UPDATED REFUGEE COORDINATION GUIDANCE NOTE

Explanatory Note

For years UNHCR has exercised leadership and coordination responsibilities in refugee situations, in line with its mandated accountabilities. These are reflected in the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) introduced in 2013, designed to ensure accountable, inclusive, predictable and transparent coordination in responding to refugee situations. The RCM is anchored in the broader humanitarian coordination structure and the IASC cluster system. It articulates the standard elements of coordination within these settings, and underscores the importance of an inclusive and transparent leadership.

Several key developments in recent years warrant further guidance. These include the Global Compact on Refugees; reforms to the UN Development System including the role of Resident Coordinators, and positive experiences in adapting the model to a range of situations including refugee and IDP emergencies; movements involving refugees and migrants; significant returns to situations of fragility; and, in meeting the needs of refugees and hosting communities.

This updated guidance responds to these new developments, and to coordination challenges in the field.

It sets out the authority for UNHCR refugee coordination (UNHCR statute and subsequent GA resolutions) and how this translates to our role in advocacy, delivery, resource mobilization, broadening the support base, monitoring, reporting and driving solutions. Importantly, it also recognizes the leadership accountabilities of Humanitarian Coordinators and Resident Coordinators (enhanced due to UN reform) and how UNHCR works alongside these partners.

It looks at refugee coordination within the context of the GCR and includes references to the support that the Programme of Action articulates, what that demands of UNHCR in terms of playing a catalytic role, and how UNHCR needs to engage early with development partners as well as the broader array of stakeholders mentioned in the GCR.

Additionally, it recognizes that coordination arrangements can be context specific – noting that in addition to coordination in complex emergencies, there are other situations that may call for a blended approach, such as with IOM in the context of mixed movements, and UNDP/and the RC in regard to advancing resilience of refugees and their hosts.

The RCM remains a useful model, however Representatives and their teams are encouraged to take stock of the current coordination arrangements in their operations and where appropriate, to consider adjustments in line with this updated guidance.

1. Purpose

For years UNHCR has had a Refugee Coordination Model that helped to ensure accountable, inclusive, predictable and transparent coordination in responding to refugee situations.[1] Several key developments in recent years warrant further guidance.

Firstly, in 2016 the world began to look afresh at refugee responses and agreed in the New York Declaration to adopt more comprehensive approaches that engaged a broader array of stakeholders. The subsequent implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, now embedded the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) also inform our coordination accountabilities. . The GCR recognizes the importance of national ownership, and the need to employ a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach in which UNHCR, consistent with its mandate, plays a supportive and catalytic role. It also embraces interventions that extend well beyond humanitarian and involve contributions that will lie beyond the UN system.

Secondly, the GCR also comes on the heels of a number of UN reforms notably to the UN Development System and in regard to peace and security. Member States and the Secretary General seek a more lined up UN system, where agencies work better together to achieve improved outcomes for prevention, sustaining peace and development. The attendant changes to the Resident Coordinator (RC) system aim to advance these objectives and UN agency representatives, including UNHCR, may need to adjust approaches to coordination to meet new mutual accountabilities between the RC and UN agency representatives.

> UNHCR
> - Coordination of all stages of a refugee response.
> - Lead advocacy on refugee international protection matters.
> - Encourage sector leadership by partners with necessary capacity, expertise, and experience.
> - Widen the support base for refugees and host countries in line with GCR and UN reforms.
> - Ensure timely and effective reporting.
> - Brief regularly RC/HC, UNCT/HCT, and donors on the progress.

Finally, UNHCR with partners has advanced models of coordination in recent years to respond to different forced displacement situations. This has included in response to: refugee and IDP emergencies; movements involving refugees and migrants; significant returns to situations of fragility; and, in meeting the needs of refugees and hosting communities. These experiences also have positively impacted coordination approaches in ways that bear reflecting in updated guidance.

2. Leadership

State

The primary responsibility for protecting refugees rests with States. There are several factors that can inhibit the full discharge of this responsibility. Over two thirds of all refugees reside in low and middle income countries that face economic and development challenges. The arrival of large numbers of refugees, places additional strains on already over-stretched infra-structure and service delivery. As well, and across the development spectrum, many States do not have institutions in place to appropriately receive, protect and otherwise respond to the challenges attendant on receiving large numbers of refugees.

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[1] UNHCR Refugee Coordination Model, November 2013

The need for international cooperation in support of States receiving refugees has long been recognized. It was at the heart of the creation of the UNHCR and the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. It has been reinforced in regional instruments and its importance is underscored in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) which notes that 'there is an urgent need for more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting the world's refugees, while taking account of existing contributions and the differing capacities and resources among States. Refugees and host communities should not be left behind'.[2] The GCR calls for a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach in meeting this objective for which UNHCR plays a supportive and catalytic role.[3]

UNHCR

According to its Statute, UNHCR, acting under the authority of the General Assembly (GA), provides international protection to refugees and seeks permanent solutions for them. As such, it is the lead agency accountable for refugee protection and seeking solutions within the UN system and engaging a wider array of stakeholders.[4] As set out in subsequent GA resolutions this includes coordination of, provision of, and appeals for protection and assistance and in finding solutions. Importantly, UNHCR also has a supervisory role: it is the UN entity accountable for ensuring adherence of States to internationally accepted standards *vis a vis* refugees and stateless persons and for strengthening State protection capacities.[5]

Practically speaking these accountabilities translate operationally into the following broad areas:

1. **Preparedness**: by engaging with government and partner counterparts to: assess the likelihood of refugee inflows; determine the impact on national response mechanisms; and, depending on the level of risk, engage in preparedness actions.
2. **Advocacy**: political, diplomatic and legal interventions to influence legislation and national practice, including direct engagement on behalf of the Office with the host government.
3. **Strengthening national capacity**: of institutions and local actors for the protection of and search of solutions for refugees.
4. **Delivery**: of protection, assistance and facilitation of solutions.
5. **Coordination**: of UN partners and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of a protection and solutions strategy in support of refugees and host countries.
6. **Participation**: of refugees and host communities in an age, gender and diversity sensitive manner that ensures their engagement in the design of appropriate, accessible and inclusive responses.
7. **Resource mobilization**: including through inter-agency plans and appeals. This includes the setting of protection objectives, coordination, and primary drafting of inter-agency plans; reporting on their implementation and impact; and tracking of contributions for responding to refugees both within and outside such plans.
8. **Broadening support base**: engaging a wide array of stakeholders and encouraging private sector, multi-lateral and bilateral development actors to help to strengthen significantly

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[2] This commitment to leaving no one behind is also a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda.
[3] Global Compact on Refugees para 33.
[4] Also in accordance with other General Assembly Resolutions, and embedded in international treaty law, notably the 1951 Convention: (see Note on the Mandate of the High Commissioner: www.unhcr.org/526a22cb6.html).
[5] Volker Turk, 'UNHCR's Supervisory Responsibilities' UNHCR Working Paper no 67, 2002.

institutional capacity and assist host communities, to address their urgent humanitarian needs and, where applicable, to overcome shocks resulting from neighbouring conflict and/or large refugee arrivals.

9. **Monitoring and reporting**: on the situation of refugees and application of the international protection regime.

10. **Prevention**: through the exercise of the High Commissioner's good offices, on prevention of situations that cause refugees to flee, addressing root causes and on refugee engagement in sustaining peace.

11. **Solutions**: promotion of durable solutions; design of refugee responses in a manner that is conducive to realizing solutions; and ensuring the safe and sustainable implementation of solutions. This includes efforts that encompass return and reintegration; resettlement; the use of complementary pathways; local integration and other local solutions[6].

UNHCR's mandate accountabilities include leadership responsibilities. Within a country context, it is the **Representative** who speaks for the High Commissioner on matters pertaining to UNHCR's mandate and who exercises the coordination responsibilities, as articulated in the next section. In situations involving large refugee movements, the Representative coordinates UN and NGO partners in the articulation of a refugee response plan, which serves as an advocacy and joint resource mobilization tool.

Regionally the High Commissioner may appoint **Regional Refugee Coordinators** to address a specific refugee situation and lead in the development and implementation of regional refugee response plans. These are developed jointly with partners at the regional level to respond to the needs of a refugee population.

The High Commissioner may also appoint **Special Envoys** to provide political representation and advocacy on behalf of the High Commissioner in specific contexts.

Resident Coordinator

Within the UN system, RCs lead the UN Country Team (UNCT) for development activities within the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and support to countries in their implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[7] UNHCR, as a member of the UNCT, contributes to this work, and is accountable to the RC for UNHCR programming in support of the UNDAF. RCs are in turn accountable to UNCT members for supporting the exercise of their respective mandates. UNHCR exercises its mandate and supervisory responsibilities, including in relation to States' compliance with their international obligations towards refugees and stateless persons and plays a catalytic and supportive role in the implementation of the GCR, a key element of which is the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders – including development actors – in refugee responses.

In line with the GCR, UNHCR is committed to work with RCs and UNCTs to advance national development priorities and ensure no one is left behind. This collaborative work includes encouraging development actors to intervene on behalf of refugees and in support of host communities, as well as to work with States to include refugees in national development plans, as part of the Agenda 2030 imperative to 'leave no one behind'.

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[6] GCR para 85-100.
[7] GA resolution on repositioning of the UNDS (adopted 31 May 2018), A/RES/72/279, Paras 7-9.

According to the new job description for Resident Coordinators, in contexts where international humanitarian assistance is required, and where a separate Humanitarian Coordinator is not designated/or there is no lead agency (e.g. UNHCR for a refugees), the RC is accountable for the strategic and operational coordination of the response efforts of the UNCT and relevant humanitarian actors.[8]

Humanitarian Coordinator

In complex emergencies, where a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) has been designated, the HC leads overall humanitarian planning, advocacy and resource mobilization. When the complex emergency takes place and an UNHCR led refugee response is underway or imminent, UNHCR leads refugee response planning in a manner that is coherent with the overall humanitarian response. This is set out in the 2014 'Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note: Mixed situations: coordination in practice',[9] reconfirmed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the High Commissioner in in 2018.[10] It provides a detailed overview of the division of responsibilities between the UNHCR Representative and the Humanitarian Coordinator in these situations.

3. Coordination accountabilities

Core elements

UNHCR's accountabilities for coordinating refugee responses include the following:

1. **Preparedness:** ensuring joint risk analysis and where necessary joint preparedness planning and action.
2. **Protection strategy**: to guide a comprehensive refugee response, drawing on contributions of partners.
3. **Resource mobilization**: for the coordination of immediate and ongoing inter-agency funding appeals; and to seek support from pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum and other support and applicable fundraising fora.
4. **Sectoral set up**:
   - Determining whether current government-led and/or inter-agency coordination mechanisms (including clusters) can be adapted to address the needs arising from refugee influx, in a manner that reflects UNHCR's accountabilities;
   - Establish, where necessary, sectoral coordination mechanisms, with government counterparts where possible, to lead sectoral specific needs assessments, planning, monitoring, reporting and information management within and across sectors at the national and/or sub-national levels;
   - Lead the refugee protection working group; ensure protection dimensions reflected in the work of other sectors; and, ensure the participation of refugees and host communities in an age, gender and diversity sensitive manner; and,
   - Ensure leadership of other sectors by experienced technical sector leads together including from other agencies with the appropriate expertise and operational capacity.
   - accountability for the refugee response and the direct line from the UNHCR Representative to the Government on refugee issues are maintained.

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[8] In accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182 and related resolutions.
[9] See 2014 Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice, https://www.unhcr.org/53679e679.pdf .
[10] Joint letter dated June 5, 2018

5. **Coordination forum**: Establish, as appropriate and if necessary, at the national level and co-chaired by the government where possible on the overall refugee response including, as appropriate, a support platform.[11]
6. **Information management**: Establish or reinforce information management capacity including through contributions by other agencies.
7. **Information sharing**: Regular information sharing with the RC and UNCT; updating and coordinating with HC and HCT where present; and, regular information sharing with donors.

Specific considerations

Preparedness

Refugee influxes can often be anticipated. Large movements may build over time and can be predicted as the conflict that drives them intensifies.

UNHCR's emergency policies require operations to engage in annual risk analysis and minimum preparedness actions. This work will be done with government and partner counterparts to: assess the likelihood of refugee inflows; determine the impact on national response mechanisms; and, depending on the level of risk, engage in preparedness actions.[12]

UNHCR's Emergency Handbook is replete with guidance, based on inter-agency protocols and good practice, on preparedness actions for UNHCR and UN and NGO partners. Where refugee influxes are anticipated, UNHCR, jointly with the government wherever possible, coordinates such preparedness actions including the mapping of partner capacities and, where relevant, as part of broader UNCT and/or HCT preparedness processes.[13]

With the growing engagement of multi-lateral development actors, including the World Bank Group, preparedness efforts have a greater chance of being more firmly anchored in national institutional readiness. These efforts go well beyond what UNHCR could do on its own, but by engaging early with development actors and financial institutions, UNHCR can provide singular information and guidance. This includes informing efforts that aim to: strengthen institutions for the management of a refugee influx; develop financial instruments to facilitate the flow of financial support; strengthen social protection systems to support affected host communities and refugees; and to establish surge capacity for service delivery.[14]

Emergency

At the outset of a refugee emergency, UNHCR's knowledge and operational capacity is critical in supporting governments in the design and rapid roll out of the response, and importantly, for setting the groundwork for sustainable approaches and contributions from a wider array of stakeholders. Importantly, governments also look to UNHCR to engage immediately in resource mobilization (both financial and in-kind) to meet urgent and pressing needs.

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[11] This may not be necessary where an appropriate structure already exists. Regarding support platform see GCR para 22-27.

[12] 2017 UNHCR Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response and the UNHCR Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE) that the Policy refers to in its Article 6.3.

[13] See UNHCR Emergency Handbook Fourth Edition.

[14] Specific elements are reflected in World Bank Group, *Forcibly Displaced: Towards a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internal Displaced and their Hosts* 2017 and in the GCR para 52-53.

Building for resilience

Not all refugee situations start with an emergency influx, yet all emergency responses need to transform into more consolidated and stable programmatic responses.

National ownership is important and UNHCR will work wherever possible, to help establish and support national arrangements for the coordination of comprehensive refugee responses. As envisaged by the GCR, this could include supporting the development of a comprehensive plan, in line with national policies and priorities. This entails setting out: policy priorities; institutional and operational arrangements; requirements for support from the international community, including investment, financing, material and technical assistance; and solutions, including resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries, as well as voluntary repatriation.[15]

Additionally, the logic of the GCR is that refugee responses need to be designed and or transformed in a manner that paves the way for more sustainable support and responses. Key to this, and indeed an objective of the GCR, is to work to strengthen resilience of refugees and the communities in which they reside, especially given the protracted nature of displacement.

The GCR's Programme of Action articulates various arrangements for supporting refugees and hosting countries and particular areas in need of support. They range from immediate response areas to those that require significant support over the longer term. The latter include strengthening asylum, education, health and child protection facilities, systems and capacities; enhancing accommodation, energy and natural resource management; efforts to promote and expand economic growth and livelihoods; and the empowerment of women and youth.

While UNHCR remains normatively engaged in all areas of refugee protection and solutions, it is also the case that the transformative support envisaged by the Programme of Action requires **investments that go well beyond a humanitarian or even a UN development response**. They demand engagement of a broader array of stakeholders with UNHCR performing a catalytic role, while also acknowledging it cannot and does not have the competency to lead in all.

Specifically this means that UNHCR must encourage others to make significant contributions to strengthen institutional capacity and help host communities overcome shocks resulting from neighbouring conflict and/or large refugee arrivals. It also means advancing the rights of refugees. This can be pursued in the following ways.

Within the UNCT, UNHCR must seek engagement in refugee resilience for issues that fall within agencies' expertise: e.g. UNICEF/UNESCO for education; ILO for employment; WHO for health etc. and overall inclusion of refugees in the UNDAF. **NGO contributions** and leadership in this regard are equally vital and can be encouraged both within an HCT and as part of a UNHCR coordinated refugee response. Encouraging others to lead in their areas of expertise strengthens their engagement and inclusion of refugees without affecting UNHCR's overall mandate accountabilities.

Similarly UNHCR encourages **private sector, multi and bilateral development action**. Through its knowledge of refugees, the operating environment, and what others do within the inter-agency refugee response community, UNHCR is an invaluable resource for others to shape their own engagement.

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[15] GCR para 21.

Voluntary Repatriation

UNHCR is the authoritative voice on the right of every refugee to a safe and dignified voluntary return to his or her own country. UNHCR provides that advice and guides UN action to facilitate voluntary return when the situation in the country of origin is conducive for safe, dignified and sustainable return.

The UN system looks to UNHCR to advise it on refugee returns in accordance with the Office's assessment of the readiness of the country to: receive returnees; provide security and essential services; and, sustain return. UNHCR identifies obstacles to, and conditions favourable for, voluntary return and specific protection needs. UNHCR also leads efforts among UN and operational partners, including in: the compilation of information on possible return areas; structured dialogues with refugees, intention surveys; go and see visits; identification of specific protection needs; monitoring and comprehensive protection and solutions support measures. UNHCR may enter into a Tripartite Voluntary Repatriation Agreement with the host and receiving governments setting out the legal framework, guarantees for refugees, and responsibilities of the parties.

In countries of return, UNHCR's work with returning refugees is often anchored in the coordination mechanisms existing in that country (notably the UNCT and HCTs where applicable), while maintaining its protection and assistance accountabilities for the well-being of returnees for a limited period of time. This includes return packages; initial reintegration support; returnee monitoring; information sharing on protection risks in areas of refugee return; and advocacy and operational guidance on measures to reduce those risks.[16]

4. Coordination arrangements

Apart from Governments leading refugee responses where possible, the manner in which UNHCR exercises its coordination responsibilities is context specific.

Refugee response plans: UNHCR leads the development, implementation and resource mobilization for inter-agency refugee response plans (country specific) and/or regional refugee response plans (to respond to a significant refugee influx into several countries). These response plans are a coordination tool that establishes a common strategy and provides the host Government and donors with an overview of the inter-agency response, including the resource requirements.

Comprehensive response framework: As requested by the host country, UNHCR supports Governments to establish and support national, regional and international arrangements for the application of the comprehensive refugee response framework. These frameworks should engage a broad range of stakeholders as envisaged by the GCR and will be context specific.

As recognized in the GCR, population movements are not necessarily homogenous, and may be of a composite character. Some may be large movements involving both refugees and others on the move; other situations may involve refugees and internally displaced persons; and, in certain situations, external forced displacement may result from sudden-onset natural disasters and environmental degradation.

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[16] GCR paras 47; 87-89.

These situations present complex challenges for affected States. In responding to refugee movements within these mixed movements, UNHCR shall work with operational partners such as OCHA, UNDP and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), engaging their respective mandates, roles and expertise as appropriate to ensure a coordinated approach.

For example, in **complex emergencies**, characterized by internal displacement and refugees, UNHCR and OCHA have a joint coordination model for practical means to ensure clear complementary leadership coordination in areas of relevant expertise and mandated accountabilities. New mechanisms like the UN Joint-Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration are designed to ensure humanitarian and development responses are linked and engage multi-lateral partners like the World Bank and international financial institutions.

Joint coordination mechanisms tailored to regional specifics have also been engaged to respond to **mixed movements of refugees and migrants**[17] and to coordinate responses to refugees and hosting communities.[18]

Similarly, in countries or regions where **existing inter-agency mechanisms** are functioning UNHCR seeks to work in close coordination with those mechanisms.

Where coordination mechanisms engage leadership of operational partners in their areas of expertise, UNHCR nevertheless continues to exercise its mandate responsibilities which include the coordination of efforts to ensure refugee protection and advance solutions.

Regardless of the situation, however, having an accountability for leadership plays only one part in the successful exercise of it. Leadership can only be effectively recognized and exercised when it inspires, motivates and acknowledges the comparative advantages of others.

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[17] UNHCR and IOM have established joint coordination mechanisms including in in response to the Europe crisis of 2015-2016 and in response to the Venezuela situation of 2018.
[18] In the Syria situation UNHCR partnered with UNDP in joint UN and partner planning for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Response Plans.