

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to explain UNHCR's refugee response coordination model and the interface with broader humanitarian coordination structures and the IASC cluster system.<sup>1</sup> It draws on current UNHCR practice and the Transformative Agenda's focus on leadership, accountability and coordination, while seeking to ensure complementarity and flexibility.

Refugees are people who have fled conflict and widespread violence, suffered persecution and crossed borders, and consequently require international protection. As they are not citizens of the country of asylum, refugees often have specific needs related to documentation and access to housing, health, education and employment. Their legal status is, in many cases, an element of vulnerability in itself.

UNHCR is accountable for ensuring the international protection of refugees and for seeking durable solutions.<sup>2</sup> Its obligation in refugee situations begins with preparedness and continues through the emergency stage, ending only when solutions are identified. Responding to host communities is important for preserving asylum space and assuring the social cohesion necessary for a protective environment for refugees.

### 2. Standard elements of the Refugee Coordination Model

The Refugee Coordination Model explains and standardizes UNHCR's best practices from the field. It is predicated on the primary responsibility of States to protect refugees, and is determined, largely, by the capacities and approaches of the host Government. Responses are, whenever possible, led by the host Government and build on the resources of refugees and the communities in which they live.

#### Highlights of Standard Model

- ✓ Inclusive strategic planning
- ✓ Partners (co)leading sectors with the possibility of using cluster capacity to deliver
- ✓ Arrangements with partners for emergencies
- ✓ Refugee appeals include requirements for partners

The Refugee Coordination Model ensures inclusiveness, predictability and transparency,<sup>3</sup> as well as clear lines of accountability. It aims to be light, operations-focused and impact-oriented. The standard elements are:

- **Direct advocacy** on all international protection matters with the host Government **by the UNHCR Representative**.
- **Strategic planning** for all phases of the response led by the Representative with operational partners in the development of a protection and solutions strategy, including development actors.
- An inclusive **Refugee Consultation Forum** at national level, co-chaired by the Government (wherever possible) and the Representative, on the overall refugee response.
- A **UNHCR Refugee Coordinator**<sup>4</sup> to lead and coordinate a multi-sectorial response and ensure participation of sector-leads and all players at the field level, supported by a **Multi-sector**

<sup>1</sup>The term 'Cluster' is used in this document for brevity. It should be read to include all non-refugee international humanitarian coordination structures established to support Humanitarian Country Teams in line with Humanitarian Reform.

<sup>2</sup>UNHCR's international protection, operational and coordination functions are derived from the Office's Statute, international treaty law, General Assembly resolutions and Executive Committee Conclusions on International Protection. See also "Note on the Mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees and His Office", October 2013 (<http://www.unhcr.org/526a22cb6.html>).

<sup>3</sup>The coordination of international protection, assistance and solutions is inherent to UNHCR's refugee mandate and derives from the High Commissioner's accountability for ensuring international protection from the time an individual becomes a refugee until he or she finds a solution, whether residing in urban or rural host communities or in camps, alongside internally displaced people (IDPs) and other populations affected by humanitarian crises or in non-emergency settings.

**Operations Team** with expertise and capacity to facilitate needs assessment, planning, monitoring, reporting and information management across all sectors.

- A UNHCR-led **Refugee Protection Working Group** responsible for the coordination of protection services and for mainstreaming protection throughout other operational sectors.
- **Service-delivery sectors**, led by Government line ministries and/or (co)chaired by partners and/or UNHCR. Sectors are intended to connect to Government-led development mechanisms, if feasible.
- **Arrangements on sector coordination and delivery** with multiple potential partners, to ensure a predictable response. Agencies may wish to draw upon Global Cluster resources to support the delivery of services.

### 3. Mixed situations<sup>5</sup>: interfacing with the cluster system

The Refugee Coordination Model is designed to adapt to situations where cluster structures exist, in order to harmonize approaches and reduce duplication. It expands or contracts depending on the characteristics of the situation (i.e. the size of the emergency, the geographical locations of affected populations and capacity to meet refugee needs).

Regardless of the form the Refugee Coordination Model takes, UNHCR's mandate, responsibilities and accountabilities remain unchanged. In order to exercise his international protection, assistance and durable solutions mandate, combined with his supervisory responsibility, the High Commissioner will maintain a direct line of communication, through his Representative, with the Government. In an operational context, UNHCR maintains coordination and oversight structures that allow it to fulfil its ultimate accountability for ensuring the international protection and delivery of services to refugees.

*The principle underpinning UNHCR's approach in mixed situations is that refugee operations should form an integral part of any overall humanitarian response, while at the same time retaining the flexibility to stand alone for international protection and accountability purposes.*

There are **six primary points of interface** between the Refugee Coordination Model and the cluster system:

- In all situations, at **the leadership level the UNHCR Representative** maintains responsibility for advocacy with the host Government and engages closely with the RC/HC. As an active member of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), this includes keeping the HCT informed on the refugee operation on a regular basis.
- The Representative will lead the **refugee-specific strategic planning exercise** with partners, drawing on the HCT, including OCHA, to ensure coherence with the broader humanitarian response.
- The **Humanitarian Country Team** will also form part of the broader consultation forum on the overall refugee response.
- The **Refugee Coordinator and Multi-sector Operations Team** will ensure effective coordination through information exchange with inter-cluster coordination forums, support for the implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle and protection mainstreaming across clusters/sectors.

---

<sup>4</sup> Depending on the circumstances, the Refugee Coordinator could be the UNHCR Representative or a designated senior UNHCR staff member and teams adapted to the needs.

<sup>5</sup>The term 'mixed situations' refers to instances where refugees and their host communities are being assisted alongside, or in the same geographic area, as populations affected by natural and/or man-made disasters, and for whom a broader international humanitarian response, including a cluster or other coordination mechanism, is activated.

- The **Protection Working Group** will continue to be convened and will harmonize approaches with the Protection cluster where applicable.
- **Arrangements will be made with humanitarian partners** to facilitate service delivery to refugees under the cluster capacity and to ensure that standards are met.

The extent to which the Refugee Coordination Model expands or contracts is determined by operational characteristics and practical considerations. In operations where refugee influxes are

**Additional highlights for mixed situations**

***Streamlining and harmonizing through:***

- ✓ Representative systematically informing HCT on refugee matters
- ✓ Drawing on HCT members for inclusive strategic planning, with OCHA providing the interface to the broader humanitarian operation
- ✓ Refugee Coordinator and Multi-Sector Team interfacing inter-cluster structure
- ✓ Refugee sectors interfacing with clusters and combining meetings and resources, where possible

geographically separate from broader emergencies, the Refugee Coordination Model expands at the field level to the full coordination structure (section 2 above); at the capital level, coordination on refugee response is ensured by establishing a fixed agenda item in the HCT, as well as through common meetings with clusters for sectoral coordination. In situations where refugee and IDP populations are in the same geographic area, the refugee sectors or clusters could contract (depending on capacity), with both field and capital-level coordination taking place through a fixed agenda item at the HCT as well as through joint meetings for clusters and sectors. Coordination would include joint needs assessment, planning, etc. while taking into consideration the specific requirements of refugees.

#### **4. Funding and resource mobilization**

UNHCR's programme-based funding system is designed to allow it flexibility to respond to refugee influxes, regardless of whether targeted funds are immediately available. UNHCR will support operational partners in raising funds through a dedicated refugee appeal. In mixed situations, where the scale of the emergency and the diversity of actors require a separate appeal process, UNHCR ensures consistency with other humanitarian mechanisms. Where the refugee appeal is included in common humanitarian planning mechanisms, UNHCR ensures an inclusive contribution informed by an analysis of where community needs are being addressed through Cluster mechanisms.

UNHCR/Geneva  
20 November