

UNHCR ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS
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International Conference Center Geneva

DISCUSSION PAPER

Title of session: #BeyondFundraising: Working together, better, with companies

Date: Friday, 5 July 2019

Time/Room: 11:00 – 12:30 – Room 3

Executive Summary:

Asking the easy, the complex and the tough questions on private sector partnerships in refugee-contexts

In order to inform the engagement of private sector at the Global Refugee Forum and catalyze business engagement towards the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), this session will ask speakers and participants to answer both easy questions of why humanitarian actors should partner with private sector companies, complex questions of how shared value partnerships become successful, as well as tough questions around what added value UNHCR and NGOs can bring to partnerships with companies that seek to solve refugee-problems through business models.

Fundamentally, there are four ways in which companies can engage with refugees either directly or through humanitarian organizations: 1) sell products or services to refugees or humanitarian organizations, 2) buy products or services from refugees, 3) employ refugees directly or indirectly through their value chain, or 4) advocate on policy change on a refugee-issue that aligns with their business interest. UNHCR and NGO partners, in the context of the GCR, have a role to play in increasing the amount of engagement by the private sector in refugee-contexts through these four ways as well as to facilitate the necessary financing.

Concept Note:

- **Background and link to the theme** [*see Concept note for the overall theme for reference*]

Humanitarian actors are increasingly starting to pursue partnerships with private sector companies that go beyond traditional procurement and fundraising. While such partnerships are often talked about as necessary to deliver on the whole-of-society-approach laid out in the Global Compact for Refugees, it can be difficult to make such partnerships function in practice, and particularly reaching both scale and financial (self-) sustainability. Fundamentally, there are four ways that companies can engage with refugees through their business as outlined below and each of those present partnership opportunities and challenges for humanitarian organizations that the session will seek to discuss in depth.

Selling to Refugees

Refugees are end-users, or consumers, of many different products or service regardless of whether they are provided to them as in-kind aid from humanitarian actors or whether refugees themselves buy them using cash that they have either earned or been given through a cash-based intervention. All products, and many services, that refugees use are produced by companies and UNHCR alone procures more than 1 billion USD worth of goods and services each year of which the majority is distributed to refugees as end-users. Refugees, using cash either earned or given as aid, furthermore consume several billions worth of goods and services produced by companies. As such, refugees - directly or through aid-agencies - represent a market for private sector companies and that means that there are opportunities for UNHCR and other humanitarian actors to collaborate with companies to ensure that refugees have access to the most relevant products and service at the most affordable prices.

Buying from Refugees

Refugees can sometimes hold certain skills or have access to certain productive assets that could enable them to be suppliers for companies. UNHCR's MADE51 initiative is an example of a "public-private-partnership" platform that seeks to enable more refugee-artisans to supply their products to wholesalers who can then reach global markets for arts and crafts. Some digital work platforms also provide refugees an opportunity, albeit with significant barriers, to offer digital services to companies that outsource certain tasks.

Employing Refugees

A person's refugee-status should not matter with regards to making a decision on whether to hire them or not, but unfortunately in many countries companies shy away from hiring refugees on the basis of legal or perceived bias. Fortunately there is a growing body of companies that make public commitments towards increasing their employment of refugees.

Advocating on Behalf of Refugees

Companies, all else equal, will have a business interest in seeing refugees be fully integrated into the labour market. Companies that have products to sell to refugees will also be interested in having unhindered access to these potential clients and as such will have an interest in refugees having freedom of movement and not live in camp-settings where access to refugees is restricted. A specific issue such as being allowed to open bank accounts is in the interest of the financial service industry.

Companies, including through business member organisations such as federations of employers, are often the most influential special interest group in a given country and as such should be well-placed to drive policy change on behalf of refugees when these align with business interest. Humanitarian actors certainly has a role to play to enter into dialogue with companies to widen the number of companies globally that engage actively in refugee policy debates.

- **Objective(s) of the session** [*Development of the executive summary provided for the detailed agenda*]

The purpose of this session is to gather key individuals from the humanitarian community who lead on "Shared Value" (non-fundraising) partnerships with private sector companies within their respective organizations in order to achieve the following objectives:

- Inform the private sector partnership aspects of the Global Forum on Refugees
- Share experiences between the organizations on what works and what does not with respect to shared value partnerships with companies

- Share toolkits and guidelines developed by each organization related to private sector partnerships.
- Inform each other on ongoing/planned activities within various sectors (Energy, Wash, Education, Financial Inclusion, Livelihoods, etc.) with significant involvement of private sector.
- Identify comparative advantages in terms of roles between UNHCR and the NGOs in moving forward shared value private sector partnerships.
- **Desired outcome of the session:** [*What would you like to achieve with this session? What would be the follow-up actions to it?*]

The Session will serve as a call for humanitarian NGOs to increase its partnership efforts with private sector and as such catalyse private sector engagement and commitment for the GRF and the implementation of the GCR. Concrete outcomes will include follow-up engagement with those NGOs that have interesting and valuable partnerships with companies, as well as the exploration of pledges for the GRF made jointly by NGOs and businesses.

- **Methodology & choreography** [*panel discussion, break-out sessions, pigeonhole, video presentation, mixture of different elements*]

The session will start out with a call to action towards the GRF by the UNHCR Senior Advisor on Private Sector Partnerships, followed by in-depth case-presentations by Mercy Corps and DRC (20 min. each). Then a real-time pigeonhole survey of all participants on the topic, and finally with a panel discussion on key questions raised.