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**Update on the application of the comprehensive
refugee response framework**

Summary

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (A/RES/71/1), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016, requested UNHCR to develop and initiate the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) contained in annex I, in close coordination with relevant States, including host countries, through a multi-stakeholder approach and with a view to informing the development of the global compact on refugees. With the intention of ensuring a comprehensive and predictable response to large movements of refugees, as well more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing in solidarity with the countries hosting them, the framework is currently being applied in 14 States and two regional contexts.

Following the conference room paper on the CRRF submitted to the sixty ninth meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2017 (EC/68/SC/CRP.21) and the oral update presented to the seventy first meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2018 (available from <http://www.unhcr.org/71standco>), this paper reflects key lessons learned since the framework's adoption, including highlights of progress made by States and partners supporting comprehensive refugee responses.

I. Introduction

1. In September 2016, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a landmark declaration that reaffirms the foundations of the international refugee protection regime and underlines the centrality of international cooperation. With global refugee numbers at a level not seen in decades, States adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (New York Declaration) with a clear imperative: to forge comprehensive and predictable responses to large-scale movements of refugees, while easing pressure on host countries. In doing so, they called for more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing, anchored in a broader base of support by the international community, including the earlier engagement of development actors and a “whole-of-society” approach.

2. In pursuit of this imperative, member States initiated two important processes. First, they requested that UNHCR develop and initiate the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF), contained in annex I, in close cooperation with States and other relevant actors, and in a range of specific situations, over the coming two years. Second, they agreed to work towards the adoption of a global compact on refugees in 2018, based on the CRRF and experience with its practical application in the intervening two years.¹

3. Today, the imperative of the New York Declaration is firmly rooted in the Office’s work and the efforts of the international community. Currently 14 States are formally applying the CRRF. Building on previous reports to the Standing Committee, this paper presents several key lessons emerging from the early application of the CRRF.

II. Reflections from the practical application of the CRRF: six key lessons

4. The CRRF is applicable to large movements of refugees, including protracted situations. At the time of writing, the CRRF is being applied in Belize, Chad, Costa Rica, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Mexico, Panama, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda and Zambia. It is also being applied through two regional comprehensive responses that further involve 11 of these 14 States: 1) the Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework, covering the north of Central America and Mexico (known as the MIRPS, by its Spanish acronym); and 2) the Nairobi Declaration and Action Plan on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia.

5. Each of these 14 country situations began from a unique starting point and each presents distinct priorities and challenges within its comprehensive response. All are, moreover, at different stages in the process, with Chad having joined the initiative just two months ago, and the majority less than a year ago. Despite the short timeframe, a number of lessons on the application of the CRRF have emerged from the breadth of experience to date.² Six of these lessons, as well as the ways in which they have informed the development of the global compact on refugees, are highlighted below.

¹ In preparation for the development of the global compact on refugees, a series of thematic consultations were held in 2017 with United Nations member States and a broad range of stakeholders. Formal consultations on the draft text of the global compact on refugees were initiated in February 2018 and are expected to conclude in July. As provided in the New York Declaration, the High Commissioner will include the proposed global compact on refugees in his annual report to the General Assembly in 2018.

² More detailed information on the practical application of the CRRF, including country information sheets and regional dashboards, is available from the CRRF global digital portal: <http://www.globalcrrf.org>.

The CRRF, while universal in nature, has proven itself to be relevant and adaptable to a range of contexts.

6. The social, economic and policy contexts in which comprehensive responses are being developed are notably diverse. They include both least developed countries and middle-income countries, as well as countries where the majority of the national population live below the international poverty line and several where fewer than 5 per cent do. They include countries such as Uganda, the largest refugee host country in Africa, with nearly 1.5 million refugees and growing (representing 3.8 per cent of the national population); and Djibouti, with approximately 27,000 refugees (also representing some 3 per cent of the national population). As foreseen, the CRRF is being applied to some of the most protracted situations in the world, as well as to ongoing and new emergencies. It has been initiated in situations of encampment, as well as in places where freedom of movement is permitted. It has also been initiated in contexts where refugees traditionally have received services through parallel systems run by humanitarian actors, as well as in contexts where refugees and host communities jointly access services provided by local and national governments.

7. The CRRF is anchored in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. From this solid legal foundation, it distills within a single framework decades of experience and good practice from a range of contexts. It also encompasses a number of elements and principles to enhance the humanitarian-development nexus, expand the base of partnership, and reinforce burden- and responsibility-sharing. The global compact on refugees aims to build on all of these elements. The text of the framework itself observes: “While each large movement of refugees will differ in nature, the elements [included] provide a framework for a comprehensive and people-centred refugee response, which is in accordance with international law and best international practice and adapted to the specific context.”³ States are demonstrating, through their application of the CRRF in a wide range of contexts, that the framework is both flexible and adaptable, enabling the development of comprehensive responses suited to the unique circumstances of each situation. The global compact on refugees seeks to take this same approach.

Comprehensive responses have begun with and are built from strong government leadership.

8. In each case, the decision to apply a comprehensive refugee response began with the political will and commitment of the State involved. In turn, this factor has driven the development of the response.

9. Political will and commitment have been manifest in a number of important ways. Nine of the countries demonstrated their commitment to greater inclusion of refugees through pledges made at the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, convened just one day after the adoption of the New York Declaration. Their commitments were wide ranging – including enhancing access to education, jobs and livelihoods, health care and civil documentation; expanding freedom of movement and out-of-camp policies; strengthening asylum systems; and offering opportunities for local integration – and have provided the foundations for the application of the CRRF in these countries.

10. Strong leadership has also been apparent in the process by which States have pursued the development of comprehensive responses. Many countries have convened extensive consultations, reflecting the whole-of-society approach. A notable example was Somalia’s National Forum on Durable Solutions for Refugee Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, which gave a direct voice to populations concerned on displacement and solutions and included the participation of national and regional governments, community leaders, and civil society, among others. This facilitated an increasing consensus on key steps toward conditions conducive for sustainable return and reintegration, which are now reflected in a National Action Plan.

³ See A/RES/71/1, annex 1, para. 3.

11. Many States have pursued a “whole-of-government” approach, with executive leadership and engagement of relevant line ministries, including finance and planning. In Ethiopia, for example, the Office of the Prime Minister leads a Steering Committee on the CRRF along with co-chairs from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation, the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and UNHCR. Other participants include the Ministries of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Education, Health, Labour and Social Affairs, and Water, Irrigation and Electricity, as well as the Department of Immigration and Nationality, the Ethiopian Investment Commission and the Industrial Parks Development Commission. Meanwhile Uganda’s CRRF Steering Group reflects the roles of both central and local governments through a structural sharing of leadership between the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Local Government. Mexico has described its application of the CRRF as a positive and constructive national experience, enabling an inter-institutional and inter-sectoral approach to evaluate progress in the fulfilment of its commitments. The global compact on refugees will seek to build upon the strong government leadership shown in the application of the CRRF.

National arrangements have been instrumental in fostering a broader base of understanding, engagement and support.

12. The CRRF is not a coordination mechanism, nor does it dictate a particular means of coordination. Its application should build on existing mechanisms, wherever possible. Yet at the national level, many States have found the creation of a strategic governance mechanism to be pragmatic and useful in several regards.

13. The “whole-of-government” approach, highlighted above, has facilitated legal and policy developments, as well as the consultation required for development planning. Yet the CRRF has also further broadened these bodies to engage the broad range of stakeholders envisioned in a comprehensive response. In other words, a “whole-of-society” approach is being embraced not only in the operational response, but also in its strategic development. National arrangements today include not only United Nations partners and civil society, but also refugees and host community members, donors and bilateral development actors, the World Bank, national chambers of commerce and representatives of the private sector. Through their broad and diverse memberships, these bodies play a valuable role in creating a shared understanding and common vision through gaps analysis and prioritization, the development of national action plans and the mobilization of resources. The global compact on refugees seeks to reflect this good practice by supporting the development of strong national arrangements under the leadership of host States.

Comprehensive approaches are being realized along with the increased engagement of development actors.

14. Government leadership both enables and supports increased engagement of development actors. In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the commitment to “leave no one behind”, there has been increasing attention to the development impacts of forced displacement. Among countries applying the CRRF, this shift is most evident in the inclusion of refugees, returnees and host communities in national and district development plans, such as in Costa Rica, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Zambia. This, in turn, has drawn greater attention from bilateral and multilateral development actors in addressing displacement impacts in their assistance frameworks and interventions, consistent with national priorities. This includes the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) currently in place in Costa Rica, Djibouti, Guatemala, Honduras and Uganda, as well as one currently in preparation in Kenya.

15. Changing socio-economic conditions through development investments take time. However, some shifts in policy and institutional arrangements are increasingly apparent. Most notably, the World Bank’s IDA18 \$2 billion sub-window for refugees and host communities targets low-income countries hosting large numbers of refugees. Through a mix of grants and highly concessional loans, the IDA18 financing seeks to support

governments addressing the development needs of both host communities and refugee populations by mitigating initial shocks, strengthening service delivery and creating socio-economic opportunities. Sixteen countries are under consideration for financing in the initial round, with the eligibility of eight countries – including Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Uganda – now confirmed. Among bilateral actors, significant investments are being made to support comprehensive responses serving both refugees and host communities, including by the European Union’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO), the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).⁴ In total, through a range of programmes, the World Bank, the European Union and bilateral development agencies have committed more than \$3 billion in support of countries pursuing comprehensive approaches.

16. There is also evidence of more coordinated sectoral support by development actors. Djibouti’s rapid action on its pledges and the inclusion of refugees in its national action plan on education have been met by support from the World Bank Group, the Global Partnership for Education and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). In Ethiopia, work on the development of industrial parks – which will enable the employment of 70,000 nationals and 30,000 refugees – is being supported by the World Bank Group as well as a multi-donor trust fund financed by the European Investment Bank, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development.

The whole-of-society approach is succeeding in expanding the base of cooperation and partnership at both local and global levels.

17. Humanitarian action alone cannot build the resilience of communities and lay the foundations for solutions; development, peace and security approaches also have fundamental roles to play. While grounding comprehensive refugee responses in the principles of international cooperation and burden- and responsibility-sharing, the CRRF and the current text of the global compact on refugees stress the imperative of a multi-stakeholder approach, recognizing the necessary contributions of national and local authorities, international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, civil society, the private sector and refugees themselves. It is precisely in leveraging the diverse mandates, capacities, resources and expertise of this range of actors that the transformative potential of the CRRF and the future global compact on refugees lies.

18. Since the CRRF’s initiation, broader engagement on behalf of refugees and host countries and communities is indeed emerging at local, national and global levels. While strengthened humanitarian-development collaboration is highlighted above, the engagement of the private sector – as innovators and problem-solvers, investors and employers – also holds great potential. A recent World Bank Group study, “Kakuma as a Marketplace,” found that Kakuma refugee camp and town represent a vibrant informal economy valued at \$56 million annually and covering a population equivalent to Kenya’s tenth largest city. The World Bank’s International Finance Corporation now plans to contribute \$20 million to the Kakuma-Kalobeyei Challenge Fund, which will benefit entrepreneurs among refugees and the host community. In Costa Rica, private enterprises are supporting the employment of refugees and asylum-seekers through the “my first job” initiative. In Ethiopia, the IKEA Foundation is helping transform the lives of 200,000 refugees and members of the local community through support for improved access to quality education; sustainable energy solutions; and livelihoods initiatives that involve building irrigation systems, training farmers

⁴ This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive, as UNHCR does not track or record development support provided in the context of the CRRF.

and providing small business loans. Through efforts such as the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, businesses, along with private citizens and communities, are also supporting access to solutions through resettlement and complementary pathways.

19. At the global level, partnerships continue to expand with increasingly diverse entities. GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, has expanded its support to refugee host communities, and the United Nations Capital Development Fund has developed a financial inclusion framework for refugees. The United Nations Development Programme has enhanced its interventions in favour of refugees and host communities, facilitating their inclusion in national development plans, providing seed funding to strengthen rule of law and governance systems, and advocating housing, land and property rights in support of solutions. The International Labour Organization adopted two instruments promoting decent work for refugees, while the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UNHCR have developed a 10-point action plan for engaging private employers in the hiring of refugees. The World Health Organization has developed the “Framework of Priorities and Guiding Principles to Promote the Health of Refugees and Migrants” and has mobilized resources to strengthen emergency health services for refugees in the context of the MIRPS.

20. Partnerships can also be enabling, providing a better basis upon which to inform comprehensive refugee responses. In this context, the World Bank and UNHCR have agreed to establish a Joint Data Centre on Forced Displacement to support the systematic collection and analysis of socio-economic and population data, providing a better understanding of the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of the displaced and their host communities. The Data Centre will also support the strengthening of global data collection, with an emphasis on national systems. The OECD is informing donor strategies through its new guide, “Addressing Forced Displacement through Development Planning and Co-operation”.

21. The “whole-of-society” approach is gradually bringing about an important shift toward greater social and economic inclusion of refugees and consideration of the role and needs of host communities as central actors in refugee responses. Critical in this regard is the increasing participation of refugees and host communities in discussions and decisions affecting them. They are participating in mechanisms at the local and national levels and contributed to the thematic discussions held in 2017 support of the development of the global compact on refugees. Building from global refugee youth consultations that involved some 1,500 youth from 34 countries in 2015-2016, and broad-based consultations in countries applying the CRRF, the High Commissioner recently established a Global Youth Advisory Council to ensure continuity in consultation and representation.

Regional comprehensive refugee responses are facilitating coherent situational approaches and strengthening responses in both countries of asylum and origin.

22. While the CRRF does not explicitly mention the notion of regional comprehensive refugee responses, the development of two such responses – the MIRPS and the regional Somali refugee response – has proven valuable in strengthening the overall response and generating momentum and political support. These two regional responses build on long-standing regional cooperation and solidarity. They provide a forum for States to cooperate, contributing to a better harmonization of approaches to protection, resilience and solutions across their regions. The regional application of the CRRF for the Somali refugee situation, for example, includes a strong focus on investing inside Somalia to create conditions conducive to voluntary return in safety and dignity. The MIRPS brings together countries of origin, transit, asylum and return to address root causes, prevention, protection, resilience and solutions, in a regional context where forced displacement is fluid and complex.

23. Where led and supported by States, the advantages of regional comprehensive responses are manifest. This includes supporting the sharing and further development of good practices. For example, with the support of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), education ministers of participating States recently reviewed regional quality education standards in the context of the CRRF, Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. The resulting Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education

contains commitments by participating States to integrate refugees and returnees into national education sector plans by 2020, as well as to recognize and validate the educational qualifications of refugees and returnees across the IGAD region. A second thematic meeting on livelihoods will take place later this year.

24. Regional comprehensive responses are also generating greater commitment and support by regional actors and facilitating cross-border interventions. The MIRPS contains individual and collective commitments by participating States, as well as commitments and plans of action by actors including the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Central American Integration System, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesiastical Network on Migration, Displacement, Asylum and Human Trafficking (CLAMOR). With support from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, the United Nations Development Group for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNDG LAC) is pursuing a joint initiative to address the root causes and consequences of violence in the north of Central America.

25. Finally, through the stewardship of IGAD and the OAS, the regional responses are helping ensure continued momentum, monitoring and follow-up. In March 2018, IGAD convened the first annual ministerial meeting on follow-up to the Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action, drawing renewed attention to the importance of investment in national data systems and analysis, as well as better financial tracking mechanisms at the national level. The OAS has convened a MIRPS support group, including cooperating States from within and beyond the region, and will hold a first review meeting in October 2018 – one year following the adoption of the MIRPS.

26. The process leading to the development of the global compact on refugees has sought to integrate as far as possible the lessons learned through the practical application of the CRRF. This includes the six lessons described above.
