



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Leadership, inclusive coordination and effective delivery: our shared duty towards the people we serve

1. What is the Refugee Coordination Model?

The Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) issued in December 2013 provides a framework for leading, coordinating and delivering refugee operations. It articulates and consolidates coordination practices with the goal of achieving the best possible protection of and assistance to refugees and addresses situations where large-scale responses require UNHCR's support and that of international humanitarian actors. The RCM:

- Outlines UNHCR's role and responsibilities in refugee operations and mixed displacement situations.
- Provides an inclusive platform for planning and coordinating refugee operations.
- Clarifies modes of coordination in relation to broader humanitarian coordination structures, including the IASC cluster system.

Under the overall leadership of the host government, partnership based and inclusive coordination is a pre-condition of an effective refugee emergency response operation. Effective coordination and leadership has a direct impact on the delivery of protection and assistance to refugees. By rearticulating UNHCR's role in the context of a changed inter-agency and operating environment, it reaffirms the integrity of the mandate and accountability of the High Commissioner for Refugee to the General Assembly and UNHCR's authorized refugee leadership.

2. What is the purpose of the Refugee Coordination Model?

UNHCR has effectively led and managed refugee operations for decades. However, it had not articulated a model of refugee coordination that was widely understood. The RCM explains UNHCR's refugee coordination role and promotes best practice in order to make refugee coordination more **predictable, inclusive and collaborative**. The RCM helps UNHCR and other humanitarian actors working in refugee operations enhance complementarities, ultimately leading to better protection, assistance and durable solutions for refugees.

3. When does the RCM apply?

The refugee mandate applies in both emergency and non-emergency asylum-seeker and refugee situations, as well as in situations of emergency and non-emergency mixed movements involving asylum-seekers and refugees. Therefore the RCM is applicable in all refugee emergency situations and throughout a refugee response, whether it is in a new or protracted emergency, or located in a camp or in urban settings or in mixed situations. (The Joint Note builds on, and further elaborates the principles of RCM for mixed situations.) Certain features of the RCM may contract or expand depending on size and length of the response and operational context. The RCM is designed to be compatible with the other coordination mechanisms such as the cluster approach and other humanitarian and development systems.

REFUGEE RESPONSE COORDINATION

Frequently Asked Questions

This document provides answers to questions from our various partners regarding the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) and Joint UNHCR- OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination. We hope you find them useful. We will continue to update this document periodically.

The RCM and Joint Note are available at UNHCR's official website:
<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/538dd3da6.html>

This document does not serve as official guidance or policy.

If you have any questions, feedback or ideas about the RCM and Joint Note do not hesitate to contact UNHCR's Inter-Agency Coordination Service:

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4. What is new in the RCM?

The RCM is designed to improve and consolidate practices that have worked well in the past, and introduce some changes that will help make coordination of a refugee response more predictable and collaborative. While UNHCR has coordinated refugee operations for decades, the RCM is characterised by several 'new' points of emphasis:

- ✓ More inclusive strategy-making by UNHCR involving key partners and a clear commitment to better joint contingency planning;
- ✓ More predictable partnership and coordination at the sectoral level;
- ✓ Systematic establishment of Refugee Protection Working Group to include protection actors;
- ✓ Less duplication / more streamlining of coordination mechanisms at the delivery level in mixed situations. Deeper engagement in Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and UN Country Team (UNCT) by the UNHCR Representative on refugee issues, ensuring that the refugee response plan is an integral yet distinct part of the overall humanitarian response;
- ✓ Clarity on the respective roles of Humanitarian Coordinators and UNHCR Representatives where both are present;
- ✓ Openness to making use of cluster / sector coordination mechanisms and resources (if agreed with relevant actors, including donors) where appropriate and efficient for delivering for refugees/ IDPs.

5. How will inclusive planning be ensured in the RCM?

The UNHCR Representative and the Refugee Coordinator work with key partners, Government, UN and NGOs (both international and national) and where relevant with members of the HCT to collectively develop the Contingency Plan prior and the Refugee Response Plan (RRP). Strategic planning will take place as an inclusive process but details of the process may vary depending on the context, and should be agreed locally.

The RRP sets out the protection and solutions vision for the population and describes the needs of refugees and host communities, how and by whom these needs will be addressed. It also includes financial requirements for all actors as a result of an inclusive planning process. It builds on national preparedness measures and existing contingency plans. The RRP should reflect and be based on assessment findings which include consultations with refugees' and host communities to elicit their perspectives on their needs, capacities and possible solutions.

6. Will UNHCR support organisations involved in the refugee response to raise funds?

Yes. In a major refugee situation UNHCR will continue to offer an inter-agency platform for coordination and fund-raising to all partners engaged in the response. This will allow partners to raise funds independently as well. The Refugee Response Plans (RRPs) are aimed at providing a comprehensive picture of identified needs, impact on host communities, operational strategy and financial requirements. Regional RRP will be established where necessary, similar to those in Central African Republic, South Sudan and Syria. Refugee Response Plans complement existing IASC Strategic Response Plans.

7. How will sector coordination work and what should partners expect?

Sectors are intended to connect to government-led, area-based humanitarian and development mechanisms where possible, and to come together at operational coordination meetings. If the ministry is not the coordinator, UNHCR and partners will coordinate or co-coordinate the sector based on established criteria. Coordination will be decentralized and based in the specific geographic areas where refugees or other persons of concern are residing. In principle, the number

of sectors should be as few as possible and should seek a **solutions and self-reliance orientation** from inception. There may be different configurations at capital and field levels depending upon the context. Although the specific context/situation will determine which sectors are established, provision should be made for: Education; WASH; Health/Nutrition; Shelter/NFIs; Food/Food Security and Livelihoods/Self Reliance.

8. How will refugee protection work be made inclusive?

The **Refugee Protection Working Group** will be established in all situations, led by UNHCR, or co-led with the relevant host government entity, where feasible. The overarching objective of the Refugee Protection Working Group (RPWG) is to ensure that a timely, effective and coordinated refugee protection response forms the basis of the broader Refugee Response Plan. To achieve this, the sectors and Refugee Protection Working Group are brought together in a multi-sector approach by the UNHCR Refugee Coordinator, supported by the multi-sector operations team. Regular meetings will be held to ensure that the multi-sector approach is coordinated and delivered smoothly.

9. What is UNHCR's role in relation to host government & communities?

The UNHCR Representative as delegate of the High Commissioner is responsible for direct advocacy with the host government for the protection of refugees and persons of concern. Host countries contribute significantly to a refugee response, depending on capacity, this includes ensuring access to territory and protection from refoulement, providing land and other environmental assets, and at times allowing refugees full access to services. Refugee emergencies frequently occur in fragile contexts in which the vulnerabilities of the host community are high, therefore UNHCR and its partners in refugee operations work closely with, and invest in, communities hosting refugees as a means of avoiding conflict, promoting equity and preserving asylum space. Typical examples include an additional borehole to improve access to water, shared access to a health clinic, or an additional school building for children. Where the community itself lacks essential services, this access to services linked to the refugee operation is particularly valued.

10. How are humanitarian and development approaches linked in a refugee response?

Since UNHCR's resources are not intended nor are sufficient to cover all the needs of hosting communities, bilateral partnerships, division of labour and shared resources with UN agencies and NGOs are very important. In these efforts, UNHCR is committed to achieving **synergies with national development planning and international development cooperation**, through processes such as Delivering as One, the UN Development Assistance Framework and Common Country Assessments, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Joint Programmes, in order to achieve efficiencies and greater lasting impact for refugees *as well as* host communities, including in areas such as education; health care; nutrition; water; sanitation; housing; energy and employment. The UNHCR Representative's engagement with the Resident Coordinator and members of the UN Country Team is geared to achieve this goal. One current example of such a situation is Lebanon¹.

11. How will refugee response interface with development interventions?

UNHCR maintains accountability for refugees from initial flight until durable solutions have been found. Some refugee responses have been underway for 20 years or more. UNHCR works with development actors to integrate refugees, returnees, stateless people and host communities into development programmes whether through the UNDAF, national plans or through specifically designed projects. Under the RCM, this aspect of UNHCR's work will be even stronger and development actors will be involved in the development of the protection and solutions strategy and response planning.

¹ Regional Cooperation on the Syria and Iraq Situations: MoU between UNHCR and UNDP, Sept. 2014

12. Why are refugees treated differently?

International law and practice addresses refugee and internal displacement emergencies differently. **Refugees are not citizens** of the country of asylum and therefore have specific protection needs. They often have no or very limited access to services, material assistance, adequate housing, health care, education and employment opportunities and are sometimes restricted in movement (for example, confined to a camp), hence the status of being a refugee is a vulnerability in itself. The outflow of refugees across international borders creates an emergency situation which requires a coordinated response of its own, with regional dimensions, specific political sensitivities and obligations of governments under international law, and important long-term implications. Seeking to address these concerns, the UN established a specialised agency for refugee protection to focus on refugees and their plight.

13. What is so different about UNHCR's mandate and why is 'non-transferable'?

The [mandate of the High Commissioner](#) was established by the UN General Assembly [GA] in 1950, to ensure that the High Commissioner, supported by his Office, *"would enjoy a special status within the UN ... possess[ing] the degree of independence and the prestige which would seem to be required for the effective performance of his functions."* The High Commissioner is elected directly by the GA, acting under its authority and reporting to it annually. UNHCR's Statute places the High Commissioner and his Office at the centre of the international refugee response system, including in respect of coordination functions. The Statute stipulates that the High Commissioner *"acting under the authority of the General Assembly, shall assume the function of providing international protection ... and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees."* The High Commissioner is also empowered to *"invite the co-operation of the various specialized agencies"* to assist his Office in the performance of his mandate.

The High Commissioner has a global mandate² for refugees regardless of the location of the refugees (camp/urban settings) in emergency, non-emergency and mixed movements involving asylum-seeker and refugees. Effective exercise of this mandate both presupposes, and is underpinned by, the commitment from states to cooperate with him and his Office, and acknowledges the High Commissioner's role in the *"effective coordination of measures taken to deal with this problem [the refugee problem]."*

Bound by legal instruments and UN resolutions, the Mandate is *"non-transferable"* meaning in no situation, stand-alone refugee or mixed, can accountability for refugee and persons of concern be transferred or delegated to another UN entity or other actor. (See Note on the Mandate of the High Commissioner: www.unhcr.org/526a22cb6.html)

14. Do refugees receive assistance on the basis of their status?

Since refugees face **specific protection risks** and vulnerabilities, this may lead to **specific responses** that other groups may not need; for example, UNHCR might support secondary school education for refugee children, as they are often more at risk than others of military recruitment. Refugees may receive food rations over a longer period than locally affected communities because refugees' access to work and livelihoods is generally limited or impossible and refugees are often specifically prohibited by host countries from working. However, refugee status and refugee protection does not necessarily imply the need for material or cash assistance, this assistance is provided on the

² The exception being the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). As UNRWA was set up in 1949, Palestine refugees were specifically and intentionally excluded from the international refugee law regime established in 1951. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto exclude Palestine refugees as long as they receive assistance from UNRWA. UNHCR provides assistance and protection to Palestine refugees outside UNRWA's areas of operations.

basis of needs. The ability to assess needs and target those in need of assistance is especially important in out-of-camp situations, but is very relevant also in protracted camp settings. In some situations, IDPs have greater protection and/or assistance needs, but the obligation of Governments to their citizens is different.

15. How does UNHCR work with partners?

UNHCR has a history of over 60 years of collaborating with governments and developing partnerships with other international agencies and NGOs. Through regular consultation with key partners as well as Memorandum of Understanding and Letters of Understanding with other UN agencies, inter-governmental agencies and NGOs, UNHCR has established a solid network of collaboration and mutual accountability to advance the protection and assistance of persons of concern.

16. How will the RCM interface with other coordination systems?

The RCM clarifies how UNHCR will work in situations where other humanitarian and development coordination systems exist. In such scenarios the UNHCR Representatives will continue to actively participate in Humanitarian and UN country teams, represent the clusters that UNHCR leads, and share information on refugee issues. S/he will also:

- Minimize duplication by streamlining coordination mechanisms and meetings in mixed IDP/refugee situations, particularly at the delivery level;
- Include the refugee response as a Refugee Response Chapter in the Strategic Response Plan (SRP) and appropriately link the response to the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF) and national development plans

17. What is a mixed situation?

A mixed situation is one where a complex emergency is taking place, a Humanitarian Coordinator has been appointed, and a UNHCR-led refugee operation is also underway. Each mixed situation is unique: one country may have instances where the refugees and IDPs are not situated in the same geographic location in one part of the country, but may be geographically co-located in another part of the country. Mixed situations, for example can currently be found in Pakistan; Yemen; South Sudan; Northern Iraq; Chad; Democratic Republic of Congo; Central African Republic; Sudan; Mali and Syria. The key point about mixed situations is that both OCHA and UNHCR have coordination roles, so it is important that those roles are clear and well understood.

18. Why are refugee operations coordinated differently from IDP or other humanitarian responses?

The cluster approach (in which cluster leads are accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Emergency Relief Coordinator) does not apply in refugee situations since the High Commissioner cannot transfer or delegate his accountability. Refugee protection and assistance is linked to the finding of durable solutions, which goes beyond the coordination of an emergency and humanitarian assistance and the intended scope and timeframe of the cluster approach. Refugee responses are not included in the cluster approach, which was established to address gaps in accountability and coordination of delivery of humanitarian response, primarily focused on the problem of IDPs, while later encompassing other populations affected by crisis.³

19. What happens to leadership, accountability and coordination in mixed situations?

The refugee response led by the UNHCR Representative, and the response for IDPs and other populations at the centre of humanitarian response led by an HC, **exist side by side in full respect**

³ IASC Guidance Note on using the cluster approach to strengthen humanitarian response (24 November 2006).

of the mandate of both organizations. Each has clear roles with respect to key functions and processes such as advocacy, planning, coordination at different levels and funding. The **Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations** agreed in April 2014 clarifies roles with respect to this leadership and sets out practical steps that should be taken to ensure complementarity and enhance delivery.

20. Does UNHCR's role for IDPs and other vulnerable populations change?

No. UNHCR's operational engagement with IDPs remains, which is based on a specific request/authorization from the Secretary-General or a competent principal organ of the UN; the consent of the concerned state or other entities concerned; assurance of access to the internally displaced; availability of adequate resources and the Office's particular expertise and experience; complementarity with other agencies; and adequate staff safety.

UNHCR's involvement on internal displacement is largely defined by the inter-agency coordination approach of 2005 Humanitarian Reform and the Transformative Agenda, developed in the IASC context under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), and operating in full respect of the mandates of the respective entities. In this connection, it was agreed in mid-2005 that the UNHCR would assume global cluster leadership for protection and co-leadership in the area of camp coordination/management and emergency shelter, focusing on conflict-induced internal displacement.⁴

21. How will UNHCR engage with a Humanitarian Country Team?

Like other UN agencies, UNHCR is an active participant in the HCT, where they represent both UNHCR as the refugee agency as well as other operational or protection roles it may have in the country (including for stateless persons). If a cluster approach is in place for IDPs, UNHCR represents the interests of the members of the clusters it leads or co-leads.

22. What changes in the delivery of services to IDPs and refugees?

Where IDPs and refugees are **in separate locations**, clusters and sectors respectively will continue to provide assistance to the respective population groups, with close exchange of information at the capital level.

Where IDPs and refugees are in the **same geographic location**, clusters or sectors may be utilized, depending on which ensures optimal efficiency and effectiveness. The decision to use either sector or clusters mechanisms to coordinate assistance to both IDPs and refugees in a particular location will be decided on a **case by case basis** in the HCT, ultimately decided by the ERC and High Commissioner. The decision will depend on practical considerations such as:

- operational context
- location of IDPs and refugees and responses (geographically together or separate)
- size of refugee and IDP populations
- capacity of IASC cluster members to deliver on the specific needs of refugees; and/or the capacity of UNHCR sector members to deliver on protection and assistance needs of IDPs

It may well be that the practical response requires a mix of coordination arrangements/systems, decided at the national level and in collaboration with cluster members and cluster lead agencies as well as the HC in the country. In all cases UNHCR and the HC will try and ensure the proposed approach is simple and pragmatic, and meets the needs of affected persons effectively.

⁴ In 2013, UNHCR was responsible for leading, coordinating and supporting assessment and response for 19 protection, 8 shelter and 7 camp management clusters or other coordination mechanisms in a total of 19 operations worldwide. The number of IDPs, including those in IDP- like situations provided with protection and assistance by UNHCR stood at 23.9 million.

23. Do the accountabilities of other agencies change?

No. The overall accountability for leading a refugee response in a mixed situation rests with the UNHCR Representative, and for IDPs and other groups as appropriate, with the HC. Assistance to refugees, IDPs and affected populations delivered through the refugee sector and/or IDP clusters does not lead to any change in the respective accountabilities.

If, for example, a refugee influx occurs in the midst of an ongoing IDP situation where the cluster approach exists, UNHCR would seek to identify economies and capacities with and within this existing system to respond to the protection and assistance needs of refugees. If, in such situations, actors within the clusters determine that they have capacity to contribute to the refugee response, they would, **as individual actors**, be responsible for the delivery of services to refugees in accordance with the established standards and systems applicable in a refugee context for this aspect of their programme.

The cluster within which this actor works **does not acquire a new accountability** to lead and coordinate any aspect of the refugee response, nor does the Cluster Lead Agency, or the Humanitarian Coordinator, acquire an accountability to lead and coordinate any aspect of the refugee response. Similarly, neither the sector lead nor the UNHCR Representative acquires additional accountability in cases where actors from within a refugee response sector provide assistance to IDPs. It is not anticipated that there will be additional reporting on behalf of the cluster or cluster lead agency when a cluster member delivers services for refugees. UNHCR will in all situations provide an inclusive and inter-agency platform for refugee contingency planning and remain the agency of **first and last resort for refugees**.

24. What implications do mixed situations have on the response planning?

In mixed situations, where there is a country level Strategic Response Plan (SRP), assistance to IDPs delivered by a cluster/sector member should be budgeted under the relevant cluster chapter while assistance to refugees should be described and budgeted under a **separate 'Refugee Response Plan Chapter'** (formerly known as the Multi-Sector section). The responsibility for the development and coordination of the 'Refugee Response Plan Chapter' rests with UNHCR.

The Refugee Response Plan Chapter remains a distinct and separable piece of the overall Strategic Response Plan for which UNHCR is accountable. While there may be significant cross-referencing with other parts of the Plan, the response for refugees and its impact will always need to be clearly distinguishable. See Strategic Response Plan Guidance and templates: www.humanitarianresponse.info/programme-cycle/space/strategic-response-planning-guidance-templates

In cases where there are refugee outflows to a number of countries, UNHCR may want to develop a **Regional Refugee Response Plan** highlighting the needs of populations crossing the border due to the crisis. The development of these Regional RRP's will be led by a UNHCR designated Regional Refugee Coordinator. Coordination will be increased with the HC and HCT of the receiving countries and also with refugee populations' country of origin. This builds on UNHCR's experience since the 1970s in managing regional approaches that include cross-border contingency planning and response and voluntary repatriation, ensuring a common understanding, analysis and approach in the countries concerned.

25. Why is the refugee response plan in a separate chapter?

Refugees are not included in the clusters but the Refugee Response Chapter to ensures several important points:

- The host government, which are in most cases legally bound to provide protection to refugees is clear about the what efforts are being made, resources available and who is accountable for the refugees.
- As refugees are not citizens of the hosting state, they cannot be expected to be integrated into its humanitarian and development planning that they become indistinguishable;
- the UNHCR Representative (delegated to by the High Commissioner) can clearly defend the needs of refugees and advocate on their behalf;
- that funding designated for refugees can be clearly accounted for; and
- that refugees are not forgotten or become less of a priority than other vulnerable groups.

26. What implications are there for resource mobilization?

In mixed situations, the SRP serves as fund-raising and resource mobilization platform for IDP/ other humanitarian responses, while UNHCR and partners will use the Refugee Response Plan as a stand-alone inter-agency appeal document for targeted fundraising for refugees. Resource mobilization for the RRP is the responsibility of UNHCR. In cases where a country level refugee inter-agency plan is a part of an SRP, resource mobilization can be done as a part of each country SRP. In cases where a RRP and SRP exist, joint launches and briefings will be encouraged as to highlight the totality of needs in such situations.

27. Why is it necessary for UNHCR to be able to accurately track funding and other resources being used in support of refugees?

This allows UNHCR to fulfil a key accountability to the donor community, but also, and perhaps less widely understood but of equal importance, it can have a direct impact on refugee protection. The presence of refugees often places a tremendous strain on host country communities, structures and systems. This often leads to refugees being perceived as a burden, and are frequently negatively characterized this way in national political and media discourse. UNHCR's ability to cite in its advocacy the amount of funding and resources flowing into a country to augment government capacities -- often the only tangible measure of international responsibility-sharing -- has on countless occasions served to counter negative characterizations of refugees and their impact, and to preserve asylum space.

28. How and by when will the RCM and Joint Note be implemented?

Strengthening refugee leadership and coordination is an organisational priority. The RCM and Joint Note are being institutionalised in new emergencies, mixed situations and existing refugee operations where leadership, coordination and partnership can be further improved. The implementation requires institutional change, and like any change process will take some time to be fully established at an organisation wide level and produce consistent results. A number of support missions, trainings and workshops are being conducted for UNHCR and partners and instructions have been issued for its implementation. Additional tools and guidance are under development.⁵

29. How will partners be involved in refining and rolling out?

UN and NGO partners, frequently and significantly involved in refugee operations, are providing advice and feedback to UNHCR on the implementation of the RCM and Joint Note. They are jointly preparing and participating in the inter-agency missions to the field with to explain the Joint Note, and are supporting the dissemination amongst their colleagues. Relevant UN and NGO partners at field-level also participate in workshops. UNHCR will also ensure broader dissemination and discussion with partners in fora such as the Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultations.

⁵ UNHCR staff can find key resources and documents at:
https://intranet.unhcr.org/intranet/unhcr/en/home/protection_and_operational/refugee-coordination.html