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Strategic partnerships and coordination

Summary

This paper reviews key developments in strategic partnerships and coordination since the last report to the seventy-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2019. It provides examples of the different types of partnerships UNHCR is pursuing and describes how internal and external changes are strengthening UNHCR's strategic partnership approach. It also highlights the importance of partnerships in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees and discusses UNHCR's ongoing engagement in various inter-agency processes.

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I. Introduction

1. In accordance with the High Commissioner's strategic directions (2017-2021) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), UNHCR continues to work on strengthening its strategic partnerships. The experience obtained to date from the implementation of the GCR and its comprehensive refugee response framework as well as the work leading up to the first-ever Global Refugee Forum, held in December 2019, have contributed to further shaping UNHCR's partnership and coordination priorities.

2. UNHCR's work in the area of partnerships has also been guided by a number of ongoing system-wide reforms and initiatives, including the reform of the United Nations development system and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). In particular, SDG17 emphasizes the importance of strengthened partnerships and cooperation to achieve the SDGs. UNHCR replaced the 2017 Guidelines on its approach to the SDGs, with a new position paper, to be published shortly, intended to further guide field colleagues on this matter. The paper demonstrates how UNHCR as a humanitarian actor, through ensuring better linkages between its humanitarian work and that of development actors, can contribute to long-term development goals.

3. In line with the GCR, UNHCR is further transforming itself to play a more catalytic role in refugee responses, including by adopting a multi-stakeholder approach and bringing together development actors in support of responses to displacement and situations of statelessness. The Office continued to support governments, including line ministries, in this context. In order to strengthen this role and to achieve greater impact, a number of internal changes were implemented in 2019. This included the reconfiguration of the Division of Resilience and Solutions, with the transfer of the technical sectors of the former Division of Programme Support and Management to strengthen UNHCR's overall capacity to engage in designing longer-term support for refugee-hosting areas and the inclusion of refugees in national programmes. UNHCR also created a new Division of Strategic Planning and Results aimed at consolidating and strengthening existing programme, budget, partner management and results-management functions in the organization. After the completion of the decentralization and regionalization process, the new operational structure will allow UNHCR to respond to emerging challenges in a more flexible, efficient and innovative way, and to further advance its strategic partnerships at the point of delivery.

II. Strategic partnerships

4. The first Global Refugee Forum gathered 3,000 participants representing States, intergovernmental and international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, faith actors, parliamentarians, cities, civil society, academics and sports organizations, as well as refugees. More than 70 refugees participated, from 22 countries of origin and 30 host countries, making pledges, sharing their experiences and views on panels and in the plenary session. The pivotal role that refugees played in preparing for and participating in the forum has set an important precedent, recognizing the importance of ensuring that refugees are part of the conversation on matters that relate to their lives and futures. Throughout the three days of the forum, a broad range of partners from different sectors of society engaged through a myriad of spotlight sessions, highlighting their contributions to the GCR, and showing good practices.

5. Furthermore, important pledges were made to address long-term needs at the forum. The World Bank Group announced a new package of support under its International Development Association (IDA) 19, which will be implemented over the period of July 2020 to June 2023. This includes support for countries impacted by fragility, conflict, and violence, as well as for prevention and resilience-building activities in countries of origin. The World Bank Group is providing a further \$2.2 billion to the window for host communities and refugees, and \$2.5 billion to the private sector window, of which part will be dedicated to fragile States, including low-income refugee-hosting countries. The Inter-American Development Bank announced \$1 billion for a similar purpose. A broad range of States and other stakeholders pledged financial support for refugees and their host

communities of over \$2 billion, in addition to more than \$250 million from the private sector. UNHCR also worked closely with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) throughout the year, including through the secondment of a senior UNHCR staff member to the OECD. Just prior to the Global Refugee Forum, the International Network on Conflict and Fragility of the OECD adopted the Common Position on Financing for Refugee Situations, outlining good practice principles for collaboration among humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors. The richness and diversity of ideas that emerged from the forum also led to many other promising results, with nearly 900 pledges announced and more than 400 good practices submitted.

6. The engagement of a broad range of actors, including those from outside the traditional humanitarian sphere, is critical to mobilizing effective responses and pursuing solutions to forced displacement and statelessness. This means strengthening existing partnerships, but also pursuing new ones that can help foster innovative approaches to protection and assistance. Practicing ‘new ways of working’ such as strengthened humanitarian-development cooperation, is key in this regard. It is also fundamental to the broader United Nations reform efforts, and in particular in relation to the reform of the United Nations development system. UNHCR has contributed to field-driven initiatives to forge and work towards collective outcomes. This allows UNHCR and its partners to capitalize on comparative advantages and mandates, transcending longstanding silos, with a positive impact on operations. A key priority for UNHCR is to ensure that protection remains central in these efforts.

A. United Nations system and international organizations

Coordination within the United Nations and with other international organizations

7. Committed to the United Nations reform agenda and its efforts to strengthen the organization as a whole, UNHCR remains a reliable partner in inter-agency fora, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) as well as the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). UNHCR supported the development of the new IASC structure, established in 2019, and contributed actively to the work of both the Emergency Directors Group, intended to provide concrete support to operations, and the Operational Policy and Advocacy Group that drives the IASC’s strategic policy work. UNHCR also participated in all IASC results groups and co-led the results group (RG) 2 on accountability and inclusion, which developed the Guidelines for Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action in 2019. This results group also worked on several other specific topics, including mental health, gender and accountability mechanisms. It is one of the largest of all results groups, and includes a wide range of partners, including national first responders and other local actors in addition to the IASC members.

8. UNHCR also participates in the other results groups, namely RG 1 on operational response; RG 3 on collective advocacy; RG 4 on humanitarian-development collaboration; and RG 5 on humanitarian financing. Under the RG 4, UNHCR and the World Health Organization (WHO) co-lead the work stream that is developing guidelines for collective outcomes, involving development actors, member States, international NGOs and local actors to ensure that all views are being considered. The draft guidelines have been widely shared to ensure that there is broad support for its key principles. They have also been shared with a number of Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators to ensure that they meet the needs of the UN country level leadership. The guidelines are set to be released by the IASC in the first half of 2020.

9. Cooperation with UNHCR’s key partners in the United Nations system, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), continued to be strengthened both at the central and field levels. UNHCR and the International Labour Organization held a high-level meeting in June 2019 to review progress made against the objectives set out in their 2016 memorandum of understanding and the accompanying joint action plan. Both organizations will improve collaboration in technical and operational areas and work together to mobilize additional resources to reinforce the self-reliance of refugees and host communities. They also agreed

to strengthen institutions and programmes and to pursue joint advocacy and capacity-building efforts. Several initiatives and training tools were developed, including in relation to inter-agency coordination. In January 2020, UNHCR and the World Food Programme launched the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub to strengthen joint assessment and analysis, to improve accountability to affected populations and to reinforce monitoring with the aim of ensuring that the provision of assistance is based on needs.

10. Efforts to strengthen the response to new crises and ensure predictability resulted in the signing of memoranda of understanding with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). UNHCR and UN-Habitat increased cooperation on issues related to shelter, settlement and urban planning and agreed to work together in providing support to operations through the deployment of joint teams and the development of urban guidelines. A memorandum of understanding will shortly be signed with WHO, and consultations for new memoranda of understanding with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) are underway.

11. To translate the United Nations reforms into practice and ensure that organizations work seamlessly together as humanitarian and development partners, UNHCR and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) developed a two-year blueprint for joint action. It focuses on improving the response in the priority areas of education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and child protection, and represents a contribution to the SDGs in these specific areas. The plan, which is titled "A Fair Deal for Refugee Children", is aimed at strengthening the response to refugee and returnee children, based on the three principles of inclusion, predictability, and additionality. It envisages a clearer division of labour between the two organizations, linking UNHCR's overall coordination role for refugees and its strong emergency response with UNICEF's development expertise and frontline responsibility in these key areas. As a first phase in 2020, the implementation will take place in a maximum of 10 focus countries, representing both large-scale refugee emergencies and those of a more protracted nature. The blueprint will include a set of core global indicators on which the two organizations will report and that will allow measuring the impact of the intervention on refugee children. The experiences and lessons learned will provide the basis for a new memorandum of understanding and for further follow up in all areas of cooperation between UNHCR and UNICEF.

12. In 2019, UNHCR and the World Bank joined forces to improve global data on refugees by establishing a Joint Data Center. This centre will be managed by UNHCR and the World Bank – and the work seeks to combine UNHCR's experience, knowledge and data on refugees and displaced people with the World Bank's experience in poverty reduction and socio-economic analytical expertise. The key objectives of the data centre are to ensure population and socio-economic data are systematically collected and analysed so forced displacement data becomes more accessible and to promote innovation. It also aims at strengthening the sustainability of a global data collection system, building on the work initiated by experts in the United Nations Statistical Commission and strengthening country-level institutional systems where necessary. Data collection and analysis will focus on refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returned refugees, as well as host communities.

B. Non-governmental organizations

13. UNHCR continued its engagement with NGOs through a series of initiatives. In June 2019, global NGO consultations were organized in Geneva, bringing together about 500 participants representing some 250 organizations from 90 countries. The discussions focused on data and evidence, integrity, preparations for the Global Refugee Forum and UNHCR's regionalization and decentralization process.

14. To strengthen collaboration with NGO partners at the regional levels, UNHCR organized consultations in the Middle East and North Africa region, as well as in southern Africa and South America. Furthermore, UNHCR joined forces with global and regional NGO networks to engage and mobilize civil society actors ahead of the forum. NGOs and

civil society have played a key role in the lead-up to and at the forum, co-sponsoring areas of focus and spearheading multi-stakeholder initiatives. Around half of the pledges and contributions were made by NGOs and civil society.

15. UNHCR organized the second edition of the NGO Innovation Award, an initiative aimed at celebrating the achievements of initiatives by civil society that advance the innovative delivery of services to persons of concern to UNHCR. In 2019, three NGOs working on new approaches to partnerships and connectivity received the award.¹

16. According to provisional expenditure figures, in 2019, UNHCR disbursed approximately \$1.25 billion to 900 national and international NGOs, reaching its Grand Bargain commitment of providing 25 per cent of its programme expenditures through local and national responders. In 2019, some \$664 million was provided to 915 local and national responders, including \$498 million to 709 NGO partners, the highest number of local and national partners recorded by UNHCR.

17. UNHCR continued to improve its policies on strengthening partnership, including by issuing a new Partnership Handbook and revising its policy on programme support costs providing greater flexibility to partners, as well as introducing more support to national NGOs.

C. Sports organizations

18. In line with the GCR, UNHCR worked to strengthen existing and develop new partnerships with sports-focused organizations and entities, galvanizing support ahead of the Global Refugee Forum. UNHCR recognizes the enormous potential of sport and play activities to enhance the protection environment for refugee, internally displaced and stateless children and youth, as well as their communities. During the year, UNHCR continued to work closely with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Olympic Refuge Foundation (ORF) to provide sports opportunities and ‘sport for protection’ projects for these young people. At the end of 2019 new ‘sport for protection’ projects were being designed in Bangladesh, Colombia and Uganda. UNHCR also worked with the Football Club Social Alliance, the Union of European Football Associations Foundation, Coaches across Continents and Jesuit Worldwide Learning to bring sports and play opportunities to displaced and stateless young people.

19. In preparation for the Olympic Games in 2020 in Tokyo, UNHCR has been supporting the IOC to further build the pool of athletes in the IOC Refugee Athlete Support Programme. By the end of 2019, 49 refugee athletes were receiving financial assistance to train full-time with a view to being selected for the Refugee Olympic Team. The individual athletes who will make up the IOC Refugee Olympic Team will be announced in June 2020.

20. Ahead of the Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR, the ORF and IOC engaged 86 entities including States, national Olympic committees, sports federations and associations, civil society organizations and clubs in a coalition supporting three dedicated sports pledges to: (i) ensure access to safe and inclusive sporting facilities; (ii) increase availability of and access to organized sports and sport-based initiatives; and (iii) provide equal access to sporting events and competitions at all levels. UNHCR and ORF organized a spotlight session during the forum, showcasing good practices from partner organizations using sports as a tool for protection, inclusion, equality, resilience building and advocacy.

¹ See <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/innovation-award-2019/>

III. Partnership for a better response

A. Refugee response

21. To ensure that the organization remains ‘fit for purpose’, UNHCR commissioned an independent review of the Refugee Coordination Model with a view to ensuring that the lessons learnt during the five years that the model has been implemented were captured. The review was also prompted by the need to ensure that changes in the external environment, not least the reform of the UN development system, the migration and refugee compacts and the more complex and protracted nature of displacement were taken into account. This independent review is expected to make concrete recommendations on how to ensure transparent and inclusive coordination, and will be finalized in early 2020. Furthermore, UNHCR launched the Inter-Agency Coordination Learning Programme to enable its staff to navigate complex inter-agency environments and implement multi-stakeholder approaches aiming at achieving the best protection and solution outcomes for persons of concern.

22. Consistent with the GCR, the regional refugee response plans (RRP) seek to integrate a solutions-oriented approach by placing greater emphasis on self-reliance and resilience. The RRP foster engagement of host governments and development partners to enhance support for host communities and promote the inclusion of refugees in national and local development plans. In addition, in 2019, UNHCR also developed country-specific refugee response plans covering different refugee populations residing in one country. This multi-partner approach is a complex undertaking aimed at ensuring the coherence and complementarity of the contributions of different stakeholders to promote a comprehensive response.

23. The Syria regional refugee and resilience plan (3RP), co-led by UNHCR and UNDP, has set the example for addressing the needs of refugees and host communities within a single multi-agency regional plan. Building on this experience and the advantages of mid- to long-term planning established by the 3RP for the Syria situation, all 2019 refugee response plans cover two-year periods (2019-2020) and integrate emergency response efforts with endeavours to build the resilience of refugees and host communities. In several countries the coordination efforts were co-led by UNHCR and UNDP, in particular to highlight the resilience needs in the refugee-hosting countries.

24. In 2019, regional refugee response plans (RRPs) were coordinated for the situations related to the conflicts in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Taking into account the different types of refugee response plans, in 2019, over 580 partners asked for some \$9 billion to respond to the protection and assistance needs of refugees in more than 36 countries.

25. In addition to these refugee response plans, the regional response plan for refugees and migrants from Venezuela was launched in 2018 by UNHCR and IOM, and it was updated in November 2019. The plan’s current budget stands at \$1.35 billion and the plan brings together 137 appealing organizations with the objective to complement and strengthen the national responses and the regional efforts of governments in 17 countries to address the humanitarian, protection and socioeconomic needs of refugees and migrants from Venezuela. It requires UNHCR, IOM and partners to have a longer-term approach, focused not only on meeting immediate needs, but also on activities to bridge the humanitarian emergency response with the longer-term perspective to build resilience. UNHCR and IOM also coordinated the Bangladesh Joint Response plan for refugees from Myanmar with 48 partner agencies in 2019. Over \$3.5 billion in total was mobilized for the response to these large-scale refugee situations.

26. In 2019 UNHCR participated in 23 out of a total of 25 humanitarian response plans, of which 13 had refugee chapters. During the year, UNHCR also participated in over 90 United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and was actively engaged in the roll out of the new United National Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) through the participation in the common country analysis in countries embarking

on a new UNSDCF cycle. At the headquarters level, UNHCR contributed to the development of guidance led by the Development Coordination Office.

B. Internal displacement

27. Throughout 2019, UNHCR worked with member States and a range of partners to strengthen the protection of IDPs, and to intensify the search for solutions and for ways to prevent situations of internal displacement. In this context, UNHCR, OCHA and other partners have compiled best practices that could serve as an example under the three-year initiative that marks the twentieth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the GP20. At the national level, in El Salvador, Ethiopia, Niger and South Sudan, UNHCR supported processes to develop and implement laws on internal displacement, while in Somalia and South Sudan the Office advocated for the ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). Through the GP20, UNHCR worked in Colombia, Ethiopia, Georgia and Ukraine, as well as in Kosovo,² to increase the number of stakeholders to promote solutions for IDPs. In the Central African Republic progress was made in creating a more harmonized approach to collecting and using data on internal displacement.

28. On the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Kampala Convention, in October 2019, the United Nations Secretary-General announced the establishment of the High-level panel on internal displacement that will focus on finding solutions to internal displacement situations and alleviating the impact on millions of affected people. The panel aims at drawing together expertise from governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector. It also includes representation from countries particularly affected by displacement. UNHCR has seconded a staff member and is committed to supporting the work of the panel on articulating new approaches to the growing challenges related to internal displacement.

29. In September 2019, UNHCR published a new policy on internal displacement, in line with the High Commissioner's commitment for the Office to become a more decisive and predictable partner in IDP settings and for it to work effectively across the entire spectrum of forced displacement. The policy establishes parameters for UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement, and in exercising protection leadership as part of the collective response to humanitarian crises. In addition, UNHCR released its data transformation strategy aimed at strengthening relations with a variety of partners, both at the global and field levels, to improve the gathering of evidence-based information on the protection of IDPs.

30. During the year, UNHCR led 30 field protection clusters and cluster-like mechanisms. In southern Africa, the Office established new protection clusters to respond to the protection needs resulting from cyclone Idai in support of government-led efforts. In the Americas, UNHCR deployed protection expertise to respond to the needs of people in a particularly vulnerable situation as a result of the destruction caused by hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas.

31. The work of the global protection cluster was reinvigorated by the election of a new strategic advisory group and the restructuring of the operations cell to enable more robust field support. Furthermore consultations were held with very diverse stakeholders to finalize the new strategic framework and a new multi-stakeholder approach was adopted to allow for a better overview of protection work and required resources.

32. UNHCR and IFRC continued to co-lead the global shelter cluster. At the country level, UNHCR led 16 of the 30 active shelter clusters and cluster-like structures, responding to the needs of more than 13.3 million people through the coordinated efforts of more than 600 partners and a combined budget of \$410 million. The global shelter cluster strategic advisory group issued a strategy statement to reduce the use of all but essential plastic when distributing non-food items and shelter materials, in an effort to tackle the problem of

² References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

single-use plastic in humanitarian responses. As part of its capacity-building activities the global shelter cluster continued to facilitate the ‘Humanitarian shelter coordination training’.

33. The global camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) cluster, co-led by UNHCR and IOM, supported 24 country-level clusters and cluster-like structures in 2019, with UNHCR leading (or co-leading) 14 of them and providing 383 days of field missions, including to Burkina Faso and Yemen.

34. In 2019, UNHCR launched its first inter-agency coordination learning programme to teach staff to how to navigate the inter-agency environment and how to implement multi-stakeholder approaches aimed at achieving the best protection and solutions outcomes for people of concern in both refugee and IDP situations.
