

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark/Permanent Mission of Denmark in Geneva**Perspectives on the implementation of the CRRF****Return as the preferred solution**

- UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2017-2021 reinstates voluntary return as the preferred solution for refugees, while acknowledging the importance of resettlement and local integration as solutions for some refugees. The SD lays out important directions for UNHCR's future efforts in order to facilitate the solution of voluntary return, both in terms of placing the organization much more centrally in the nexus between humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peace building, and by making internal structures and processes more solutions-oriented. The SD recognizes that maintaining and further developing education, skills and capacities of refugees and allowing them to access to livelihoods and work is key to creating conducive conditions for voluntary return as soon as the political conditions in the country of origin allow this. We fully support these directions.
- But strategic directions alone will not do the job. UNHCR is confronted with both internal and external challenges that call for more systemic, organizational and cultural changes if the organization is to succeed in meeting the expectations of furthering solutions to refugee situations, including the many protracted situations. Some of these challenges also pertain to UNHCR's work with protracted IDP-situations, but the focus here is on the mandated refugee protection work and enhancing this to bring about durable solutions.
- Two challenges are of particular importance:
- Internally, the organization is geared to take full responsibility for all aspects of refugee life, when host countries states, for one reason or another, are not capable to live up to do so. UNHCR delivers protection, care and maintenance – and sometimes also solutions. It does so with great competence and experience, based on its mandate, but chiefly through retaining full responsibility in all regards. In so doing, it may actually and unwittingly block more inclusive, solutions-focused approaches that not only require support from governments and development actors but rather that these actors take over – and take their responsibility as in-country development actors seriously, also in respect of the refugee population.
- Secondly, affected host governments will only accept to adopt more inclusive approaches to refugees if they see evidence of sustained additional support coming in – in recognition of the global public good that they provide hosting refugees. Almost by definition, this cannot be based on traditional humanitarian sources only. Bilateral and multilateral development actors must become involved, working in direct partnership with affected governments, based on national development frameworks. Refugee populations only become part of national development plans, if those who prepare and implement these plans take proactive steps in this direction.

The potential of the CRRF and the role of UNHCR

- The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) has the potential to transform the manner in which affected governments and the international community responds to refugee situations. It calls for inclusive, solutions-focused approaches, and through the New York Declaration it has the support of UN member states to an extent not seen before. And because of this, the importance of CRRF extends far beyond the current situations in which it is being rolled

out these months. The concept embodies key lessons and best practices from decades of work with refugees and must become the policy backbone of UNHCR's work towards solutions.

- The CRRF is not simply an add-on to UNHCR's existing portfolio or a special project – it is a New Way of Working, comprising all existing and new initiatives in support of an inclusive approach to managing protracted refugee situation and promoting durable solutions for refugees. If managed the right way, and with continued or even enhanced support from all member states, it could – and should – be the future for UNHCR.
- The CRRF approach will only work if UNHCR learns to step back and facilitate the process. UNHCR being seen to retain overall control, thus placing the whole issue in the humanitarian domain with the 'help' of development actors, will not be the right point of departure and will not create the buy-in from host governments and major bilateral and multilateral development actors which remain the key to success. Instead, CRRF must be anchored in the national development agenda to secure the active involvement of development partners in providing assistance and eventual solutions for refugees.
- As the aim of the process is to secure new policies and partnerships that extend beyond humanitarian actors and place refugees on the development agenda of host countries, UNHCR must focus on facilitating the process, allowing relevant government departments and development actors to lead the operationalization. At the same time, UNHCR must of course fulfill its core protection mandate in respect of refugees.
- If UNHCR is to succeed in doing this, it must initiate some fundamental internal change-processes. Strong vocal and directional leadership is required for staff across the organization to understand that the days of Care and Maintenance are over and that UNHCR has to re-focus its fundamental approaches. Existing structures need to be broken down and new, more agile and protection-focused functions have to be built. The Strategic Directions 2017-2021 includes relevant thinking - but it must be taken much further.
- This is about HR policies that ensure staff with the right skill-sets in the right place at the right time – in particular at operational management levels. More than anything, visionary, empowered and skillful country representatives – with sufficient authority – are the key to success.
- It is about creating an organization that can support the leadership in refocusing UNHCR on core protection tasks, including facilitating and monitoring efforts to bring solutions to refugee situations.
- It is about developing an entirely new partnership approach – focused on strategic dialogue and engagement of and with partners rather than operational implementation, covering in particular bilateral and multilateral development partners, and the large INGOs.
- And it is about recognizing and accepting that such a new strategic direction, if successfully implemented, will entail a leaner, more focused and agile UNHCR – with less staff and lower budgets. Charting the direction towards this will not be easy for the leadership of UNHCR – but it is the way to go. Unless this happens, CRRF will not reach its full potential and a real opportunity for improving prospects for forcibly displaced refugees across the world will remain a paper concept.