeeping missions is coordinated by the Refugee Coordinator and the relevant Force Commander or Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for the peacekeeping mission. The Refugee Coordinator, in consultation with the RCF, may consider the conclusion of a formal arrangement with the relevant Force Commander (for stand-alone peacekeeping missions) or the SRSG (for integrated missions) to facilitate collaboration between the refugee response and the peacekeeping force. The latter could also be part of the RCF, where appropriate.

The RCM could also be used to coordinate with peace actors, including regional organizations, national governments, civil society, activists, community leaders, and other UN agencies in the relevant sectors, to ensure the inclusion of refugees in social cohesion and peaceful coexistence initiatives, as well as in peace-making and peacebuilding processes occurring in their countries of origin.

Poland: Refugees from Ukraine at the Kapelanka hostel
© UNHCR/Anna Liminowicz

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH DEVELOPMENT ACTORS FROM THE START

Collaboration across humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) work

Linking humanitarian, development and peace actors' work is a crucial collective effort to reduce people's humanitarian needs, risks and vulnerabilities. While collaborative HDP approaches encourage joined-up complementary efforts, it does not imply that humanitarian, development, peace and other actors should merge their activities or integrate roles; it calls for programmes or activities to be layered in all contexts, in line with the respective mandates of each actor.

The RCM contributes to operationalizing HDP collaboration by coordinating and combining mutually reinforcing humanitarian, development and peace efforts towards solutions for refugees, host communities and other people in need, in line with the OECD's DAC recommendation on the HDP nexus. All actors involved in the RCM should engage in joined-up analysis to ensure complementarity across humanitarian, development and peace planning and programming. This includes actively engaging in the common country analysis (CCA), ensuring strong analysis of the context challenges and enablers for sustainable programming for refugees and subsequently ensuring strategic inclusion of refugees in Cooperation Frameworks.

More concretely, RCM/RRPs should consider including development and peace actor initiatives in the areas of:

- data sharing and the development of baselines;
- context and situation analysis;
- joint planning for inclusion and solutions;
- collaborative, joint or joined-up programming and response;
- joint or joined-up monitoring and reporting; and
- resourcing, funding and financing.

Moreover, RCM actors should work with the Resident Coordinator's Office, Cooperation Framework Results Groups, and with Peace and Development Advisors, to link up existing coordination platforms to support implementation of collaborative approaches to humanitarian, development and peace work.

Engaging development actors and international financial institutions (IFIs)

The RCM can be used to catalyse development interventions and investments in refugee-hosting areas, benefiting host communities and refugees. Engaging development actors in refugee coordination structures aims to:

- strengthen alliances that can shift political will and policies in host governments to achieve protection, inclusion and solutions goals;
- leverage development actors' financial and technical support to enable the transition towards inclusion in national plans and access to basic services;
- mobilize development actors' support to ensure refugees have access to employment and are economically empowered; and
- increase development investments in return areas, to make return sustainable wherever possible.

These actors include national and local governments, bilateral development cooperation agencies, multilateral and regional development banks and other UN development agencies and inter-governmental organizations. More concretely, integrating international financial institutions (IFIs) and other development actors in the RCM helps to strengthen national and local institutional capacity to manage a refugee influx; advocate for the inclusion of refugees in national plans and services from the start; develop financial instruments to facilitate the flow of financial support; strengthen social protection systems to support affected host communities and refugees; and establish surge capacity for service delivery. In protracted refugee situations, IFIs and other development actors could also contribute to collecting, analysing and disseminating more targeted socioeconomic data.

Please see additional guidance on engaging development actors and international financial institutions (IFIs) on the **RCM guidance website**.

TRANSITION

The RCM incorporates the principle of 'solutions from the start' meaning that the initial emergency response should consider, and be designed to progress into, medium- to long-term interventions that involve refugee inclusion and removal of barriers to refugee self-reliance, and to speed up investment in development initiatives that benefit both refugees and the communities that host them. The approach progressively transitions the refugee response from a focus on immediate, life-saving needs to increased resilience in line with the Global Compact on Refugees and sustainable programming. Some of the medium- to long-term aims may be addressed and coordinated through national development plans or the Cooperation Framework. To advance this objective, national and international development and peace actors should be involved in the RCM and RRPs from the start of a response.

In parallel, RCM/RRP actors will strive to include longer-term refugee protection and solutions objectives in national or local development plans, Cooperation Frameworks or other frameworks of relevance, while maintaining UNHCR's mandated responsibilities and accountabilities.As the scope and scale of humanitarian needs reduce in a refugee emergency, or the national response systems no longer require support, the refugee coordination structure and subsequent Refugee Response Plans can be downscaled, keeping these mechanisms fit for purpose, i.e. coherent with the refugee response being implemented.

The RCM's annual review process is an opportunity for all sector working groups, the ISWG and the Refugee Coordination Forum to reflect on the progression from emergency life-saving activities towards inclusion, solutions and sustainable programming, identifying successes as well as barriers and strategies to remove them. This review will inform operational planning, with the expectation that humanitarian response activities will scale down and become more targeted while other activities may be integrated into national or international development planning frameworks and coordination systems. This process shall be conducted in close consultation with the Government. The refugee coordination structure should likewise evolve alongside opera-

tional changes and in step with the interest and capacities of State actors to take over coordination functions in line with humanitarian principles.

RCM actors are expected to engage in transition planning from the outset of an emergency. This means that RCM sectors/RRP partners, coordinated through the ISWG and under the guidance of the RCF, will need to set out criteria or benchmarks[34], according to the country context, to be met to guide this process, taking into consideration that the transition process and timelines may not be identical for each sector. The RCM provides strategic and operational coordination until such a coordination mechanism for humanitarian actors is no longer needed or more suitably led under a differentiated national arrangement or if activities are no longer humanitarian in nature and better coordinated by other national or international development coordination systems. The Refugee Coordination Forum may be retained as a strategic mechanism to support this process.

Sector working groups will cease to operate when their coordination function is no longer needed or transitioned to other mechanisms. There may be residual humanitarian coordination needs that cannot be met through existing government or development coordination systems. In this case, the coordination structure for any ongoing humanitarian response needs to be tailored to the scope and scale of response and number and type of responding partners.

When relevant, a refugee Inclusion/Solutions Working Group (see Other working groups section) may be created to work alongside the sector working groups and facilitate analysis and planning to include refugees in the overall national response by mapping opportunities to build on existing capacities, programmes and plans in coordination with existing sectors.

More tools and resources on transition can be found on the **RCM guidance website** .

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34. Depending on context, these benchmarks could relate to documentation; access to health, education and livelihoods; inclusion of refugee populations in public service providers; local and institutional ability to fundraise for inclusion; etc.

ANNEX I: REFUGEE EMERGENCY RESPONSE SCALE-UP PROTOCOL

Background

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees[35] is the centrepiece of international refugee protection[36], laying out minimum standards for their treatment. States hold the primary responsibility for protecting refugees. UNHCR, governed by the General Assembly, is the UN agency[37] accountable for providing protection and assistance and seeking solutions for refugees. The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)[38] reiterated the call for a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach to reach these objectives, and for UNHCR to play a catalytic and supportive role therein, to complement and augment the level of assistance provided on the host countries' request.

In November 2018, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals endorsed protocols on the Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation. These protocols are a set of measures designed to enhance the humanitarian response in the face of major sudden-onset crises and/or the substantial deterioration of a humanitarian situation. The IASC protocols underscore those agencies with a specific mandate, such as UNHCR, are accountable for ensuring a robust, inclusive and effective response. The protocols note UNHCR's mandated role to prepare, lead and coordinate refugee and returning refugee responses.[39]

Purpose and Scope

Based on its mandate and inter-agency commitments, UNHCR updated the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) in 2024 and introduced the Refugee Emergency Response Scale-up Protocol (hereafter referred to as the "Refugee Protocol"). The purpose of this Refugee Protocol is to clarify the roles and principles of collective action and allow for a more predictable and inclusive joint response to refugee emergencies.

In exercising his or her mandated responsibilities, the High Commissioner for Refugees can activate the Refugee Protocol to scale up an inter-agency emergency response in situations:

■ characterized by significant refugee flows; or
■ that cause loss of life and/or other serious harm, or significantly affect the rights or well-being of refugees or refugee returnees unless immediate action is taken; and
■ where the existing capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver – together with relevant authorities, humanitarian and development actors, and civil society – does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of a situation without additional financial, human and material support.

Activating the Refugee Protocol is a call for all relevant stakeholders[40] to mobilize additional capacities and resources for the collective response to refugee and host community needs, in line with the RCM and the GCR's whole- of-society approach. UNHCR will support the host government(s) in leading and coordinating the response in a predict-

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35. UN General Assembly, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951, United Nations, and UN General Assembly, Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 31 January 1967, United Nations.
36. In conjunction with the UN General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, art. 14, that recognizes everyone's right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution.
37. UN General Assembly, Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 14 December 1950, A/RES/428(V).
38. Global Compact on Refugees, affirmed by the General Assembly on 17 December 2018, A/RES/73/151.
39. IASC Standard Operating Procedures, Humanitarian System-wide scale-up activation, Protocol 1: Definition and Procedures, footnote 7.
40. As per the Global Compact on Refugees, stakeholders include but are not limited to: international organizations within and outside the United Nations system, including those forming part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; other humanitarian and development actors; international and regional financial institutions; regional organizations; national and local authorities; civil society, faith-based, and refugee-led organizations; academics and other experts; the private sector; host community members and refugees themselves.

able, transparent and inclusive way.[41] The Refugee Protocol automatically expires after six months, with the possibility of a three-month extension in exceptional situations.

Activation of the Refugee Protocol

To inform the decision on activating this Refugee Protocol, within 72 hours of a refugee influx or a dramatic deterioration of the situation, the UNHCR country representative will provide the UN High Commissioner for Refugees with an initial assessment of refugee protection and humanitarian needs, and a recommendation on activating the Refugee Protocol, following inclusive consultations with response partners[42] and relevant stakeholders.[43] To facilitate decision-making, the initial assessment should take into account:

- **Scale:** the number of new refugee arrivals, including in relation to the existing refugee population in the host country.
- **Urgency:** critical protection risks and the level of access to basic services and life-saving assistance.
- **Complexity:** overlapping crises; humanitarian access and security risks; social, economic and political factors; and the threat to the civilian character of asylum.
- **Capacity:** host government and local community absorption capacities; presence of local and international organizations with refugee expertise; and the availability of human and financial resources for immediate response.
- **Risk of failure to deliver effectively and at scale** to refugees and host communities.

Pending the initial assessment and decision to activate the Refugee Protocol, an immediate inter-agency, protection- centred emergency response should be initiated. The assessment and decision-making should be guided by the principles of 'do no harm' and 'no regrets' to ensure a timely, effective and efficient emergency response.

Upon deciding to activate the Refugee Protocol, the High Commissioner for Refugees will:

- Designate a Refugee Coordinator, usually UNHCR country representative. For situations with multiple refugee-hosting countries, the High Commissioner will appoint a Regional Refugee Coordinator;
- Notify the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), IASC Principals, UNSDG Chair, and other relevant UN bodies and stakeholders of the Refugee Protocol activation and the designation of a Regional Refugee Coordinator, where applicable. The notification should also clarify geographic coverage and target population;
- Keep stakeholders informed of evolving protection risks and needs, galvanizing inter-agency resource mobilization; and
- Notify the ERC, IASC Principals, UNSDG Chair, and those involved in the response, in case of an exceptional three- month extension of the Refugee Protocol.[44]

Implications of Refugee Protocol activation

Upon activation of the Refugee Protocol, the **(Regional) Refugee Coordinator's** responsibilities include:

- Consulting immediately with relevant national authorities at the highest level, RC/HC and with the members of the UN Country Team / Humanitarian Country Team on effective ways to bolster operational capacity and to build on existing coordination mechanisms, in line with the RCM.[45]
- Leading the collective refugee response in support of national authorities. This involves:

    1. establishing the coordination system and designating agencies to coordinate sectors, mobilizing local and international partners with appropriate expertise, operational capacity and geographical presence, and ensuring meaningful participation of refugees and

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41. In line with the UNHCR Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response (UNHCR/HCP/2023/01).
42. Response partners are stakeholders with operational response capacity on the ground, such as UN agencies, national and international NGOs, among others.
43. Such as relevant authorities, the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) if present.
44. Based on stakeholder consultations and recommendation from the (Regional) Refugee Coordinator (see Heading IV of this Refugee Protocol).
45. 2024 RCM guidance.

affected host communities (based on the intersection of age, gender, and diversity) in all stages of the refugee response; and

2. incorporating cross-cutting priorities and ensuring that refugee response principles and commitments are upheld, including but not limited to the centrality of protection, 'do no harm', the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, Accountability to Affected People, gender-based violence, localization, and the sustainability and engagement of development actors from the start.

- Ensuring collective engagement in needs assessments; gap analysis; data and information management; the implementation of programmes that support public service providers; and resource mobilization and advocacy, including on protection, which also informs the (Regional) Refugee Response Plan (RRP).

- Overseeing, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the development of an emergency inter-agency RRP in the first week of the crisis to cover the first three to six months. An RRP sets out the comprehensive protection, multisectoral assistance and solutions strategy for the refugee response based on the feedback of refugees and affected communities; priority areas of intervention; comprehensive financial requirements; and a reporting, monitoring and evaluation framework. If multiple countries are affected, a regional RRP will be issued. If the situation persists, the RRP should be reviewed and extended.

In line with the 2024 RCM guidance,[46] **stakeholders contribute to the collective response** through:

- **Needs assessments:** engaging in joint participatory needs assessments and gap analyses across and within sectors, taking into account the views of people of different age, gender and diverse characteristics, to inform response strategies and priorities, advocacy, and fundraising for the refugee response.

- **Coordination system:** collectively supporting the establishment of a national-level coordination mechanism, co-led with the government and adapted to the context. This includes a strategic Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF); sector-specific working groups at the national level as needed, including a protection working group, as well as at sub-national level if needed; an inter-sector technical coordination forum, where needed, that is attended by cross-cutting task forces or working groups, where sector-coordinating agencies are represented at a technical level. If the Refugee Protocol concerns multiple countries, regional-level coordination should also be considered.

- **Response planning, monitoring and resource mobilization:** coordinating the development of a comprehensive inter-agency RRP centered on the Protection and Solutions Strategy; monitoring and report on the response implementation and impact; raising the profile of the crisis through a common communication strategy to attract necessary political, financial[47] and technical support, including through dissemination events; and tracking contributions received for the RRP.

- **Promoting protection mainstreaming across the refugee response:** ensuring that protection remains central to the response and support all sectors in their mainstreaming protection, including by being accountable to forcibly displaced and stateless people and by considering age, gender and diversity in all response activities.

- **Information management:** establishing or reinforcing data and information management capacity and, where possible, anchoring it in existing statistical and census mechanisms. Ensuring the development and dissemination of high-quality information products that use reliable data on population figures, needs and the response.

- **Advocacy and information sharing:** Regularly engage, update and coordinate with the RC/HC and UNCT/HCT, where present, and ensure regular advocacy and information sharing with donors and government counterparts as well as refugees, affected host communities and the public at large – particularly regarding maintaining the protection space.

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46. 2024 RCM guidance, section on Leadership and Coordination Accountabilities.
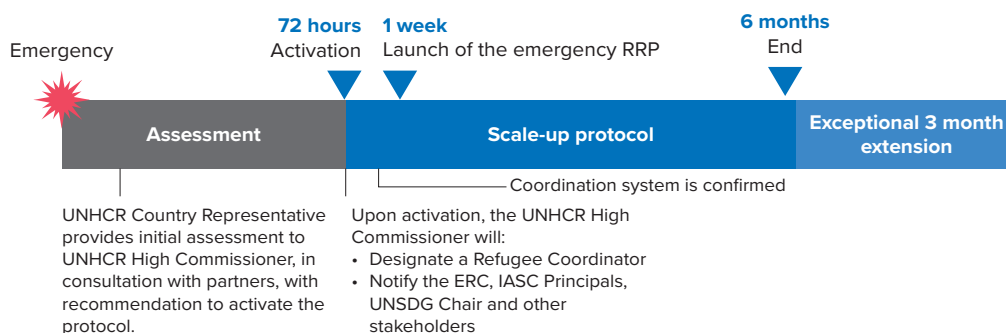47. For new or rapidly deteriorating refugee situations, UN agencies may call upon the top UN official in the country to facilitate the release of urgent allocations from pooled funds.

Expiration of the Refugee Protocol

The Refugee Protocol automatically expires after six months. Before the expiration, the (Regional) Refugee Coordinator(s), in consultation with the Refugee Coordination Forum(s), may recommend a three-month extension to the High Commissioner for Refugees. This recommendation should be based on exceptional circumstances, such as significant constraints on the response in the initial period or a further deterioration of the situation. In the event of a Refugee Protocol extension, the High Commissioner notifies the Emergency Relief Coordinator, IASC Principals and other key stakeholders accordingly. The (Regional) Refugee Coordinator, with the support of the RCF(s), will provide clear messaging on the Refugee Protocol expiration.

The expiration of the Refugee Protocol does not imply that the crisis it relates to has come to an end. Rather, it could indicate that the coordination structure has been set up and that the inter-agency operational response has been scaled up and stabilized. The RCM and the (Regional) RRP can be prolonged under the leadership of the (Regional) Refugee Coordinator beyond the expiration of the Refugee Protocol, until other coordination mechanisms with the host government ensure refugee inclusion in multi-year instruments or frameworks with longer-term objectives that emphasize solutions and socioeconomic inclusion.

REFUGEE PROTOCOL TIMELINE

72 hours Activation

1 week Launch of the emergency RRP

6 months End

Emergency

Assessment | Scale-up protocol | Exceptional 3 month extension

Coordination system is confirmed

UNHCR Country Representative provides initial assessment to UNHCR High Commissioner, in consultation with partners, with recommendation to activate the protocol.

Upon activation, the UNHCR High Commissioner will:
• Designate a Refugee Coordinator
• Notify the ERC, IASC Principals, UNSDG Chair and other stakeholders

ANNEX II: REFUGEE RETURNEES: COORDINATION AND RESPONSE

Seeking durable solutions for refugees being an integral part of its mandate, UNHCR is accountable for coordinating the voluntary repatriation of refugees. Voluntary repatriation and reintegration activities are generally governed by a tripartite agreement, usually concluded between the governments of the country of origin and the country of asylum and UNHCR. While concluding this agreement is a standard practice in situations where voluntary repatriation is facilitated or promoted, it is also a good practice to establish tripartite agreements when returns are self-organized or occur spontaneously under adverse circumstances, so that UNHCR can assess if refugees were able to make an informed and voluntary decision and UNHCR has access to them upon return. Having free and unhindered access to returnees, so that it can monitor conditions upon return and identify and address challenges and barriers to sustainable return and reintegration through broad and early established partnerships, is part of UNHCR's mandated responsibility[48].

Which coordination mechanism is best depends on the context. Addressing needs upon return[49] requires coordination with a broad range of actors, including national and local authorities and development and peace actors, and the participation of returnees and host communities, since the areas from where people have been displaced often require investment in services and infrastructure. A good practice is to adopt an area-based, rather than status-based, approach as refugees will most likely return to the same locations to which IDPs are returning.

As such, including instances where return happens under conditions that are not optimal (e.g. where voluntariness is in question, or where there is a situation of force majeure such as conflict forcing refugees to leave from the country of asylum, or when refugees decide on their own to return despite conditions not being conducive), there may be a need for returnees to be included in the humanitarian coordination mechanisms that are already in place, including the RCM and the cluster approach, with UNHCR playing a lead role on the refugee return component on the latter. Where the cluster approach is not activated but the RCM is in place, a working group on return and reintegration could be established.[50]

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48. Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Voluntary Repatriation No. 40 (XXXVI) - 1985, 18 October 1985, No. 40 (XXXVI):"(l) The High Commissioner should be recognized as having a legitimate concern for the consequences of return, (…) The High Commissioner must be regarded as entitled to insist on (her) legitimate concern over the outcome of any return that (she) has assisted. Within the framework of close consultations with the State concerned, (she) should be given direct and unhindered access to returnees so that (she) is able to monitor the fulfilment of the amnesties, guarantees, or assurances on the basis of which the refugees have returned. This should be considered as inherent in (her) mandate."
49. Including the protection situation, restoration of rights, and reintegration to ensure that return was a sustainable solution.
50. See Return and Reintegration Working Group

RCM guidance