

CONVENTION PLUS AT A GLANCE

What is Convention Plus?

Convention Plus is an international effort initiated and coordinated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Its aim is to improve refugee protection worldwide and to facilitate the resolution of refugee problems through multilateral special agreements. This will be achieved through a process of discussion and negotiation with States and other partners of UNHCR to mobilize support and bring about firmer commitments.

Why new tools for refugee protection and durable solutions?

The 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol define the responsibilities of States toward refugees. These instruments remain the cornerstone of the international refugee protection regime.

Despite their continued relevance, the Convention and the Protocol cannot address all the pressing issues pertaining to refugee protection in today's changing world. These include how durable solutions for refugees can be pursued more effectively and how the responsibility for admitting and protecting refugees can best be shared.

For this reason, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees launched the "Convention Plus" process. The "Plus" will be "a number of special agreements aimed at managing the refugee challenges of today and tomorrow in a spirit of international cooperation."

What are the tools being developed through Convention Plus?

In the past, UNHCR has frequently been a party to special agreements with States. Such agreements have generally focused on operational arrangements with Governments, often in relation to a particular group of refugees or a specific situation. Most of these agreements have concerned voluntary repatriation operations. Using this experience, the Convention Plus process will broaden the application of special agreements and increase the level of State and other stakeholder involvement.

On what areas will these agreements focus?

UNHCR will pursue **generic** multilateral agreements to tackle three priority challenges:

- The strategic use of **resettlement** as a tool of protection, a durable solution and a tangible form of burden-sharing;
- More effective **targeting of development assistance** to support durable solutions for refugees, whether in countries of asylum or upon return home; and
- Clarification of the responsibilities of States in the event of **irregular secondary movements** of refugees and asylum-seekers, that is, when refugees and asylum-seekers move, in an irregular manner, from an initial country of refuge to another country.

These generic agreements will set out shared understandings and commitments which can be relied upon and incorporated into **situation-specific** multilateral agreements designed to resolve a particular refugee situation. The Convention Plus effort will also promote and support the development of these agreements.

How will multilateral special agreements be developed?

The Convention Plus process is chaired by the High Commissioner and co-chaired by Director of UNHCR's Department of International Protection. They guide the work of the Convention Plus Unit, which is based at UNHCR's Headquarters in Geneva. The Unit is responsible for working with States to develop the generic agreements. It will also provide advice and assistance within UNHCR for the formulation of situation-specific special agreements.

The work on generic agreements is currently led by five "**facilitating**" States: Canada on resettlement, Denmark and Japan on the targeting of development assistance, and South Africa and Switzerland on irregular secondary movements. Their role, in collaboration with UNHCR, is to lead the process of crafting special agreements. Each facilitating State coordinates discussions and deliberations with a group of other interested States, and ensures that non-governmental organizations have ample opportunity to provide their views.

The development of situation-specific special agreements is led by UNHCR's Regional Bureau, with support from the Convention Plus Unit.

Who else will be involved?

Twice a year the High Commissioner will convene a **Forum**, open to member States of UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom) and observers of its Standing Committee. The High Commissioner may also invite others who can make a positive contribution to the Forum.

The meetings of the Forum will focus on the progress made in the different Convention Plus strands. ExCom will receive regular updates on the progress of the Convention Plus process and the work of the Forum.

What is the role of UNHCR's country offices?

Convention Plus is an organization-wide effort. While many of the discussions will by necessity take place in Geneva, input and support from UNHCR staff in field locations is essential to encourage active State participation. It is at the field level that the majority of advocacy and liaison work will need to be pursued.

Need more information?

For further information on Convention Plus, including updates on the latest developments, see the Convention Plus website, which can be found under "Protecting Refugees" on UNHCR's public website (<http://www.unhcr.org/convention-plus>). Additional information can be provided by contacting the Convention Plus Unit directly either by e-mailing lander@unhcr.org or hug@unhcr.org, or by calling (41) 22.739.8103 or 7622.

Update

Where do we stand as of 1 June 2005?

Resettlement

The Core Group on the Strategic Use of Resettlement reached agreement on the “Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement” [MFU] in June 2004. It was subsequently given broader support by the Forum when it met on 1 October 2004. In its General Conclusion on International Protection, adopted on 8 October 2004, UNHCR’s Executive Committee welcomed the MFU and encouraged interested States, UNHCR and other relevant partners to make full use of it. The consultations in the Core Group that led to the final version of the Multilateral Framework were characterized by a frank and constructive atmosphere. NGOs made a number of important contributions to the text.

The purpose of the Multilateral Framework is to guide parties to situation-specific multilateral agreements in designing comprehensive arrangements, involving multilateral resettlement operations, to address the protection and durable solutions needs of refugees. The text of the Multilateral Framework is contained in document FORUM/2004/6 and can be found on the Convention Plus page of UNHCR’s website.

The next step is to put the Multilateral Framework into practice and planning to this effect is in progress.

Irregular secondary movements

Following a first open meeting of interested States and stakeholders on 16 December 2003, a Core group was formally constituted. During its first two meetings in September and November 2004, the Core Group discussed two background documents prepared by UNHCR, entitled “Issues Paper on Addressing Irregular Secondary Movements” and “Basic Propositions on Irregular Secondary Movements” as well as comments thereon received from Core Group members. During the meeting of 20 September 2004, a number of shared understandings on possible building blocks of a multilateral framework began to emerge. The Core Group identified notions of burden and responsibility sharing as key principles that should guide its work. During a meeting on 24 November 2004, the Core Group further discussed these notions (including the underlying human rights principles), how to operationalize them, as well as relevant regional experiences¹. In meetings on 31 January and 23 February 2005, the Core Group discussed key issues related to addressing irregular secondary movements, such as registration, fair and efficient asylum procedure, safe avenues to access protection, the causes of onward movements and protection capacity building initiatives.

On 23 March 2005 the Core Group commenced the first reading of a draft Framework of Understandings on addressing irregular secondary movements of refugees and

¹ This discussion took place on the basis of a paper presented by Amnesty International on “Human Rights Principles Applicable to Responsibility and Burden-Sharing Arrangements”.

asylum-seekers prepared by the Secretariat in light of the Core Group's deliberations and the preliminary outcomes of the survey of Somalis and other analyses available to UNHCR. The Core Group continued negotiations on the draft on 9 and 11 May and 1 and 2 June 2005, and will meet again on 11 and 12 July 2005.

Work on the survey of the scope and causes of movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as State responses thereto, is progressing thanks to contributions from a number of States². The preliminary findings of surveys in Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland and Yemen were presented by the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) to meetings of the Core Group in February and May 2005. The overall comparative analysis is expected to be available in the third quarter of 2005.

Targeting development assistance

In April and June 2004, Denmark and Japan convened meetings of key development aid donors in Geneva, with a view to involving gradually in a Core Group a number of development aid recipients that are also major refugee-hosting countries or countries of origin. In the June meeting it was agreed to focus efforts initially on two specific refugee situations, i.e. a cross-border project for Somali refugees/ returnees in Ethiopia and Somalia, and the Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda. In early October 2004 a focus group meeting was held on the targeting of development aid for the latter group. Donors, UN agencies and NGOs participated in the meeting, in which the Government of Uganda presented its Self-Reliance/ Development Assistance for Refugee Hosting Areas (DAR) strategy. Following the presentation of the DAR programme at the 2004 UNHCR Executive Committee meeting, the programme was officially launched in Kampala in November 2004 by the Government and UNHCR with key stakeholders present.

In February 2005, another focus group meeting was held to provide updates on developments in Ethiopia/Somalia and Uganda with the participation of representatives from the Ethiopian and Ugandan governments as well as key donors, UN agencies and NGOs.

Beyond these discussions on targeting development assistance in specific situations, UNHCR prepared a draft "Issues Paper on Targeting of Development Assistance", identifying issues relating to the targeting of development assistance in a Convention Plus context. Since the successful targeting of development assistance also requires the involvement and commitment of a range of actors, the issues paper was, as a first step, presented in a meeting with United Nations agencies, the World Bank, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), major aid donors and NGOs, hosted by Denmark in Geneva on 22 September 2004. In February 2005, the Issues Paper was discussed with the African Group in Geneva.

In October 2004, UNHCR finalized a study on 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) – A Displacement Perspective' assessing the priority given to displacement issues in PRSPs. The study has been shared with all stakeholders, including the World Bank, which together with the International Monetary Fund is embarking on a thorough review of PRSPs.

² Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

Both these documents and the ensuing discussions provided the basis for the preparation of a ‘Statement of Good Practice on Targeting Development Assistance for Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement’, which was presented to an Open Meeting in Geneva on 28 April 2005. A revised version, enriched with additional examples of positive State practice, was discussed at the fourth meeting of the Forum on 20 May 2005. Another document was circulated at the Forum, namely ‘Putting Refugees on the Development Agenda’, which seeks to show how the strategic targeting of development aid towards areas and communities hosting refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons can enable those communities, and the displaced populations themselves, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. This document will be discussed in an Open Meeting in the sidelines of UNHCR’s Standing Committee, on 30 June 2005.

High Commissioner’s Forum

The fourth meeting of the High Commissioner’s Forum took place on 20 May 2004 in Geneva. It was chaired by Mr. Kamel Morjane, Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees. In his opening statement, he called for more engagement of States in the resolution of protracted refugee situations. He also recommended new mechanisms to prepare for durable solutions early in a refugee crisis. Mr. Morjane also mentioned the importance of development and peace-building tools in ensuring the sustainability of reintegration efforts. Progress reports were presented on the application of the “Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement” and on the work of the Core Group on irregular secondary movements. The central theme of this Forum meeting was the targeting of development assistance for durable solutions to forced displacement, which was discussed at length on the basis of the ‘Statement of Good Practice’ tabled by UNHCR.

During the course of the meeting, delegations voiced their appreciation for the ongoing work on Convention Plus and the goal to define further multilateral frameworks on the two outstanding strands. Further, the fundamental relationship between each of the strands, which will become evident through the development of comprehensive approaches, was reaffirmed.

All documents submitted to the fourth meeting of the High Commissioner’ Forum, as well as the annotated order of business, the Assistant High Commissioner’s and other personalities’ statements, and the Chairman’s Summary of the meeting, are available on the Convention Plus page of UNHCR’s public website.

Other initiatives

Convention Plus is also involved in a number of projects in specific countries that engage host States, donor countries and other international and national partners in implementing strategies to expand opportunities for durable solutions. Afghanistan Plus, the Preparatory Project for the Somali CPA, and multilateral strengthening protection capacity initiatives are tangible manifestations of the Agenda for Protection in action centered around the type of approaches advocated by Convention Plus.

The Strengthening Protection Capacity project, funded by the EC and three co-funding states is well underway. This project seeks to strengthen the capacity to receive and protect refugees of four African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya

and Tanzania. The SPC project is designed to look at protection problems broadly, from the moment of admission until durable solutions are found. It is built around a wide range of possible interventions to strengthen capacity. The selection of the most appropriate approach is being determined through a consultative process involving key stakeholders, including donor governments, host governments, other UN and international partners, NGOs and refugees themselves.

On all these subjects please consult the Convention Plus page of UNHCR's [website](#).