



Iterative evaluation of the UNHCR/UNICEF blueprint for joint action for refugee children

EVALUATION REPORT

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Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank Jane Mwangi of UNICEF’s Evaluation Office and Nabila Hameed of UNHCR’s Evaluation Office for their support in the preparation of this report.

Title: Iterative evaluation of the UNHCR/UNICEF blueprint for joint action for refugee children, Evaluation report | September 2023

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Abbreviations

CO	Country Office	MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
CCC	Core Commitments for Children	NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
CP	Child Protection	PAF	Partnership Analysis Framework
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child	RAM	Results Assessment Module
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework	RO	Regional Office
DWG	Data Working Group	RFW	Results Framework
ECW	Education Cannot Wait	RRP	Refugee Response Plan
GBV	Gender-based violence	SC	Steering Committee
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees	SCF	Strategic Collaboration Framework
GRF	Global Refugee Forum	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan	SoC	Stories of Change
IDP	Internally displaced person	ToC	Theory of Change
JAP	Joint Action Plan	ToR	Terms of Reference
JCT	Joint Coordination Team	UN	United Nations
KII	Key Informant Interviews	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
LOU	Letter of Understanding	UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
LTA	Long Term Agreement	WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation	WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

Glossary of terms

Term	Description
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	The UN CRC is an international treaty that recognizes the human rights of children, defined as persons up to the age of 18 years. The Convention establishes in international law that States Parties must ensure that all children – without discrimination in any form – benefit from special protection measures and assistance; have access to services such as education and health care; can develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential; grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding; and are informed about and participate in, achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner. ¹
Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)	The GCR garners international solidarity in ensuring that refugees and the countries and communities that host large numbers of them are not left behind. It sets out arrangements to ensure that both refugees and their host communities benefit from this support. The GCR explicitly links forced displacement with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provides support for efforts to ensure refugees are included in work towards achieving the SDGs. ²
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared vision for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. At its heart are the 17 SDGs, which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. ³

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/frequently-asked-questions>.

² UNHCR (2020) *The Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Compact on Refugees*.

³ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. The Blueprint Initiative represented a renewed commitment by UNHCR and UNICEF to accelerate joint efforts to promote and protect the rights of refugee children and the communities that host them, and to support their inclusion and access to nationally led services. It was operationalized through an intensive, time-bound partnership from 2020 to 2022 in a group of focus countries, with regional offices/bureaux and at global level, to leverage existing mandates, capacities and comparative advantages of UNHCR and UNICEF and build on areas of ongoing work with the greatest potential. Overall, it aimed to realize and demonstrate both amplified programmatic results in three key areas of education, child protection and WASH, and the effectiveness and efficiency of a transformed partnership⁴. Learning from the Blueprint was intended to inform the development and implementation of a new UNHCR-UNICEF global partnership agreement in 2023.

The purpose of this independent evaluation was to critically assess and analyze implementation and emerging results from the partnership countries to generate evidence in order to:

- Inform ongoing implementation and strategic decision-making throughout the Blueprint pilot phase; and,
- Identify lessons learnt and good practice in partnership initiatives between UNHCR and UNICEF more broadly to inform the revised global partnership agreement.

15. The thematic, temporal and geographic scopes of the evaluation are summarized below.

Scope of the evaluation

Scope	Description
Thematic scope	While the Blueprint Results Framework has four specific Outcomes, the ToR for the Iterative Evaluation focused on assessing Outcome 4, and its corresponding outputs: <i>'By 2021, Refugee and returnee children and host communities' benefit from a transformed partnership between UNICEF and UNHCR, resulting in a more predictable, effective, sustainable and cost-efficient response in 9 countries</i> . Because of the short timeframe of the Blueprint (two years with a year extension), it was not expected that much measurable progress would be made towards achieving sectoral outcomes and impacts and so this was not a significant focus.
Temporal scope	This report focuses on the three years of implementation of the Blueprint from the beginning of 2020 until the end of 2022 in addition to drawing on good partnership practices between UNHCR and UNICEF more broadly.
Geographic scope	The first round of the evaluation covered UNHCR-UNICEF's Blueprint partnership in 10 focus countries, which included Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Rwanda. The second round expanded this sample to include two non-Blueprint countries; Uganda and Italy.

Methodology

- 1 The key methods are listed in the table below along with a summary of how they were applied during the evaluation and the evidence that this evaluation report draws on.

Summary of methods used during the evaluation

Method	Description
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⁴ The Blueprint Initiative aimed to realize and accelerate progress to achieve increased access to education, clean water and sanitation, and child protection services for 10 million refugee and host community children and their family members by the end of 2022 through an effective, efficient, and transformed partnership.

Document review	Blueprint documentation was reviewed, in addition to broader literature on partnerships. Country-level documentation was reviewed in advance of case study analysis. A list of information sources is provided in the annexes.
Summary	The review drew from a document repository of 1,982 documents (see annex 3)
Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted during the evaluation with stakeholders at global, regional and country level. These were used as a means of building evidence, triangulating findings and filling evidence gaps. A set of interview questions was developed which drew on the evaluation matrix which informed the team's line of questioning.
Summary	Interviews were conducted with 101 informants in the first round of data collection and 166 in the second round of data collection (see annex 2)
Country case studies	A case study approach was used for the focus countries, each of which was requested to submit 3-4 program case studies to provide a focus for the evaluation. The evaluation team conducted virtual country visits during the first round of data collection, complemented by a small number of in-persons visits in the second round of data collection.
Summary	10 Blueprint countries participated in the first round of data collection; 9 Blueprint countries and 2 non-Blueprint countries participated in the second data collection round

Evaluation design

- The evaluation team prepared an analytical framework which included a clearly articulated set of success factors against which to evaluate the partnership (see figure below).

Analytical framework: partnership building blocks⁵

1. Partnership Fundamentals						
Partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF benefits from a shared vision, committed leadership & an approach that can be adapted to the context						
Key elements	Compelling, shared over-arching vision	Committed & accountable leadership	Sufficient alignment of interests for net benefit	Adaptable framework	Agreed measures of success	
Key risks: Lack of buy-in from leadership; failure to agree key aspects of the vision; insufficiently flexible partnership to accommodate context or innovative approaches; inability to measure success; failure to align interests erode potential for benefit.						
2. Partnership management and implementation						
Partnership is results-oriented, is well-managed. It has adequate funding and robust procedures for monitoring and review. The benefits of partnership are perceived to outweigh its costs						
Key elements	Effective management of the partnership	Achievement of partnership results	Compatible systems & processes	Adequate funding & resources	Robust monitoring & review	Net value compared with resources
Key risks: Failure to adequately harmonise systems, lack of resources to support partnership ambition and changed ways of working; failure to achieve and/or measure results; perceptions/evidence that partnership costs outweigh the benefits.						
3. Partnership relationship						
Trust, transparency, strong communication and mutual benefit ensures the sustainability of the dynamic partner relationship. A focus on learning ensures the partnership adapts to the context						
Key elements	Trust and transparency	Power balance and equity	Mutual benefit	Clear communication	Scope for learning and adaptation	
Key risks: Lack of trust, failure to play fair, or perceptions that one partner is disproportionately benefitting; failure to identify contextual changes (positive or negative) which have implications for the partnership.						

- The analytical framework comprises a set of building blocks separated into three groups, which include: (i) the partnership fundamentals; (ii) management and implementation; and (iii) relationships, which are considered fundamental to the achievement of a predictable, effective, relevant, cost-efficient and sustainable partnership. While these building blocks are presented

⁵ Adapted from Stibbe, D., Prescott, D. and UNDESA (2020) *The SDG Partnership Guidebook: A practical guide to building high impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals*. The Partnering Initiative and UNDESA.

separately in the framework, they are strongly inter-connected and are all linked to working within complex, changing and often ambiguous environments.

4. The ToR for the evaluation (reproduced in annex 1) and the analytical framework informed the evaluation matrix, and interview questions. The structure of the report is also consistent with the framework for purposes of consistency.

Findings

Partnership fundamentals: To what extent and in what ways do the fundamental features of UNHCR-UNICEF partnerships influence the predictability, sustainability and effectiveness of joint action in support of refugee inclusion/better results for refugee children?

5. The partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF is framed around the New York Declaration,⁶ the Global Compact on Refugees⁷ and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework,⁸ which provide a strategic alignment of interests and offer an important foundation for collaboration between the two organizations. Moreover, the strong backing that the Blueprint partnership received from leadership in both agencies ensured that it was given HQ prioritisation. This support has provided an enabling environment for the partnership which has been realized through the launch of the Strategic Collaboration Framework (SCF). As such, HQ prioritisation has offered an important foundation for **sustainability**.
6. While the evaluation found that the strategic vision of the Blueprint provided a bedrock for the partnership, the organizations encountered challenges in operationalizing these goals. The translation of commitments into action in support of refugee inclusion requires operational leadership, adequate resourcing and consistent institutional prioritization. A shift to regional oversight for the recently launched SCF offers significant potential to strengthen the **effectiveness** of the partnership. Ultimately, however, transformative change in strengthening refugee inclusion requires that States themselves take steps to make the necessary legal or policy changes and the case studies clearly demonstrated the challenges that were faced by UNHCR and UNICEF where this commitment did not exist or in contexts where commitments were inconsistently applied.
7. The evaluation documented the important link between a **predictable** partnership and an alignment of interests between UNHCR and UNICEF, which offer a foundation from which operational challenges can be navigated. Finding an alignment of interests between the two organizations worked better in some countries than others, and consequently, levels of ambition and willingness to work also together varied from context to context. At a sectoral level, the Blueprint provided valuable opportunities for technical staff within the two agencies to learn from each other and to build common ground across the three technical sectors. While considerable progress was made, there is scope for further collaboration in these sectors, as well as in the other technical areas.

Partnership management and implementation: How, and in what ways, does the management and implementation of UNHCR-UNICEF partnerships influence the predictability, effectiveness and sustainability of joint action in support of refugee inclusion/better results for refugee children?

⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/asylum-and-migration/new-york-declaration-refugees-and-migrants>.

⁷ <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/global-compact-refugees>.

⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework>.

8. The **predictability** of joint action in support of refugee inclusion has been strengthened as a consequence of the Blueprint's more rigorously articulated results framework and clearer accountabilities. This required a trade-off in terms of staff time, particularly at the outset of the initiative. It worked better where there was scope for the accountabilities to be discussed and locally contextualized, and with time as responsibilities for the partnership became embedded in day-to-day workloads, and accountabilities were subsequently formalized within individual work plans and institutional country planning documents.
9. The evaluation found it difficult to attribute **efficiencies** to the Blueprint. This was in large part because a consistent approach was not taken to measuring and reporting these. While anecdotal evidence suggested that some cost-savings were made as a consequence of the partnership, it was also evident that the extra meetings, documents, processes and reporting that were required all had time costs. It is noteworthy that the general view among evaluation participants was that better results for refugee children – where these occurred and could be evidenced - justified any additional workload that may have resulted from the partnership.
10. UNHCR and UNICEF have been successful in leveraging their distinctive strengths, competencies, areas of experience and relationships to increase the **effectiveness** of action in support of refugees in many of the Blueprint focus countries. However, the different systems, approaches and ways of working of the two agencies have at times complicated efforts to work in partnership. While the Data Working Group made promising progress, different approaches to planning, budgeting, and resource mobilization made it difficult to consistently realize the aspirations of the Blueprint partnership at country-level. Weaknesses in monitoring and reporting – notably, an emphasis on quantitative over qualitative data and difficulties attributing refugee inclusion results to the partnership – made it challenging to demonstrate credible results from the partnership.
11. Governments are key to the **sustainability** of results achieved through the partnership and there were numerous examples of UNICEF and UNHCR leveraging their respective relationships with government stakeholders in order to prompt longer-term change. Despite evidence of important contributions from the partnership that were not reliant on large financial investments, joint advocacy in particular, lack of additional funding was still identified as a particularly significant and pervasive challenge. Resource gaps were found to have limited the transformative potential of the partnership and generated frustrations within the two organizations. Securing additional resources for the SCF from donors and greater commitment from refugee-hosting governments will be key to delivering more sustainable results through the SCF.

Partnership relationships: What influence (positive or negative) does the relationship between UNHCR and UNICEF have on the predictability, effectiveness and sustainability of joint action in support of refugee inclusion/better results for refugee children?

12. One of the most important conclusions of the evaluation is that the quality of the relationship between UNHCR and UNICEF staff – at country, regional and headquarters level - was one of the most important arbiters of the **effectiveness** of the partnership. While softer aspects of the partnership such as discussions and meetings between the staff of both agencies often attracted criticism from staff as they considered them time-consuming, these investments have also proven to be beneficial as they have strengthened trust and understanding between the two agencies, which has in turn strengthened the overall **predictability** and **effectiveness** of the partnership.

13. While, on the face of it, *'trust'* is an intangible partnership characteristic, the number of references made during the evaluation to the importance of trust when brokering and **sustaining** the Blueprint partnership underlined the importance of seeking to prompt and promote it. Moreover, the number of examples given during the evaluation of when a loss of trust undermined an existing partnership was significant. This speaks directly to one of the key success factors during the Blueprint, which was the influence of agency staff. The scope that individual personnel had to influence the partnership – either positively when they were predisposed to the partnership or negatively when they felt that the partnership added little value – was significant. Moreover, these views, which were often strongly held, were rarely based on an objective assessment of what the partnership could offer, but rather, were most often influenced by negative relationships from the past. This finding was consistent across all of the Blueprint countries.
14. The evaluation found that the added value of the partnership was harder to evidence in contexts where agency staff perceived a mismatch in how it benefitted their agency; in several of the Blueprint countries, a lack of engagement in the initiative was prompted by a concern that one agency was disproportionately benefitting compared to the other. Ultimately, if the partnership is to be **sustainable**, then the two agencies need to feel that it benefits their own agency individually in addition to both agencies collectively.

The overall contribution of the partnership to the inclusion of refugee children

15. Overall, the evaluation found that many staff in UNHCR and UNICEF are committed to working together to achieve better results for refugee children, and there are many examples from the Blueprint experience (and beyond) to demonstrate what they can achieve when the two organizations consistently invest in the partnership. However, even where there was a strong leadership commitment to delivering the Blueprint, and a foundation of trust and good communication which underpinned the relationship, it was most often the enabling factors that undermined good intentions and prevented the organizations from translating commitments into action. Operational aspects of the partnership such as the need for adequate resources, compatible systems (e.g., for data management, programme planning and implementation) and effective ways of measuring progress are all elements that have proved problematic for the collaboration and will continue to act as barriers in an increasingly challenging and resource-scarce humanitarian/development landscape.
16. Fortunately, with the benefit of experience and a commitment to learning, these challenges can also be mitigated and, to some extent, overcome. In that respect, the Blueprint did what it set out to do. It provided an opportunity to incubate and accelerate the partnership – both to achieve better results on behalf of refugee children within a short two- to three-year period, and to highlight the successes and challenges of an operational partnership with a horizon that stretches far beyond the Blueprint. In many respects, the recently approved SCF already demonstrates that lessons have been learned from the Blueprint experience, in part through this iterative evaluation process. The new Framework offers clarity on the expected outcomes of the partnership and the technical contributions of both parties, for example, and provides a flexible template to agree on clear, contextually-relevant accountabilities underpinned by strong country and regional leadership.

Recommendations

1. The recommendations listed hereunder were generated through an iterative process of discussion and validation over the two rounds of data collection and analysis. Draft recommendations were

discussed and revised based on input from the respective evaluation offices of UNHCR and UNICEF, the JCT and the Evaluation Reference Group. They highlight additional key actions to allow the partnership to continue to evolve and deliver on behalf of refugee children.

Partnership fundamentals		Prioritisation/ Action by?
1.	Leadership: Ensure that the partnership continues to benefit from strong leadership at all levels	High
	<p>Strong support by leadership for the partnership played an important role in the Blueprint and it will be even more important for the launch and global roll-out of the SCF. The strong support of HQ leadership and, most importantly, regional leadership will be essential for success. Furthermore, HQ support to ensure continued progress against shared goals of strengthening the compatibility of organisational systems (for data sharing and analysis, programme planning and implementation etc.) and shared responsibilities (funding, monitoring etc.) will be particularly important for some time to come.</p> <p>Both organisations should commit to embedding objectives related to partnership and the inclusion of refugee children in the work plans of Regional Directors and Country Representatives, and progress against these responsibilities should be included in regular performance appraisals. Related objectives should also be incorporated into the work plans and performance appraisals of key individuals in headquarters and regional offices tasked with supporting the roll-out of the SCF.</p>	<p>Who: HQ, Regional Bureaux, Country Offices</p> <p>See report sections 4.2 & 5.1</p>
2.	Learning: Ensure that lessons from the Blueprint are institutionalised to strengthen the rollout of the SCF and inform partnership-brokering approaches more widely in the future	Medium
	<p>The Blueprint was a bold and successful attempt to pilot and learn from a transformed partnership. It has yielded a wealth of learning, much of which will be relevant to partnership brokering in the future (the importance of stimulating joint implementation, the value of identifying a discrete first cohort of countries, the value of leadership for maintaining momentum, the importance of adaptability etc.). In addition to the lessons identified in this evaluation, there are others that are specific to each agency. There would be much value in gathering all of these lessons together – internal and external – both as a means of respecting the value of the process, but, more importantly, to inform partnership brokering in the future. Subsequently, these lessons should be incorporated into the implementation plan for the SCF, including the internal communications plan and training materials, and should be reviewed for their relevance to other partnership initiatives.</p>	Who: TBD

Partnership management and implementation		Prioritisation/ Action by?
3	Resource mobilisation: Clarify intentions with respect to, and recognise the importance of, funding to support initiatives to make transformative change in refugee children's inclusion	High
	<p>While the Blueprint demonstrated that change is possible without additional funding, it is also noteworthy that many efforts aimed to bring about transformative change with respect to refugee inclusion were not embarked upon or were de-prioritised by countries when it became clear that funding was not available. Both partners should consider ways to better frame a transformative approach through partnership approaches to donors; one that offers an ambitious country-led change agenda which is more tangible and targeted towards development donors, emphasising the need for a more ambitious agenda to 'close the gap' and reach 2030 Sustainable Development Goal targets with respect to leaving no (refugee) child behind.</p>	<p>Who: TBD</p> <p>See report section 5.4</p>
4.	Monitoring: Develop a 'meaningful and useful' approach to monitoring and measuring changes in the inclusion of refugee children.	High

	The Blueprint highlighted important deficiencies in approaches to monitoring inclusion which focused on quantitative approaches which were ineffective. It is important this gap is addressed in order to better understand the effect of individual and collective efforts to strengthen refugee children's inclusion. Lessons from the evaluation suggest that a qualitative approach, which draws on in-depth case studies would add significant value. An approach which links to policy milestones specific to individual contexts should be developed over time.	Who: Regional Directors See report section 5.2
5.	Advocacy: Continue global level joint advocacy on refugee children's inclusion, building on the work begun by the Joint Coordination Team (JCT) and subject matter leads during the Blueprint pilot period	Medium
	While the evaluation agrees that a relatively light-touch role for headquarters is appropriate for implementation of the SCF, there are key areas in which global representatives can continue to add value. This includes strategic advocacy on the continued benefits of working in partnership for the purposes of refugee inclusion, both within and across technical areas, and positioning of the two organisations to continue to prioritize their collaboration.	Who: Former JCT members See section 5.1
6.	Maintain momentum: Sustain momentum for the UNHCR-UNICEF partnership during the transition from the Blueprint initiative to the roll-out of the SCF	High
	There is a danger of losing momentum during the period in which the Blueprint initiative comes to an end and before the new SCF gains traction. As well as a strong communication effort on the SCF, making clear that the partnership is a priority for both organizations, a range of other actions can ensure that good commitments do not dissipate during the transition, but are built upon to keep the partnership moving forwards. Actions include: careful planning around regional SCF kick-off meetings to ensure that learning from this evaluation and dissemination of the findings from this Blueprint evaluation to inform the ongoing rollout of the SCF and to avoid a sense of <i>'starting from scratch'</i> ; articulation of a robust process to support countries as they determine the appropriate level of ambition for the partnership and draft country Letters of Understanding; and more detailed forward thinking on the Annual Review process for the SCF, including setting out responsibilities for programme leads and other teams to review technical annexes and elements of the SCF Compendia as <i>'living documents'</i> that continue to be rooted in the experience of the partnership and evolve in line with good practice.	Who: TBD

#3	Partnership relationships	Prioritisation/ Action by?
7.	Prioritise the partnership: Mitigate the risks of the partnership being negatively influenced by personal attitudes and perceptions	High
	For the partnership to be effective, both UNHCR and UNICEF must continue to institutionalise it and seek to manage competitive tendencies. In this respect, the SCF provides an important foundation. It is essential that staff have clear responsibilities for the partnership in their work plans, that partnership objectives are visible in country planning documents and that there are clear communications about the institutional prioritisation of the partnership.	Who: TBD See report section 6.1
8.	Promote an enabling environment for the partnership: continue to build capacities and knowledge within both agencies for successful implementation of the partnership	Medium
	The Implementation Plan for the SCF already includes the dissemination of trainings and technical guidance to support roll-out. In addition, a more comprehensive and organic approach to learning and documenting the successes of the partnership will ensure growing understanding staff within both organizations understand the purpose of the partnership and progressively support its implementation over time. Actions that could be taken include the identification of leaders, coaches and role models; incentives for individuals to act as champions for collaboration; sustained efforts to document case studies which highlight comparative advantage and positive partnership case studies; proactive dissemination of the achievements of the partnership; and prospects for opportunities to pilot innovations with small amounts of dedicated funding. Creating an	Who: HQ and Regional Directors

enabling environment for the partnership can be driven at both regional and global levels, with the latter taking a relatively light-touch approach and focusing on cross-regional learning and knowledge sharing.

1. Introduction and purpose of the evaluation

This section outlines the purpose of this report and describes the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation.

1.1 Introduction: the fair deal for refugee children

16. In February 2020 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the UNICEF Executive Director launched a 'Blueprint' for joint action ('*A Fair Deal for Refugee Children*'). The Blueprint represents a renewed commitment by UNHCR and UNICEF to accelerate joint efforts to promote and protect the rights of refugee children and the communities that host them, and to support their inclusion and access to nationally led services.
17. The initiative was operationalized through an intensive, time-bound joint effort in a first group of ten focus countries, namely: Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Rwanda. These countries are home to 2 million refugee children – over 20 per cent of the global total – and represent a diverse range of political and operational contexts, including protracted and acute displacement crises, low- and middle-income countries, camp-based and urban settings, as well as mixed-migration and internally displaced persons (IDP) contexts.⁹
18. At the global level, the aim of the Blueprint was to leverage existing mandates, capacities and comparative advantages of UNHCR and UNICEF and build on areas of ongoing work with the greatest potential. Overall, the Blueprint aims to realize and accelerate progress to achieve increased access to education, clean water and sanitation, and child protection services for 10 million refugee and host community children and their family members by the end of 2022¹⁰ through an effective, efficient, and transformed partnership.
19. UNICEF and UNHCR commissioned the joint iterative evaluation to inform ongoing implementation of the Blueprint and to support the generation of a rich and cumulative evidence base on results. This evaluation report is the culmination of this undertaking.

1.2 Organisation of this report

- 2 This report outlines findings, conclusions and offers recommendations from the iterative evaluation of the UNHCR/UNICEF fair deal (blueprint) for refugee children.¹¹ The report is organized as follows:
 - **Section 1** (this section) describes the Blueprint and outlines the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation.
 - **Section 2** provides background to the partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF. It describes the vision of UNHCR and UNICEF for the joint action and examines the external context.
 - **Section 3** outlines the approach used by the evaluation. It provides details of the methods and provides a summary of the sources of information which informed the findings of this report.
 - The focus of **Section 4** is on the foundational aspects of partnership, including leadership

⁹ UNICEF and UNHCR (2020) *UNICEF-UNHCR Blueprint for joint action: theory of change narrative*, 11 May 2020.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The term '*Blueprint evaluation*' will be used henceforth for ease of reference.

commitment; a vision of what success looks like and alignment of interests; and flexibility to accommodate dynamic contexts.

- **Section 5** focuses on effective management of partnerships, with contributions from both organizations and attention to the downstream effect on partners. It also examines issues of governance, management, operational arrangements; as well as resourcing of the partnership and efforts to achieve efficiencies.
 - Partnerships are driven by a complex and dynamic relationship between the partners. This is the focus of **section 6**.
 - **Section 7** seeks to use the case studies examined during the evaluation to better understand the contribution that the UNHCR – UNICEF partnership has made to strengthening refugee inclusion.
 - **Section 8** provides a conclusion and a set of recommendations which focus on practical steps to strengthen the partnership in future
- 3 To improve clarity and to aid navigation, summary findings have been included in **grey boxes** at the start of the sub-sections of the three evaluation questions. Findings are also emphasized by the use of **bold text** in the body of the report. Lessons have been extracted and are highlighted throughout the report by the use of **green boxes**. Recommendations are made at the end of the report and include a reference to the relevant section where they are substantively discussed.

1.3 Evaluation objective, purpose and scope

- 4 The overall objective of this evaluation is to assess, as systematically as possible, the Blueprint implementation and its contribution to demonstrated results in the focus countries; as well as assessing successful approaches to partnerships that have led to refugee children’s inclusion in a number of non-Blueprint countries, with the aim of generating findings and drawing good practices, opportunities, lessons learnt and strategic actions that can be scaled up.
- 5 The evaluation purpose is to inform a new UNHCR-UNICEF global partnership agreement in 2023. The evaluation also sought to inform ongoing implementation and strategic decision-making during the pilot phase.
- 6 In addition to promoting learning, the evaluation contributes to strengthening accountability towards refugee children and their families, especially in the Blueprint focus countries, as well as for partners and stakeholders involved in this initiative.

Figure 1: Map of the countries under evaluation



- 7 With a strong learning orientation, this forward-looking, phased evaluation,¹² utilized data collected from the Blueprint as well as more broadly from other experiences of partnership. In

¹² The focus of this inception report is on the first phase of the evaluation.

particular, the evaluation explores the nuances of the relationship between the two agencies at headquarters, regional and country levels, examining how predictably, sustainability, effectively and efficiently UNHCR and UNICEF are working together. The scope of the evaluation is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Scope of the evaluation

Scope	Description
Thematic scope	While the Blueprint Results Framework has four specific Outcomes, the ToR for the Iterative Evaluation focused on assessing Outcome 4, and its corresponding outputs: <i>‘By 2021, Refugee and returnee children and host communities’ benefit from a transformed partnership between UNICEF and UNHCR, resulting in a more predictable, effective, sustainable and cost-efficient response in 9 countries.</i> Because of the short timeframe of the Blueprint (two years with a year extension), it was not expected that much measurable progress would be made towards achieving sectoral outcomes and impacts and so this was not a significant focus.
Temporal scope	This report focuses on the three years of implementation of the Blueprint from the beginning of 2020 until the end of 2022 in addition to drawing on good partnership practices between UNHCR and UNICEF more broadly.
Geographic scope	The first round of the evaluation covered UNHCR-UNICEF’s Blueprint partnership in 10 focus countries, which included Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Rwanda. The second round expanded this sample to include two non-Blueprint countries; Uganda and Italy. An indicative map showing the location of the focus countries (Blueprint countries highlighted in red, non-Blueprint countries highlighted in blue) is provided in Figure 1.

1.4 Users of the evaluation

- 8 The primary audience of this evaluation includes: UNHCR and UNICEF management and country teams in focus countries that are responsible for all strategic, implementation, coordination, and monitoring of the Blueprint/partnership; and the UNHCR-UNICEF global Joint Coordination Team (JCT) and Steering Committee for the Blueprint. Regional Offices are also a primary stakeholder for both agencies as they have significant responsibility for ensuring provision of the relevant resources for Country Office (CO) program delivery.
- 9 The expected secondary audiences of the planned final evaluation include governmental and other implementing partners that collaborate and/or coordinate with UNHCR and UNICEF in programming for refugee children and their families; other UN organizations, Non-governmental Organizations and donor agencies.

1.5 Timeline for the evaluation

- 10 It is important to note that the evaluation was split into four components which were spread over three years. These comprised an inception phase, two rounds of data collection, and a final evaluation phase. A summary of the activities and outputs from each phase of the evaluation is provided below (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of activities and outputs from the different phases of the evaluation

Activities and outputs	
Inception and pilot phase Sep – Dec 2020	<u>Activities:</u> Development of evaluation tools and approach, literature review, inception interviews and two virtual focus country visits to pilot the approach. <u>Outputs:</u> Inception report; country feedback presentations; global webinar.
Round 1 data collection Jan – Jul 2021	<u>Activities:</u> Ten virtual country visits, consultations with key informants at regional and global level <u>Outputs:</u> Country feedback presentations; global webinar; year one evaluation report (internal).

Round 2 data collection Apr – Dec 2022	<u>Activities:</u> Nine virtual country visits, three in-person country visits, consultations with key informants at regional and global level <u>Outputs:</u> Country feedback presentations; interim evaluation report (internal).
Summative evaluation Jan – Mar 2023	<u>Activities:</u> Evidence analysis and synthesis <u>Outputs:</u> Evaluation report, global webinar and presentation

2. Evaluation context

This section provides background to partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF. It outlines the external context for the partnership and the vision of UNHCR and UNICEF to accelerate their collaboration in support of refugee children.

2.1 Background to the partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF

2.1.1 Commitments to refugee children

11 On 17 December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR),¹³ after two years of extensive consultations led by UNHCR with Member States, international organizations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts. The GCR is a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation. It provides a shared plan for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities get the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives and has four key objectives:

- Ease pressures on host countries;
- Enhance refugee self-reliance;
- Expand access to third country solutions;
- Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

12 The GCR garners international commitment to ensuring that refugees and the countries and communities that host large numbers of them are not left behind. It explicitly links forced displacement with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provides support for efforts to ensure refugees are included in work towards achieving the SDGs. Together, these complementary frameworks ensure that displaced and stateless persons are not left behind in development processes and that displacement is addressed through inclusive and comprehensive approaches.¹⁴

13 While UNHCR plays an important leadership role in oversight of steps to realize the GCR vision, UNICEF also has a critical function in terms of engaging with governments and line ministries on incorporating refugee children in national policies, systems and plans. In response to the New York Declaration¹⁵ that preceded the GCR, and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)¹⁶ that it set out, in 2016, UNICEF developed a six-point agenda for action for Children on

¹³ For more information on the GCR, see <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>.

¹⁴ UNHCR (2020) *The Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Compact on Refugees*.

¹⁵ Signed in September 2016, The New York Declaration reaffirms the importance of the international refugee regime and contains a wide range of commitments by Member States to strengthen and enhance mechanisms to protect people on the move.

¹⁶ For more information on the CRRF, see <https://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html>.

the Move, including refugee children, internally displaced children and child migrants.¹⁷ The six priority areas cover protection from exploitation; ending child immigration detention; keeping families together and giving children legal status; securing access to health and learning; addressing root causes and combating discrimination and xenophobia. Through the Agenda for Action, UNICEF committed to support Member States, UNHCR and other stakeholders to realize the rights of all refugee children as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).¹⁸ It is these points that provide the framework for UNICEF's engagement with the GCR and a cornerstone for the partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF.

2.1.2 Partnership as a central pillar for the delivery of the GCR and the SDGs

14 Both the SDGs and the GCR place significant emphasis on the necessity of collaborative partnerships as an essential mechanism to deliver these important commitments.¹⁹ However, despite the rhetoric around collaboration, there is significant evidence to show that much work is required if the transformative potential of partnerships is to be realized and galvanized in support of addressing the challenges faced by refugee children. In part, this is because of the scale of the task, as well as an insufficient quantity and quality of existing partnerships to deliver the GCR and SDGs.²⁰

15 Importantly, many of the partnerships that do exist are far from fully delivering on their potential, either because they are not appropriate for the context, or because they are not set up and running as effectively and efficiently as needed.²¹ UNHCR and UNICEF themselves have acknowledged that there are missed opportunities for collaboration between the two organizations (Box 1).

Box 1: Addressing missed opportunities for effective collaboration between UNHCR and UNICEF²²

As the lead UN organizations working respectively for children and for refugees, it is UNICEF and UNHCR's joint responsibility to shape and improve the future of refugee children, their families and communities and those who host them. However, the extent of and approach to collaboration between UNICEF and UNHCR currently varies significantly across contexts. This in turn leads to missed opportunities, inefficiencies (including duplication, failure to share assets and information, lack of streamlining in organizational processes, and additional work to negotiate roles and ways of working in each context) and competition for resources. The result is that both agencies' responses for some of the most vulnerable children in the world and their families are falling short.

2.2 History of partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF

16 UNICEF and UNHCR have a long history of collaboration and partnership. Their collaboration was formalized in a global Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 1996;²³ an agreement on field-level collaboration in 2015, which provided a template for contextualized Letters of Understanding (LOU) between UNICEF and UNHCR at country level;²⁴ and, in 2018, through a joint

¹⁷ UNICEF's Agenda for Action for uprooted children can be found here: <https://www.unicef.org/children-uprooted/agenda-for-action>.

¹⁸ Convention of the Rights of the Child text: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text#>.

¹⁹ United Nations General Assembly (2015) *Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/Res/70/1. 21 October 2015.

²⁰ Stibbe, D.T., Reid, S. and Gilbert, J. (2018) *Maximising the impact of partnership for the SDGs: A practical guide to partnership for the SDGs*, The Partnering Initiative and UN DESA.

²¹ Stibbe, D.T., Reid, S. and Gilbert, J. (2018) *Maximising the impact of partnership for the SDGs: A practical guide to partnership for the SDGs*, The Partnering Initiative and UN DESA.

²² UNHCR and UNICEF (2020) UNICEF-UNHCR Blueprint for joint action: theory of change narrative, 11 May 2020.

²³ See: <https://press.un.org/en/1996/19960314.icef1830.html>.

²⁴ UNHCR and UNICEF (2015) Annex A: Guidance for Country LOU development, January 2015.

letter agreeing how the two organizations would work together to support the CRRF and later the GCR, following its adoption.²⁵

- 17 In addition to these global bilateral agreements, there are multiple examples of partnership, both formal and informal, between the two organizations at global, regional and country levels. One of the most significant of these is the Prospects partnership,²⁶ which brings together UNICEF, UNHCR, the International Labor Organisation, the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank, under the leadership of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to shift from a humanitarian to a development approach in response to displacement-related crises in northern and eastern Africa and the Middle East.²⁷ The Prospects partnership is operational in a number of the Blueprint pilot countries.

2.3 The vision driving the Blueprint for Joint Action

- 18 In February 2020 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the UNICEF Executive Director launched a *'Blueprint'* for joint action (*'A Fair Deal for Refugee Children'*). The Blueprint represented a renewed commitment by UNHCR and UNICEF to accelerate joint efforts to promote and protect the rights of refugee children and the communities that host them, and to support their inclusion and access to nationally led services. It was operationalized through an intensive, time-bound joint effort in ten focus countries, namely: Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Rwanda. These countries are home to 2 million refugee children – over 20 per cent of the global total – and represent a diverse range of political and operational contexts, including protracted and acute displacement crises, low- and middle-income countries, camp-based and urban settings, as well as mixed-migration and internally displaced persons (IDP) contexts.²⁸ At the global level, the Blueprint aims to leverage existing mandates, capacities and comparative advantages of UNHCR and UNICEF and build on areas of ongoing work with the greatest potential.

- 19 Overall, the Blueprint aimed to realize and accelerate progress to achieve increased access to education, clean water and sanitation, and child protection services for 10 million refugee and host community children and their family members by the end of 2022²⁹ through an effective, efficient, and transformed partnership. Its overall vision was as follows:

'By 2030 All refugee children enjoy an equitable chance in life: they are learning, living in clean and safe environments, protected from violence and exploitation, included in national systems and supported by an effective and efficient UN system.'

- 20 The joint Outcomes targeted by the Blueprint were:

- **Outcome 1.** By 2021, All refugee and returnee children of primary school age and 50 percent of all children of secondary age are accessing accredited quality education through national systems; while refugee youth have improved access to tertiary education, skills and vocational training opportunities, in 10 focus countries.

²⁵ UNHCR and UNICEF (2018) Joint letter from the UNICEF Executive Director and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees regarding collaboration between the agencies in relation to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, 13 July 2018.

²⁶ See https://www.ilo.org/global/programmes-and-projects/prospects/WCMS_725066/lang-en/index.htm.

²⁷ For more details of the Prospects partnership, see: <https://www.government.nl/topics/development-cooperation/the-development-policy-of-the-netherlands/refugees-and-migration>.

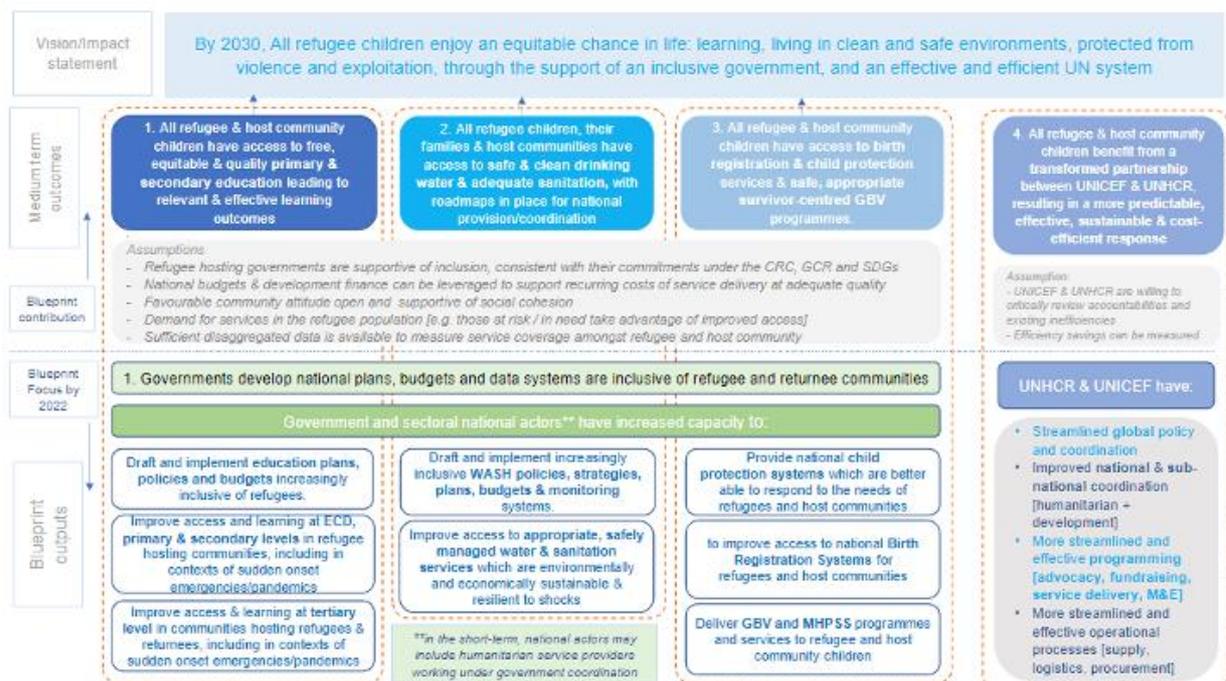
²⁸ UNHCR and UNICEF (2020) *UNICEF-UNHCR Blueprint for joint action: theory of change narrative*, 11 May 2020.

²⁹ Ibid.

- **Outcome 2.** By 2021, All refugee children and the communities that host them have access to safe and clean drinking water, and adequate sanitation, with roadmaps in place for their inclusion in national systems.
- **Outcome 3.** By 2021, All refugee children will have access to birth registration services and child protection systems; and all refugee women, girls and boys affected by gender-based violence will be supported with appropriate services, in 10 focus countries.
- **Outcome 4.** By 2021, Refugee and returnee children and host communities benefit from transformed partnership between UNICEF and UNHCR, resulting in a more predictable, effective, sustainable and cost-efficient response in the blueprint focus countries. This was important because an enhanced partnership between the two agencies would contribute to the achievement of all the programmatic outcomes.³⁰

21 The Blueprint Theory of Change, depicted in Figure 2, centres on working towards inclusion of refugee children in national systems through four pillars: WASH, Education, Child Protection and Partnership. The Blueprint Results Framework (RFW), including corresponding indicators of achievement, also provides a useful summary of wider contextual and influencing factors in the development of the Blueprint.

Figure 2: Blueprint Theory of Change



2.4 Strategies to support the implementation of the Blueprint

2.4.1 Country level strategies

22 A range of strategies to achieve joint results at **country level** were set out in Joint Action Plans (JAPs) and summarized in ‘Pacts’ which were approved by Country Representatives and implemented to the extent possible within ten focus countries. These included advocacy and action for the inclusion and non-discrimination of asylum-seeking, refugee and returnee children of all backgrounds; strengthening national capacity; supporting national planning; strengthening internal capacity; inclusion of refugees and returnees in internal program and operational planning; and inclusion of refugees and returnees in data and evidence collection and analysis.

³⁰ Ibid.

2.4.2 Global strategies

23 At **global-level**, aspirations to make progress across a range of strategies were fundamental for the realization of UNICEF and UNHCR's joint vision under the Blueprint:

- Joint planning, decision-making and external communication at all levels;
- Joint advocacy on inclusion at country level, including leveraging financing, to move towards nationally led provision of services to refugees;
- The integration, wherever possible, of Blueprint related activities and processes into what already exists in order to find and demonstrate efficiencies;
- The use of focus countries and priority program areas to incubate, refine and measure a transformed way of working; and
- Adaptation of approaches on the basis of ongoing learning.

2.4.3 Promotion of an enabling environment

24 UNHCR and UNICEF also sought to create an enabling environment for the delivery of the Blueprint. In order to jointly manage planning and implementation, a JCT was established at the global level, reporting to a Steering Committee co-chaired by UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director for Programs. In addition to this, technical staff (including relevant Directors) in education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection (CP), Gender-Based Violence (GBV), social policy, social protection, planning, monitoring and evaluation across both partners had key roles in planning, the provision of technical assistance, and quality assurance. A Data Working Group was established between the two agencies to develop solutions to strengthen coordination and collaboration on data-related issues.

25 Country and regional level leadership in both organizations were instrumental to implementation of the Blueprint. Agreed roles and terms of reference for these key internal stakeholders and groups were agreed and documented. Further staff, such as those involved in fundraising, communications and capacity building also contributed their time and expertise as required, at all levels. With the exception of two global level program coordinators, the contribution from all staff involved in implementation of the Blueprint drew on existing capacity.

2.4.4 Blueprint 2.0

26 While the Blueprint was officially launched in February 2020 and intended to run until December 2021, its early months suffered significant disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that in most cases, work planning and implementation of activities did not get underway until midway through 2020 at the earliest. At the same time, this iterative evaluation had already begun to flag certain issues, including areas where the partnership could be strengthened. In order to allow sufficient time to demonstrate its proof of concept in the initial group of countries, and to provide an opportunity to make certain course corrections within the Blueprint pilot as suggested by the evaluation, the expected end date was extended to December 2022. Some of the main changes within the Blueprint 2.0 included:

- clearer roles and a division of labor between headquarters, regional offices/bureaus and country offices;
- lightening of reporting processes; and

- complementary approaches to strengthened partnership from additional countries where existing collaboration is strong, and inclusion of other sectors such as nutrition, health and cash, as well as collaboration for populations of concern beyond refugees, e.g., covering statelessness and internal displacement.³¹

2.4.5 UNICEF-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration Framework

- 27 Concurrently with implementation of Blueprint 2.0, planning commenced within UNICEF and UNHCR to agree on a more predictable global partnership between the two organizations from 2023 onwards. In early 2023, a new UNICEF-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration Framework (SCF),³² with an emphasis on the inclusion of refugee children was signed by the two organizations, replacing the 1996 MOU and building on learning from implementation of the Blueprint. The SCF includes jointly defined outcomes in education; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); child protection; social protection; data; and ending childhood statelessness. It is also intended to enhance collaboration in other areas of common interest, including health, nutrition and cash-based interventions.
- 28 The over-arching SCF is accompanied by a series of technical annexes setting out agreed joint goals and ways of working in the specific areas of the partnership, as well as an accompanying compendium with details in the agreed areas of additional collaboration. It includes an Implementation Plan to support the launch and dissemination of the Framework, including an approach to identify priority countries, roll-out a series of kick-off meetings and trainings, and establish a baseline for measuring progress.³³ There is also a template LOU for country level contextualization and agreement of the goals set out in the SCF.³⁴

³¹ UNHCR and UNICEF (2021) *UNHCR-UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action - discussion paper on extension and strengthening of the Blueprint initiative*, April 2021.

³² UNHCR and UNICEF (2022) *Strategic Collaboration Framework between the United Nations Children's Fund and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. At the time of writing, the Framework was expected to be agreed and signed by the respective Principals of the two organizations in February 2023

³³ UNHCR and UNICEF (2023) *UNICEF-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration Framework: Implementation Plan*, Release 1.0, 9 January 2023.

³⁴ UNHCR and UNICEF (2022) *UNICEF-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration Framework, ANNEX – II, Template Letter of Understanding (LoU) for Country Offices*.

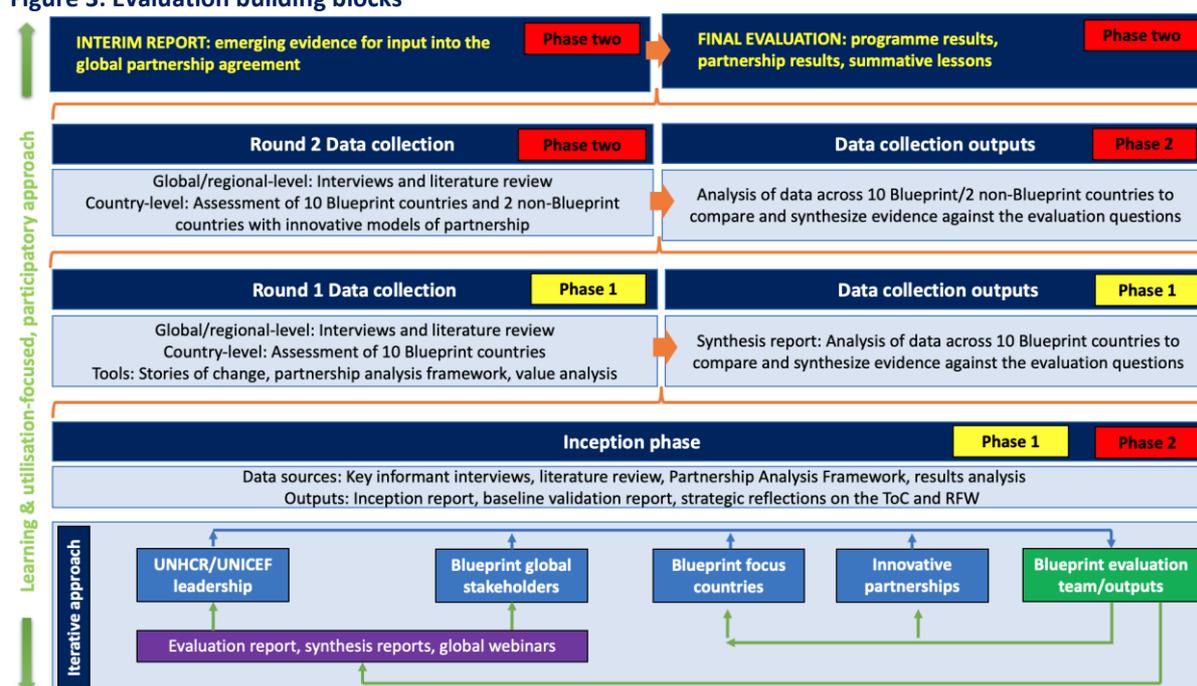
3. Approach and methodology

This section outlines the approach that was used to undertake the evaluation. It provides details of the specific methods and provides a summary of the sources of information which informed the findings of the evaluation.

3.1 Evaluation building blocks

29 Figure 3 below presents the building blocks of the evaluation design and methodology developed during the inception phase.

Figure 3: Evaluation building blocks



3.2 Evaluation approach

30 The overarching approach to this evaluation consisted of three prongs:

- Learning and utilisation-focused to ensure the generation of observable patterns and practical solutions to support UNHCR and UNICEF Country Offices to strengthen their partnership in order to contribute to shared programmatic outcomes.
- Country-focused (albeit with reference to headquarters and regional offices), to ensure the evaluation added as much value as possible to innovative partnership strategies and shared ways of working at the level of the country office.
- Participatory approach to ensure continued engagement of and consultation with a range of UNHCR and UNICEF stakeholders throughout the evaluation, particularly around the focus country findings and synthesis of global findings and recommendations.

31 The key principles of the evaluation can be summarised as follows:

- Use of both a formative and summative lens: A formative evaluation is focused on identifying areas for improvement and learning. While the evaluation sought to understand the progress that UNHCR and UNICEF partnerships have made towards strengthening programmatic

outcomes, the initial focus of the evaluation was on examining good practice and innovations across their partnership, facilitating learning and generating clear and practical recommendations and solutions going forwards. This happened in an ongoing way throughout the evaluation through engagement with each of the focus countries after each data collection visit and through periodic meetings with the global coordination forums including the preparation of a synthesis report and debrief at the end of the first round of data collection. This provided timely insights which enabled UNHCR and UNICEF to re-focus and course correct where appropriate, adapting their strategies, approaches and practices as a result.

- A focus on generating learning and improving practice at CO level: The members of the evaluation team sought to gather and disseminate good practice harvested across the focus countries. They also made use of feedback loops built into the evaluation to provide opportunities for validation and feedback from COs that participated in the evaluation. Through this approach and the evaluation methodology, the team inductively explored the enablers and barriers to strengthening UNHCR/UNICEF partnerships. Combined with robust methods of data collection and triangulation, this evaluation aimed to add value in making evidence-based recommendations to improve creativity, innovation and good practice.
- A commitment to informing global policy: The data collection rounds added an additional feedback loop between the country, regional and global level and played the role of raising field-level and regional realities to global stakeholders. As the evaluation headed towards its conclusion, this role was particularly important as the team more systematically engaged with global stakeholders in order to inform the development of the Strategic Partnership Framework, by drawing on lessons and findings from the evaluation.
- Ensuring utilisation through a participatory approach: critical to the value and success of this evaluation was the continued engagement by the evaluation team and Evaluation Office of UNICEF HQ, Evaluation Office of UNHCR HQ and country-level staff and managers. The evaluation approach was designed to build ownership and inclusion of the evaluation's findings and recommendations. This was achieved primarily through i) regular formal and informal communications between the evaluation team and the evaluation offices and Reference Group; ii) consultations with key stakeholders in Geneva and New York; iii) continued engagement with Country Offices throughout the two rounds of data collection and the evaluation in order to add as much value as possible; iv) consultations with key stakeholder groups at HQ, Regional Bureaux and CO level to share and validate findings, and; v) engagement at the global level to build trust and inform the emergent Strategic Partnership Framework.
- Combining a rigorous approach to evidence assessment with a focus on generating practical solutions: The first round of data collection benefitted from the use of an analytical framework that enabled the team to explore what worked well and why and to tackle the barriers and challenges to partnership outcomes across a range of different Country Offices across a range of contexts. The second round of data collection built on this. An evidence summary approach was used to organise data collected from the focus countries from multiple data sources and enabled the team to systematically synthesise evidence. In moving from findings to exploring and proposing solutions, the evaluation team adopted a practice-oriented approach and used the different contexts observed during the desk reviews and field missions as a means of determining the viability of the recommendations that are made. The advantages of these approaches was that, in combination, they were not prescriptive, but recognise that progress against the aspirations of the Blueprint would be influenced by a range of factors including external context, established ways of working, organisational cultures, staff attitudes, managerial support and leadership commitment. By using this context as a starting point, the evaluation sought to maintain its relevance across the diverse settings of the focus countries.

3.3 Evaluation design

3.3.1 Analytical framework

32 Based on feedback received on the draft inception report, it was agreed that the evaluation team should prepare an analytical framework with a clearly articulated set of success factors against which to evaluate the partnership (figure 4). It was adapted from a framework jointly developed by The Partnering Initiative and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs to accelerate the delivery of the SDGs.³⁵

Figure 4: Analytical framework: partnership building blocks

1. Partnership Fundamentals						
Partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF benefits from a shared vision, committed leadership & an approach that can be adapted to the context						
Key elements	Compelling, shared over-arching vision	Committed & accountable leadership	Sufficient alignment of interests for net benefit	Adaptable framework	Agreed measures of success	
Key risks: Lack of buy-in from leadership; failure to agree key aspects of the vision; insufficiently flexible partnership to accommodate context or innovative approaches; inability to measure success; failure to align interests erode potential for benefit.						
2. Partnership management and implementation						
Partnership is results-oriented, is well-managed. It has adequate funding and robust procedures for monitoring and review. The benefits of partnership are perceived to outweigh its costs						
Key elements	Effective management of the partnership	Achievement of partnership results	Compatible systems & processes	Adequate funding & resources	Robust monitoring & review	Net value compared with resources
Key risks: Failure to adequately harmonise systems, lack of resources to support partnership ambition and changed ways of working; failure to achieve and/or measure results; perceptions/evidence that partnership costs outweigh the benefits.						
3. Partnership relationship						
Trust, transparency, strong communication and mutual benefit ensures the sustainability of the dynamic partner relationship. A focus on learning ensures the partnership adapts to the context						
Key elements	Trust and transparency	Power balance and equity	Mutual benefit	Clear communication	Scope for learning and adaptation	
Key risks: Lack of trust, failure to play fair, or perceptions that one partner is disproportionately benefitting; failure to identify contextual changes (positive or negative) which have implications for the partnership.						

33 The analytical framework comprises a set of building blocks separated into three groups, which include: (i) the partnership fundamentals; (ii) management and implementation; and (iii) relationships, which are considered fundamental to the achievement of a predictable, effective, relevant, cost-efficient and sustainable partnership. While these building blocks are presented separately in the framework, they are strongly inter-connected and are all linked to working within complex, changing and often ambiguous environments. Each of the building blocks is described in greater detail in the inception report.³⁶

3.3.2 Use of the analytical framework in the context of an iterative evaluation

34 In The ToR for the evaluation, UNHCR and UNICEF Evaluation Offices proposed an iterative approach for the evaluation in order to support the Blueprint’s evidence needs, principally framed around the partnership pillar to help assess how successfully UNICEF and UNHCR are in developing a more predictable, effective and sustainable partnership. The analytical framework was an

³⁵ Stibbe, D., Prescott, D. and UNDESA (2020) *The SDG Partnership Guidebook: A practical guide to building high impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals*. The Partnering Initiative and UNDESA.

³⁶ Featherstone, A. & Lattimer, C. (2021) *Iterative evaluation of the UNHCR/UNICEF blueprint for joint action for refugee children*. Inception report. January 2021.

important part of this as it permitted the evaluation team to focus on different aspects of the partnership as implementation progressed; given the focus of the Blueprint on learning while doing it was anticipated that the initiative would evolve over time, particularly with the Strategic Collaboration Framework being developed in parallel.

- 35 In the first phase of the evaluation, prioritisation was given to the first cluster of questions in the analysis framework, the *'partnership fundamentals'*, as, at the time, the Blueprint was newly launched and strengthening the partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF was the main focus of attention. During this first year, limited progress was made and it was too early for results to be attributable to the Blueprint and so the *'partnership implementation and management'* elements of the analysis framework were a lower priority. In the second phase of the evaluation, results were a more significant priority.
- 36 Through the consistent use of the partnership framework, the evaluation team has been able to accommodate the shift in emphasis, while at the same time being able to ensure consistency and coherence in the approach. A similar approach has been used when writing the evaluation report; rather than slavishly working through each element in the analytical framework, effort has been made to focus on those that are most material for the partnership and where the evidence has been the strongest. In a number of instances, key elements of the framework have been addressed in a single section of the report. This has been done in order to improve the flow of the report and reduce repetition.

3.3.3 Evaluation matrix

- 37 The partnership analysis framework and ToC was used as the basis for the development of an evaluation matrix which is presented in annex document. This outlines the revised evaluation questions and sub-questions together with indicators, data collection methods and sources.

3.4 Data collection methods and evidence sources

- 38 The team used a mixed-methods approach for data collection and analysis albeit with a focus on qualitative methods. The evaluation ensured methodological rigor through i) the collection of both primary and secondary data across the evaluation period and triangulation of evidence across multiple data sources; ii) the combination of evaluation tools and multiple analytical methods; and iii) rigorous comparative qualitative analysis through the use of an evidence summary approach.
- 39 The main methods for data collection and analysis included the following:
- Document and literature review;
 - Semi-structured key informant interviews;
 - Country case studies;
 - Analysis of results;
 - Scrutiny of gender and equity aspects of the partnership;
 - Evaluation reporting

3.4.1 Document review, Key informant interviews and country case studies

- 40 The key methods are listed in the table below along with a summary of how they were applied during the evaluation is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of methods used during the evaluation

Method	Description
--------	-------------

Document review	Blueprint documentation was reviewed, in addition to broader literature on partnerships. Country-level documentation was reviewed in advance of case study analysis. A list of information sources is provided in the annexes.
Summary	The review drew from a document repository of 1,982 documents (see annex 3)
Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted during the evaluation with stakeholders at global, regional and country level. These were used as a means of building evidence, triangulating findings and filling evidence gaps. A set of interview questions was developed which drew on the evaluation matrix which informed the team's line of questioning.
Summary	Interviews were conducted with 101 informants in the first round of data collection and 166 in the second round of data collection (see annex 2)
Country case studies	A case study approach was used for the focus countries, each of which was requested to submit 3-4 program case studies to provide a focus for the evaluation. The evaluation team conducted virtual country visits during the first round of data collection, complemented by a small number of in-persons visits in the second round of data collection.
Summary	10 Blueprint countries participated in the first round of data collection; 9 Blueprint countries and 2 non-Blueprint countries participated in the second data collection round

3.4.2 Analysis of results

41 Through its engagement with each of the focus countries, the evaluation sought to complement existing monitoring data with a qualitative approach to understand changes that have occurred for refugee and returnee children, their families and host communities. With the guidance of countries, the evaluation focused on specific areas of the partnership, or '*case-studies*', looking in greater depth at a few key areas where the partnership is perceived to have contributed to change and/or where the partnership has generated learning on ways or working together (see section 7 of this report).

3.4.3 gender equality and equitable access

42 Gender equality and equitable access to protection and assistance are critical to the work of UNHCR and UNICEF. Moreover, at the 2022 Global Refugee Forum, both agencies committed to work with groups that are at heightened risk, including children living with disabilities and diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The team applied a gender sensitive approach to this evaluation and sought to examine the extent to which the implementation of the Blueprint is considering and addressing issues of equity. Where relevant to partnership aspirations outlined in the Blueprint, evaluation questions and accompanying indicators outlined in the matrix refer to gender, diversity, vulnerability and inclusion ensured consistent inclusion across the approach. Where relevant and possible, was disaggregated according to these parameters.

3.4.4 Evaluation reporting

43 The main deliverable for the first phase of the evaluation was a report which took its structure from the Partnership Analysis Framework and which drew from the evidence gathered from the global, regional and country consultations during the first round of data collection. For the second phase of the evaluation, there were two deliverables; an interim report and an evaluation report. The reports are outlined below:

- **Synthesis report:** Report on emerging cross-cutting strategic findings and lessons learnt from across all focus countries, drawing on wider evidence base as relevant, to inform high-level discussion and decision-making
- **Interim report:** the interim report focused on two main aspects of the partnership which included; (i) results achieved by working together on refugee inclusion (extracted from reported quantitative and qualitative results, as well as KIIs) – this responded to KEQ2; and (ii)

the extent to which the existence of an accountability framework to guide the partnership (usually in the form of a JAP in-country) has helped to strengthen the partnership (data to come from KIIs and document review) – this responded to KEQ3 in particular. The interim report was brief and was primarily used to inform the new UNICEF-UNHCR Global Partnership Framework.

- **Evaluation report:** A final Evaluation Report which draws on both rounds of data collection plus a standalone executive summary. These documents and a presentation of the main findings were shared, discussed and validated with key stakeholders in both organisations, representing country, regional and global levels.

3.5 Approach to sampling

- 44 There are different views about how Country Offices were selected to participate in the Blueprint which has an important bearing on the evaluation. Despite both agencies collaborating to agree on a criterion for inclusion, there is a misperception that the majority of Country Offices opted into the process and did so on the basis of having strong, pre-existing partnerships between the two agencies. This has led to concerns of bias in the selection.
- 45 While the risk of bias cannot be ignored given the purposive nature of the sample, inception interviews revealed that participation in the Blueprint came about as a consequence of a mix of factors both internal and external; these included a diverse range of inter-agency relationships, programmes and partners. The external context across the Blueprint countries were similarly varied in terms of geography, relationships with government, humanitarian context and refugee caseload.
- 46 The ToR anticipated that the evaluation team would engage with up to four additional countries to supplement the evidence gathered from the focus countries and ultimately two participated in the evaluation. These were selected by the agencies jointly.

3.6 Evaluability and mitigation measures

- 47 The evaluation team conducted a light-touch review of evaluability. The purpose of this was to ensure that the evaluation design and tools took account of limitations identified in, for example, the availability and quality of data, and to ensure that the scope of the evaluation was appropriate to address the needs and views of key evaluation stakeholders. The risks and limitations that it highlighted, and mitigation measures that were proposed and outlined in the inception report, are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Risks and mitigation measures

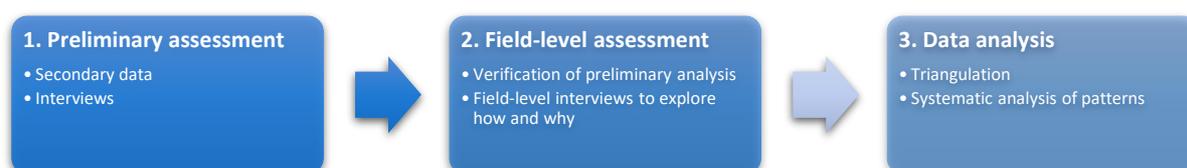
Summary of risks	Mitigation measures proposed
Risks associated with security, logistics, HR and administration	

Heavy workloads, including the additional workload of COVID-19, limits country engagement in the evaluation	The team adopted a systematic methodology for engaging global, regional and country-based staff. This was supplemented with document review. The two rounds of data collection provided a means of testing and validating findings. Despite these efforts, engagement varied significantly between countries, with far greater engagement in the first round of the evaluation. In the second round, it was more difficult to elicit the same level of engagement from countries and to harvest the same quantity and quality of case studies.
Restrictions as a consequence of COVID-19 will hinder the delivery of the evaluation	The evaluation team adopted a 2-option approach to country visits which included, covering (i) virtual visits; (ii) in-person visits. While the team sought to visit countries, this was ruled out in the first round and in the second round, only three countries were able to host an in-person visit by the evaluation team despite plans for more trips.
Risks associated with clarity about the scope and scale of the evaluation	
Changes made to the ToR between evaluation rounds	The ToR was re-written between the two evaluation rounds. The use of the partnership framework for both rounds and adaptation of the evaluation matrix ensured a level of consistency.
Additions to the number of countries under evaluation	Two additional non-Blueprint countries were proposed for the second round of the evaluation. The same approach was used by the evaluation team for the Blueprint and non-Blueprint countries to ensure replicability of findings and results.
Changes in the timeframe of the evaluation	The change in the timeline for the preparation of the Strategic Collaboration Framework required the addition of an Interim report output in order for the evaluation to feed into the final iteration of the Framework.
Risks associated with the quality and availability of data	
Monitoring processes are not timely, flawed or fail to deliver	The evaluation was not able to address limitations in the monitoring data. Through its engagement with each of the focus countries individually, and through the use of a case study approach, the evaluation was able to gather country-level data on individual case studies. Implicit in the lack of monitoring was an absence of outcome-level data for any of the outcomes associated with the Blueprint.
A lack of willingness of agency staff to report on failures	Concerns were raised about the willingness of staff to discuss failures in addition to successes associated with the partnership. Interviews were undertaken on a non-attributable basis in order to promote honest discussion and sharing of challenges associated with implementing partnerships.
A lack of data to measure efficiencies associated with the partnership	UNHCR and UNICEF aspired to measure cost-efficiencies associated with the partnership, linked to the inclusion of efficiency in the results framework. In the eventuality, the indicators were not refined and data was not consistently collected by agency monitoring processes. Efforts to monitor cost-efficiency were ceased at the end of the first year. The evaluation was able to collect some examples, but without a consistent approach to monitoring, the data collected is largely anecdotal.

3.7 Data synthesis and analysis

48 A synthesis and analysis process was designed that enabled the team, in a systematic and transparent way, to gather data in a way that minimized bias, and to take a pragmatic but systematic approach to analyzing a substantial data and evidence across the range of focus countries (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Process for systematic evidence gathering and analysis



3.7.1 Preliminary assessment

49 The evaluation team reviewed the analysis and findings from each case-study country from phase 1 of the evaluation. In addition, they conducted a preliminary analysis of additional resources during the inception phase and prior to travel in order to identify progress on UNHCR-UNICEF collaboration, including policies and practices linked to refugee inclusion. This enabled a more focused approach to be taken during country data collection to gathering further data and verifying the data that has already been collected. The preliminary assessment drew on documentation provided by the two COs; the evaluation team did not undertake its own primary analysis at this stage.

3.7.2 Country-level assessment

50 Based on the preliminary assessment of evidence conducted for each focus country, the evaluation team focused in on the most relevant aspects of the ToR in order to explore the contribution made by the partnership to change, the relative importance of enabling and inhibiting factors, and the contributory role of key stakeholders.

51 Interviews were structured so as to minimise bias. For example, questions were asked about output-level changes first which were followed by an exploration, in an open way, of what contributed to these changes. This approach allowed respondents to provide a more considered view of the range of contributory factors, which assisted in understanding the influence of the partnership.

3.7.3 Triangulation of data

52 The analytical process brought together evidence from these different streams against the evaluation matrix as the main analytical tool. To strengthen the validity of the findings, a series of layered triangulation techniques were applied to the data collection and data analysis processes. These included triangulation of data types, triangulation of data sources, and the triangulation of data collectors. A set of systematic tools (for document review and qualitative exercises) were intended to ensure consistency in application. Specifically, 'Airtable' was used to collate and organise relevant entries from primary and secondary data sources and organise them according to the different evaluation questions.³⁷

53 Finally, a participatory and collaborative analysis process was adopted to control for bias. Complementarity was used to explain and understand findings obtained by one method by applying a second. Where findings diverged from the application of the different methods, these were further investigated to either reconcile or explain the differences in findings.

- **Data Types:** The evaluation gathered information via the qualitative and secondary data tools described above. Evaluation questions were explored through these different tools to serve as possible checks against each other.
- **Data Sources:** Steps were taken to diversify information sources wherever possible at a country-level. The focus countries were reflective of different geographic regions and contexts. The collection of data from different sources permitted triangulation.³⁸
- **Consistent Tools:** The consistent use of the different methods helped ensure that even though

³⁷ 'Airtable' is an online platform that combines features of a spreadsheet and a database. It allows team members to collaboratively construct an evidence assessment/summary. More details on 'Airtable', including its built-in data protection features, can be found here: <https://airtable.com/>.

³⁸ The evaluation should also have access to focus country monitoring reports which will offer a set of qualitative information on successes and challenges from two designated focal points in each focus country by the two global level programme coordinators. This information will be collected through interviews and will also be complemented by an agreed process to collect information from non-focus countries.

different data collectors and sources were engaged, the techniques were being applied in a consistent manner that could be cross-checked.

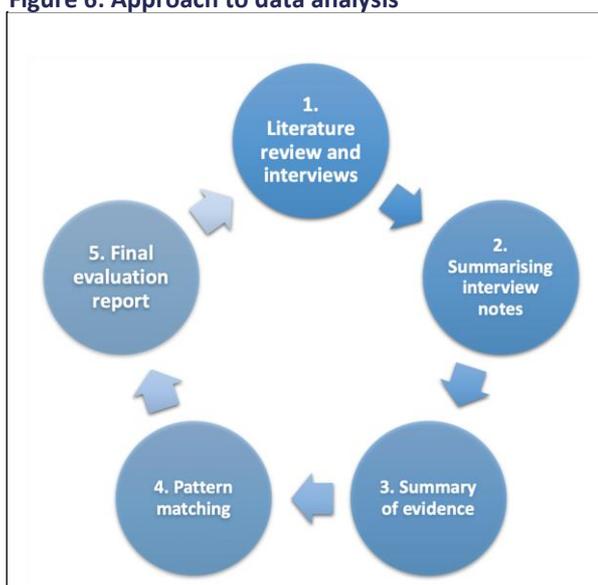
- **Participatory Analysis:** For the conclusions and recommendations, the evaluation team took a consultative approach, with findings presented to, and validated by the stakeholders – including debriefings at the end of each evaluation focus country visit.

3.7.4 Data synthesis and analysis

54 A five-step process was used to gather data in a systematic and transparent way that minimized bias and took a pragmatic but systematic approach to analyzing a substantial volume of data and evidence across the range of case studies (Figure 6).

- **Step 1:** Prior to commencing each of the country visits, an initial review of secondary data was undertaken to ensure understanding of the country context.
- **Step 2:** Notes from interviews were retained and a summary of key evidence was recorded on an evidence summary table.
- **Step 3:** For each focus country visit, a presentation was developed which summarized the key evidence against each of the evaluation questions.
- **Step 4:** The evaluation team looked across the evidence summary table and country presentations to identify common themes and patterns which were then presented in the Synthesis report at the end of the first round of data collection, and in the Interim report mid-way through the second round of data collection.
- **Step 5:** The evidence summary table, Synthesis report, Interim report, country presentations and interview notes were used to inform this evaluation report.

Figure 6: Approach to data analysis



3.8 Ethical considerations

55 The main ethical issues that were anticipated in the evaluation related to the stakeholders that the evaluation team engaged with and involved considerations of confidentiality (Box 2), data protection, protecting vulnerable respondents, and ensuring that the evaluation team avoided causing harm.

Box 2: Approach to confidentiality and anonymity

The stakeholder analysis undertaken by the team highlighted the potential for some issues to be sensitive. In order to mitigate participants concerns and to maximize the opportunities to elicit relevant information, interviews were undertaken based on an agreement that details would not be attributed to a specific person or agency.

56 The evaluation team applied the procedures, guidelines and tools to ensure the human dignity of affected people is honored and that their rights and well-being are respected in all research, irrespective of context. Interviews and other data collection and sharing was conducted in

accordance with these guidelines and principles, and in particular, United Nations Evaluation Group's code of conduct for evaluations.³⁹

3.9 Evaluation management, governance and support

3.9.1 UNHCR Evaluation Office/UNICEF Evaluation Office

57 The evaluation was co-managed by UNHCR's Evaluation Office (EvO) and UNICEF's Evaluation Office (EO). The two Evaluation Offices jointly managed and supervised the evaluation team throughout the entire process. The evaluation managers were the primary interface between the EvO/EO, JCT, the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG), Regional Offices/Bureaus (ROs/RBs) and Country Offices; and the evaluation team. The managers' role involved day-to-day support to all aspects of the evaluation process, including facilitating access to data, providing input to key methodological and strategic choices, and managing the evaluation budget.

58 Staff of the Evaluation Offices are independent from UNHCR-UNICEF management and operations. As part of their guidance and quality assurance role, the two offices provided quality assurance on all evaluation tools and documents based on the UNEG's norms, standards, ethical guidelines, processes and tools. This included assessment of gender, equity and human rights responsiveness of the evaluation.

3.9.2 UNHCR/UNICEF Evaluation reference group (ERG)

59 The Blueprint ERG provided expert advice, inputs and support to the evaluation as it unfolded. The ERG comprised members from the JCT and Senior Programme staff from both agencies.⁴⁰ They supported the evaluation at key moments to ensure that the evaluation benefits from the highest level of technical knowledge and of a diversity of viewpoints. Members provided substantive technical inputs, facilitated access to documents and informants, and ensured the high technical quality of the evaluation products as well as organizational learning and ownership of the exercise.

3.9.3 Country Offices

60 The Country Offices were responsible for facilitating access to documentation, data and materials that were not readily available within HQ and Regional Offices. Each Country Office had a focal point for the evaluation for the purposes of liaison and coordination with the Evaluation Offices. Country Offices also provided logistical support (including organisation of meetings, transportation, interpretation if necessary) and acted as resource staff for the exercise, including helping to arrange for interviews with key stakeholders.

³⁹ United Nations Evaluation Group (2008) *UNEG ethical guidelines for evaluation*, 2008.

⁴⁰ The revised ToR for the evaluation proposes that the regional Blueprint Focal Points from each agency be included in the Evaluation Reference Group.

4. Findings: Partnership fundamentals

This is the first findings section of the evaluation and focuses on the foundational aspects of partnership which include issues of leadership commitment, a strategic vision of the partnership, and alignment of interests. This section responds to Evaluation Questions 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 2.2 (see the Evaluation Matrix in Annex 4).

4.1 Strategic vision

- The global commitments of both agencies are clearly aligned and have provided a strong basis for the partnership.
- The willingness of States to include refugees in national policies and services provides an enabling environment for the partnership. Where this was not the case, agreeing on a joint vision and plan of action was more challenging.

61 At a global level, both agencies have a commitment to the 2016 New York Declaration, GCR and CRRF. The tenets of these commitments are consistent with broader humanitarian and development ambitions to strengthen programming across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and make progress on the SDGs. These **global commitments offer important reference points and represent a clear alignment of interests between the two agencies. As such, they provide a strong foundation for the partnership.**

62 This alignment of interests offers a framework to deliver the ambitions of the Blueprint partnership, but it is important to recognize that success in strengthening refugee inclusion requires that the partnership is extended to include the host State. **Where States themselves share these global commitments and have taken steps to make the necessary legal or policy changes to deliver them, there was often an enabling environment for the Blueprint partnership such as in the case of Uganda.** However, where this was not the case, or for States that are not signatories to the 1951 Convention, implementing a partnership focused on refugee inclusion was more challenging. The inclusion of contexts such as these in the Blueprint focus countries offered an important opportunity to explore what can be achieved through partnership, although it is important to acknowledge the greater complexity that exists for progress to be made.

4.2 Committed leadership

- Strong global leadership, including at Principal level, has incentivized the partnership.
- Backing and oversight from the senior headquarters staff of both agencies has kept the partnership visible and prioritized throughout the Blueprint pilot period, despite other competing priorities.
- The importance of regional leadership was acknowledged mid-way through the Blueprint timeframe. A subsequent devolving of responsibilities to regional offices has strengthened the partnership, which is set to continue with implementation of the SCF.
- Country leadership has been key to the success of the partnership. Changes in leadership have made the collaboration vulnerable at times, demonstrating the need for continued messaging on the priority of the relationship and institutionalized partnership accountabilities.

4.2.1 Global

63 **The important contribution that leadership makes to incentivizing and driving partnership has been a consistent finding across both rounds of the evaluation.** In the first round of data collection, the strong messages of support from senior staff of both agencies provided clarity

about the prioritisation that had been given to the partnership. This played an important part in driving the Blueprint initiative forwards, despite the existence of country-level skepticism.

- 64 The role of the JCT and engagement of senior leadership at headquarters level, supported by a focal point in each agency has also been instrumental in ensuring adequate oversight (see also Section 5.1.3 for more detail on the role of the JCT in providing management and support for the Blueprint initiative). It has allowed issues of concern to be escalated and discussed. Keeping the Principals apprised of the situation and of the lessons from the Blueprint has ensured that the partnership has remained on institutional agendas despite the existence of competing priorities such as COVID-19 and global funding shortages.
- 65 The determination to press ahead with the SCF despite the heavy workload and the challenging external environment in both agencies is a very clear demonstration of the commitment that exists at senior levels of both agencies to the partnership and the value that is placed on it. **The evaluation found the strong engagement of UNHCR's and UNICEF's leadership in the Blueprint as an important success factor for the partnership.**

 **LESSON LEARNED:** Strong support from senior management in both agencies' and clear and consistent communication is an essential ingredient for incentivizing and driving partnerships.

4.2.2 Regional

- 66 There was initial criticism of the Blueprint by staff from the regional offices of both agencies regarding the limited involvement they had in its planning and the early stages of implementation. At that time, the role of Regional Offices and Bureaus was largely confined to offering ad-hoc support, most often as a mediator between country and global staff. An interim evaluation report which was submitted in October 2021 at the end of Round 1 of data collection recommended devolving accountability for the Blueprint partnership closer to the field. In response, Regional Bureaus were asked to take on stronger oversight, quality assurance and support functions for the partnership, with HQ returning to its normative role of providing strategic leadership and technical support as required (see also Section 5.1.2 for more on the role of Regional Offices and Bureaus on day-to-day oversight of and support for the partnership).⁴¹
- 67 While the evaluation elicited very mixed reactions from regional staff about the Blueprint, many of the concerns that were expressed early in the evaluation have now been addressed through the development of the SCF. To this end, it would appear that important lessons have been learned about the important role of consultation. **Interviews conducted during the second round of the evaluation highlighted the level of engagement of regional offices in preparatory discussions about the SCF and the normalization of management and reporting lines through regional offices. The SCF itself also outlines a clear role for Regional Directors in each organisation, giving them primary responsibility for operationalizing the Framework at regional and country levels.**⁴²

4.2.3 Country

- 68 At a country level, strong leadership support for the partnership was recognized as a key ingredient for success from the outset. Where Country Representatives and senior staff modelled

⁴¹ Featherstone, A. & Lattimer, C. (2021) *Iterative evaluation of UNHCR/UNICEF blueprint for joint action for refugee children: Year One Report, October 2021* (internal report, not for circulation outside UNHCR & UNICEF).

⁴² UNHCR and UNICEF (2022) *Strategic Collaboration Framework between UNICEF and UNHCR*. At the time of writing, the Framework was expected to be agreed and signed by the respective Principals of the two organizations in February 2023

commitment to the partnership, this was generally replicated by technical and field staff. However, support for the partnership was variable and the evaluation collected many examples of staff that were not supportive of it either (i) because of negative perceptions about the added value of the partnership, and/or (ii) concerns about the additional workload associated with managing the partnership.

- 69 As implementation progressed, it became evident that where the partnership was seen to be making a tangible contribution to refugee children’s inclusion and as the administrative burden associated with the Blueprint reduced – both because of the normalization of the partnership, but also because of efforts taken at global level to reduce the burden of monitoring and reporting – there was greater acceptance of it. The evaluation elicited some very positive feedback on the contribution of the Blueprint to strengthening the UNHCR-UNICEF partnership and of the steps senior leaders took to making space and defending time to steer the partnership. However, staff support for the partnership was inconsistent, often because of the legacy of negative experiences that staff had of working in partnership. This was not confined to one of the agencies but was evident in both agencies.
- 70 A finding across all of the case studies is the vulnerability of the partnership to individual staff’s perceptions of the value or otherwise of joint working. On a number of occasions, **changes in leadership at different levels resulted in the partnership being under-valued and, at times, downgraded. This highlights the fragility of the partnership and underlines the need to continue to ensure that leadership at all levels invest in and are held accountable for supporting the partnership.**

✔ LESSON LEARNED: Partnerships are fragile and highly vulnerable to changes in staff, particularly at country level, which can result in partnerships being de-stabilized and under-valued.

4.3 Alignment of interests

- Finding an alignment of sectoral interests at global level was initially challenging, but ultimately proved to be an important exercise that laid the groundwork for a more productive partnership in the future, particularly in the case of education and child protection.
- At country level, leveraging of comparative advantages helped to demonstrate the benefits of the partnership. Finding an alignment of interests was more challenging in some countries compared with others and continues to be a dynamic process in response to changes in context.
- Despite different models of partnership from country to country, and varying levels of ambition and willingness to work together, a convergence of agency mandates provided (and will continue to provide) a natural bedrock for the relationship.

- 71 The evidence shows quite clearly that an alignment of interests is required for partnership to be successfully incentivized at the outset and for it to be sustainable in the longer-term.

4.3.1 Alignment of sectoral interests

- 72 **Globally, at a sectoral level, the technical teams of both agencies found the initial pace of discussions regarding the partnership, and the need to quickly develop common indicators extremely challenging.** While many of the areas of disagreement or dissonance proved difficult to address in the short-term, the investment made in seeking to understand agency positions and addressing areas of divergence ultimately paid dividends. It is noteworthy that **some of the sectors which found the early discussions to find complementarities most difficult – notably,**

education and child protection – ultimately managed to achieve the greatest progress in terms of recognizing each other’s comparative strengths and clarifying how to put the partnership into practice. As such, the Blueprint has played a valuable role in offering an opportunity for agencies’ sectoral staff to learn from each other and to build common ground. This should be considered a significant success of the initiative as it has laid important groundwork for the SCF. The development of compendia and technical annexes offers far greater scope for the two agencies to work in a more predictable way in the future.

73 That is not to say that consensus has been reached about how the partnership will work across all of the sectors. The majority of case studies that were submitted by Blueprint countries and which were reviewed by the evaluation team were in the education and child protection sectors; the sector in which there most frequently appeared to be the least alignment across the country case studies was WASH. While there was a strong spirit of collaboration evident among technical WASH staff at global and country levels, this had not fully translated into a strong alignment of programmatic interventions in the field – in part a consequence of the top-down approach of the Blueprint,⁴³ as it initially left little space for any of the three selected sectors to opt out or adapt globally-defined indicators. The first round of data collection during the evaluation revealed that there were several countries where there was a significant mismatch in WASH capacities, or one or other of the partners did not have a WASH program. In such instances, it was understandably difficult to identify commonalities.

4.3.2 Alignment of interests at a country-level

74 The evaluation found that there was broad support for the strategic focus of the UNHCR-UNICEF partnership on refugee children’s inclusion to which both agencies share a strong commitment. Interviews with agency staff also highlighted that it is an area which is extremely complex as a result of the interplay between government and mandated agencies, the growth in protracted refugee situations and the challenges posed by securing adequate funds to meet needs. It is at country level that these complexities were most evident and had to be navigated in order for the partnership to contribute to a shift in refugee inclusion.

75 Interviews and case study analysis undertaken during the evaluation highlighted a range of different types of partnership which can be categorized according to their characteristics. The typology of partnerships is outlined in a simplified form in the table below (Table 5).

Table 5: Typology of partnerships evident among the Blueprint case study countries⁴⁴

Partnership type	Description	Characteristics
1. COORDINATION	No partnership or joint working between UNHCR and UNICEF. Basic coordination, which is in consistent with Inter-Agency Standing Committee commitments	Program and advocacy delivered largely independently
2. CONTRACTUAL PARTNERSHIP	Partnership agreements or pass-through arrangements at a project or sector-level. Commitment to deliver specific results, based on a jointly agreed project agreement.	One-way, transactional agreement focused on delivery of specific services.
3. LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIP	This partnership is based on complementarity: One of the two agencies recognizes that the other can provide resources (knowledge, services, skills) that it can employ towards its strategic goals. While mutual benefit may result from this type of partnership, they are often perceived to be skewed towards one agency	In the context of the Blueprint, characterized by reciprocal exchange of skills, knowledge, funding etc. Involves negotiation to maximize the gains on both sides.

⁴³ The ‘top-down approach’ is discussed more fully in section 5.1.1 of this report.

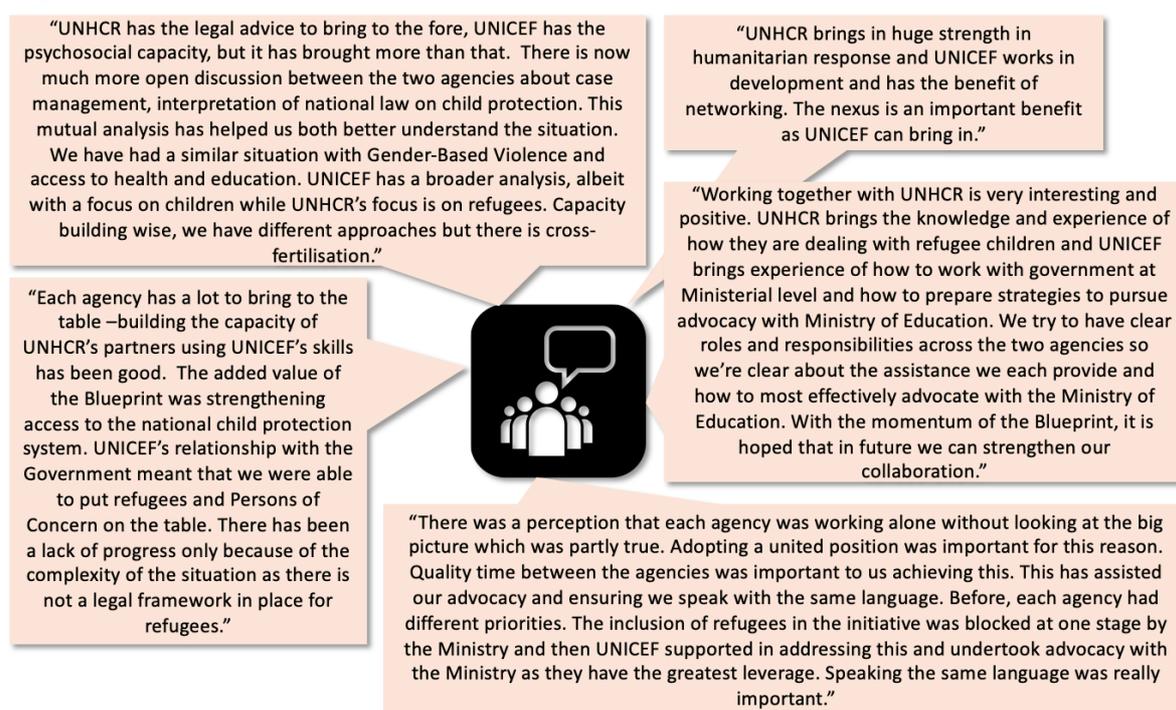
⁴⁴ The table draws inspiration from Stibbe, D.T., Reid, S. and Gilbert, J. (2018) *Maximising the impact of partnership for the SDGs: A practical guide to partnership for the SDGs*, The Partnering Initiative and UN DESA.

4. PURPOSEFULLY COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP	<p>A collaboration where complementary resources are brought together to tackle a common challenge or achieve a shared strategic goal. The critical point here – and the essence of partnership – is the belief that working in partnership will achieve outcomes that neither UNHCR nor UNICEF could achieve working independently. Combining resources in this manner requires a higher degree of planning, attention to procedures and a commitment to building mutual trust.</p>	<p>Characterized by co-generation, mutual accountability, and innovative approaches. Involves brainstorming and creative dialogue to together develop new approaches that create value.</p>
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76 It is important to stress that all of the types of partnership and coordination outlined in the Typology of Partnerships are valid under particular conditions. The nature of the Blueprint which, through the use of Joint Action Plans, sought to foster a more deliberate process of identifying changes that UNHCR and UNICEF could jointly contribute to, pitched the partnership towards tiers 3 or 4, those of ‘leveraging’ or ‘purposely collaborative’ partnerships.

77 Interviews with staff from both agencies offered evidence of a range of different ways in which UNHCR and UNICEF worked in partnership (see Figure 7).⁴⁵

Figure 7: Evidence of how UNHCR and UNICEF have leveraged their comparative advantage in support of refugee inclusion outcomes



4.3.3 The dynamic nature of partnership

78 The evaluation found that additional resources (people and funding) and political capital are frequently required to remain engaged in partnerships, particularly in contexts where there is not a conducive/enabling environment. Each agency in each country has its own set of issues which it seeks to balance in determining whether there is value in expending this in support of partnership outcomes. The factors that will inform this decision are rarely explicit, but implicit and will change over time. As a consequence, **actual and perceived program alignment between agencies is not consistent across countries or sectors and neither is it static.**

⁴⁵ The outputs and intermediate outcomes of the UNHCR-UNICEF partnership are explored in greater detail in section 7 of this report.

- 79 Primary data collection undertaken during the evaluation highlighted a range of factors that influenced program alignment. These included the following:
- The value placed by leadership on the partnership;
 - The resources available to fund joint work;
 - Pre-existing program and partnership commitments and competing priorities;
 - Level of field presence and operationality;
 - Technical capacities;
 - Connections and relationships with Government;
 - Perceptions of the potential to achieve individual agency and shared outcomes through the partnership.
- 80 The case study countries offered evidence of variations in these factors both between and within countries; where there was not an enabling environment, or where there was insufficient alignment of programs, there was limited scope for a successful partnership.
- 81 A key finding of the evaluation is that **the alignment of agency interests is dynamic and changes over time and it is important to recognize that each agency has its own set of interests that it will seek to prioritise. These are often articulated in country strategies and/or annual plans and these will play an important role in determining the extent of this leverage, and the boundaries of the partnership.** In politically complex countries, the onus is often placed on prioritizing this towards outcomes that benefit the individual agency as opposed to both agencies collectively – although purposively collaborative partnerships may offer a win-win where both the individual agency and the collective partnership are able to benefit.
- 82 **Importantly, the findings of the evaluation suggest that at a strategic level, UNHCR and UNICEF mandates have natural convergence points which, assuming that there is a willingness to collaborate, offer comparative advantage.**

 **LESSON LEARNED:** An alignment of agency interests is required for partnership to be successfully incentivized at the outset and for it to be sustainable in the longer-term. It is important, however, to recognise that this alignment is dynamic and for this reason it requires structured engagement throughout the lifespan of the partnership.

5. Findings: Partnership management and implementation

This section focuses on the effective management of the partnership with a focus on implementation. It also examines issues of governance, management, operational and reporting arrangements. *This section responds to Evaluation Questions 2.1, 2.3, 2.4,2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1 and 3.2 (see the Evaluation Matrix in Annex 4).*

5.1 Effective management of the partnership

- A top-down process to ensure accountability of the partnership during the Blueprint pilot was initially met with resistance.
- However, the use of a robust mechanism to ensure clarity of the purpose of the partnership and hold the agencies to account was ultimately perceived as fundamental to its success.
- Shifting the locus for oversight of the partnership to regional offices helped to contextualize the partnership and provided better support to country offices.
- Having a global group of focal points from both agencies focusing on the partnership worked well for a time-bound initiative such as the Blueprint pilot and helped prioritize the collaboration. It was largely extractive, however, and there were different perceptions between global and country levels on the success of the partnership.

5.1.1 Country level management

83 Global guidance was issued to the pilot countries at the outset of the Blueprint initiative on how to manage the country-level planning and implementation process.⁴⁶ Interviews with Blueprint pilot countries and global-level stakeholders indicate that this guidance was closely followed, with limited or no flexibility to deviate from the stipulated process.

84 In response, during Round 1 of data collection for the evaluation in particular, many of the pilot countries raised concerns about the **top-down approach**, the **additional workload** as a result of Blueprint processes, and a **lack of flexibility to tailor JAPs to the specific country context, and the implications this had for the potential effectiveness of the partnership**. Table 6 summarizes the challenges faced by pilot countries with the initial management of the partnership process, particularly in relation to the JAP design process.

Table 6: Challenges faced by pilot countries with the early Blueprint partnership development process

Challenges	Description
Top-down approach	Concern was expressed about the implications of the template and mandatory indicators that were developed at global level and the limited scope to adapt them to specific country contexts. Some countries developed their own 'real' indicators or work plans that they use for tracking progress; others undertook additional narrative reporting to ensure that the full spectrum of the partnership was considered.
Timeframe	There was some concern about unreasonable expectations about promoting change in refugee inclusion in the timespan of the Blueprint pilot, given the length of time it had taken in the past to lobby for changes in government policy, which in some countries required many years of concerted action.
Mandatory sectoral focus	The fact that most focus countries were required to partner across all three Blueprint sectors was cause for frustration in a number of cases, as was the limited latitude to focus on other areas where the two organizations could potentially add the greatest value. There

⁴⁶ UNHCR and UNICEF (ND) *The UNHCR/UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action: Planning Overview for Blueprint Focus Countries*, internal document.

	was greater flexibility shown with time, however, and some of the countries that joined late in the process were able to agree exceptions as well as include additional sectors. ⁴⁷
Relevance	The Blueprint was described by some Country Offices as refugee-centric. This is to be expected given that the stated objective of the initiative was to improve refugee children's inclusion. However, some of the contexts in which it was piloted only had small refugee populations, amid the presence of other vulnerable populations e.g., IDPs, migrants, children affected and displaced by violence, protracted refugee populations living in urban settings. Where there were comparatively small number of refugees and/or where the presence of refugees was politically sensitive, UNICEF staff in particular, felt that the partnership was less relevant and given finite resources, a focus on refugees could potentially detract from their work with other stakeholder groups.
Duplicative partnership processes	A number of countries highlighted concerns about duplicative processes and, in some cases, were skeptical about the added value of the JAP in contexts where a partnership agreement was already in place prior to the Blueprint. In a number of cases, this required that the Blueprint JAP was implemented alongside an LOU.
Tools/templates	Some countries experienced difficulties in using the JAP tool/template itself, which was in an Excel format with pre-embedded macros.

 **LESSON LEARNED:** A top-down approach to monitoring and reporting partnership results that requires the development and use of parallel systems lacks relevance, reduces efficiency and makes partnership burdensome.

85 Despite the challenges listed here, interviewees across global, regional and country levels confirmed that **the use of a more robust accountability framework was fundamental to strengthening the partnership**. This was the case whether through the use of a JAP and/or an enhanced LOU. Despite the potential for additional work, an enhanced accountability framework was perceived as **encouraging the two agencies to actively look for ways to increase their collaboration**. Some examples of this positive feedback are highlighted in Figure 8.

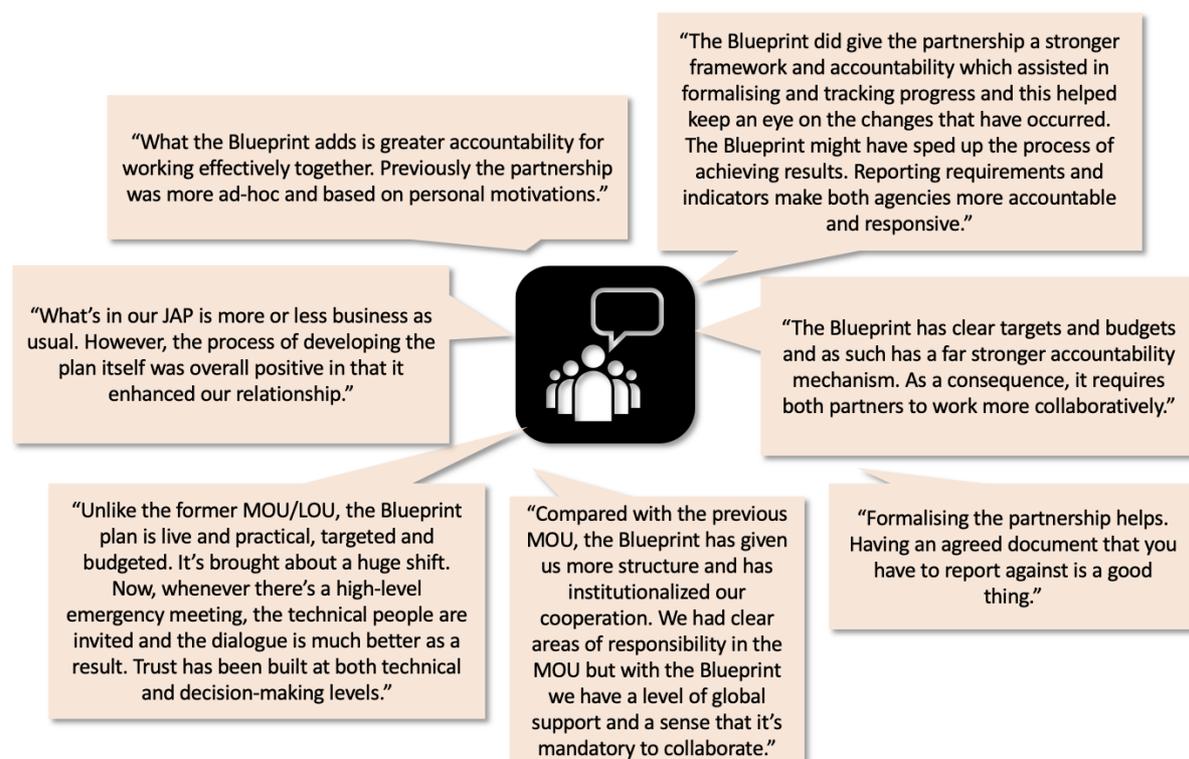
86 **The best examples of strengthened accountability were in countries that had adapted JAPs into their sectoral work plans and where regular stock-takes took place to check on progress and need for change**. The stock-takes took a variety of forms, but tended to be either within specific sectors or at the aggregate level across all of the Blueprint sectors. These exercises kept JAPS relevant, but also offered an opportunity to raise concerns about implementation. In countries that have developed such plans, relationships have tended to be more collegiate and feedback was more positive. Box 3 provides an example of how an enhanced LOU was used to structure the partnership in Uganda (a non-Blueprint pilot country).

Box 3: The use of an enhanced LOU in Uganda to structure and strengthen the partnership

In early 2021, UNHCR and UNICEF in Uganda agreed an enhanced LOU, learning from the experience of the Blueprint and drawing on elements of the JAP format. Interviewees in Uganda generally confirmed that the LOU strengthened accountability by adding a degree of formality and mutual accountability and expectations of behavior of each partner and the collective partnership; and, at least in theory, provided structure for the scope of the partnership, and procedural clarity for oversight and management of day-to-day running of the partnership. Overall, the evaluation found that the LOU provided a strong basis for the partnership between the two organizations in Uganda. However, its application was significantly influenced by individual's perceptions of the value or otherwise of the partnership, and the regularity of meetings to take stock of progress.

⁴⁷ In Rwanda, for example, which was a late addition to the Blueprint pilot initiative, country focal points were able to negotiate a refocusing of the WASH section of the JAP towards WASH preparedness and response activities in relation to epidemic outbreaks, which were felt to be more relevant to the context and the comparative advantages offered by the two organizations.

Figure 8: Selective positive feedback from Blueprint pilot countries on strengthened accountability within the partnership



87 Despite the importance to partnership of an accountability framework, the evaluation found that **an accountability framework alone was unlikely to be sufficient to sustain partnership or to protect it from destabilizing factors**. This was evidenced in several of the country case studies where despite the existence of JAPs or enhanced LOUs, the accountability frameworks were inconsistently applied and there were examples of review meetings being missed. While there were also positive examples of how accountability frameworks had led to strengthened collaboration, the lesson here is that **additional measures or incentives for partnership were shown to be beneficial in ensuring effective management of the partnership**.

✔ LESSON LEARNED: While an accountability framework is essential for partnerships to survive and thrive, this must be partnered with regular and structured engagement between the agencies in activities such as joint monitoring and partnership meetings in order to obtain the greatest value from joint work.

88 Among those additional measures was the idea that **accountabilities can and should be formalized through inclusion of partnership objectives in the work plans and deliverables of individuals at all levels of the two organizations**. In addition – and recognizing that the bilateral partnership is set in the context of a much wider set of partnerships with governments, other multilateral and civil society organizations, as well as other actors – **both organizations need to align their bilateral accountabilities within the priorities of their respective country planning documents** (Country Program Documents for UNICEF and Multi-year Plans for UNHCR), as well as the broader planning documents to which they contribute e.g., UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), Humanitarian Response Plans, Refugee Response Plans, UN Country Team Annual Joint Work Plans, etc.

5.1.2 Regional support for effective management of the partnership

- 89 Regional Offices and Bureaus were moderately engaged in the Blueprint process from the beginning and supported countries to partner more effectively together prior to and outside the scope of the Blueprint initiative. Their role was clarified and considerably strengthened mid-way through implementation of the Blueprint pilot (see also Section 4.1.2 on the changing role of Regional Offices and Bureaus during piloting of the Blueprint).
- 90 During Round 2 of the evaluation, interviewees, including those at regional level, generally agreed that **shifting the locus of responsibility from headquarters to regions had helped to better contextualize the partnership and to some extent had shielded country offices/operations from multiple requests for information and examples of good practice from headquarters**. That said, there were several areas where ongoing interaction between global and country levels had continued to add value. For example, in operationalizing and field-testing activities initiated by the Data Working Group (DWG), and for specific program areas with less capacity at regional level.
- 91 On some particularly difficult issues, such as fundraising for the partnership, there was a degree of frustration from some (but not all) Regional Offices and Bureaus that they had been handed the lead responsibility for supporting COs where headquarters had failed to make significant progress. Overall, the *'regionalization'* of the Blueprint was perceived to have been more effective within UNICEF, given the longevity of its Regional Offices compared with UNHCR, which was in the process of devolving greater capacity to its Regional Bureaus during the period of the Blueprint pilot, and its greater numbers of program and technical experts at regional level.

 **LESSON LEARNED:** There is a need for global partnerships to be inclusive and engage all levels of both organizations. The inclusion, from initial conception of the partnership, of country-level, regional and headquarters representatives will offer the best opportunity to ensure that partnerships are relevant and effective and can benefit from the full support of each agency.

5.1.3 Global management and support

- 92 Since its launch, the Blueprint has been driven by a Joint Coordination Team (JCT) of focal points from different functional areas within UNICEF and UNHCR, supported by a partnership secretariat staffed by one dedicated focal point from each organization. **This model worked well for the purposes of a time-bound initiative such as the Blueprint, serving as a temporary means of propelling the partnership at global level and maintaining oversight.**
- 93 From regional and country perspectives, however, outside of this structure, there was some perception that **the JCT, and headquarters in general, had played a largely extractive role**, particularly in terms of requests for results, information and examples of good practice. While cognizant of some of the main recurring challenges, global stakeholders were not able to resolve some of the more significant problems raised at country-level such as scarcity of resources, which are perceived to have compromised the potential to leverage transformative change and have hampered progress. Overall, **global support for management of the initial roll-out of the Blueprint was considered helpful by Country Offices**. This took the form of meetings with pilot countries, trainings on various issues, and technical support for specific areas where additional capacity was required. **However, the evaluation noted a considerable gap in knowledge of and communications about the initiative at different levels of the organisation**. This was most stark between headquarters and Country Offices, where perceptions of some of the progress that had been made and the associated challenges and frustrations differed significantly.

5.1.4 Management of the new Strategic Collaboration Framework

94 During Round 2 of data collection for the evaluation, the new Strategic Collaboration Framework (SCF) was in the process of being drafted and both regional offices and Blueprint pilot countries were given several opportunities to provide inputs during its development. **The collaborative process was generally appreciated and most interviewees provided positive feedback – both on the process itself and on the general scope and content of the draft SCF.** In terms of how the SCF was expected to support effective management of the partnership between the two organizations, most interviewees at regional and country levels saw it as **a useful tool for framing the conversation at country level, and as a launching point for a more country- and context-oriented configuration of the partnership in 2023 and beyond.** However, there was strong pushback on the idea that the same processes that had guided implementation of the Blueprint – notably the JAP and reporting against a common set of indicators to headquarters – should be repeated during the roll-out of the SCF.

95 This same sentiment was generally echoed at global level, with most interviewees expressing the view that implementation of **the new SCF should respect the need for country ownership and flexibility.** Indeed, the Implementation Plan for the SCF (included in the final package of documents signed by the two Principals at the end of the 2022) states that the main responsibility for the partnership rests with Country Representatives, supported by Regional Directors, and supported by a global-level JCT: *“to support implementation at all levels and coordinate actions which are not specific to any one technical area, such as global-level joint advocacy on refugee inclusion; the management response to the Blueprint evaluation; facilitating troubleshooting; and supporting the meetings of the Principals, ASGs and HQ Directors set out in this plan”*.⁴⁸ The evaluation agrees that this relatively light-touch role for headquarters during implementation of the SCF demonstrates that **lessons have been learned in terms of ceding power from the global level to regions and countries to determine the structure and nature of the partnership; albeit with an accompanying risk that this decentralized approach leaves the partnership vulnerable to a lack of consistency in its implementation** from region to region and from country to country, depending on the aspirations and priorities of different regional and country representatives.

96 **The evaluation found general agreement across key stakeholders of the continuing need for some level of upwards accountability and continued global support for particular aspects of the partnership during implementation of the SCF.** There were divergent views on where the main responsibility for global oversight and management should sit within each organization, but widespread agreement that all relevant parts of the two agencies should be brought in as needed to leverage development capacities (particularly within UNICEF given the significant capacity that exists in social policy) and drive forward policy change on refugee inclusion.

5.2 Achievement of partnership results

- The approach to measuring the success of the partnership primarily emphasized quantitative over qualitative results, obscuring some of the most important achievements of the collaboration, which were difficult to capture in numbers.
- There was some skepticism at regional and country levels about the tendency to attribute refugee children’s inclusion results to the Blueprint partnership, rather than to the actions of States, to each organization individually, or to the joint work of a wider set of humanitarian and development stakeholders.
- The monitoring and reporting process initially proved challenging and burdensome for countries, but in response to country feedback, was subsequently streamlined to avoid duplication and lighten workloads. The introduction of events and processes to facilitate the exchange of best practices were a good addition and encouraged a greater spirit of reflection and learning.

⁴⁸ UNHCR & UNICEF (2023) *UNICEF-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration Framework: Implementation plan, Release 1.0*, 9 January 2023.

97 This section focuses on the parameters, objectives of and approach to reporting on results achieved through the partnership, while Section 7 of this report outlines some of the outputs that were shared with the evaluation team.

98 On results, the most important message that emerged from the evaluation, particularly during round two of data collection, is **the need to ensure that what is measured is both meaningful and attributable to the partnership**; and that when it comes to measuring outcomes associated with either partnership or its contribution to refugee inclusion, **an approach that prioritizes quantitative over qualitative results risks overlooking important achievements of the partnership, making it more difficult for busy country offices to prioritise partnership working over other, more immediate and evident, priorities**. Moreover, reporting should not only focus on the output level and process aspects of the partnership but also on the outcomes achieved during its implementation.

5.2.1 Measures of success

99 Many of the indicators and targets used to track and report on results achieved through the Blueprint were quantitative, and emphasized results achieved on service delivery within program areas e.g., the number of children and youth in humanitarian and situations of protracted displacement enrolled in pre-primary, primary and secondary education levels, and the number of children, adolescents and caregivers who receive community based mental health and psychosocial support and child protection services. **The numbers generated by quantitative measurement were potentially useful for donor-oriented communications and upwards accountability,⁴⁹ however, they were considered less relevant among interviewees at country and regional levels for genuinely reflecting on progress towards refugee inclusion within the two organizations and for making course corrections; or for learning on how to make policy and system change happen in general.**

100A lessons learned exercise on joint monitoring of the Blueprint initiative came to much the same conclusion, indicating that *'having a results framework led to a focus on demonstrating results and service delivery outputs rather than measuring meaningful changes that speak to inclusion'*.⁵⁰ In other words, an overemphasis on quantitative results risked overstating the results of the partnership, and understating the benefits and improved outcomes that accrue from a purposefully collaborative partnership approach.

101 This point can be illustrated by looking at results in some of the Blueprint pilot countries. Both Ecuador and Italy offer examples of results which are difficult to quantify, but which demonstrate genuinely positive benefits of working together to support refugee inclusion (see Box 4).

Box 4: Partnership results in Ecuador and Italy

In Ecuador, UNHCR and UNICEF work together in an integrated support space/center for refugees and migrants (predominantly for new arrivals from Colombia and Venezuela, and increasingly for returnees from those countries). While the collaborative effort is reportedly driven in large part by UNHCR and UNICEF, it brings together multiple partners including federal agencies, the municipality, other UN bodies, the Red Cross and multiple NGO partners. The center provides a wide range of protection services (child protection and gender-based violence as well as legal advice) as well as health and community services. The collaboration undoubtedly generates quantitative results in that more arrivals are provided with services, accelerated by their co-location. These results were captured in joint monitoring of Blueprint results. Other benefits, however, are harder to quantify and were not recorded as results within the Blueprint reporting process. These included direct and

⁴⁹ Section 2.2.2 above, however, summarises concerns about the extent to which this is the case.

⁵⁰ The Blueprint Initiative: 'Lessons Learned' Report – unpublished document shared with the Evaluation Team in September 2022.

efficient referrals leading to co-ownership of case management, including with government bodies present in the space; and a real sense of collective working in which the partners in the space offered each other coverage during staff absences.

In **Italy**, as well as in **Ecuador**, government representatives spoke positively in interviews about the partnership, stating that the agencies spoke with the same voice and were committed to developing effective tripartite relationships including the governments. This has contributed to positive change, such as common positions and approaches on technical issues as well as consensus on broader advocacy positions – results that were not easily captured and shared within the Blueprint monitoring and reporting process.

102 Even in some of the countries where the partnership was not meeting global aspirations or contributing to clearly quantifiable results, there were often signs that *'softer'*, qualitative partnership outcomes had benefited from an investment in the partnership through the Blueprint initiative. This was the case in Bangladesh, for example, as described in Box 5.

Box 5: Partnership results in Bangladesh

Despite the difficulties of advancing refugee inclusion outcomes in **Bangladesh**, UNHCR and UNICEF have continued to work together to make progress. This was evidenced by a range of ongoing activities between the agencies, such as preliminary meetings in advance of liaison with the government, and joint advocacy positions, which leveraged the weight of two large UN agencies to influence government positions on refugee inclusion. The development of joint positions benefited from greater proximity between the two agencies, more frequent communication, and prioritisation from leadership in both agencies on the partnership. At the same time, this was largely outside of formal reporting mechanisms and continue to be largely invisible to staff outside of the country.

103 **An over-emphasis on quantitative results as a result of the partnership appears to have been acknowledged and recalibrated during the piloting period.** For example, narrative reporting in 2021 (on 2020 results) to complement quantitative data was shared with the evaluation team. And, importantly, for the final round of annual reporting (in early 2023, for results achieved in 2022), countries were not asked to update the usual quantitative data. Rather, they were requested to provide narrative reporting on results achieved, as well as reflections on the overall experience of partnership during the period covered by the Blueprint initiative. While changes in the approach to monitoring and reporting limited the potential to aggregate data over the period of the pilot and compare data points over time, the evaluation agrees that the shift is likely to generate a more relevant and substantive set of information to reflect investments made in the partnership during the Blueprint, and to catalyze learning that will inform the future of the partnership between the two organizations.

5.2.2 Attribution of results

104 The tone of reporting on the Blueprint is generally positive, both in terms of internal briefings⁵¹ and external communications.⁵² However, among interviewees, the evaluation encountered a **degree of skepticism, particularly at regional and country levels regarding the extent to which some of the results accurately represent what has been achieved through the partnership. More specifically, there were concerns that much of the reporting captured the results of ongoing programs that the two organizations were already doing separately, rather than reflecting joint action through an enhanced partnership.** In some instances, there were also concerns that attributing results to the partnership between UNICEF and UNHCR risked undermining government achievements, given the primary responsibility of governments for refugee inclusion,

⁵¹ For example: UNHCR and UNICEF (2022) *Blueprint for Joint Action*, Briefing Note, September 2022.

⁵² For example: UNHCR (2022) *UNHCR Global Report 2021*, 15 June 2022; UNICEF - <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/unhcr-unicef-blueprint>.

as well as the achievements of the broader inter-agency humanitarian and development communities on behalf of refugees.

105 The country case studies in the second round of data collection of the evaluation highlighted a number of instances of partnership in which it was particularly challenging to attribute results to the Blueprint. Many of these examples fell into the category of ‘*coordination*’ – such as deconfliction of programming, and agreements to focus on complementary geographical areas or different thematic areas – rather than examples of more advanced and transformative models of partnership, characterized by co-generation and mutual accountability towards common goals for example (see Section 4.3.2 for a categorization of different partnership types). The example of Honduras is highlighted below in Box 6.

Box 6: The challenge of attributing results to the partnership in Honduras

In Honduras, UNICEF and UNHCR worked together to support children at risk together with an international Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) partner in gang affected areas in the capital. The work can correctly be described as collaborative, in that program activities are complementary and both the partner and community representatives were able to cite benefits of working with the two organizations. However, both agencies were clear that the origins of joint working were ‘*coincidental*’ UNICEF approached the partner, unaware at the time that they were already implementing in that same location with UNHCR. Moreover, the collaboration pre-dated the timeframe of the Blueprint. In this case, it is questionable whether the results from such parallel programming can reasonably be attributed to the Blueprint.

5.2.3 Approach to monitoring and reporting on results

106 During round 1 of data collection for this evaluation, key informants at country level commented extensively on the system and approach for monitoring and reporting on results from the Blueprint initiative. **Overall, the evaluation found that the monitoring process was overly labor intensive, duplicative and complicated by a lack of quality data to genuinely report on progress of the partnership.**

107 By round 2 of data collection, the approach had been adapted somewhat and interviewees were generally less critical. The introduction of other **efforts to enhance learning and exchange of good practices also helped to shift from a strong focus on progress towards quantitative targets towards a greater emphasis on reflection and learning.** This included the submission and sharing of written good practices between countries as well as webinars and meetings on various topics, including advocacy, resource mobilization and generating and reporting on efficiencies. Feedback on the approach to monitoring and reporting, as well as steps taken by headquarters to adapt the approach, is summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Feedback on and adaptations to monitoring and reporting on Blueprint results

Challenges	Description
Heavy workload	The system for monitoring on Blueprint results initially included both annual and mid-year reporting requirements. During the first year of the Blueprint pilot, country-level interviewees described the workload as overly heavy and duplicative of existing corporate reporting requirements. Based on their feedback, headquarters streamlined the process and removed the requirement for mid-year reporting, thereby lightening the workload, and provided more support and step-by-step guidance. The roles of headquarters and regional offices in the monitoring process were also clarified, taking some of the burden from country offices and offering a more streamlined quality assurance process. By round 2 of data collection for the evaluation, country-level interviewees were considerably less critical of the monitoring and reporting process from a workload perspective.
Lack of alignment with	Interviewees commented on the lack of alignment of Blueprint indicators with existing corporate indicators and systems, which added to workloads and caused frustration, particularly

corporate systems	at the country level. This was further complicated by UNHCR shifting to a new results-based management monitoring system during the period of the Blueprint pilot. The timing of reporting also caused difficulties, given the different corporate reporting timelines for UNICEF (end of January) and UNHCR (end of February). This created challenges both in terms of compiling and entering data, as well as for the quality assurance process.
Data availability and quality	Concern was expressed by interviewees at country, regional and global levels about the availability of relevant and quality data to report against particular indicators, as well as a degree of skepticism about the robustness of baseline and targets. The criticisms were particularly acute during round 1 of data collection for the evaluation but appeared to have eased (or at least normalized) somewhat during round 2.
Tools, templates and systems	The Excel-based tool for reporting was described as complicated and not user-friendly, which generated a considerable amount of criticism early in the Blueprint process. The use of UNICEF's Results Assessment Module (RAM) for consolidated reporting on the Blueprint also created access issues for UNHCR staff and hindered efforts to collaborate on the monitoring and reporting process.

108 Despite the difficulties of monitoring and reporting on the Blueprint, there was also a recognition among some key stakeholders that **embarking on a joint process of monitoring, did at least bring staff from the two organizations together, and had gone some way to strengthening their mutual understanding of how each organizations works.** Moreover, streamlining and simplification of reporting for results in 2021 and again in 2022 had gone some way to easing the process-related problems described here.

✔ LESSON LEARNED: Capturing partnership results is essential and can play an important role in influencing institutional priorities. At a country level, there is a natural inclination to orientate country programmes towards these priorities. One of the implications of this is that if the results and outcomes of partnership either (i) cannot be determined because of a lack of harmonized systems, (ii) are considered to duplicate existing results reported elsewhere, or (iii) are not collected and remain invisible, then it is difficult for busy country offices to prioritise partnership working over other, more visible priorities.

5.3 Compatible systems and processes

- The Data Working Group has made a valuable contribution to the partnership, with progress in several key areas that up to now have acted as bottlenecks to effective collaboration. Visibility of the Blueprint and the allocation of resources has helped to catalyze progress.
- Different corporate approaches and timeframes for planning and budgeting in UNHCR and UNICEF complicated efforts to collaborate. A move to multi-year results frameworks for UNHCR brings the two organizations more in line, but genuine joint planning is still largely aspirational.
- Regular country plans and broader UN planning frameworks were more likely to determine priorities than bilateral plans between UNHCR and UNICEF. However, there were rarely any contradictions that prevented the two agencies from pursuing refugee inclusion objectives within these broader frameworks.

5.3.1 Data

109 An important element of the partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF, including within the Blueprint initiative, was (and continues to be) increased collaboration on data. Joint work on data between the two organizations focused on increasing the availability and quality of data on refugee and returnee children; strengthening national data systems to support refugee children's inclusion; and enhancing interoperability of the two organization's corporate data systems to support timely and effective programmatic responses.⁵³ Within the overall umbrella of the

⁵³ UNHCR and UNICEF (2022) Strategic Collaboration Framework between UNICEF and UNHCR. At the time of writing, the Framework was expected to be agreed and signed by the respective Principals of the two organizations in February 2023

Blueprint initiative, a Data Working Group (DWG) was established in mid-2020 to identify institutional solutions for strengthened bilateral data collaboration.⁵⁴ The group quickly developed a clear terms of reference, work plan, and initiated a series of twelve active working groups to follow up on different activities.

110 The work of the DWG is well documented and regular reporting suggests that there has been good progress in a number of workstreams (see Box 7).

Box 7: Addressing the challenges of data interoperability between UNICEF and UNHCR and national data system strengthening

Internal working documents and briefings as well as interviews confirmed that the DWG has advanced in a number of key areas since its establishment in 2020. One particularly important workstream which has made progress is the activity on interoperability - improving the ability of data systems (specifically [Primero](#) in UNICEF and [progress v4](#) in UNHCR) to streamline case management information sharing between both agencies and the broader child protection case management community. As a result, referrals are now possible between the two systems, improving case management for refugee children with particular protection needs.⁵⁵ Another important area of progress is the work on system strengthening to support data disaggregation and inclusion of refugees and other persons of concern in national data systems. Progress in this area means that refugees are more visible in national surveys (including MICS, UNICEF's flagship survey?) and systems and can be counted and budgeted for accordingly.⁵⁶

111 Many of the activities within the remit of the DWG are designed to address longstanding bottlenecks to effective collaboration – bilaterally between UNICEF and UNHCR, in support of national governments, and in collaboration with a broader set of actors working in support of refugee children. Interviewees at global level suggested that the visibility of the Blueprint initiative and its prioritisation by the leadership of both organizations helped to catalyze progress and provided access to resources that enabled long outstanding work to move forward. There is still a significant amount of work to be done, and progress is concentrated within certain workstreams and in particular sectors where resources have been mobilized to bring in outside expertise; leaving certain other areas under-resourced and stagnant for the time-being. Piloting of different initiatives in different country contexts is also perceived to have been slow for some activities, hindering the necessary step of field-testing technical solutions and rolling them out across the organizations. Momentum appears to be strong, however, and both organizations are committed to continuing joint work through 2023.⁵⁷

112 In parallel and as a complement to the SCF, the DWG is drafting a Global Data Sharing Framework between the two organizations, which is due to be finalized and signed in 2023. This Framework is designed to institutionalize and sustain the progress made and facilitate country-level data sharing agreements. As such, it represents an important milestone and a significant achievement that can be at least partially attributed to the Blueprint initiative.

5.3.2 *Planning and budgeting*

113 As the two organizations sought to embed Blueprint results and broader partnership objectives within their overall objectives, different corporate approaches and timeframes for planning and budgeting between the two organizations were described as challenging, particularly during round 1 of data collection for the evaluation. At the time, UNHCR's approach to planning was centralized, using annual country operational plans, with an agreed envelope of funding allocated

⁵⁴ UNHCR and UNICEF (2020) Memo: Update from Blueprint Data Working Group (Internal document), 23 July 2020

⁵⁵ UNHCR and UNICEF (2022) *Blueprint for joint action: Briefing note, September 2022* (internal document)

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

for the coming year.⁵⁸ In contrast, UNICEF plans on the basis of country programs, generally over a three- to five-year period, with a proposed budget which is then used to guide (predominantly country-level) fundraising. The program is then operationalized through annual or multi-year rolling workplans.

114 UNHCR's move from one-year to multi-year results frameworks and plans was perceived as conducive to accelerating joint work on refugee children's inclusion. However, there was little hard evidence from countries that more synchronized planning timeframes and approaches had significantly improved the alignment of plans and budgets between the two organizations, which was still raised as a challenge during round 2 of data collection. Interviewees in some countries said that they were aware of each other's plans but stopped short of describing 'joint planning' beyond collaboration on specific activities.

115 Recognizing that the bilateral partnership is set in the context of a much wider set of partnerships with governments, other multilateral and civil society organizations, as well as other actors – both organizations are aware that they need to align their bilateral accountabilities within the priorities of their respective country planning documents (Country Program Documents for UNICEF and Multi-year Plans for UNHCR), as well as the broader planning documents to which they contribute e.g., UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, Humanitarian Response Plans, Refugee Response Plans, etc.

116 The overlap with broader planning processes and documents was not raised as a significant challenge during the evaluation. To the extent that it elicited comment from interviewees at all, the general view was that both the spirit and the objectives of the bilateral partnership on refugee children's inclusion were usually aligned with the country planning documents of both organizations, as well as with broader inter-agency plans and frameworks. In some instances, interviewees mentioned that other organizations had queried why UNICEF and UNHCR needed an exclusive, bilateral partnership when there were other organizations contributing to the same objectives, working under the umbrella of more generic and inclusive collaboration frameworks. However, there were no perceptions that the bilateral partnership contradicted or deviated in any way from agency-specific or from broader, inter-agency ambitions around refugee inclusion.

5.4 Adequate funding and resources

- Lack of funding was perceived as one of the most significant and pervasive challenges to the partnership, which limited the ambition of the two organizations and created frustration and, at times, tensions.
- In the event of funding gaps, UNICEF struggled to predictably prioritize refugee children's inclusion, given its broader mandate and responsibility for other vulnerable groups.
- That said, some of the most important achievements of the partnership were realized with only minimal financial resources, thanks to targeted and sustained advocacy efforts with governments on including refugee children in key policies and initiatives.
- An initial lack of clarity regarding responsibilities for resource mobilization for the Blueprint led to disappointment and subsequent demotivation in some countries. Difficult and dichotomous messaging on the need for resources also hindered fundraising efforts at all levels.

⁵⁸ UNHCR is progressing towards multi-year planning and programming. As of late 2020, changes were being incrementally introduced to move towards multi-year results frameworks, implementation plans and indicative budgets. Country operations can choose between three- and five-year budget cycles for non-detailed budgets, for the purposes of presenting multi-year requirements to donors and raising more multi-year funds. However, detailed budgets and related spending authority is still developed and granted on an annual basis. (UNHCR (2020) *Discussion Papers 1-4, UNHCR's Engagement in Humanitarian-Development Cooperation, Emerging Findings from a Longitudinal Evaluation, Phase 2, November 2019 – May 2020*, December 2020).

- Inadequate staff capacity to service the partnership was perceived as a problem in the initial set-up of the Blueprint initiative, though this eased as partnership responsibilities became embedded in regular workloads and reporting processes were streamlined. Staff turnover continued to create difficulties for both organizations.

5.4.1 Funding gaps

117 At the outset of the Blueprint initiative, countries were instructed to embed refugee inclusion activities within existing work plans and budgets and identify additional funding needs to further enhance collaboration and work towards transformative change. **Additional funding requirements were largely unmet, however, and lack of adequate funding was identified as one of the most significant and persistent challenges to an effective partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF during both rounds of data collection for the evaluation.** In almost all of the Blueprint focus countries, as well as non-Blueprint countries covered by the evaluation, funding gaps were perceived as a serious constraint to the achievement of results and effective ways of working together.

118 **Funding gaps were especially pertinent for UNICEF and presented a challenge for the organisation in terms of its ability to predictably prioritise refugee inclusion within its broader mandate. Given the finite nature of resources, the case studies demonstrated that, in some instances, a greater focus on refugee inclusion meant there were fewer resources for UNICEF to progress other important priorities.** In contexts with relatively small refugee populations amid the presence of other priority vulnerable groups, such as IDPs and migrants, and with shortages of funding overall, it was particularly difficult for UNICEF to prioritise refugees. **This created internal tension and affected motivations to work in partnership.** In a number of instances across different contexts, the evaluation encountered disappointment on the part of UNICEF staff who were unable to secure adequate funding to realize their joint ambitions within the Blueprint; and frustration on the part of UNHCR, who saw UNICEF as a reliable partner only in the event of available resources.

 **LESSON LEARNED:** In a competitive funding environment where many agencies have seen a decline in fund availability, the institutional rewards for partnership and for delivering refugee inclusion outcomes have to be very clear if the partnership is to be consistently prioritized when other issues linked to organizational mandates may not be fully funded.

119 Despite the combined efforts across country, regional and global levels, only very modest levels of funding were secured for the Blueprint partnership. Of the US\$236.5 million of resources required (in 2020, to achieve results in Blueprint countries by 2021),⁵⁹ approximately US\$50 million was mobilized at the global level in 2021. This amount was not explicitly raised in response to a call for Blueprint funding, but through a more complex allocation and reallocation of contributions by the organizations in collaboration with donors.⁶⁰ Limited resources were mobilized at country level (see Box 8 for an example from Ethiopia), though the evaluation does not have a comprehensive stock take of the amounts raised to allow for any real analysis of the success or otherwise of country-level fundraising for the partnership.

Box 8: Country-level resource mobilization for the partnership in Ethiopia

⁵⁹ UNHCR and UNICEF (2020) *Blueprint for Joint Action: Case for Investment*.

⁶⁰ The figure of \$50 million was cited in interviews and not verified through reporting or other documentation. Additional funding may have been allocated to aspects of the Blueprint initiative, but given the complexity of the funding picture, there was no comprehensive record of relevant incoming contributions, nor a clear picture of how that funding had been allocated to different workstreams or locations.

In Ethiopia, the R-WASH program was used as a positive example of effective joint action, facilitated through a joint grant from the German government. A joint program proposal was developed between UNHCR, UNICEF and KfW based on lessons from implementation in Itang, Gambella. A generous budget was initially secured for phase 1 in 2020 which was subsequently extended with an additional budget in 2022. The Regional Water Bureau of the Government of Ethiopia also made a commitment to contribute approximately one million USD to the capital investments of the WASH systems, demonstrating ownership of the government.

120 During interviews, key informants occasionally contrasted their experiences of implementing the Blueprint initiative without dedicated resources with other models of partnership that came with funding attached. One such example is the Prospects partnership (see section 2.2 for details), funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁶¹ Where the Prospects partnership overlapped with countries piloting the Blueprint – in Ethiopia for example – it provided a contrasting model, demonstrating the convening power that funding can have in terms of brokering and sustaining a collaborative approach and achieve joint outcomes.

5.4.2 Fundraising challenges

121 **Lack of clarity regarding responsibilities for resource mobilization for the Blueprint was also a source of frustration and subsequent demotivation for a number of focus countries.** In some cases, countries entered into the Blueprint pilot with the expectation of benefitting from additional funding at global level, or at least receiving global and regional support for country-level fundraising. Indeed, considerable global effort went into developing an investment case for the partnership and convening donors to encourage their support.⁶² Global-level donor roundtables were organized in November 2020 and November 2021: the first of which had a clear fundraising purpose, while the latter was more focused on awareness raising and advocacy – showcasing progress made through the Blueprint initiative and presenting donors with key asks (or accelerators) to mobilize support and generate financial pledges. Bilateral efforts were also made to encourage support from specific donors, both at global and regional levels.

122 Documentation related to resource mobilization for the Blueprint stressed that the main responsibility for fundraising sat with countries and that UNHCR and UNICEF country offices should lead on resource mobilization, with support from regional offices/bureaus and headquarters as needed.⁶³ Within countries, however, the evaluation team encountered few examples of joint fundraising for the partnership and no successful attempts (see the example from Libya in Box 9).

Box 9: Country-level fundraising for the Blueprint in Libya

In Libya in 2021, UNHCR and UNICEF agreed to a joint Blueprint fundraising strategy with budget requirements, existing contributions from UNHCR and UNICEF, and gaps to be filled through additional fundraising.⁶⁴ Joint briefings were conducted with key donors with an emphasis on the multiplier approach of joint action and realization of development goals. Despite the best efforts of the two organizations in Libya, as far as the evaluation team are aware, no dedicated funding for the partnership was secured.

123 Challenges that were raised by interviewees related to fundraising for the partnership – in both Blueprint and non-Blueprint countries – included the **different models and approaches to resource mobilization between the two organizations.** To generalize, UNICEF puts more emphasis on country-level fundraising, whereas resource mobilization in UNHCR is more centralized and country operations can face challenges receiving earmarked funding from donors,

⁶¹ For more details of the Prospects partnership, see: <https://www.government.nl/topics/development-cooperation/the-development-policy-of-the-netherlands/refugees-and-migration>.

⁶² UNHCR and UNICEF (2020) *Blueprint for Joint Action: Case for Investment*. A number of other documents, presentations and resources were also compiled to make the case to donors for investing in the partnership.

⁶³ UNHCR and UNICEF (2020) *Blueprint for Joint Action: Case for Investment*.

⁶⁴ UNHCR and UNICEF (ND) *Blueprint fundraising strategy* (internal document, in draft).

making the two agencies poorly aligned for the purposes of joint or even collaborative fundraising. **Continued and increased competition for funding** was also described as a persistent problem, especially at a time when both organizations are faced with unprecedented funding shortages. This was felt in almost all case-study countries for the evaluation, but particularly in ‘stable’ or ‘transition’ contexts, with a dwindling donor interest in supporting UN agencies to fund remaining humanitarian needs among refugee caseloads and limited interest from development donors.⁶⁵

124 **Difficult and dichotomous messaging also hindered fundraising efforts.** Interviewees at different levels within both organizations said that the donors they had approached were supportive of a strengthened partnership but questioned why additional funding was required when the UN is already expected to be more efficient and reduce costs by working better together through established initiatives such as ‘*Delivering as One*’.⁶⁶ Joint fundraising that targets private donors is unlikely to take place due to the separate strength of each organization’s brand and competing priorities for resource mobilization from private sources.

125 The newly agreed SCF between UNICEF and UNHCR includes a description of how the two organizations will work together to mobilize resources for the partnership. Under the heading of ‘*Coordinated resource mobilization*’, it states that, ‘*The two organizations will actively support one another’s efforts to mobilize resources to meet their respective funding needs through regular exchange of information and early warning on resource gaps. They will seek funds through their respective regular channels and will strive to attract new funding, including from non-traditional donors, in a complementary manner.*’ While the Framework, also notes that the two organizations will, ‘*actively work to identify opportunities at all levels for joint resource mobilization, particularly in areas of priority focus*’, there is a clear emphasis on ‘*complementary*’ rather than ‘*joint*’ resource mobilization, perhaps in recognition of the fundraising challenges experienced to date within the partnership. The evaluation agrees that this pragmatic approach is appropriate to resourcing of the partnership going forward and continuing to dogmatically pursue joint funding is unlikely to yield significant results.

5.4.3 Progress in spite of funding gaps

126 Despite resource constraints, countries were able to make progress in some areas, and a number of interviewees commented that **some of the most important achievements of the partnership were not heavily reliant on large financial investments. This was particularly the case in instances of joint advocacy, resulting in important changes in policy and practice** on behalf of refugee children and their families with only limited financial investment (see Box 10 for an example from Ethiopia and Section 7 for additional examples from other contexts). In these instances, staff time, expertise, and sheer determination were the organizations’ most valuable assets.

Box 10: Advocacy efforts in Ethiopia to influence national policy on behalf of refugee children

In Ethiopia, as part of the efforts to accelerate the partnership through the Blueprint, UNHCR and UNICEF identified a number of key areas where they could work together to advocate on behalf of refugee children with the government’s Refugee and Returnees Service (RRS). In a joint advocacy document, the two organizations listed ‘*key asks*’ under the headings of birth registration, child protection systems, accelerated learning, and

⁶⁵ Rwanda was one example of a ‘stable’ context, in which there was little opportunity to fundraise for requirements that were perceived as humanitarian, given that they targeted refugee populations. Iraq was an example of ‘transition’ context, where, according to interviewees, there was a misconception that costs should reduce during the transition making fundraising even more difficult.

⁶⁶ ‘*Delivering as One*’ refers to a concept at the core of the UN reform process: coordinating different agencies to exploit their competitive advantages. See: <https://www.sdgfund.org/un-jointefforts#:~:text=%E2%80%9CDelivering%20as%20One%E2%80%9D%20refers%20to,to%20exploit%20their%20competitive%20advantages.>

sanitation to work towards more refugee-inclusive national systems and services.⁶⁷ Over a period of time, including prior to the introduction of the Blueprint, the two organizations made important gains, such as the inclusion of refugees in the Child National Protection Management Framework; inclusion of refugee women and children in a draft National Strategy and Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Children; and Protection of Children in Contact with the Law in Ethiopia, (2021 –2026), developed by the Ministry of Justice. The Blueprint advocacy planning document aimed to build on that progress and continue leveraging the strengths of both organizations to lobby government and strive for further commitments and practical action. Much of this work was achieved through sustained joint advocacy and was not reliant on major programmatic costs.

127 Despite these achievements, the fact remains that countries struggled to make progress without additional funding to accelerate the partnership and allow the more transformative elements of joint work plans to progress. This had a major impact on levels of enthusiasm and ambition during the lifespan of the Blueprint pilot.

5.4.4 Human resources

128 Interviews highlighted a **country-level perception that the partnership lacked adequate staff capacity within both organizations, particularly at the outset of the Blueprint initiative, where capacity dedicated to the partnership was not seen as commensurate to the internal pressure that was placed on delivering results and responding to information and learning requests from headquarters.** During round 1 of data collection for the evaluation, some countries expressed the need for additional and dedicated resources to manage the partnership. However, the appetite for additional staffing declined over the timeframe of the evaluation in large part due to the lack of any additional resources and only one country (Cameroon) actually proceeded with creating a dedicated staff position to manage the partnership.⁶⁸ By round 2 of data collection for the evaluation, there was a strong sense from all levels – country, regional and global – that **dedicated staffing for the partnership was neither necessary nor feasible, and that making better use of existing staff to further the partnership was a better and more realistic approach.**

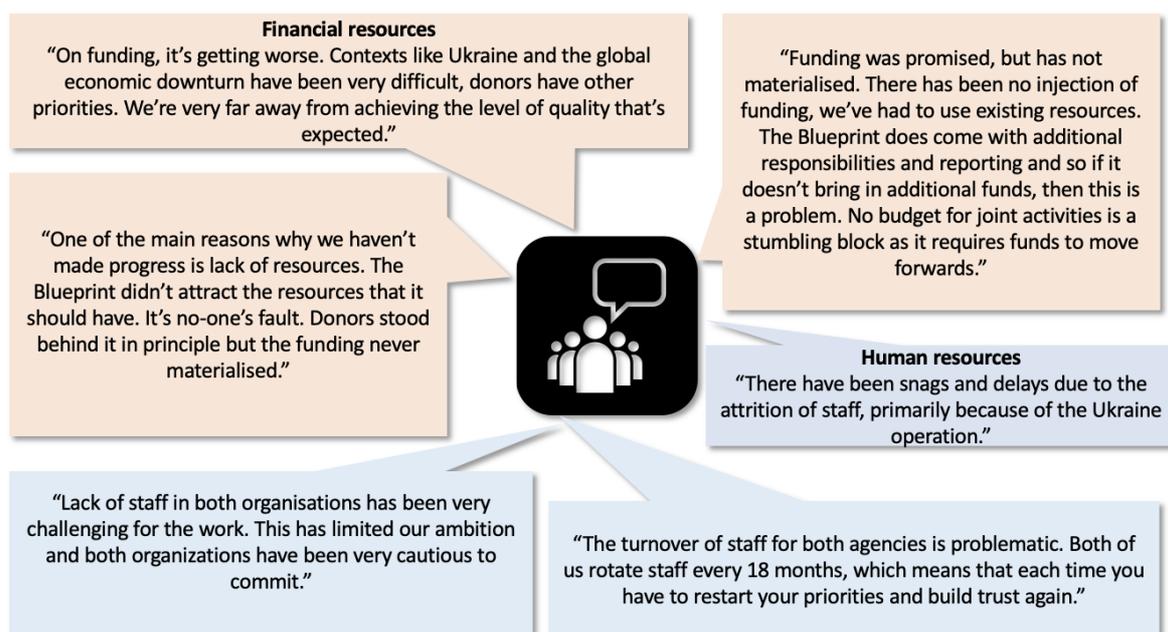
129 **Staff turnover also created challenges for both organizations in its resourcing of the partnership,** particularly UNHCR given its more frequent rotation of staff between operations. UNICEF too, however, described changes in staffing as disruptive to the relationship and a deepening of the collaboration. This and other challenges related to staffing are captured in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Select perspectives on resourcing of the partnership and related challenges and opportunities⁶⁹

⁶⁷ UNHCR and UNICEF (ND) *Blueprint Ethiopia: Asks for meeting with Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS)*.

⁶⁸ Interviews with UNICEF and UNHCR in Cameroon did not take place during round 2 of data collection for the evaluation and it was not, therefore, possible to verify whether the two organisations had proceeded with hiring a dedicated partnership manager.

⁶⁹ Note that references to specific sectors have been replaced by 'sector x' to protect the anonymity of key informants.



5.5 Net value

- While it was not possible to calculate cost savings as a result of the partnership, countries were able to cite anecdotal evidence of efficiencies realized through programmatic collaboration, operational streamlining, or through a more coordinated approach to working with partners.
- Countries also emphasized the cost of the partnership, however, particularly in terms of the extra workload associated with additional meetings and reporting requirements. These costs should be taken into account when calculating the net value of the partnership.
- At the same time, there was broad consensus among countries of the higher-level benefit of better results on behalf of refugee children, justifying any additional costs or workloads associated with the partnership.

130 Increased efficiency was one of the fundamental premises of the Blueprint initiative, with the expectation of realizing cost savings through a more collaborative partnership.⁷⁰ As such, throughout the period of the pilot, there was an appetite to find and demonstrate efficiencies. Early reporting on Blueprint progress included a specific indicator to measure efficiencies, though this was discontinued as part of a streamlining of the monitoring and reporting process during 2022 in which the need to report against the overall partnership outcome (including efficiencies) in the JAPs was removed. Wider efforts continued, however, including gathering and sharing of experiences on efficiency gains through UNICEF and UNHCR collaboration in Blueprint countries – through a webinar in 2021, for example, that encouraged pilot countries to showcase examples of cost-savings and learn from each other in a ‘marketplace’ event.⁷¹ Effort was also invested in developing a methodology for measuring efficiencies, though ultimately this was not pursued as there were questions around the robustness of the data as well as the approach, and any resulting figures would have needed to be heavily caveated before sharing externally.

5.5.1 Examples of cost savings

131 While it was not possible to calculate an aggregate figure of cost-savings as a result of the Blueprint pilot (due to a lack of comparable data), **countries were able to cite specific examples**

⁷⁰ UNHCR and UNICEF (2022) *UNICEF – UNHCR Blueprint for Joint Action: A Fair Deal for Refugee Children. Frequently Asked Questions*. February 2022.

⁷¹ In April 2021, UNICEF and UNHCR organised a ‘Blueprint marketplace on efficiency gains’, which took the form of a webinar where countries shared examples of how they had leveraged the partnership to bring about savings.

of where they had realized efficiencies through more collaborative ways of working. These can be disaggregated by i) **partnership efficiencies**, realized by streamlining collaboration with government, NGO and private sector partners; ii) **program efficiencies**, generated by leveraging of complementary expertise and avoiding duplication; and iii) **operational efficiencies**, as a result of more collaborative back-office ways of working and resourcing.⁷² Examples of cost savings can be found in Table 8 under these three headings.

Table 8: Selected examples of efficiencies in Blueprint pilot countries

Efficiency type	Description
Partnership efficiencies	<p>Lebanon - UNHCR and UNICEF undertook joint Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) assessments for common implementing partners within the child protection sector (based on UNHCR’s methodology); as well as joint capacity building on PSEA. Avoiding multiple assessments of the same partners, and pooling resources for capacity building, was credited with efficiencies for both organizations.</p> <p>Bangladesh – The organizations agreed a clear division of responsibilities for NGO partners with a focus on limiting duplication, particularly in the education sector.</p>
Programmed efficiencies	<p>Iraq – UNHCR and UNICEF worked together to agree a consistent approach to solarization of water supply in refugee camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and broader integration of refugee camps into existing townships, thereby reducing the recurrent costs of providing services to refugees.</p> <p>Indonesia – UNICEF provided capacity for a UNHCR-led rapid needs assessment, avoiding the need for UNHCR staff to travel for the purposes of data collection. This was both a more efficient way of working and resulted in improved coordination with government and more effective provision of services.</p> <p>Lebanon – UNICEF and UNHCR jointly collected and analyzed education sector data to support government efforts to improve access and retention of stateless children, refugee children and children with disabilities in the national education system.⁷³</p> <p>Ecuador – UNHCR adapted COVID-19 messaging and communication materials produced by partner COOPI with UNICEF funding.</p> <p>Italy – A thematic partnership with a focus on transition to adulthood was initiated as a way of reducing duplication and leveraging the respective expertise of the different organizations involved. The joint initiative by UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM and academia included a survey, which was particularly highly regarded.</p> <p>Across countries - In interviews, a number of countries cited examples of ‘deconfliction’ – concerted efforts to reduce or avoid duplicative programming either geographically or thematically, resulting in efficiency gains for one or both organizations.</p>
Operational efficiencies	<p>Bangladesh – Co-location of education staff in Cox’s Bazar in the UNICEF office reduced costs and facilitated better coordination and programmatic collaboration.</p> <p>Indonesia - Strategic use of one organization’s Field Office to cover the work of both organizations has brought about potential cost-savings.</p> <p>Ethiopia – UNHCR piggy-backed on UNICEF’s long-term agreements (LTAs) with suppliers, reducing the need to repeat risk-management and due diligence processes.</p> <p>Libya - UNICEF and UNHCR had joint framework agreements in place for sharing of LTAs with contractors for services such as printing and transportation of program supplies (such as textbooks for basic numeracy and literacy), reducing the staff time spent on procurement and bidding processes. Sharing of staff transportation (armored vehicles and drivers) also resulted in cost-savings.</p> <p>Ecuador - UNHCR was able to shortcut procurement procedures and development of community messaging during the response to COVID-19 by relying on the expertise of UNICEF and its partner,</p>

⁷² This disaggregation of efficiencies is derived from UNICEF and UNHCR guidance: UNHCR and UNICEF (ND) *Measuring and Monitoring Efficiencies – The UNICEF/UNHCR Blueprint for Joint Action*.

⁷³ UNHCR and UNICEF (2021) *The Blueprint in Action: 5 Accelerators for Refugee Inclusion*. October 2021.

132 It should be noted that some of these examples pre-date the Blueprint and cannot therefore be attributed to the initiative. Linked to this, interviewees stressed that in a number of cases, other ongoing business efficiency initiatives, such as the UN Business Operations Strategy (BOS),⁷⁴ have driven efforts to streamline processes and generate savings, raising the risk of double-counting of cost-savings through the Blueprint partnership.

5.5.2 Costs

133 While examples of efficiencies can be found in countries, there was also broad consensus on the **additional workload associated with the partnership, in terms of extra meetings, documents, processes and reporting. The investment of staff time was particularly heavy at the front-end of the initiative but was considered to have reduced over time**, particularly as partnership-related planning and reporting processes became embedded within general ways of working and were no longer considered as additional work. Interviewees also pointed to a reprioritization of the partnership over time in some cases, leading to a reduced number of meetings, joint activities and deliverables.

134 As well as taking tangible costs such as staff time into account, the evaluation noted **the importance of other less tangible costs, such as political capital**. This was raised as being particularly relevant for UNICEF when working in constrained and politically sensitive contexts, where their engagement with governments on issues of refugee inclusion had the potential to impact on their relationship with government stakeholders and affect their overall standing. This is not to suggest that this deterred UNICEF from actively participating in the partnership; more that the political economy of the relationship was a consideration among others for UNICEF when assessing the net value and mutual benefit of the partnership.

5.5.3 Balancing efficiency gains with effectiveness

135 While there were mixed responses from countries about whether the additional workload and potential impact on political capital (for UNICEF) were offset by the cost-savings that had been achieved, there was greater consensus about the benefits in terms of the increased effectiveness of the two organizations working together. **Interviewees in almost all countries, as well as at regional and global levels, elevated better results for vulnerable refugees over cost savings**, and considered that better results for refugee children justified any additional workload that may have resulted from the partnership.

⁷⁴ See: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/business-operations-strategy-bos-20-guidance>.

6. Findings: Partner relationships

Partnerships are driven by complex and dynamic relationships between partners which is the focus of this section. This section responds to Evaluation Questions 2.2 and 3.1 (see the Evaluation Matrix in Annex 4).

6.1 Communications, transparency and trust

- Deliberate efforts to strengthen the partnership, including through formal accountability processes introduced as part of the Blueprint initiative, had the positive effect of improving communications and information sharing between the two organizations at all levels.
- Trust and transparency were perceived as prerequisites of an effective partnership. Better communication had built trust, and more systematic sharing of information had increased transparency; though both were perceived as vulnerable to changes in staffing and programs and to contextual shifts.
- People and personalities were identified as the most important factors in determining the success of the partnership.

6.1.1 Communications

136 Good communication is an essential aspect of partnership, and there was particularly **positive feedback from global interviewees who viewed the changes in the nature, frequency and tone of communications between the two agencies very positively** (Figure 10).

137 Interviews revealed a recognition that while there had been much progress, there continued to be scope for further improvement at all levels. It is important that the structured conversations, that have now started, continue, particularly as the SCF is launched and rolled out. It may be that particular attention and support is required to facilitate this in a more deliberate way in the countries where the partnership is weaker. Given the challenging experience for some countries during the Blueprint rollout, this is likely to be a valuable investment.

138 A number of the focus countries considered that the increased formality and accountability of the Blueprint partnership as compared with previous approaches had strengthened communications and information sharing. The additional meetings, in particular, had created more frequent opportunities for communication and mutual understanding of each agency's mandate. They also offered opportunities to address any challenges that existed – both with

Figure 10: Improvements in communications at global level

"At global level, there is much more regular and positive interaction than before. Previously the communication was sporadic. Now we meet every week and that leads to lots of positive discussions, including collaboration beyond the Blueprint. The process to develop the global collaboration framework has been really good, but that's at global level and it won't necessarily translate into good collaboration in the field. In my view, we haven't done enough to reach out to the field, partly because of COVID-19 and lack of funding, but also because of the way the Blueprint was designed. As we roll out the global framework we need to think differently about how it's done. I'd like to see us doing more proactive work to support countries. I'm mindful that staff at country level are often told to implement new initiatives and priorities. We need to help them see why they should act on this one and how to go about it."

"The Blueprint paved the way for where we are now with the Global Collaboration Framework, it's been a long and amazing journey...We're talking to each other and trying to figure it out. We're not quite at the point have having the reflex to check with each other everywhere, but we're beginning to get there."

"We have much better working relations now with good, direct lines of communication. But that hasn't necessarily advanced the partnership."

"The best thing about the Blueprint is that it made everyone sit down and talk, instead of griping about each other from the outside. The message came from the top that we needed to work together and that trickled down. There's less paranoia and rudeness than there used to be. There is at least more clarity now on who leads on certain areas and why and the value added of doing it that way."



implementation of the activities outlined in the JAP, but also with activities outside the scope of the Blueprint partnership. Even in countries where staff were co-located, the Blueprint was credited with further enhancing communications and information sharing. Understandably, most focus countries considered that a previous history of good relations and a legacy of partnership was a key ingredient to the quality of communication and information sharing.

✔ **LESSON LEARNED:** Formal accountability mechanisms can play an important role in strengthening communications and information-sharing which in turn strengthen trust.

6.1.2 Trust and transparency

139 Issues of trust and transparency were raised frequently during interviews during both rounds of the evaluation. While these characteristics might be considered as necessary prerequisites for partnership, they can also be considered as products of collaborative working in their own right (i.e., elements that are established and strengthened between partners over time). The most striking example from the case studies was detailed in an interview with a representative of the Italian Government which is described in Box 11.⁷⁵

Box 11: Advocacy efforts in Italy in support of Mediterranean migration

In Italy, both UNHCR and UNICEF staff described in interviews how the partnership had developed in the context of Mediterranean migration, around entry points in southern Italy. UNICEF, as an international body as well as a national society, was relatively new in Italy and had leveraged the partnership with UNHCR to establish relationships with the Italian authorities. At the onset of the Ukrainian conflict, as refugees started to arrive in Italy, the Government representative stated that building on the trust which had been established, it was their *'first instinct'* to contact both agencies together. The resulting collaboration saw two UNHCR personnel seconded into the department in question, and *'fully transparent communication channels'* with both agencies. While each partners' flaws were visible, this partnership allowed for, in the words of the Government, *'real time problem solving'* and an attitude of *'working things through'*, whatever issues arose.

140 **While there is a clear *'partnership dividend'* related to issues of trust, the evaluation also found that it is fragile and the case studies and interviews also revealed setbacks;** field visits undertaken during the second phase of the evaluation revealed significant deficits in trust and transparency and highlighted instances where a loss of trust undermined an existing partnership. In a number of the countries that participated in the evaluation, the progress made in strengthening the partnership suffered setbacks or was undermined. These were a consequence of a range of factors which included program negotiations, changes in staffing, and changes in context which sometimes resulted in the partners adopting different positions, at least in the short-term.

141 **The evidence from the evaluation suggests that a high degree of trust and transparency are prerequisites if the partnership is to go beyond a basic level to a leveraging or collaborative one. At the same time, these attributes are difficult to incentivize through process alone, although regular meetings can help strengthen knowledge and understanding which can in turn assist in fostering trust.** In the cases where there was a more purposeful collaborative partnership, trust and transparency were frequently role-modeled by leadership. These softer attributes of partnership are among the most challenging to cultivate but they are a pre-condition for stronger partnerships which are most likely to contribute to transformative change.

⁷⁵ As outlined in the methodology section, Italy was one of two non-Blueprint countries that participated in the evaluation.

LESSON LEARNED: Relational aspects of a partnership are often overlooked or de-prioritised in comparison to other more tangible partnership characteristics. However, while trust and transparency are difficult to cultivate, they are also one of the most important enablers for achieving partnership outcomes.

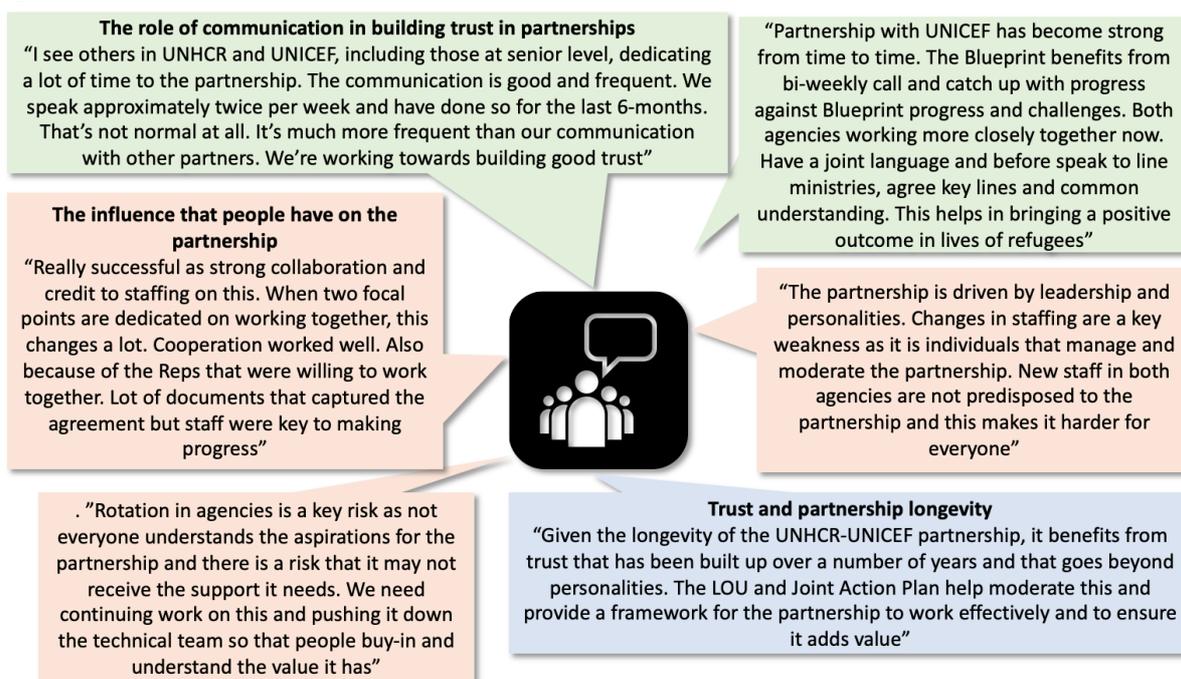
6.1.3 The influence that people have on partnership

142 **Personalities were considered to have the most significant influence on the strength of the partnership and trust was considered to be vulnerable to changes in staffing and adversely affected by sudden or unilateral decisions made without consultation, even when those were outside the scope of the Blueprint.** Examples of changes in staffing that had set back the partnership were raised in almost all of the case study countries (see Section 5.4.4 for more on the impact of sufficient and consistent human resources on the partnership).

143 The willingness of staff to communicate and work together was considered an essential ingredient for success, both at a leadership and technical level. There were a number of examples given from the case study countries of challenges in maintaining momentum that had been built when new staff struggled to understand and accept the nature of the partnership and the responsibilities that this bestowed on the agency. On several occasions, incoming staff felt that the partnership took visibility away from one or other of the agencies or ceded too much power to them. This underlines the importance of supporting communication and institutionalization of the partnership in order to make it less vulnerable to changes in staffing, particularly during the global roll-out of the SCF.

144 **One of the key findings of this evaluation is that the softer aspects of trust and the relationship between the two agencies are key to the success of the partnership. And that good communication and an approach which requires engagement between the agencies, pays dividends in terms of strengthening trust in the partnership.** The effect of these relational benefits on the partnership are captured in Figure 11.

Figure 11: The influence of communications, transparency and trust on partnership



6.2 Mutual benefit, power balance and equity

- The added value of the partnership was harder to evidence in contexts where staff of either UNICEF or UNHCR or both were unable to see how the partnership directly benefited the mandate of their organization and in several cases, interviews highlighted a mismatch in benefits accrued from the partnership and a concern that one agency was disproportionately benefitting compared to the other.
- While there were instances of the two organizations positively leveraging their differences in technical capacity, disparities in staffing more often had the effect of creating power imbalances and introducing uneven perceptions of mutual benefit. In such cases, honest and frequent communication could help to restore balance.
- The findings highlight the importance of relational aspects of the collaboration and the importance of monitoring and carefully managing these aspects of the partnership.

6.2.1 Mutual benefit

145 **In countries where UNHCR or UNICEF staff was unable to see their agencies mandate advanced by the partnership, there tended to be far more questions asked of its added value.** In this context, the partnership was far more likely to falter, or be de-prioritized. It is also in these contexts that strong communication is of paramount importance as a test of the partnership is whether such sensitive issues can be raised and addressed – noting that addressing them might necessarily include a renegotiation of the terms of the partnership.

146 **On the issue of mutual benefit, the evaluation had mixed findings; in several cases, interviews highlighted a mismatch in benefits accrued from the partnership and a concern that one agency was disproportionately benefitting compared to the other.** In each of these cases, there did not appear to be an easy route to raising or addressing these concerns which tended to result in problems festering rather than being resolved.

147 In several countries, UNICEF found the Blueprint challenging to prioritise in the face of significant need across other parts of its mandate. This was particularly true in contexts where refugee children were few in number and where there were perceived to be far greater needs among other caseloads. However, if the partnership is to be predictable, then even in countries that have a small refugee caseload, or where refugee issues are politically sensitive, there is an expectation that UNICEF must prioritise its time and resources (see also Section 5.4.1) and use its political capital (see also Section 5.5.2) in support of refugee inclusion.

148 The case studies also revealed missed opportunities to capitalize on comparative advantage; in several of the countries, a successful partnership was heralded when the two agencies had effectively '*cut the cake*' in order that they could both implement, even when one agency might have been able to do this more efficiently or effectively alone, or with modest input from the other partner. An approach which divides responsibilities (and often, funding) equally and cuts activities down the middle is more akin to '*coordination*' than it is to partnership, although some of the countries sought to pass it off as partnership.

149 While Blueprint documents make references to one model of partnership in which one of the partners works on behalf of both, there were no examples of this encountered during the evaluation. While this is a valid partnership approach, interviews highlighted the challenges presented by it, as there continues to be a strong desire within both agencies to compete for funds and to remain '*visible*'. This is in large part a consequence of the competitive nature of the sector and hence may be difficult to overcome, particularly in contexts where funding is scarce.

6.2.2 Power balance and equity

150 The issue of power balance in partnerships is another factor that has an important bearing on both the effectiveness and the sustainability of partnerships. **A mismatch in power or perceptions of a lack of equity can affect engagement and the motivations of partners to commit to the partnership.** In the countries that participated in the evaluation there were a small number of issues that influenced perceptions of equity. These included (i) the comparative size of the agency; (ii) the seniority of agency staff; (iii) geographic footprint; and (iv) financial resources.

151 **Human resources and the combined technical capacities of UNICEF and UNHCR have been particularly important enablers of the success of the partnership. Conversely, different levels and concentrations of staff across the two organizations have, in some instances, created imbalances in power and equity in the partnership, affecting the willingness and ability of individuals to continue prioritizing and investing time in collaborating with one another.**

152 In general, the evaluation found that the relationship was more effective in instances where the two organizations had similar levels of staffing including seniority of staff. This was rarely the case in the country contexts covered by the evaluation, however, and more often UNICEF had the larger program and more senior staff (except in large-scale refugee contexts; but even in these funding and staffing quickly starts to reduce as situations become protracted). Across sectors, staffing in the agencies tended to be most comparable for child protection, which is an area of overlapping competence for both UNHCR and UNICEF; it was less so for education and WASH, where UNICEF tended to dominate in terms of technical expertise and staffing.

153 While UNHCR's specific and often highly specialist knowledge on refugee issues was identified as a major asset within the partnership, in general its staff were more thinly stretched across program areas and held fewer senior positions, with less decision-making authority as a consequence. The same was also observed at global level, which in some instances and in some sectors had led to tensions between the two organizations e.g., during the design and drafting of the new SCF in some sectors. In regional offices, UNICEF generally had greater numbers of staff and technical capacities, though UNHCR had progressively built more staff capacity in its Regional Bureaus during the timeframe of the evaluation (which coincided with an overall move within the organization to decentralize and regionalize operations).⁷⁶

154 The nature of the partnership means that the respective strengths and capacities of the two organizations should, in theory, be combined to compensate for any weaknesses or gaps in one or other of the two agencies. Indeed, there were examples where this was the case, and **the strong technical knowledge and established relationships with partners had been leveraged for the benefit of the partnership overall.** Box 12 describes one such example in Rwanda within the WASH sector. **In other instances, disparities in the number and seniority of staffing resulted in perceptions of power imbalances. In all contexts, significant value was placed on the frequency and quality of communication in order for issues to be raised and addressed, and the importance of honesty and humility between partners.** This evaluation recognizes that the importance of such relational aspects of partnership. Rather than ignore or downplay such imbalances, the evaluation considers it essential that they are monitored and that any concerns are carefully managed.

 **LESSON LEARNED:** If both partners are to contribute to the partnership, it is a reasonable expectation that they should also receive shared value from it. A healthy partnership should deliver results for each partner, in

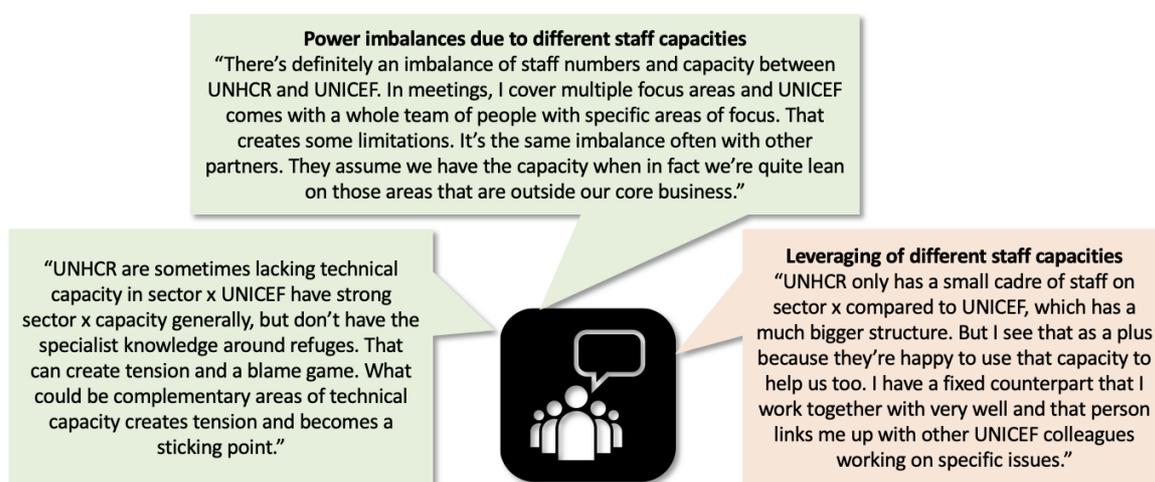
⁷⁶ UNHCR (ND) *Update on Decentralization and Regionalization in UNHCR.*

addition to the shared results for both partners. Ultimately, it is only by achieving individual and collective results that the agencies can expect to maintain their commitments and for the partnership to be sustainable in the longer-term.

Box 12: Leveraging of respective staff capacities and relationships in Rwanda

Both UNICEF and UNHCR acknowledged the value added of each other's different strengths in terms of staff capacities in Rwanda. UNICEF has a greater number of staff working on WASH and over time has established strong relationships with government authorities. In discussion with UNHCR, this strength was leveraged for the benefit of refugees in a number of ways. For example, at UNHCR's request, UNICEF opened discussions with the relevant government authorities to advocate for special/lower water tariffs for several priority camps refugee camps in Rwanda; and UNICEF had introduced UNHCR to key decision-makers within the government to continue lobbying directly. UNICEF also used its contacts within Ministry of Health to allow UNHCR to circumvent certain lengthy bureaucratic procedures to accelerate behavior change activities in refugee camps in response to COVID-19.

Figure 12: Select perspectives on the different staff capacities of UNHCR and UNICEF⁷⁷



⁷⁷ Note that references to specific sectors have been replaced by ‘sector x’ to protect the anonymity of key informants.

7. Results: The contribution made by partnership to refugee inclusion

This section seeks to use the case studies examined during the evaluation to better understand the contribution that the UNHCR – UNICEF partnership has made to strengthening refugee inclusion.⁷⁸ This section responds to Evaluation Questions 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 3.3 (see the Evaluation Matrix in Annex 4).

7.1 Progress made toward refugee inclusion

The short-term timeframe of the Blueprint meant that it was not expected that significant measurable progress would be made towards sectoral outcomes and impacts. Furthermore at country-level, there were modest expectations of achieving significant shifts in government policies on refugee inclusion during implementation.⁷⁹ Consequently, it was agreed that these results areas would not be a significant focus for the evaluation, although where changes were evidenced, the evaluation was tasked with examining ways in which the partnership had contributed to policy change, refugee inclusion or improved service provision as outlined in the Theory of Change for the Blueprint which is reproduced below (Figure 13).

Figure 13: ‘Blueprint outputs’ from the Blueprint Theory of Change⁸⁰



The approach taken to monitoring and reporting Blueprint results and the implication for the evaluation is discussed in section 5.2.3. Modifications to the approach to monitoring and reporting on the Blueprint initiative during the pilot process, mean that the evaluation team cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of what was achieved, but this report can draw on case studies gathered during the evaluation to provide examples of how the partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF has contributed to refugee inclusion in the education, WASH and child protection sectors, as well as in other areas outside of the Blueprint priority sectors.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Please note that the selection of the case studies submitted to the evaluation team was country-driven and the data shared/interviews conducted did not permit an evaluation of the programs. The program sample is drawn from both Blueprint and non-Blueprint countries. Of the programs selected from Blueprint countries, the majority are drawn from pre-existing programs which pre-date the launch of the Blueprint and so the intermediate outcomes or changes described are not solely attributable to it.

⁷⁹ UNHCR and UNICEF (2022) *Terms of reference: Evaluation of the UNHCR-UNICEF Fair Deal (Blueprint) for Refugee Children 2020-2022*, March 2022.

⁸⁰ The ToC was outlined in the ToR for the evaluation.

⁸¹ The evaluation team asked the focus countries to suggest ‘case-studies’ that illustrated how the partnership was being put into practice. By nature, this approach encouraged countries to submit positive examples, a selection of which are featured in this section. Interviews with key stakeholders in countries also sought to bring out some of the challenges of working in partnership, which are covered in other sections of the report.

7.2 Education

157 Within the education sector, countries shared examples of how UNICEF and UNHCR had worked together to advocate for refugee-inclusive education plans, policies and budgets (Box 13), and improved access to early childhood development (ECD), primary and secondary education for refugee children (Box 14). No examples were provided to demonstrate how the partnership had improved access and learning at tertiary level in communities hosting refugees and returnees.⁸²

Box 13: Advocating for inclusive education plans, policies and budgets

In **Lebanon**, UNICEF and UNHCR informed inclusive education plans, policies and budgets through joint collection and analysis of education sector data, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. These efforts helped improve access and retention of stateless and refugee children and children with disabilities, in the national education system.

Similar action was taken to promote system-level integration of refugees in **Ethiopia** where UNICEF and UNHCR supported the Ministry of Education to address shortcomings in the access of refugees to education in the Education Act.

In **Indonesia**, advocacy by UNHCR and UNICEF for inclusive education services for refugee children contributed to the issuance of a new Circular Note by the Ministry of Education on refugee inclusion which clarified the process through which refugee children can continue their education from primary to secondary level.

In **Ecuador**, after two years of virtual education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Venezuelan refugees and migrants, along with students within the intercultural bilingual education system, have been significantly affected. UNHCR and UNICEF worked together to (i) advocate for inclusion, (ii) develop relevant activities for the inclusion of drop-out students, (iii) provide technical assistance to Ministry to review regulations, support to schools and active detection of children on the move.

Box 14: Improving the access of refugees to ECD, primary and secondary schools

In the Kurdistan Region of **Iraq**, UNICEF along with education cluster partners supported UNHCR in advocacy in support of a Refugee Education Integration Policy which the Ministry of Education agreed to implement from the 2021 academic year. The policy was endorsed by the Kurdistan Region of Iraq government in November 2021 and in June 2022, UNHCR and UNICEF supported implementation of the policy for grades 1-4 in 3 Governorates. The focus now is on joint advocacy on the implementation of phase 2 which will target grades 5-9. Both agencies are providing technical assistance and capacity building to support implementation of the policy.

In **Ethiopia**, in response to the high numbers of out of school refugee children, UNHCR and UNICEF jointly implemented an accelerated learning program across six regions of the country.

In **Lebanon**, advocacy was undertaken for the inclusion of targeted non-Lebanese, including refugee children in a 6-week summer catch-up program. In follow-up, joint support was provided by UNHCR and UNICEF in logistics, payment of incentives and support for recreational activities. The initiative reached 98,400 students of which 26% were refugees.

7.3 WASH

158 Within the WASH sector, Blueprint countries shared the following examples of how the partnership had contributed to improving access to appropriate and safely managed water and sanitation services for refugees (Box 15).

⁸² The absence of examples under this third output area for education does not mean that there were no initiatives under this heading; only that no case-studies relevant to this area of work were suggested to the evaluation team.

Box 15: Improving refugee access to appropriate and safely managed water and sanitation services

In **Iraq**, UNHCR and UNICEF are leveraging their longstanding partnership to accelerate efforts to promote and protect the rights of refugee children and host communities through the improvement of refugee access to appropriate and safely managed water and sanitation services. Through this partnership, the agencies are working together to put green energy to use by implementing solar powered water supply schemes, and in so doing, assisting government partners to deliver clean water, and to improve and expand sanitation services in refugee camp settings and in host communities in the Kurdistan Region. The Blueprint provided an opportunity for the agencies to extend their interventions in both scale and scope in order to meet growing demands as a consequence of COVID-19 to both in camp and out of camp communities, in addition to health facilities.

Also in **Iraq**, discussions were ongoing between the two partners and the General Directorate of Erbil Surrounding Water on a strategy to provide safe, sufficient and sustainable quantities of water to refugees and host communities in Kawergosk district through the construction of a water treatment plant. In addition to providing greater sustainability, the plant will be part of a long-term solution to the high concentration of nitrates recorded in the existing boreholes which are currently being used, in addition to preventing further ground water depletion.

In **Ecuador**, together with an NGO partner, UNHCR implemented a COVID-19 WASH program which focused on migrants in the southern border with Peru. At the same time, UNICEF started a WASH program with the same NGO partner in another geographic area. Through a joint meeting between the three agencies, opportunities to strengthen collaboration and coordination were identified.

In the area of solid waste management, again in **Ecuador**, refugees and migrants started to use recyclable solid waste as a source of income for subsistence and to save money to finance further travel, putting them into conflict with the Municipality. UNHCR and UNICEF worked towards integrating the recyclers in condition of mobility within the association of local recyclers which resulted in a strong sense of innovation, sustainability, and social and environmental responsibility within a context of humanitarian response for migration.

In **Ethiopia**, development of a durable water supply system managed by a town water utility established by the Benishangul Gumuz Region aimed to protect the health of camp residents and host community members by addressing inadequate and unreliable temporary water delivery system in the camp and host community villages.

7.4 Child Protection

159 Within Child Protection, countries shared examples of how joint initiatives had strengthened national child protection systems to better respond to the needs of migrants and children (Box 16); improved access to birth registration for refugees (Box 17); and delivered GBV and MHPSS services to refugees (Box 18).

Box 16: Strengthening national child protection systems that are better able to respond to the needs of migrants and refugees

In **Honduras**, despite a reduction in the flow of returned migrant children, significant effort was required to maintain the pre-pandemic levels of support, particularly under new national guidelines which imposed mandatory quarantine upon entering Honduras. UNICEF collaborated with UNHCR and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility to guide the establishment of child-friendly safe spaces for children on the move in mandatory quarantine centers in Tegucigalpa. Government systems were also strengthened through the partnership in Iraq and Uganda.

In **Iraq**, UNHCR and UNICEF jointly advocated for the use of Best Interest Procedures to facilitate access to civil documentation for a complex caseload of unaccompanied and separated children with missing or unknown fathers, who would otherwise need to undergo DNA testing. In addition, the two organizations successfully advocated with governments in both the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and federal Iraq for the utilization of government social workers who have been capacitated by UNHCR for specific Child Protection duties; as well as the endorsement of the Terms of Reference of social workers to formalize their child protection duties.

In **Uganda**,⁸³ joint action by the Task Force on Case Management and Alternative Care identified the capacity gaps of refugee partners in the roll-out of the training curriculum on the national alternative care framework developed by the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development. Mobilization of additional resources permitted training of all refugee child protection actors on the national framework.

Box 17: Improving access to birth registration for refugees

In **Ethiopia**, UNHCR and UNICEF supported government to digitize the civil registration, ensuring interoperability with existing refugee registration systems. From August 2022 the system was in use across the country to provide access to refugees to birth registration and to ensure that targets were met. In addition to this regular registration process, the Refugee and Returnee Service and the Immigration and Citizenship Service through the financial support from UNICEF and logistical support from UNHCR also engaged in a three-month backlog clearance exercise between December 2021 and March 2022. This targeted refugee children below age three whose births were not registered because birth registration services were suspended due to COVID-19 and lack of dedicated registrars. Through this exercise alone, the births of 26,020 children were registered between January and March 2022. Compared to the 31,801 children registered through the regular program between October 2017 (start of refugee civil registration) and June 2022, this is a huge achievement in granting legal identity to significant proportion of refugee children. As has been continuously advocated for by UNICEF and UNHCR, this initiative showcased what can be achieved if dedicated full-time registrars are put in place. Accordingly, the Refugee and Returnee Service agreed to include full-time registration officers in its structure and assigned the officers to every refugee registration points from August 2022. This will have huge impact on accessibility and the sustainability of birth and other vital events registration services in refugee settings.

Box 18: Delivering GBV and MHPSS services to refugees

In **Honduras**, UNICEF activated the Child Protection Area of Responsibility and coordinated with UNHCR and the National Child Protection Agency, DINAF to prevent violence and GBV against children and adolescents in shelters and community spaces and ensure access to specialized protection services for survivors of violence. Every year, children and adolescents leave Honduras to protect themselves from situations of violence in their communities; they undertake a journey, sometimes alone and without protection nets, that forces them to face risks of trafficking and other high-risk activities. Within the framework of the Blueprint agreement, UNHCR and UNICEF, prioritized the strengthening of communities in charge of the protection of children and adolescents to create and strengthen safe spaces in communities controlled by criminal groups and gangs, adapt services for COVID-19 prevention, enhance mental health and psychosocial support, and ensure presence of national child protection authorities in border areas to respond to mixed movements.

In **Rwanda**, in order to promote inclusion of refugee children within national and host community child protection systems, UNHCR and UNICEF collaborated to strengthen joint coordination platforms for in-camp and host community volunteer and professional workforces.

In **Libya**, UNHCR and UNICEF strengthened their response to the needs of unaccompanied children through structured group activities for children's wellbeing through establishment of two Child Friendly Spaces in UNHCR's community development center as well as through Baity centers established by UNICEF. The centers provided a safe space for children and young people to access child protection and community-based mental health and psychosocial support services in addition to learning opportunities. The collaboration included technical support by UNICEF in the development of the spaces including through the drafting of standard operating procedures, capacity building of staff and regular joint monitoring of the programme.

7.5 Other areas where the partnership has delivered results for refugees

160 In addition to the sectors which were the focus of the Blueprint, there have been other changes that have been brought about by the partnership, either in different sectors, or initiatives that are more general in nature. In a number of countries, **humanitarian response** was strengthened as a consequence of the partnership (see Box 19).

⁸³ Uganda is featured in this section on Blueprint results, despite the fact that it was not a Blueprint pilot country, given the comparable approach to partnership taken by UNHCR and UNICEF in the country.

Box 19: Strengthened humanitarian response and health epidemic preparedness and response as a consequence of the partnership

In **Cameroon**, The Blueprint approach was used in the timely response to the new influx of Central African refugees in the east region of Cameroon. UNHCR and UNICEF engaged directly in the field and shared implementing partnerships which provided technical assistance and support to vulnerable refugee children (unaccompanied and separated children and other children at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation) affected by the Central African Republic crisis.

In **Rwanda**, joint and coordinated work between UNHCR and UNICEF facilitated the development of preparedness and response plans for Ebola Virus Disease and COVID-19. A division of responsibilities was agreed with UNHCR supporting the government's WASH services and UNICEF responsible for monitoring standards and back-stopping in the event of capacity constraints.

In **Indonesia**, joint advocacy was undertaken which contributed to a Decree that enabled the inclusion of half the refugee caseload in regular COVID-19 vaccinations. As of November 2022, 9,378 refugees had received the first dose, 8,162 received the second dose and 65 people received a booster shot.

161 Elsewhere, **innovative partnership approaches** offered potential to strengthen refugee inclusion (see Box 20).

Box 20: Innovative and inclusive partnerships

In **Ethiopia**, UNICEF and UNHCR have initiated the first ever tripartite agreement with the (former) government refugee agency, the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA). This has created new opportunities for refugee inclusion, leveraging UNICEF's sectoral knowledge and networks with regional authorities, together with UNHCR's strong relationship with ARRA. While there have continued to be persistent challenges in accessing refugee camps, the foundations are in place to address these.

In a number of Blueprint countries, technical expertise has been strengthened by embedding experts within government ministries. In **Ecuador**, for example, a technical expert was seconded by UNHCR to the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion to help design and implement a protocol to regularize refugee and migrant children and adolescents.

Regionally, In **East and Southern Africa**, transformational change in support of refugee inclusion has been brokered through the Regional WASH program funded by the German government. Under the 'Blueprint for Sustainable WASH in East Africa' program, WASH infrastructure utility projects have benefitted refugees and host communities in **Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda and Sudan**.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

This section provides a set of conclusions and lessons learned from the implementation of the Blueprint partnership. A series of recommendations are made which focus on strengthening the UNHCR-UNICEF partnership during the implementation of the SCF, in addition to informing other partnerships that the agencies may broker in the future.

8.1 Conclusions

162 The conclusions of this evaluation are organized according to the three evaluation questions outlined in the inception report for this evaluation, and against the contribution made by the partnership to the anticipated outcomes of the Blueprint - **a predictable, effective, cost-efficient and sustainable partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF which contributes to refugee inclusion and services to refugee children**. They provide an overall commentary on the progress that was made toward achieving these criteria, make suggestions to strengthen the partnership in the future, and offer lessons for partnerships that are brokered with other organizations.

8.1.1 Partnership fundamentals: To what extent and in what ways do the fundamental features of UNHCR-UNICEF partnerships influence the predictability, sustainability and effectiveness of joint action in support of refugee inclusion/better results for refugee children?

163 The partnership between UNHCR and UNICEF is framed around the New York Declaration, the GCR and the CRRF, and the commitments that both agencies have made to delivering these provides a strategic alignment of interests and an important foundation for the partnership. Moreover, the strong backing that the Blueprint initiative received from leadership in both agencies ensured that it was an organizational priority, albeit one that initially failed to adequately engage Regional Offices. This prioritisation of the Blueprint (understandably, perhaps) waned as the initiative wound down as and preparations were made to launch the SCF towards the end of 2022. The evaluation found that this shift has ensured the partnership has retained profile and maintained momentum. It has also provided an enabling environment for long-term investment and management oversight and support which offers the promise of **sustainability**.

164 Making progress in strengthening refugee inclusion requires that these global commitments are translated into action. While the evaluation found that the strategic vision of the Blueprint provided a bedrock for the partnership, the organizations encountered challenges in operationalizing these goals. The translation of commitments into action in support of refugee inclusion requires operational leadership, adequate resourcing and institutional prioritisation. At a strategic level, the evaluation acknowledges that the shift in oversight and support for the recently launched SCF from headquarters to regions, and the greater scope that exists at country-level to adapt the partnership to reflect the context, offers significant potential to strengthen **effectiveness**. Ultimately, however, transformative change in strengthening refugee inclusion requires that States themselves take steps to make the necessary legal or policy changes and the case studies clearly demonstrated the challenges that were faced by UNHCR and UNICEF where this commitment did not exist or in contexts where commitments were inconsistently applied.

165 The evaluation documented the important link between a **predictable** partnership and an alignment of interests between UNHCR and UNICEF, which offers a foundation from which operational challenges can be navigated. At a sectoral level, the Blueprint offered important opportunities for agencies' sectoral staff to learn from each other and to build common ground

and understanding across the three technical sectors. Progress was inconsistent, however, and while there continues to be scope for further progress to be made in alignment of interests, in these and in other sectors/areas of collaboration. Important groundwork has been achieved, however, and is now embedded in the Compendia and the technical annexes of the SCF. While the evaluation highlighted mixed progress on predictability across the Blueprint sectors during its implementation, its legacy should be evidenced in a SCF partnership which benefits from greater clarity and stability, and which is better able to navigate and adapt to differences between countries and the dynamic nature of the partnership within and between contexts.

8.1.2 Partnership management and implementation: How, and in what ways does the management and implementation of UNHCR-UNICEF partnerships influence the predictability, effectiveness and sustainability of joint action in support of refugee inclusion/better results for refugee children?

166 The **Predictability** of joint action in support of refugee inclusion has been strengthened as a consequence of the Blueprint's more rigorously articulated results framework and clearer accountabilities. This required a trade-off in terms of staff time and worked better where there was scope for the accountabilities to be discussed and locally contextualized. Regardless, the evaluation received consistently positive feedback about the advantages that strong accountabilities offered to the partnership and so the cost appears to justify the benefits.

167 There is significant evidence that UNHCR and UNICEF have been successful in leveraging their distinctive strengths, competencies, areas of experience and relationships to increase the **effectiveness** of action in support of refugees in many of the Blueprint focus countries. However, the different systems, approaches and ways of working of the two agencies have at times complicated efforts to work in partnership. The difficulties of aligning systems and approaches at global level have made it difficult to consistently realize the partnership aspirations of the Blueprint at country-level, including in the areas of planning, budgeting, and resource mobilization. In saying this, it is important to acknowledge the promising progress made by the Data Working Group and the potential this holds to strengthen the partnership under the SCF in the future.

168 Throughout the tenure of the Blueprint, funding was considered to be a major obstacle to UNHCR and UNICEF's ability to articulate and achieve transformative refugee inclusion results through the partnership. In many of the Blueprint countries, aspirations were either pared back or moderated once it became clear that no additional resources were available. More positively, evidence collected during the evaluation suggests that some of the most important contributions to refugee inclusion made by the partnership were not heavily reliant on large financial investments. This was particularly the case for joint advocacy, which on a number of occasions, resulted in important policy and practice changes which strengthened inclusion of refugee children and their families. In these instances, the sustained efforts of dedicated and talented staff within both organizations were the main success factor in bringing about change.

169 Institutional efforts to examine the **effectiveness** of the partnership were complicated by weaknesses in monitoring and reporting. The targets and many of the indicators used to track and report on Blueprint results were quantitative, emphasizing improvements in service delivery. These were considered insufficient for any meaningful reflections on progress towards refugee inclusion or for learning on how to make policy and system change happen. The evaluation concludes that an overemphasis on quantitative results, and a tendency to attribute results to the partnership without fully taking other factors and the contribution of other actors into account, risked overstating the results of the partnership, and understating the benefits and improved

outcomes that accrue from progress towards refugee inclusion, which is largely qualitative in nature and primarily dependent on the willingness and capacity of national actors.

170 The evaluation also found it difficult to attribute **efficiencies** to the Blueprint. This was in large part because a consistent approach was not taken to measuring and reporting these. While anecdotal evidence suggested that some cost-savings were made as a consequence of the partnership, it was also evident that the extra meetings, documents, processes and reporting that were required all had time costs. The investment of staff time was particularly heavy at the front-end of the initiative but was considered to have reduced over time. While it is not possible for this evaluation to offer a cost-benefit analysis, it is noteworthy that there was broad consensus among evaluation participants that better results for refugee children – where these occurred and could be evidenced - justified any additional workload that may have resulted from the partnership. The evaluation concurs that effectiveness is a more important indicator of success, and an over-emphasis on finding cost-savings and efficiencies during the Blueprint risked burdening country offices and compromising efforts to communicate with donors and mobilize the necessary additional resources to deliver transformational change.

171 Governments are key to the **sustainability** of results achieved through the partnership and there were numerous examples given of UNICEF and UNHCR leveraging their respective relationships with government stakeholders in order to prompt longer-term change. Securing additional resources for the SCF from donors and greater commitment from refugee-hosting governments will be key to delivering more sustainable results through the SCF.

8.1.3 Partnership relationships: What influence (positive or negative) does the relationship between UNHCR and UNICEF have on the predictability, effectiveness and sustainability of joint action in support of refugee inclusion/better results for refugee children?

172 The evaluation found that relational aspects of the Blueprint tended to be undervalued and less well-understood. This was evidenced, in part, by changes made in the revised ToC midway through the implementation of the Blueprint which removed many of the *'softer'* aspects of the partnership, including issues of adaptability of the partnership to different contexts, the need to address differences in organizational culture, and the importance of recognizing, celebrating and learning from the changes that occurred as a consequence of the transformed partnership. However, one of the most important conclusions of the evaluation is that the quality of the relationship between UNHCR and UNICEF – at both sectoral and leadership levels - was one of the most important arbiters of the **effectiveness** of the partnership.

173 As a key area of vulnerability, it is essential that both partners ensure that there is clear and consistent communication about commitments to the partnership and its value, and that there are structured opportunities for partners to meet, monitor, learn and course correct. While these partnership processes often attracted criticism from staff as they required time, which was often in short supply, the investment in them was beneficial as they strengthened trust and understanding between staff which strengthened the **predictability** and **effectiveness** of the partnership.

174 While, on the face of it, *'trust'* is an intangible partnership characteristic, the number of references made during the evaluation to the importance of trust when brokering and **sustaining** the Blueprint partnership underlined the importance of seeking to prompt and promote it. Moreover, the number of examples given during the evaluation when a loss of trust undermined an existing partnership was significant. This speaks directly to one of the key success factors during the

Blueprint, which was the influence of agency staff. In almost all of the countries that participated in the evaluation, the scope which individual personnel had to influence the partnership – either for good or for bad – was significant. The frequency with which changes in staffing had a significantly negative influence on the partnership suggests that this is an important vulnerability to address and is also one of the most difficult for either agency to have influence over.

175 The evaluation found that the added value of the partnership was harder to evidence in contexts where there was a lack of perceived mutual benefit. In several cases, interviews highlighted a mismatch in benefits accrued from the partnership and a concern that one agency was disproportionately benefitting compared to the other. Ultimately, if the partnership is to be **sustainable**, then both agencies need to feel that they are benefiting both as individual agencies and collectively. While both UNHCR and UNICEF share a commitment to strengthening refugee inclusion, both agencies must balance this against other priorities that compete for resources and organizational attention.

176 Despite the emphasis placed by this evaluation on mutual benefit, under no circumstances should this be used as justification for *'cutting the cake'*. an approach which divides responsibilities (and often, funding) equally and cuts activities down the middle is no more than coordination rather than partnership, although some of the countries sought to pass it off as such.

8.1.4 The overall contribution of the partnership to refugee children's inclusion

177 Overall, the evaluation found that many staff in both UNHCR and UNICEF are strongly committed to working together to achieve better results for refugee children, and there are many examples from the Blueprint experience (and beyond) to demonstrate what they can achieve when the two organizations consistently invest in the partnership. However, even with a strong vision at the forefront, and a solid foundation of trust and communication underpinning the relationship, it is the enabling factors in the middle that have the potential to undermine good intentions and prevent the organizations from translating commitments into action. Operational aspects of the partnership such as the need for adequate resources, compatible systems and effective ways of measuring progress are all elements that have proved problematic for the collaboration and will continue to act as barriers in an increasingly challenging and resource-scarce humanitarian landscape.

178 Fortunately, with the benefit of experience and a commitment to learning, these challenges can also be mitigated and, to some extent, overcome. In that respect, the Blueprint did what it set out to do. It provided an opportunity to incubate and accelerate the partnership – both to achieve better results on behalf of refugee children within a short two- to three-year period, and to highlight the successes and challenges of an operational partnership that can have a horizon that stretches far beyond the Blueprint. In many respects, the SCF already demonstrates that lessons have been learned from the Blueprint experience – it offers clarity on the expected outcomes of the partnership and the technical contributions of both parties, for example, and provides a flexible template to agree on clear, contextually-relevant accountabilities underpinned by strong country and regional leadership. The recommendations that follow highlight additional key actions to allow the partnership to continue to evolve and deliver on behalf of refugee children.

8.2 Recommendations

2. The recommendations listed hereunder were generated through an iterative process of discussion and validation over the two rounds of data collection and analysis. Draft recommendations were discussed and revised based on input from the respective evaluation offices of UNHCR and

UNICEF, the JCT and the Evaluation Reference Group. They highlight additional key actions to allow the partnership to continue to evolve and deliver on behalf of refugee children.

Partnership fundamentals		Prioritisation/ Action by?
1.	Leadership: Ensure that the partnership continues to benefit from strong leadership at all levels	High
	<p>Strong support by leadership for the partnership played an important role in the Blueprint and it will be even more important for the launch and global roll-out of the SCF. The strong support of HQ leadership and, most importantly, regional leadership will be essential for success. Furthermore, HQ support to ensure continued progress against shared goals of strengthening the compatibility of organisational systems (for data sharing and analysis, programme planning and implementation etc.) and shared responsibilities (funding, monitoring etc.) will be particularly important for some time to come.</p> <p>Both organisations should commit to embedding objectives related to partnership and the inclusion of refugee children in the work plans of Regional Directors and Country Representatives, and progress against these responsibilities should be included in regular performance appraisals. Related objectives should also be incorporated into the work plans and performance appraisals of key individuals in headquarters and regional offices tasked with supporting the roll-out of the SCF.</p>	<p>Who: HQ, Regional Bureaux, Country Offices</p> <p>See report sections 4.2 & 5.1</p>
2.	Learning: Ensure that lessons from the Blueprint are institutionalised to strengthen the rollout of the SCF and inform partnership-brokering approaches more widely in the future	Medium
	<p>The Blueprint was a bold and successful attempt to pilot and learn from a transformed partnership. It has yielded a wealth of learning, much of which will be relevant to partnership brokering in the future (the importance of stimulating joint implementation, the value of identifying a discrete first cohort of countries, the value of leadership for maintaining momentum, the importance of adaptability etc.). In addition to the lessons identified in this evaluation, there are others that are specific to each agency. There would be much value in gathering all of these lessons together – internal and external – both as a means of respecting the value of the process, but, more importantly, to inform partnership brokering in the future. Subsequently, these lessons should be incorporated into the implementation plan for the SCF, including the internal communications plan and training materials, and should be reviewed for their relevance to other partnership initiatives.</p>	Who: TBD

Partnership management and implementation		Prioritisation/ Action by?
3	Resource mobilisation: Clarify intentions with respect to, and recognise the importance of, funding to support initiatives to make transformative change in refugee children's inclusion	High
	<p>While the Blueprint demonstrated that change is possible without additional funding, it is also noteworthy that many efforts aimed to bring about transformative change with respect to the inclusion of refugee inclusion were not embarked upon or were de-prioritised by countries when it became clear that funding was not available. Both partners should consider ways to better frame a transformative approach through partnership approaches to donors; one that offers an ambitious country-led change agenda which is more tangible and targeted towards development donors, emphasising the need for a more ambitious agenda to 'close the gap' and reach 2030 Sustainable Development Goal targets with respect to leaving no (refugee) child behind.</p>	<p>Who: TBD</p> <p>See report section 5.4</p>
4.	Monitoring: Develop a 'meaningful and useful' approach to monitoring and measuring changes in the inclusion of refugee children.	High

	The Blueprint highlighted important deficiencies in approaches to monitoring inclusion which focused on quantitative approaches which were ineffective. It is important this gap is addressed in order to better understand the effect of individual and collective efforts to strengthen refugee children's inclusion. Lessons from the evaluation suggest that a qualitative approach, which draws on in-depth case studies would add significant value. An approach which links to policy milestones specific to individual contexts should be developed over time.	Who: Regional Directors See report section 5.2
5.	Advocacy: Continue global level joint advocacy on refugee children's inclusion, building on the work begun by the Joint Coordination Team (JCT) and subject matter leads during the Blueprint pilot period	Medium
	While the evaluation agrees that a relatively light-touch role for headquarters is appropriate for implementation of the SCF, there are key areas in which global representatives can continue to add value. This includes strategic advocacy on the continued benefits of working in partnership for the purposes of refugee inclusion, both within and across technical areas, and positioning of the two organisations to continue to prioritize their collaboration.	Who: Former JCT members See section 5.1
6.	Maintain momentum: Sustain momentum for the UNHCR-UNICEF partnership during the transition from the Blueprint initiative to the roll-out of the SCF	High
	There is a danger of losing momentum during the period in which the Blueprint initiative comes to an end and before the new SCF gains traction. As well as a strong communication effort on the SCF, making clear that the partnership is a priority for both organizations, a range of other actions can ensure that good commitments do not dissipate during the transition, but are built upon to keep the partnership moving forwards. Actions include: careful planning around regional SCF kick-off meetings to ensure that learning from this evaluation and dissemination of the findings from this Blueprint evaluation to inform the ongoing rollout of the SCF and to avoid a sense of <i>'starting from scratch'</i> ; articulation of a robust process to support countries as they determine the appropriate level of ambition for the partnership and draft country Letters of Understanding; and more detailed forward thinking on the Annual Review process for the SCF, including setting out responsibilities for programme leads and other teams to review technical annexes and elements of the SCF Compendia as <i>'living documents'</i> that continue to be rooted in the experience of the partnership and evolve in line with good practice.	Who: TBD

#3	Partnership relationships	Prioritisation/ Action by?
7.	Prioritise the partnership: Mitigate the risks of the partnership being negatively influenced by personal attitudes and perceptions	High
	For the partnership to be effective, both UNHCR and UNICEF must continue to institutionalise it and seek to manage competitive tendencies. In this respect, the SCF provides an important foundation. It is essential that staff have clear responsibilities for the partnership in their work plans, that partnership objectives are visible in country planning documents and that there are clear communications about the institutional prioritisation of the partnership.	Who: TBD See report section 6.1
8.	Promote an enabling environment for the partnership: continue to build capacities and knowledge within both agencies for successful implementation of the partnership	Medium
	The Implementation Plan for the SCF already includes the dissemination of trainings and technical guidance to support roll-out. In addition, a more comprehensive and organic approach to learning and documenting the successes of the partnership will ensure growing understanding staff within both organizations understand the purpose of the partnership and progressively support its implementation over time. Actions that could be taken include the identification of leaders, coaches and role models; incentives for individuals to act as champions for collaboration; sustained efforts to document case studies which highlight comparative advantage and positive partnership case studies; proactive dissemination of the achievements of the partnership; and prospects for opportunities to pilot innovations with small amounts of dedicated funding. Creating an	Who: HQ and Regional Directors

enabling environment for the partnership can be driven at both regional and global levels, with the latter taking a relatively light-touch approach and focusing on cross-regional learning and knowledge sharing.

