

GLOBAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT: PRIORITIZATION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In 2009, UNHCR committed itself to presenting the full range of its budgetary needs, as determined in the global needs assessment (EC/60/SC/CRP/14). As a result, UNHCR's financial requirements for 2010 are based on the comprehensive needs of people of concern, in contrast to the previous approach, which was closely linked to projected income levels. This explains the significant increase in the 2010 and [initial] 2011 requirements as compared to previous years.

2. However, the Office does not yet know the precise level or timing of the voluntary contributions it will receive during the year, nor the earmarkings attached to such contributions. This requires a phased approach to the implementation of activities, based on prioritization done early in the year, and the careful management of income and budgets. While this is not a new feature of programming in UNHCR, the significance of such measures is greater in the context of a comprehensive needs assessment and the new budget structure.

3. This paper outlines the challenges involved in prioritizing objectives and implementing a phased approach to activities throughout the current biennium; highlights the utility of the Global Strategic Priorities (EC/60/SC/INF.2), which have been incorporated into UNHCR's Global Appeal 2010-2011, in performance management; and provides a broad description of operational priorities, as set by UNHCR field offices within the context of initial detailed budgeting for 2010.

II. PRIORITIZATION: AT THE HEART OF PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

4. A certain degree of prioritization is inherent in comprehensive needs-based planning, and has therefore been reflected in the results chain embedded in *Focus*, UNHCR's planning and programming tool. In setting targets and developing budgets, operations managers identify the problems to be addressed and the results to be achieved, in order of priority, both within and across population planning groups.

5. UNHCR field offices have been instructed to prioritize interventions that deliver life-saving assistance; ensure key protection activities; improve access to education and livelihoods in protracted displacement situations; strengthen protection capacity in situations of mixed migration; improve response to urban refugee situations; ensure emergency preparedness and response; and facilitate durable solutions. While these remain broad parameters, it is understood that other factors may be taken into account, due to the very different operational contexts

around the world in which UNHCR operates. UNHCR's role within the broader humanitarian response is also a significant operational factor which can lead to variations between UNHCR country plans in terms of prioritized areas of intervention. Within such plans, the implementation capacities of UNHCR and its partners, and the capacity of State institutions to assume their protection responsibilities, together with the prevailing political context and the availability of funds, dictate the sequencing and the pace of implementation.

6. At the beginning of every planning cycle, each operation must not only establish which objectives should be pursued first, but also determine the level of human and financial resources that need to be employed early on in the process. Early investments may be necessary to achieve measurable progress in the well-being of persons of concern later in the year, or even the following year. For example, capacity-building for local NGOs or water infrastructure activities may require more extensive initial investments, which have a significant and lasting impact on the beneficiaries. Thus, urgent or pressing needs relate not only to those that can be expressed in terms of life or death, but also those that require significant investment early on.

7. UNHCR's Regional Bureaux play a key role in setting strategic direction at the regional level, which then serve as a foundation for the setting of country priorities. The prioritization process is however largely field-based, reflecting UNHCR's move to increase decision-making and authority at the point of delivery. Regional and country offices are not only better equipped to identify needs and assign priority to them, but are also better able to identify and capitalize on the opportunities that arise on the ground. For example, the establishment of a new partnership, or a new orientation in State policy, may provide greater return on UNHCR's investments and may justify that resources be assigned, on a priority basis, to the corresponding area.

8. The ability to ensure and measure positive progress in the protection and well-being of persons of concern, and in the realization of solutions, is also key to results-based programming. As crises arise in the midst of displacement situations, a significant investment of resources may be required without delay in order to preserve the protection environment that has been secured so far or to prevent a regressive trend.

9. In summary, prioritization in UNHCR programming:

- is about sequencing objectives and phasing implementation, taking into account the operational context of each situation;
- requires that critical needs are properly assessed and that the initial human and financial resources needed from the outset are determined;
- seizes opportunities to maximize impact; and
- mitigates the risk of a regressive trend in the protection, well-being and solutions for persons of concern.

III. GLOBAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

10. The introduction of the Global Strategic Priorities (GSPs), represents UNHCR's endeavour to present in a most consolidated manner, a view of the most pressing global challenges on which the Office will focus its efforts during the 2010-2011 biennium. As far as

field operations are concerned, priority objectives fall into the following rights groups: favourable protection environment; fair protection processes and documentation; security from violence and exploitation; basic needs and essential services; community participation and self-management; and durable solutions.

11. Each Global Strategic Priority includes an indicator for measuring progress, a description of the current situation and a target to be achieved by the end of 2011. The targets represent the best estimates of what can be achieved within the budgets approved for 2010 and 2011. They guide the resource allocation process, in that they inform the decisions as to where to direct any fresh unearmarked contributions over and above the initial budget targets. The targets may be reviewed on the basis of what is achievable and the resources available.

12. While extensive consultations were undertaken at the Headquarters and regional levels in formulating this first set of GSPs, UNHCR anticipates that further refinements will take place during the biennium, based on lessons drawn from its application. Underpinning the GSPs, the UNHCR results framework and *Focus* are new tools, which are being applied worldwide for the first time this year. To further develop and refine performance measurement, UNHCR is undergoing a comprehensive process of comparison and the analysis of baselines and target values set by field operations, in order to make such critical operational data accurate, consistent across operations, specific and measurable.

IV. 2010 PLANS AND INITIAL TARGETS

13. In the latter part of 2009, each regional office and country operation prepared a detailed plan of activities to be implemented as of January 2010. Based on the principle of careful management of income, each operation was provided with an initial authority to spend, which was set somewhat below the comprehensive budget level but sufficient to preserve the integrity of ongoing programmes and to start investments in pursuit of new and better results.

14. The challenges faced by regional and country offices in prioritizing one set of activities over another is demonstrated in the country chapters of UNHCR's Global Appeal 2010-2011 (CD-ROM version only), in the form of adverse consequences of a 20 to 40 per cent funding gap. It is clear, for example, that in several operations even a late injection of resources will not allow for the deployment of UNHCR teams to new locations, or the hiring of implementing partners for a new type of activity, which may be deemed necessary.

15. Therefore, in setting their initial 2010 targets, most operations have tried to secure a reasonable level of implementation capacity in most or all of the rights groups and key objectives listed in their comprehensive plans. Within this general trend, however, it is possible to detect those rights groups and objectives that have been re-prioritized in the detailed plans and budgets and, in the process, to progressively but comprehensively respond to all of the needs of populations of concern.

16. It is under budget Pillars 1 (refugee programme) and Pillar 4 (projects for IDPs or internally displaced persons) that the prioritization and sequencing of objectives is most visible, therefore the succinct analysis which follows will refer to these two populations of concern only. It is meant as an illustrative, not exhaustive, view of prioritization as an operational reality in UNHCR's programmes, large and small, in all regions.

17. As far as refugee programmes are concerned, globally, it is in the shelter and infrastructure sectors that the greatest efforts will be required, both relative to other sectors and in absolute financial terms, to bridge the gap between initial spending authority and comprehensive requirements. The same is true with regard to IDP projects, which is of concern given that UNHCR, as the co-lead agency for the emergency shelter cluster, may be called upon to intervene as a provider of last resort.

18. The ‘basic needs and essential services’ rights group, which includes key objectives in, among others, the health, water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, and education sectors, draws upon the bulk of UNHCR’s resources for refugees world-wide. These areas must, because of the magnitude involved, be subjected to phased approaches. To adequately sequence interventions in key sectors, including those that are life-saving or life-sustaining, is however, a delicate task. In Africa, for example, where health programmes are well underway at the beginning stages of 2010, the gap between initial and comprehensive targets is still close to USD 10 million. In the same region, it is not certain that the real needs identified in respect of basic domestic and sanitary items, education, and shelter, can be met during the course of the year. Education has, for the time being, been prioritized over shelter and infrastructure in the aggregated plans of UNHCR refugee operations in Africa. In the Americas, services for refugee groups with special needs have – in relative terms – been prioritized over education services, and the timely achievement of health objectives (including those that are HIV/AIDS-related) will require substantial efforts. This is equally true of the health and education objectives in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and the Asia and Pacific regions.

19. The ‘favourable protection environment’ rights group is witnessing, at the global level, a de-prioritization of the objectives related to emergency preparedness, administrative and legal framework-building and the prevention of *refoulement*. In relative terms, it is in Africa, the MENA region and Europe that this trend is especially noticeable. This illustrates the point, made above, regarding the difficulty, in a constrained financial environment, to front-load investments in capacity-building and systems development. Under the ‘fair protection processes and documentation’ rights group, it appears that significant efforts will be required later in the year to improve reception conditions and raise registration and profiling standards – both for refugees and for internally displaced persons.

20. Under the ‘community participation and self-management’ and ‘durable solutions’ rights groups, early indications are not encouraging regarding the extent of the impact of 2010 interventions on the level of self-reliance of refugees, and the gap may be even greater in the case of IDPs. A similar concern applies to the potential for local integration or the voluntary repatriation of refugees. At the global level, the relatively slow start of rehabilitation and reintegration objectives in situations of internal displacement (Pillar 4) is noticeable. Since Pillar 4 is designed to be implemented on a project basis, this gap can arguably be met, but this will require both a significant scaling-up of humanitarian funding for early recovery, as well as an increased availability of transition funds in IDP and mixed IDP/returnee situations.
