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# UNHCR's Leadership and Coordination Role in Refugee Response Settings

DESK REVIEW  
DECEMBER 2019

Conducted by:  
Sarah Collinson and Ed Schenkenberg  
Independent Consultants

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### **Evaluation Service**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Case Postale 2500  
1211 Genève 2  
Switzerland  
[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

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<b>Evaluation manager / contact in UNHCR:</b>	Joel Kinahan, <a href="mailto:kinahan@unhcr.org">kinahan@unhcr.org</a> Nabila Hameed, <a href="mailto:hameedn@unhcr.org">hameedn@unhcr.org</a>
<b>Support staff:</b>	Selam Araya Soum <a href="mailto:soum@unhcr.org">soum@unhcr.org</a> Cassie Yao <a href="mailto:yaoy@unhcr.org">yaoy@unhcr.org</a>

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# Executive Summary

UNHCR's leadership and coordination role in refugee response settings is an essential and defining part of the agency's mandate and mission. The protracted and multidimensional character of recent refugee crises, and shifts in the humanitarian and development landscape (including the Global Compact on Refugees) have led to significant variation in how UNHCR executes its leadership and coordination functions. This, in turn, raises questions about how UNHCR positions itself as the global leader and coordinator in refugee settings. Against this background, UNHCR commissioned an independent desk review of its leadership and coordination role in refugee settings, looking at past refugee responses in the period 2014—2018 and considering whether and how UNHCR may need to reorient its approach to leading and coordinating refugee responses in the future.

The desk review was conducted over the period of May to November 2019 and sought to answer the following questions:

1. undertake extensive mapping of coordination structures in refugee responses to examine how UNHCR engages in refugee coordination and, if possible, determine a typology;
2. analyse the degree to which UNHCR's role in coordination structures is predictable, transparent and consistent;
3. assess the factors that contribute to or constrain effective and efficient refugee coordination.

This report is built on a thorough document review including of independent evaluation reports, individual interviews and focus group discussions with UNHCR staff members, donor and host government representatives, and staff from other United Nations and international agencies and non-governmental organizations. This was complemented with a two-day workshop with UNHCR staff engaged in inter-agency coordination. The review, while considering mixed flows, did not examine UNHCR's role in responses concerning internally displaced persons (IDPs) or natural disasters.

## **Definitional discussions**

The lack of a clear, agreed understanding of what coordination and leadership mean in practice in humanitarian and/or refugee responses was immediately apparent and needed to be factored into the analysis from the outset. UNHCR makes a distinction in terms of leadership and coordination accountabilities, but its own refugee coordination guidance does not provide any real clarity on the relationship between the two concepts. In practice, given the broad spectrum of coordination imperatives and activities required in any refugee response situation, UNHCR may pursue different coordination and leadership roles simultaneously, without this being made explicit. The organization's distinct refugee protection mandate may encourage it to take a more directive and assertive approach to coordination than other actors expect (or desire) from the agency.

Since late 2013, UNHCR has defined the way in which it understands its leadership and coordination role in refugee settings through the framework of the refugee coordination model (RCM). The RCM closely resembles one of the two standard models for humanitarian coordination: the (UN) lead-agency coordination model, which sees one operational agency leading an integrated approach to service delivery. This review has found that the RCM, while

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intended to ensure predictability in refugee responses across different settings, has not made adequate sense of the complex arenas and dynamics of response that UNHCR has to operate within.<sup>1</sup>

**Finding one: This desk review has found too many context-dependent variables to support any clear typology of refugee coordination arrangements across different response situations.** Within each context, leadership and coordination arrangements are closely tied to and determined by distinct political economies of crisis and response which evolve dynamically (and sometimes fairly rapidly) over time. A range of factors, including the type and pattern of displacement, and especially the prevalence of mixed flows, host government responses, donor funding, and regional and international political and strategic involvement, have a varied, dynamic and often decisive influence over the particular coordination and leadership arrangements in place in any situation and point in time. **As in all humanitarian response situations, the (security) context has a direct bearing on whether and how UNHCR can effectively lead and coordinate refugee protection and assistance.** Insecurity often directly hampers relief and protection efforts and/or directly influences the overall response framework and coordination structures. For instance, in Libya the operating environment is highly unstable, complex and dynamic, continuously challenging humanitarian access and response planning and coordination. Thus, prescribed or standardized approaches or predetermined structures may exist on paper, but much less so on the ground.

Across all the response situations reviewed, there has been a significant evolution of leadership and coordination arrangements over the past five years, with structures often proving transitory. This means that the precise configuration of coordination arrangements in place can only be treated as a snapshot of arrangements as mapped at one moment in time.

**Finding two: Prominent, if not dominant, among the variables impacting on UNHCR's leadership and coordination role are the role and position of host governments towards refugees and the support that UNHCR receives from other (donor) governments. Both factors are a part of the distinct political economies of crisis and response across different contexts.** In situations where host governments are reluctant or unwilling to admit and protect refugees and/or in highly insecure conflict-affected contexts, the responsibility for UNHCR to assert political authority, specifically on the protection of persons of concern, may be greatest, but its actual ability to lead and influence the protection response will be heavily impacted by the position and policies of the host government. When the government lacks the capacity or will to lead the response, UNHCR is often called upon to take an operational leadership role of (at least certain aspects of) the refugee response. As and when the government builds and expands its own response systems, this necessarily requires adjustments in UNHCR's leadership and coordination role. To add to this, the space for UNHCR to lead and coordinate refugee responses is also highly determined by other governments' responses and the international responsibility and burden-sharing arrangements that would be made available.

As a consequence, **UNHCR's de facto influence and authority may be constrained within the broader response system. This often affects its protection activities, either because of wider political circumstances surrounding the crisis, and/or because the amount of international funding managed by UNHCR is relatively**

<sup>1</sup> Although not the subject of this review, there are indications that the same can be said of the cluster approach, which has become a heavy bureaucratic system with pre-fabricated structures that do not necessarily address the exigencies on the ground.

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**small and new actors are working outside the usual UNHCR-managed response.** In many situations the influence of a single donor or a dominant grouping of donors, typically those with the greatest strategic interests in the situation, can be decisive for who leads and coordinates responses and how this is done. Therefore, in practice, UNHCR has highly variable levels and forms of effective authority to lead and coordinate a response. At one end of the spectrum, it has exercised such extensive authority over the entire response that its role has approached a form of state substitution; in other situations its role has been far more constrained, sometimes limited to low-profile advocacy focused on a very narrow spectrum of specific protection concerns.

**Finding three: There is considerable confusion in the interface and interactions between the multitude of (UN-led) international coordination mechanisms.** Refugee responses may overlap significantly with other humanitarian, development, human rights, and protection and peace/stabilization systems, some of which UNHCR may also be involved in directly (e.g. IDP assistance, responses to mixed flows, or development programmes benefiting populations of concern to UNHCR, and host communities). Especially in mixed flows, which see refugees together with IDPs, migrants and/or affected resident communities, there has been confusion and, at times, tension around how the multiple coordination platforms (e.g. the clusters and the RCM) intersect or, at least, can co-exist. Overall, the integration of refugee and IDP/ broader humanitarian response planning and coordination appears to have been very inconsistent to date, with tensions between status-based and needs-based responses representing a key (and often unresolved) issue of contention.

**Fundamentally, the RCM is not an easy fit with the Humanitarian Coordinator-led cluster approach, not only because of the different way in which the coordination of service delivery is structured, but also for accountability reasons.** The UNHCR Representative at the country level remains accountable for leading and coordinating the refugee response, while the Humanitarian Coordinator, as the most senior UN official in the country, is overseeing the entire humanitarian response. The potential issue of leadership and accountability in mixed situations may become even more pertinent in the context of the reformed UN development coordination framework, which sees a strengthened Resident Coordinator on top of the UN system, holding the UN agencies, including UNHCR, to account for their contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Finding four: While the range and influence of the external variables seen in refugee situations make coordination complex and unpredictable, one of the most significant factors in refugee coordination is the quality of UNHCR's leadership.** UNHCR's coordination role and its leadership are inter-linked. With partners not working under a UNHCR contract, UNHCR's de facto authority and credibility are derived in large part from the quality of its leadership, especially on protection matters. Many of the interviews and consultations undertaken for this desk review, especially those with external stakeholders, highlighted the importance of institutional leadership behaviour, specifically the leadership style employed by senior managers and Representatives, and the overall leadership culture of the organization. The view of partner organizations, which highlights the pivotal role of individual leaders in facilitating good coordination and inclusive responses, stands in contrast to UNHCR's internal debates on the types and mechanics of coordination structures required to deliver its coordination function.

### **Future Considerations**

Given the extent and complexity of external factors that UNHCR has to navigate and address to deliver on its mandate, we suggest that UNHCR develop a new approach to its leadership and coordination role in refugee settings.

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Prioritizing predictability by describing the model for refugee coordination and related accountabilities and by investing heavily in (more) coordination mechanisms and information products does not appear as the best way forward. The main suggestion of this review is for UNHCR to strengthen collective refugee responses by investing in its leadership role. This investment would enable the organization to become more intentionally agile, adaptive and strategic in its approaches to ensuring refugee protection and assistance within the prevailing circumstances of a given response situation. It would also be able to adjust its leadership and coordination role to influence multi-actor response systems so that they deliver the best possible outcomes for refugees.

To bring about this shift, we have identified four key priorities for UNHCR.

**First, UNHCR should devote more attention to leadership styles and behaviour, especially – but not limited to – the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).** The importance of UNHCR adopting a new role as catalyst in the collective search for new durable solutions as part of the GCR is now well recognized both internally and externally, and implies a form of leadership that prioritizes facilitation and support to others. With this change comes a more accommodating leadership style, rather than a directive one. The complexity and dynamism of all aspects of refugee response coordination highlighted by this desk review point strongly to the importance of UNHCR adopting a more catalytic and supportive role across all areas of refugee response. This would serve to complement more directive leadership where this is needed, not only in broader arenas of comprehensive responses but also in emergency response situations. Adopting a more horizontal and facilitative way of working alongside more directive forms of leadership will be all the more critical as UNHCR encounters an ever-increasing range of informal networks of civil society actors as part of the localization trend, and a more fragmented response architecture as a consequence. UNHCR will need to become more of facilitator than an implementer in leading and coordination refugee responses.

**Second, we suggest that UNHCR develop more systematic and strategic approaches to developing and implementing its leadership and coordination functions, and in a way that will inform how and when different forms of leadership and coordination will be most needed.** One avenue is to develop a theory of change (ToC) for each country situation, as a useful step in arriving at a shared understanding of UNHCR's (evolving) strategies and objectives. In developing a ToC, UNHCR will need to clarify what it expects to achieve in leading and engaging in coordination platforms. Another route for a more systematic approach is to develop a framework for understanding and analysing the external and internal factors that influence coordination contexts, coupled with UNHCR's leadership and coordination accountabilities. While external factors may present formidable barriers for the agency to exercise its mandate, the crucial issue is the type of leadership that it displays in addressing these challenges.

**Third, as UNHCR adapts its leadership and coordination role, it will need also to adjust its internal systems.** Much of its organizational systems have an internal, UNHCR-oriented focus. Planning, budgeting and performance appraisals do not sufficiently recognize what UNHCR staff do on behalf of collective efforts and in coordination with other actors. UNHCR should reward its Representatives for leading and undertaking coordination on behalf of the collective.

Fourth, as determined from interviews with key external stakeholders, **UNHCR needs to bring about a shift in the nature of its relationships with partner organizations and demonstrate clearly the importance that it attaches**

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**to developing a more adaptive and facilitative approach to leading and coordinating refugee responses.** While there is certainly an appreciation of UNHCR and its unique role in refugee response, there is also a clear expectation that UNHCR should further modernize its approach to leadership and coordination.

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## List of abbreviations

CCCM	Camp coordination and camp management
CGD	Center for Global Development
CRRF	Comprehensive refugee response framework
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
EU	European Union
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HRP	humanitarian response plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IDP	Internally displaced person(s)
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JRP	Joint Response Plan
MBTI	Myers-Briggs Typology Indicator
MYMP	Multi-year, Multi-partner (protection and solutions strategy)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCM	refugee coordination model
RMP	Refugee and Migration Platform
RMRP	Refugee and Migrant Response Plan
RRP / Ref RP	Refugee response plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSG	Strategic Steering Group (whole of Syria)
ToC	Theory of change
ToR	Terms of reference
UN	United Nations

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UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSF	United Nations Strategic Framework

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# 1. Introduction

In December 2018, an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). This gave new impetus to the global search for durable solutions for refugees and highlighted UNHCR's central role in working with governments and a wide variety of stakeholders "to mobilize support for the GCR and the achievement of its objectives on an equal footing, through more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing". Following its mandate, UNHCR has for decades led and coordinated international responses to refugee flows. The growing complexity of these, due to their increased, protracted and multi-dimensional nature, and the GCR create both opportunities and challenges for UNHCR to execute its leadership and coordination responsibilities.

This desk review seeks to examine and reflect on UNHCR's leadership and coordination role across a broad range of refugee response situations over the past five years with the aim of identifying key imperatives and priorities for the future development and implementation of that role. It particularly considers the opportunities, challenges and demands presented by new initiatives such as the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF), the GCR and the United Nations reform, as well as the mounting tests that UNHCR and partners face in responding effectively to mixed situations and mixed movements.

## 1.1 Scope and objectives

The primary audience the desk review includes UNHCR HQ, specifically the Partnerships and Coordination Service (PCS) and the Division of Emergency Security and Supply (DESS), and country-level UNHCR staff and managers participating in activities. The report will also be of specific interest to UNHCR partners and donors. The desk review was conducted between May and September 2019, and is intended to analyse relevant trends, identify good practices and summarize lessons learned across UNHCR's coordination and leadership function. It also considers some of the emerging coordination challenges and opportunities as UNHCR moves towards the catalytic and convening role envisaged in the GCR. The report is designed around the three main objectives of the review, namely:

- To map and, if possible, categorize the leadership and coordination structures in refugee response situations and explore how UNHCR engages with coordination structures across the range of contexts in which it works.
- To explore how predictable, transparent and accountable leadership and coordination arrangements are across different response settings and across the timeline of a response, and to explore the factors that contribute to or constrain effective and efficient refugee coordination.
- To identify any current trends or patterns in refugee response leadership and coordination that are relevant for future responses and assess the implications for UNHCR, particularly in terms of emerging priorities for future organizational investment and adaptation.

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Drawing on a wide range of documentary and key informant data sources,<sup>2</sup> the desk research focused on declared emergencies between 2014 and 2018 where UNHCR played a leading role in refugee response coordination. While primarily focused on UNHCR's role in refugee responses, the review also looked at how UNHCR interacts with other coordination systems including broader humanitarian coordination structures (including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster approach) and development partners.

To ensure that a wide spectrum of different refugee response situations was considered and explored in sufficient depth, a two-stage approach was taken involving:

- (a) an initial broad mapping to identify and, if possible, categorize the range of formal/institutional coordination and leadership arrangements that have been in place across 20 major refugee response situations globally over the past five years;<sup>3</sup> and
- (b) closer analysis of refugee response coordination and leadership in practice in a selection of 10 response contexts (specific countries).<sup>4</sup> The review, while considering mixed flows, did not examine UNHCR's role in responses concerning internally displaced persons (IDPs) or natural disasters.

The following section sets the scene conceptually, asking what is meant by 'leadership' and 'coordination' and how these are related. Coordination and leadership remain ambiguous terms and are often conflated, which contributes to much of the complexity that we have found.

While UNHCR is the only international organization with a clear legal mandate and accountability for refugee protection and assistance, it is always operating within a shared programming space and wider systems of local, national and international response or engagement – most notably government responses – which directly affect how it exercises its leadership and coordination roles in practice. Drawing on the findings of the mapping of refugee response arrangements over the past five years, Section 3 considers how UNHCR's effective leadership and coordination roles have varied across different response situations and some of the key factors that account for this variation.

In view of the dynamic, multi-layered and overlapping coordination arrangements and processes that the response mapping revealed, our forward-looking analysis in Section 4 asks whether and how UNHCR may need to reorient its approach to leading and coordinating refugee responses going forward. UNHCR will need to address the question as to what next steps it will take in ensuring effective leadership and coordination of refugee responses. Instead of strengthening a coordination model that seeks to (pre-)define its role, it appears that a more adaptive and agile form of institutional leadership and coordination role is expected from UNHCR in order that it is fit for purpose in a complex and fast-changing world.

<sup>2</sup> The desk review drew on four main data sources: (1) UNHCR documentation, including relevant situation-specific and thematic evaluations commissioned by UNHCR between 2014 and 2019; (2) evaluations commissioned by other agencies, (including operational and donor agencies); (3) relevant published and "grey" literature from external agencies and expert stakeholders; (4) key informant interviews and workshop and focus group discussions (see Annex 3).

<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Greece, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mexico, Niger, Pakistan, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

<sup>4</sup> Bangladesh, Cameroon, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Libya, Niger, Turkey and Uganda.

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## 2. What is meant by ‘leadership’ and ‘coordination’?

Across the documents and literature reviewed, there does not seem to be a clear, agreed understanding of what coordination and leadership actually mean or entail in humanitarian and/or refugee responses.<sup>5</sup> Leadership and coordination are both aimed at ensuring that diverse individuals and groups work together effectively.<sup>6</sup> The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) uses the two terms interchangeably when it refers to its “humanitarian coordination leadership function”.<sup>7</sup> UNHCR makes a distinction in terms of leadership and coordination accountabilities, although its “Refugee Coordination Guidance” provides no real clarity on the relationship between the two concepts.<sup>8</sup> Before looking at UNHCR’s leadership and coordination practices in recent years and in the future, these terms need to be considered, explained and better defined. This section seeks to clarify the inextricable relationship of the two concepts in UNHCR’s mandate.

### 2.1 Coordination

**UNHCR’s distinct mandate may encourage the organization to take a more directive and ambitious approach to coordination than other actors expect of response coordination.**

UNHCR’s Statute places the High Commissioner and the Office of the High Commissioner at the centre of the international refugee response system, including in respect of coordination functions.<sup>9</sup> Reflecting the organization’s unique responsibilities to protect and find solutions for refugees, UNHCR’s *Emergency Handbook* describes refugee coordination as “the act of bringing organizations under a common protection and solutions strategy to work together in clusters and sectors to deliver protection and services effectively to persons of concern”. UNHCR’s distinct mandate-based responsibilities therefore could imply a normative role that potentially leads to a more directive leadership and assertion of standards within a common framework.

Other actors, however, will not necessarily see themselves as part of a single system or as acting so directly under a common (protection) strategy, and instead may expect to coordinate with, rather than be coordinated by, UNHCR. For many humanitarian and other actors, coordination is a far less directive or ambitious concept; rather, it is limited

<sup>5</sup> For example, P. Knox Clarke and L. Campbell, *Exploring humanitarian coordination in clusters*, (ALNAP 2015), p.16.

<sup>6</sup> P. Knox Clarke. *Who’s in charge here? A literature review on approaches to leadership in humanitarian operations*, (ALNAP 2013),

<sup>7</sup> For example, OCHA briefing ‘Humanitarian Coordination Leadership’ at: [www.unocha.org/our-work/coordination/humanitarian-coordination-leadership](http://www.unocha.org/our-work/coordination/humanitarian-coordination-leadership) (accessed 30 April 2019)

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, “Updated refugee coordination guidance note”, 1 April 2019, (UNHCR 2019), [www.unhcr.org/5d7b50e74](http://www.unhcr.org/5d7b50e74)

<sup>9</sup> The Statute provides that the organization shall provide for the protection mandate by: “Keeping in close touch with the Governments and inter-governmental organizations concerned” (para. 8 (g)); “Facilitating the co-ordination of the efforts of private organizations concerned with the welfare of refugees” (para. 8 (i)); and “The High Commissioner may invite the co-operation of the various specialized agencies” (para. 12).

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to ensuring complementarity and preventing overlap between diverse actions and plans of different actors involved in refugee response.<sup>10</sup> Even within this definition, however, coordination can mean many different things, ranging from limited sharing of information through to close collaboration and full alignment of programmes and activities, and with variations in between. Behind this spectrum of coordination can lie two distinct objectives: 1) to maximize complementarity of various actors' mandates in pursuit of different goals; and 2) to work towards coherence and integration to achieve common goals.<sup>11</sup> These two objectives might be pursued simultaneously by UNHCR, without this being made explicit.

**Coordination challenges associated with mixed flows, mixed situations and comprehensive approaches have introduced new frameworks that interact with and sometimes complicate refugee response coordination.** Since 2013, UNHCR's refugee coordination model (RCM) has been the basis for the organization in leading and coordinating refugee operations. Although UNHCR had led and managed refugee operations for decades, it had previously not articulated its coordination role and approach on paper. Doing so became all the more necessary as the RCM was expected to clarify UNHCR's refugee coordination in relation to the IASC-endorsed cluster approach. Led by the most senior humanitarian UN Representative in the country, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), the cluster approach was designed in 2005 to coordinate the international humanitarian response in non-refugee crises to clarify accountabilities for service delivery in those responses. Refugee responses were not "clusterized", because the leadership and accountability for the response lies with UNHCR.

Historically, humanitarian coordination has seen two models: the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator-led model, representing the United Nations at the country level, and the lead agency model. This second model, used particularly in the 1990s, saw the Security Council or the Secretary-General (or, in theory, the IASC) deciding on the designation of the lead agency, usually an operational UN agency, which would then assume the overall coordination of the response on behalf of the system. UNHCR, for example, was the lead agency in the response to the crisis in the Balkans in the 1990s. With the cluster approach that has become the default model for humanitarian coordination since 2005; the lead agency model has not been used in any recent crisis. The RCM, however, closely resembles the lead agency model, and could be seen as subset of it.<sup>12</sup> It sees one operational agency in charge, but it is mostly applied simultaneously with other coordination models, given that many refugee crises are nowadays mixed with other humanitarian crises. The sole criterion for activating the RCM is the presence of a refugee population in a given area and the presence of UNHCR in the country in question. In contrast to the cluster approach, in which the response is partitioned in a variety of specific operational areas and subareas (such as shelter, health, education, protection), the RCM sees a more integrated approach to service delivery.

Much (operational) refugee coordination takes place in humanitarian settings and is therefore seen as a part of humanitarian coordination. However, refugee coordination increasingly intersects with development coordination frameworks. As part of recent reforms of the UN system, a new Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework has been developed for system-wide coordination at the country level. It replaces the old United Nations Development

<sup>10</sup> P. Knox Clarke and L. Campbell, *Exploring humanitarian coordination in clusters*, (ALNAP 2015),

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> It is remarkable though that the RCM does not contain references to its parent, the lead agency model.

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Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The new framework assigns the Resident Coordinator with increased authority when it comes to setting system-wide goals and objectives at the country level in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Each agency will be obliged to clarify its contribution to achieving these goals. UNHCR's refugee coordination objectives will have to fit this new framework. Further to this, the GCR, adopted by UN member States in 2018, commits UNHCR to playing a catalytic and supportive role in contributing to the task of all States and other relevant stakeholders in order to mobilize support for the GCR and achieve its objectives on an equal footing, through more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing.<sup>13</sup> Much of the GCR commits UNHCR to work with member States as well as a wide variety of other stakeholders on durable solutions as part of broader sustainable development efforts.

## 2.2 Leadership

**Leadership is the crucial ingredient to making humanitarian and/or refugee response coordination work properly, and it carries both institutional and individual dimensions.**<sup>14</sup> As with coordination, there is a range of definitions of 'leadership', with many focused on the skills and abilities required of humanitarian leaders as individuals.<sup>15</sup> UNHCR's leadership, however, should also be looked at from an institutional perspective. As an institution, the agency is mandated to lead refugee responses.<sup>16</sup> This desk review considers the interrelated challenges of institutional leadership by the organization and associated demands on individual leaders within it. After all, it is individuals who shape an institution and implement its mission. Recent research shows that a chief executive officer's or a country representative's leadership and their understanding of an organization's mission makes a major difference to the way in which organizations define their priorities.<sup>17</sup>

The quality and nature of institutional leadership shapes how UNHCR approaches and resolves both higher-level coherence problems at a strategic level and a multitude of more practical coordination challenges at different levels in the delivery of assistance and protection operations. How UNHCR as an organization tackles strategic coherence challenges will influence its operational coordination role, and vice versa. A more directive type of leadership and coordination, for example, might apply equally to how UNHCR seeks to achieve coherence on refugee protection in the UN system and to its direction of programme integration among the implementing (i.e. contractual) partners with which it coordinates.<sup>18</sup>

Since the strengthening of humanitarian leadership as one of the three pillars of the 2005 ERC-led humanitarian reform process, much has been invested in improving the cadre of people fit for humanitarian leadership positions,

<sup>13</sup> Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), para. 101.

<sup>14</sup> N. Reindorp and P. Wiles, *Humanitarian coordination: lessons from recent field experience*, (OCHA and ODI 2001), p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> For example, M. Buchanan-Smith and K. Scriven, *Leadership in Action: Leading effectively in humanitarian operations*, (ALNAP 2011).

<sup>16</sup> See UNHCR, "Note on the Mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees and His Office", (2013), [www.refworld.org/docid/5268c9474.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/5268c9474.html) (accessed December 2019)

<sup>17</sup> HERE-Geneva, "Humanitarianism unpacked", (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> P. Knox Clarke and L. Campbell, *Improving humanitarian coordination*, (ALNAP 2016) p.6.

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including not only Humanitarian Coordinators, but also people suitable for cluster coordinator positions. UNHCR appears to have made a number of investments in leadership development and training as well. Several of its learning programmes have been in place for years, if not decades. The 2015 version of UNHCR's *Emergency Handbook*, for example, includes a section that describes in some detail what is expected of a coordinator as a person-oriented leader and includes several references to practical tools and methods.

The GCR refers to UNHCR's catalytic and supportive role in relation to member States and other stakeholders. In the absence of a further elaboration of the term 'catalytic' by UNHCR, this review understands such a role as one that facilitates, supports and accelerates the creation of a constituency, platform or initiatives that protect refugees and search for durable solutions with various networks. While it does not exclude UNHCR's direct operational engagement, one can easily foresee that the catalytic role involves leadership that has facilitation, providing space and support to others as its key characteristics. Examining UNHCR's catalytic role in more detail requires delving into the issue of leadership styles – an issue that goes beyond the GCR and is likely to be applicable to all UNHCR's coordination roles and environments.

The issue of leadership styles, however, appears to have received relatively little attention in the humanitarian world so far. Two opposite styles can be discerned.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, there is a "command-and-control" style that is predominantly leader-centred and directive. This style is solutions-oriented, and while good for executing decisions, getting things done and reducing ambiguity, it is not inspiring or team-oriented. On the other hand, there is a style that involves actively seeking participation, listening and experiencing. This leadership style is accommodating to change, more transformative and harnesses collective input, but it provides less certainty than the first. Good leadership is not a matter of adopting either one or the other style; instead it sees the application of both styles at right time and in the right doses. It requires full awareness from the leader of when to apply best which leadership style.

For certain responsibilities, such as emergency response in a sudden-onset mass influx or for mandated protection tasks that only UNHCR can do, it may need to be more top-down and directive for a period of time. In coordinating refugee responses with partners outside the United Nations or contractual agreements – i.e. with a voluntary grouping of independent organizations – where the objective of complementarity is more relevant and feasible, UNHCR may need to demonstrate more accommodation.<sup>20</sup> Yet, as observed in a 2010 UNHCR research paper that compared the organizational culture and decision-making process with the requirements of partnership and collaboration as seen in the cluster approach, UNHCR's default leadership approach may have tended more towards the directive style in the past; it noted hierarchical processes "mirroring its vertical values, assumptions, and behaviour in its relations with external partners" and potentially "contradicting the emerging horizontal task culture of inter-agency collaboration".<sup>21</sup> Our reference to this 2010 finding from a UNHCR member of staff is only intended to suggest that UNHCR leaders

<sup>19</sup> From a presentation by Professor Martha Maznevski: "Hercules meets Buddha and other humanitarian leaders", HERE-Geneva Round Table, 25 October 2019. Meeting report available at [http://here-geneva.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HERELeadershipEvent\\_25-Oct-2019-website.pdf](http://here-geneva.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HERELeadershipEvent_25-Oct-2019-website.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> M. Gottwald, "Competing in the marketplace: UNHCR's organizational culture and decision-making processes", *New Issues in Refugee Research*, no. 190, (UNHCR 2010).

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may be more familiar with the first style of leadership than with the second<sup>22</sup> – something that may need to be revisited if UNHCR is to play a more catalytic role in future comprehensive responses as envisaged by the GCR. Indeed, as discussed further in Section 4, our analysis points to a more catalytic role being demanded of UNHCR across all stages and areas of refugee response in the future, including in emergency response situations.

<sup>22</sup> It could even be argued that a more directive leadership style may be needed in order to overcome the problems of the cluster approach, especially the heavy emphasis on the coordination process and too much fragmentation of the response.

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## 3. Leadership and coordination: factors influencing current practice

Our reflections on the underlying concepts of leadership and coordination as outlined above are, of course, only relevant when they are put in the context of current coordination practices. This section delves into these practices following an extensive desk-based review of a wide variety of contexts and coordination arrangements in which UNHCR is involved. Drawing on a combination of documentary and key informant sources, this desk review combined a mapping and analysis of coordination structures with scrutiny of contextual factors influencing refugee coordination arrangements and processes across different refugee response situations (see Annex 1 for a summary of coordination arrangements mapped across 20 response contexts).

### 3.1 UNHCR's shared coordination space

**In carrying out its refugee response coordination role, UNHCR is always operating within a shared programming space and wider systems of engagement while, at the same time, holding accountability for the refugee response.**

UNHCR's mandate-based responsibilities and accountabilities are multidimensional: they span protection, assistance and solutions for refugees and other persons of concern and encompass a wide range of leadership and coordination activities including emergency preparedness, resource mobilization, relief distribution, status determination, protection advocacy, monitoring, development action and representing populations of concern in a quasi-diplomatic and consular role.<sup>23</sup> UNHCR is also accountable in different ways and for different activities to a variety of entities – including the General Assembly, its Executive Committee, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams, donors, host governments, regional organizations and refugees and other populations of concern – with varying legal foundations for its different roles and activities in relation to different stakeholders and in respect of different populations of concern.

Complicating matters further is the extent to which the organization's responsibilities for delivering protection, assistance and solutions for refugees are shared with other actors; every protection and assistance responsibility listed in UNHCR's refugee coordination guidance is shared to a greater or lesser extent with other actors, including

<sup>23</sup> V. Türk and E. Eyster, "Strengthening UNHCR's system of accountability", (UNHCR 2009)

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(most importantly) the host government as the primary duty bearer (for example, see Box 1 for a description of how Uganda's refugee response arrangements reflect this shared programming space).

In this shared programming space, refugee responses may overlap significantly with other development, humanitarian, human rights, and protection and peace/stabilization systems, some of which UNHCR may also be involved in directly – for example, IDP assistance, responses to mixed movements or development programmes benefiting populations of concern to UNHCR, and host communities.<sup>24</sup> UN structures at country level therefore add a further layer of complexity to UNHCR's accountability and authority to lead and coordinate refugee responses. For instance, UNHCR is accountable to the Resident Coordinator for programming that supports the development framework where UNHCR is engaged with development activities within the UNDAF – which has now been replaced by the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), with the 2030 Agenda as its centrepiece. There may be a question of conceptual hierarchy between UNHCR's programming as part of the GCR and the UNSDCF, which is the primary collective performance framework for (other) UN agencies. While UNHCR is clearly accountable for its refugee mandate to the General Assembly, including supervisory responsibilities in relation to governments' compliance with their international obligations, it will also have to report to the Resident Coordinator on SDG implementation. With the current drive to deliver more comprehensive approaches to refugee protection, assistance and solutions under the GCR, there is a risk of considerable ambiguity around who, between UNHCR and the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, has ultimate responsibility for determining and directing the UN refugee response.<sup>25</sup> The RC and UNHCR will have to develop a mutually functional relationship, even more so in mixed IDP-refugee situations where a variety of coordination and leadership arrangements have been implemented.

UNHCR's own differing responsibilities for IDPs as compared with refugees adds further complexity to response coordination in mixed situations. As the cluster lead agency for protection, camp coordination and camp management (CCCM), and shelter in IDP responses, UNHCR has specific coordination accountabilities.<sup>26</sup> Application of the OCHA–UNHCR joint note has been very patchy to date, and in many mixed refugee-IDP situations, UNHCR continues to lead and implement a separate refugee response. This has proved more difficult to maintain in some countries than others – for example, in Cameroon, where refugee and IDP populations have been very mixed, compared to Chad, where the refugee response has been mainly focused on a relatively small camp-based population. In Niger, application of the joint note has led to efforts to integrate the refugee response with the cluster-led humanitarian response, as described below; however, this arrangement appears to have led to quite confused and unstable hybrid coordination arrangements. Overall, the integration of refugee and IDP/broader humanitarian response planning and coordination appears to have been very inconsistent to date. UNHCR staff have also noted that in mixed refugee-IDP situations, UNHCR may tend to favour its refugee responsibilities as these activities are

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR, "Updated refugee coordination guidance note", 1 April 2019, (UNHCR 2019), [www.unhcr.org/5d7b50e74](http://www.unhcr.org/5d7b50e74)

<sup>25</sup> An evaluation of UNHCR's emergency response to the influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey over an 18-month period in 2014–2015 illustrates the potential for tension around this question; in that situation, there was no clear agreement between the Resident Coordinator and the UNHCR Representative regarding who had overall coordination responsibility for UN agencies supporting refugees in Turkey, and in particular for representing the United Nations to the Government of Turkey on refugee matters. A. Caglar, Y. Conoir, J. Murray, V. Thomas, N. Ulkuer, "Evaluation of UNHCR's emergency response to the influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey January 2014 – June 2015", (UNHCR 2015), pp.15-19.

<sup>26</sup> See Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), 'Evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services', (OIOS 2017), at: [file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/1486757616\\_1\\_E\\_AC.51\\_2017\\_2\\_UNHCR.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/1486757616_1_E_AC.51_2017_2_UNHCR.pdf) (accessed on 16 October 2019). See also Annex 1.

usually less sensitive or controversial with the government concerned. By contrast, UNHCR's partners, including donors, other UN agencies and NGOs, have raised the issue of "needs versus status" as they feel that UNHCR's focus on status may result in a disproportionate response – in other words, the focus on refugees implies (inadvertently) the neglect of IDPs (and others) whose needs may be more urgent. Tensions between status- and needs-based responses may be heightened somewhat by the relative visibility of UNHCR's refugee response role compared with its shared coordination role in IDP responses, and in some cases by any collective weaknesses in the IDP response as was reported by UNHCR staff as an issue in the cases of Chad and Cameroon.

A compounding factor has been the poor connectivity of the (IDP-related) clusters and UNHCR's (refugee response) sectors. Since the 2005 humanitarian reforms, when the clusters were introduced, they follow a structure in which UN agencies, often in a co-led arrangement with NGOs, have responsibility for a certain service area. A structural problem with the clusters is that they have led to a fragmentation of the response whereby the clusters and sub-clusters (for protection called areas of responsibility) have become silos. By contrast, traditionally, the RCM follows a more integrated structure or holistic approach as it combines several service areas, such as shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), site planning and management and community services. While the partnership element, and, especially the co-leadership, are features that speak in favour of the clusters as they increase

### **Box 1: Coordination in the context of government leadership: the case of Uganda**

The Government of Uganda (GoU) now includes refugee management and protection within its own national development planning framework (NDP II 2015/16 – 2019/20). The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) with support from UNHCR leads the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF, launched in 2017). It incorporates both the humanitarian refugee response (emergencies and protracted situations) under a Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and development-oriented interventions including the Refugee and Host Populations Framework (ReHoPE) under the UNDAF. The CRRF Steering Group, co-chaired by the OPM and Ministry of Local Government, steers implementation of the CRRF, and is supported by a CRRF Secretariat. Meanwhile, the United Nations Country Team in Uganda is expected to introduce, expand and/or accelerate its existing programmes and initiatives in refugee-hosting regions and districts in order to meet the socioeconomic needs of the refugee and host populations, while the Resident Coordinator will continue to coordinate UN agencies under the development responsibilities. Numerous other coordinating platforms are also linked to the CRRF governance framework, including sector working groups, the Humanitarian Donor Partners Group, the CRRF Development Partners Groups, the National NGO Forum, and the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat for the East and Horn of Africa. International financial institutions including the World Bank are increasingly involved in financing the refugee response in Uganda, adding further complexity to the coordination of the response. The operational coordination of refugee response under the RRP takes place within a dedicated refugee coordination structure in refugee-hosting areas with four levels of coordination: leadership level (co-led by the OPM and UNHCR); inter-agency at country level (co-led by the OPM, Ministry of Local Government and UNHCR); technical sector level (co-led by the Government, United Nations and NGO partners for each sector); inter-agency and sector structures at district/settlement level (co-led by the OPM, local government departments. and the UNHCR co-chair).

Sources: "Roadmap for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in Uganda 2018 – 2020", <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64290> (accessed 16 October 2019); and UNHCR, Regional Refugee Coordination Office (RRC), Nairobi, "Uganda country Refugee Response Plan Jan 2019-Dec 2020: the integrated response plan for refugees from South Sudan, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo" (revised in March 2019), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/69674> (accessed 7 June 2019).

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ownership and engagement, the advantage of the RCM lies in its operational integration. The structure of the Rohingya response in Bangladesh, which has combined elements of the clusters and the RCM, was initially heavily critiqued by several evaluations for allowing this combination and further blurring accountability lines.<sup>27</sup> If, however, this response succeeds in combining the two approaches, it may well provide very informative lessons on how such a combination could be put into effect in the future. In mixed situations, area-based coordination is another initiative that seeks better integration of the different coordination arrangements for refugees, IDPs and other affected people. In this model, one organization, possibly UNHCR, assumes the coordination for all humanitarian activities on behalf of the Humanitarian Coordinator in a certain part of a country. It takes a multisectoral approach, instead of the fragmented sectors that are seen in the cluster approach.

## 3.2 Context issues

**Leadership and coordination arrangements are closely tied to context-specific and dynamic political economies of crisis and response.** UNHCR's own guidance on coordination arrangements for refugee response acknowledges that the "manner in which UNHCR exercises its coordination responsibilities is context specific".<sup>28</sup> This is certainly confirmed by the findings of this desk review. Perhaps more significantly, though, our findings indicate that, within each context, leadership and coordination arrangements are closely tied to distinct political economies of crisis and response that evolve dynamically (and sometimes fairly rapidly) over time. Thus, prescribed or standardized approaches or predetermined structures exist on paper, but much less so on the ground. The mapping reveals that coordination arrangements do not only vary across different contexts, but also that there is no clear pattern or typology of arrangements that could help to match any particular type of coordination structure with a particular type of context or refugee situation. Instead, our review reveals a broad range of strategic multi-actor response frameworks or plans across different response situations with a correspondingly broad range of refugee response coordination arrangements – as reflected in the overview of leadership and coordination structures and arrangements across 20 response settings presented in Annex 1. Across all the response situations reviewed, there has been a significant evolution of leadership and coordination arrangements over the past five years, with structures often proving transitory. This means that the precise configuration of coordination arrangements in place (including those summarized in Annex 1) can only be treated as a snapshot of arrangements as mapped at one moment in time.

Taken on its own, therefore, the RCM, which is designed to manage refugee responses in a predictable way across different settings, does not make adequate sense of the complex arenas and dynamics of response that UNHCR has to contend with.<sup>29</sup> In reality, UNHCR has highly variable levels and forms of effective authority to lead and coordinate the response. At one end of the spectrum, it has exercised such extensive authority over the entire response that its

<sup>27</sup> See L. Sida, F. Jahan, Mamun-ur-Rashid, T. Nelis, R. Lakshman, "Independent evaluation of UNHCR's emergency response to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh – August 2017 – September 2018, (UNHCR 2018),; and E. Schenkenberg, R. Luff, A. Bush, F. Ballarin, L. Olsen, 'Evaluation of UNICEF's response to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh', (UNICEF 2018),

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Although not the subject of this review, there are indications that the same can be said of the cluster approach, which has become a heavily bureaucratic system with prefabricated structures that do not necessarily address the exigencies on the ground.

role has approached a form of state substitution,<sup>30</sup> but in other situations its role has been far more constrained, sometimes limited to low-profile advocacy focused on a very narrow spectrum of specific protection concerns.

The precise form that response coordination takes in any particular setting will probably owe less to UNHCR's predetermined application of its refugee coordination model than to the specific circumstances of displacement and the main factors and drivers influencing a government's responses and/or wider international engagement – and hence also to the higher-level (multi-agency) response plans or frameworks developed by the key strategic players (donors, agencies and governments), and the capacities and priorities that these reflect. The likelihood is that UNHCR will have to agree or negotiate the refugee response component of these plans on both an ongoing and a case-by-case basis (see Box 2).

## Box 2: The influence of strategic priorities on leadership and coordination arrangements for refugee responses

**Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of):** Reflecting the overarching strategic designation of outflows from Venezuela as a mixed movement situation by host and donor governments, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have been jointly tasked by the Secretary-General with coordinating and steering the response on behalf of the United Nations. A Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform was established in September 2018 with corresponding country-level coordination platforms set up in host countries.

Source: Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Colombia January – December 2019, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2019%20RMRP%20Venezuela%20%28December%202018%29.pdf> (accessed 4 October 19).

**Lebanon:** In Lebanon, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) responding to the Syrian refugee crisis is a stand-alone national “chapter” of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) regional plan led jointly by UNHCR and UNDP, and is linked to the current UN Strategic Framework for Lebanon (with both humanitarian and stabilization dimensions). While the United Nations characterizes Syrian arrivals as refugees, the Government of Lebanon has framed them as a mass influx of temporarily displaced people. Lebanon has received exceptionally high levels of financial support in recent years owing to a donor policy agenda promoted by the European Union and its member States, which seeks to ensure that Syrian refugees stay in regional host countries; this agenda underpins the EU–Turkey Agreement that the EU Compacts signed with Jordan and Lebanon in 2016. According to a recent independent assessment of Lebanon's refugee response arrangements, the quality of asylum for Syrian refugees in Lebanon remains “dismal” despite unprecedented levels of donor funding (in 2018, this amounted to more than \$1 billion in humanitarian funding and more than \$11 billion in development-focused grants and loans for the next 10 years) – raising questions about the ability of donors and UNHCR to deliver protection for Syrian refugees. By early 2018, the coordination structure in Lebanon had also reportedly become “extraordinarily complex”, with multiple and sometimes mutually conflicting decision-making centres and agendas, due partly to the complexity of Lebanon's political system. While initially focused on delivering humanitarian assistance, the complexity of the response reportedly increased in 2016 with the inclusion of development funding, governed by its own set of political rules and conditions.

Sources: 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan In Response to the Syria Crisis Regional Strategic Overview 2019/2020, (2019), [file:///D:/Lebanon/syria\\_sr\\_strategic\\_overview\\_2019.pdf](file:///D:/Lebanon/syria_sr_strategic_overview_2019.pdf) (accessed 4 June 2019); Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2020 (2019 update), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/68651> (accessed 4 June 2019); and A. Uzulac and J. Meester, “Is there protection in the region? Leveraging funds and political capital in Lebanon's refugee crisis”, CRU Report, Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations 2018).

<sup>30</sup> A. Slaughter and J. Crisp, “A surrogate state? The role of UNHCR in protracted refugee situations”, *New Issues in Refugee Research*, No.168, (UNHCR 2009)

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## 3.3 Coordination with host governments

**For UNHCR to deliver on its refugee coordination mandate it has, of course, to support and work closely with the host government.** The specific leadership and coordination arrangements arrived at among UN and other international agencies in a host country are always interlinked to some degree with certain government structures and/or government-led coordination mechanisms. Indeed, governments' own structures, policies and response arrangements often play a primary role in influencing the coordination structures and processes established by UNHCR and other international actors and how these interact with different levels and parts of government. In Lebanon, for example, the government was initially prepared to outsource management of the refugee response to the United Nations, but there was subsequently much greater involvement and even gradual takeover of some sectors by relevant line ministries and new restrictions imposed on some interventions.<sup>31</sup> In Uganda, responsibility for refugees sits largely within the Office of the Prime Minister's Department of Refugees, supported by UNHCR and NGOs, rather than being fully embedded in the portfolios of specific ministries. A process is, however, now under way to strengthen the alignment of sector working groups within the refugee response with government sector groups under the National Development Plan, and the refugee education, health and WASH sector working groups are now co-chaired by the respective line ministries.<sup>32</sup>

Coordination and protection are closely linked. While UNHCR clearly holds the legal authority to advocate for refugee rights and protection and to monitor governments' protection of refugees, the broader *de facto* recognition of UNHCR's authority to lead on protection and to coordinate responses cannot be assumed. Indeed, in the protection sphere more than any other, both the imperatives and the ability of UNHCR to exercise its distinct legal and political authority over the protection response is heavily contingent upon the host government's stance.

In situations where host governments are reluctant or unwilling to admit and protect refugees and/or in highly insecure conflict-affected contexts, the responsibility for UNHCR to assert political authority over the protection response may be greatest, but its actual ability to lead and influence the protection response will be heavily impacted by the obstacles put in the way. Albeit extreme, the situation in Libya may serve as an example. The country's current humanitarian response plan (HRP) reports that although the Government of Libya is party to the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and also the Arab Charter of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, these legal instruments are not applied in Libya, thereby rendering asylum-seekers and refugees exposed and subject to arbitrary detention.<sup>33</sup> In Lebanon, although refugees have been allowed to stay, Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and UNHCR is only present on the basis of the government's invitation. There is also a

<sup>31</sup> A. Uzulac and J. Meester, "Is there protection in the region? Leveraging funds and political capital in Lebanon's refugee crisis", CRU Report, Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations 2018), p.82.

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR, Regional Refugee Coordination Office (RRC), Nairobi, Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan: The integrated response plan for refugees from South Sudan, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo January 2019 – December 2020, (2019), p.38.

<sup>33</sup> Libya Humanitarian Response Plan January – December 2019 (November 2018 version), [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019\\_LBY\\_HRP-FINAL.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_LBY_HRP-FINAL.pdf) (accessed 9 October 2019).

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lack of clarity over the sharing of responsibilities between UNHCR and the government.<sup>34</sup> In the response to the August 2017 Rohingya influx in Bangladesh, UNHCR was initially pushed aside by the government as it favoured IOM in leading the inter-agency coordination efforts.

UNHCR is often called upon to take on the operational leadership role of, at least, certain aspects of the refugee response where the government lacks the capacity or will to lead the response. But even in these situations, the delegation of operational leadership to UNHCR may only be for a limited time, for example, following a sudden influx or escalation of a crisis. As and when the government builds and expands its own response systems, for example in Greece and Turkey, this necessarily requires adjustments in UNHCR's leadership and coordination role. Even where national operational leadership capacity requires UNHCR's full operational engagement and support in the response, both donor and host governments may still assert a significant level of strategic leadership over the protection space, directly limiting UNHCR's own leadership capacities over refugees' protection, as seen in Lebanon.

Where host governments are willing to admit and offer protection to refugees, UNHCR may have more space to exercise its political authority in a supportive role in relation to the host government, but at the same time there may be less political imperative for UNHCR to be leading a protection response (for instance, in Uganda – see Box 1). In Uganda's progressive policy context, the priorities for UNHCR are focused on the challenges of ensuring adequate assistance and successful implementation of comprehensive approaches in partnership with development actors. Colombia, on the other hand, presents a different case, and one that underlines the context-specificity of UNHCR's protection role more generally. While the Government of Colombia has maintained an open-door policy to new arrivals from Venezuela, UNHCR has still maintained a significant protection focus due to the range of specific protection issues and protection risks faced by many Venezuelans in Colombia, such as status regularization, documentation recognition, or risks of trafficking or smuggling.

### 3.4 Refugee coordination in a broader geopolitical context

**UNHCR's refugee response coordination role is contingent on geopolitics.** As regards mixed refugee and migrant situations in particular, UNHCR's role appears to be strongly influenced by both host and donor governments' political or strategic framing and definition of the populations concerned, and by governments' political objectives or positioning regarding the migrant and refugee populations concerned (such as in Turkey, Greece, Libya, in the Venezuela response or in Mexico). UNHCR is accountable to the international community for the treatment of refugees in these situations, but (de facto) refugee populations may not be given recognition as refugees or asylum-seekers by the governments concerned. Some populations that UNHCR and other international actors might have deemed to be refugees have been designated by host governments as 'mixed refugee and migrant' populations, for example countries hosting Venezuelans, forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals – the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh,<sup>35</sup> or "temporarily displaced people" or "guests" in the cases of Lebanon and Turkey respectively concerning Syrian refugees. Security or other circumstances may make status determination extremely difficult, as in Libya, or restrictive asylum determination procedures may result in many refugees being categorized as migrants

<sup>34</sup> Uzulac and Meester, op. cit., pp.46-47.

<sup>35</sup> This situation involved only refugees.

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or moving as migrants, often irregularly, as seen in Greece and other EU member States. In practice – and often reflecting their own politically driven framing of the situation as a migration or mixed movement situation – donor and/or host governments may accord as much or greater responsibility and authority, if not any formal accountability, to IOM as to UNHCR, as initially seen in the response to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

When it comes to large-scale assistance operations to deliver relief to refugees and often host communities and other populations in need of assistance, both UNHCR's ability to lead and coordinate assistance and whatever wider arrangements are put in place to manage the response depend very directly on the relative scale of donor funding and the relative share of the overall funding that is managed by UNHCR. Donors frequently, perhaps usually, are not entirely aligned with one another on their preferences and priorities for how a particular response should be organized and who should lead it. But in many situations the influence of a single donor or a dominant grouping of donors – typically those donors with the greatest strategic interests in the situation – can be decisive for who leads and coordinates responses and how this is done. The recent change from a joint leadership and coordination arrangement between IOM and UNHCR to an HRP situation in Libya, shows that when donor preferences and priorities shift, so too might the structures and arrangements for responding to the needs of refugees and other people needing humanitarian assistance that donors support.

Where UNHCR plays a central role in mobilizing donor funding for refugee response, this can translate into a correspondingly leading role in directing and coordinating the refugee response as a whole, particularly where the response is managed on the basis of the RCM and where funding is concentrated on the activities of UNHCR's implementing partners. However, even where clear UNHCR-led RCM structures and partnerships are in place, chronic underfunding and other factors such as insecurity and lack of humanitarian access can significantly constrain effective response coordination. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, the current RRP (2019–2020) reports that the overall refugee response is critically underfunded, which has resulted in core refugee programming being forced to focus on registration and other protection activities, the development of sites and the provision of basic assistance and services to newly-arrived populations while the provision of and better access to protection, shelter, health and nutrition services have had to be restricted.<sup>36</sup>

UNHCR's de facto influence and authority may be constrained within the broader response system, often impacting on the organization's protection activities, either because of wider political circumstances surrounding the crisis, and/or because the amount of international funding managed by UNHCR is relatively small and new actors are working outside the usual UNHCR-managed response. In Turkey and Colombia, the amount of donor funding for the refugee response managed by UNHCR has been dwarfed by the sums managed (and/or contributed) by the government and/or regional organization involved. In Greece, during the 2015 onset of the Mediterranean refugee situation, the absence of effective interventions by either national governments or the humanitarian community created space for new actors. As usual, local communities were the first to respond, but they were quickly joined by at least 200 volunteer groups across Europe, most of which were formed during 2015 or early 2016. Although the

<sup>36</sup> Democratic Republic of the Congo Country Refugee Response Plan January 2019 – December 2020, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/DRC%202019-2020%20Country%20RRP%20%28February%202019%29.pdf>.

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international NGOs and UNHCR became operational eventually, “their influx was both welcome and destabilising”.<sup>37</sup> Similar experiences have occurred in Somalia where civil society networks gather local Islamic NGOs and activists around the provision of social services and humanitarian assistance, also because the traditional international humanitarian agencies struggle to overcome the barrier of insecurity on the ground.<sup>38</sup> Although perhaps small-scale, many of these informal or civil society efforts, which fall outside the scope of a formal RRP or HRP, do have an impact on the lives of refugees and other forcibly displaced people. In Lebanon, meanwhile, the scale on international donor funding has enabled UNHCR to effectively “coordinate through the allocation of resources”.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.5 Security constraints

**In all humanitarian response situations, including refugee responses, the security context has a direct bearing on whether and how – and how effectively – UNHCR can effectively lead and coordinate refugee protection and assistance.** Insecurity often directly hampers relief and protection efforts and/or directly influences the overall response framework and coordination structures. For instance, in Libya, the operating environment is highly unstable, complex and dynamic, continuously challenging humanitarian access and response planning and coordination. Protection and assistance needs are acute as a result of people’s exposure, vulnerability and inability to cope with conflict and violence, human rights violations and abuses, contamination from explosive hazards in urban areas, breakdown of the rule of law and major challenges to people’s access to critical services and essential goods and commodities. Correspondingly, response strategy falls in the main under an HRP and is focused on people with the most severe humanitarian needs. Outside the framework of the HRP, UNHCR and IOM are jointly establishing a Refugee and Migrant Platform (RMP) to support and coordinate activities focused on finding solutions for refugees and migrants stranded in Libya.<sup>40</sup>

In the case of the Venezuela response, Colombia was the only country in the region with an existing humanitarian architecture due to ongoing armed conflict and its much larger IDP population, including a cluster system. It is hence the only country where the UNHCR and IOM-led Inter-Agency Mixed Migration Flows Group (GIFMM) established a “back-to-back” system with the humanitarian coordination architecture.<sup>41</sup> In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the remoteness of certain operational zones combined with high security risks, poor roads and other infrastructural weaknesses have directly restricted the coverage (and associated leadership and coordination) of UNHCR-led refugee protection and assistance.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> P. Currión, “Network humanitarianism”, HPG Working paper, (2018), p.7.

<sup>38</sup> Saggiomo, V. (2014), *Building the State From Below. Networks of NGOs in Somalia*. In, Anceschi, L., Gervasio, G., Teti, A., *Informal Powers in the Greater Middle East. Hidden Geographies*. Chapter 9.

<sup>39</sup> Uzulac A. and Meester J. (2018), ‘Is There Protection in the Region? Leveraging funds and political capital in Lebanon’s refugee crisis’, CRU Report, Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations), p.44.

<sup>40</sup> *Libya Humanitarian Response Plan January – December 2019 (Nov 2018 version)*: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019\\_LBY\\_HRP-FINAL.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_LBY_HRP-FINAL.pdf) (accessed 16/10/19).

<sup>41</sup> ‘RRMRP for Colombia Jan – Dec 2019’ at: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2019%20RRMRP%20Venezuela%20%28December%202018%29.pdf> (accessed 04/10/19).

<sup>42</sup> *Democratic Republic of the Congo Country Refugee Response Plan January 2019-December 2020*: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/DRC%202019-2020%20Country%20RRP%20%28February%202019%29.pdf>.

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## 3.6 UNHCR's leadership style

**Many of the interviews and consultations undertaken for this review, especially those with external stakeholders, raised the issue of leadership and UNHCR's behaviour. The frequency and intensity with which it was raised appear to point to an issue in terms of partners' perspectives on the specific characteristics of UNHCR's leadership style. The partners' attention to this issue stands in contrast to UNHCR's focus on coordination structures as part of this review.**

Especially, but not only, NGOs referred to UNHCR's leadership style in terms of command and control. Part of this can be explained as many of UNHCR's relationships with NGOs are contractual, implementing partnership arrangements. With a number of large international NGOs, UNHCR has developed privileged relationships and it approaches them more as strategic partners, raising the question of whether a different kind of behaviour occurs with this approach. It should also be kept in mind that a number of international NGOs have developed significant protection departments and capacities, and that they may no longer be inclined to accept UNHCR's position on protection issues without further consultation. In Bangladesh, for example, an overly authoritative UNHCR leadership style created tensions with the organization's main partners. As the evaluation of UNHCR's Rohingya response notes: "Sometimes it is not enough to be right – you have to be seen to be right too and people need to understand and come with you on that journey. [...] Investment in building networks and partnerships that can be relied on in difficult moments is as important as the technical judgement and expertise that UNHCR brings."<sup>43</sup> On certain

### **Box 3: Competing in the humanitarian marketplace – UNHCR's organizational culture and decision-making processes**

In October 2010, UNHCR's Policy and Evaluation Service published a research paper, "Competing in the marketplace: UNHCR's organizational culture and decision-making processes". The paper contrasted UNHCR's internal vertical way of working with the cluster approach, which requires a horizontal process and a more consultative form of leadership. It offered evidence that the two do not match: "Various field-oriented and practical trainings confirm that staff have a tendency towards vertical behaviour and directive leadership. How can UNHCR staff acquire horizontal coordination, and leadership skills and attitudes, despite the fact that inside the organisation they face – on a day to day basis – behavioural processes wherein vertical rather than horizontal skills and attitudes are solicited and rewarded?"

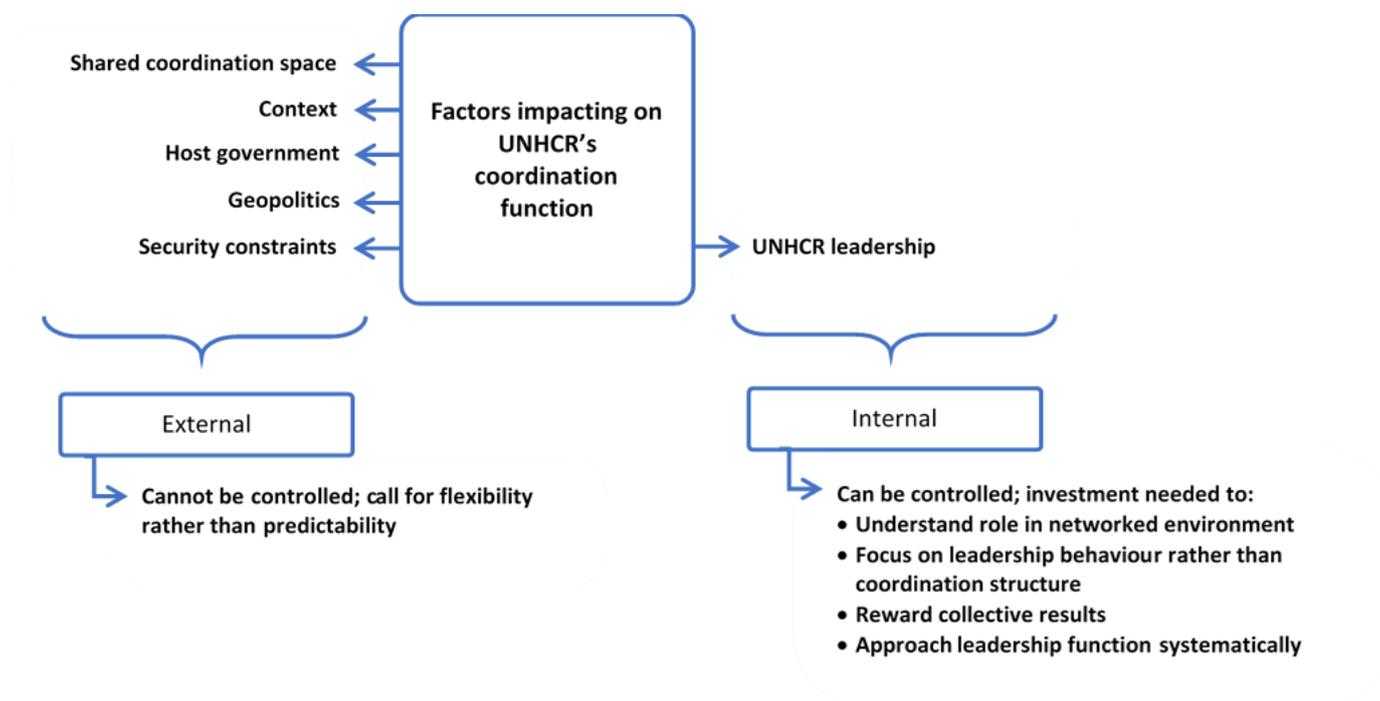
The paper also pondered the implications for UNHCR if the organization fails to adopt a more consultative form of leadership: "If facilitative leadership related hard and soft skills are key to UNHCR's performance [...], the question arises as to what would be the consequences if UNHCR's change efforts fail to prepare the organization for the horizontal requirements of the changing external environments". Perceptions expressed during the interviews and consultations for this desk review suggest that they are as relevant now as they were nearly 10 years ago. Given UNHCR's intended catalytic role they are also highly relevant to refugee coordination.

Source: Gottwald, op. cit.

<sup>43</sup> Sida, Jahan, Mamun-ur-Rashid, Nelis, and Lakshman, op. cit. p. 64

protection aspects that only UNHCR can perform, such as refugee registration, UNHCR may need to be more authoritative, but when it comes to creating buy-in for its overall protection strategy, or in the collective search for solutions, a more accommodating style is required, even though this takes time and energy. UNHCR should consider how to combine directive and adaptive leadership styles, and build alliances.<sup>44</sup> It is not obvious how systematically or consistently UNHCR is operating in both leadership styles.

**Figure 1: Overview of factors affecting UNHCR's coordination function**



<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

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## 4. Next steps: Opportunities and challenges

The findings of this desk review have highlighted how, in seeking to deliver on its mandate, UNHCR must navigate and address many complex and dynamic external variables in the exercise of its leadership and coordination role. As discussed in Section 3, key variables include, among others, the role of the state and the geopolitical situation; the UN system's overall strategy and engagement in a country; donor funding and the engagement of the international community; and the presence of other operational partners with intersecting mandates. Despite UNHCR's efforts to create predictability by describing a stand-alone model for refugee coordination and related accountabilities, circumstances on the ground have made for highly variable and often fast-changing response arrangements. UNHCR may have very different leadership and coordination roles from one situation to another, and from one aspect of response to another, for example, regarding protection versus assistance. Clearly, the variables are not static; they can change and affect UNHCR's role at any moment.

Going forward, UNHCR will need to address the question of which will be its next steps to ensure effective leadership and coordination of refugee responses. Instead of strengthening a coordination model that seeks to (pre-)define its role, it appears that a more adaptive and agile form of institutional leadership and coordination role is expected from UNHCR. This expectation corresponds to UNHCR's new "catalytic and supportive" role that is envisaged for UNHCR to help deliver the GCR. Our findings suggest, however, that it is not only in the context of delivering on the GCR that UNHCR will need to adjust its leadership and coordination role. It should consider doing so in all its responses to refugees.

This section analyses the next steps that the organization might consider in the light of these findings. The GCR provides UNHCR not only with opportunities, but also challenges in terms of its leadership and coordination role. But there are also other developments and transformations in UNHCR's environment that require it to make changes to way in which it performs its leadership and coordination role. We also examine, in particular, how a theory of change approach might help UNHCR to ensure that its future role in refugee response leadership and coordination will be fit for purpose in a complex and fast-changing world.

### 4.1 UNHCR's leadership and coordination role in the context of the GCR

As it pertains to finding collective solutions to refugee problems, the GCR clearly presents new opportunities for UNHCR's leadership and coordination role. The text of the compact commits the organization to "play a catalytic and supportive role in contributing to the task of all States and other relevant stakeholders to mobilize support for the global compact and the achievement of its objectives on an equal footing, through more predictable and equitable

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burden- and responsibility-sharing”.<sup>45</sup> The GCR foresees a broad constituency involving a wide, non-static group of stakeholders, including those beyond the traditional humanitarian system such as development actors, the private sector and refugee representatives themselves. While the GCR opens new opportunities, these opportunities will only be seized if UNHCR is able to address the challenges that come with them.

First, UNHCR’s role and involvement in developmental processes and frameworks need to be clarified. Its leadership in implementing the GCR confronts UNHCR with the much broader development challenges facing many of the world’s refugee-hosting countries. The nature and degree of UNHCR’s involvement in development has been a point of attention, if not discussion, for decades. In the 2000s, for example, it applied a variety of policies and tools to link humanitarian assistance and development.<sup>46</sup> UNHCR’s efforts over the years to strengthen these links have, however, produced mixed results for a variety of reasons, including the late and insufficient involvement of development actors to stimulate stability and early economic investments in areas of return, for example; countries’ failure to recognize refugees’ rights to livelihoods;<sup>47</sup> or, simply, too many (other) obstacles in the transition from refugee assistance led and supported by UNHCR to national systems. While the humanitarian–development nexus has been adopted as the way forward for the humanitarian community at large and as part of the new way of working for the United Nations, it remains to be seen whether these processes will deliver on their promises. The nexus and broader development challenges are likely to prove, at least, as varied, dynamic and context-specific as any other aspect of refugee response.<sup>48</sup> The connection between humanitarian response and development work has also been a complex one, not least because humanitarian actors, including UNHCR, are expected to follow a set of core principles, including independence. For UNHCR to fulfil its protection mandate, maintaining this key principle as part of its way of operating is not optional.

Second, as noted, the complicated connection between refugee response and the development sphere is also seen in terms of coordination frameworks. As part of the GCR implementation, UNHCR has reached out to other parts of the United Nations to increase their knowledge and/or involvement in the GCR. However, the interface of GCR-related structures and processes with the reformed UNSDCF needs more attention. The question whether there should be separate GCR-related coordination processes or whether they should be integrated with the new UNSDCF is similar to the complicated relationship between humanitarian coordination processes and structures and UNHCR’s RCM and RRP. In Ethiopia, for example, several mechanisms have been set up to govern and manage the implementation of the CRRF.<sup>49</sup> At the time of undertaking this review, UNHCR was also setting up coordination structures and partnerships with four other UN and international agencies. With the support of a major donor, the

<sup>45</sup> GCR, para. 101.

<sup>46</sup> In the mid 2000s, for example, UNHCR noted that it used a number of tools detailed in what was then called the “Framework for Durable Solutions”, such as Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR), Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (4Rs) and Development through Local Integration (DLI). See UNHCR, “Framework for durable solutions for refugees and persons of concern”, (UNHCR 2003), <https://www.unhcr.org/partners/partners/3f1408764/framework-durable-solutions-refugees-persons-concern.html>

<sup>47</sup> In countries where refugees are allowed to work, there may also be structural economic and administrative or cultural barriers to the labour market which prevent them from working. See: UNHCR, “Two year progress assessment of the CFF approach”, December 2018, p.5, [www.unhcr.org/5c63ff144.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/5c63ff144.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> CRRF, para. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ethiopia has seen the creation of a CRRF Steering Committee comprised of the Office of the Prime Minister, line ministries, federal agencies, development actors, UNHCR and other UN agencies, NGOs and donors; a CRRF National Coordination Office; and intends to create several Technical Committees.

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partnership under the name Prospect is expected to work on education, livelihoods and economic opportunities for displaced communities (refugees and IDPs) in eight countries. It may risk creating parallel coordination arrangements which overlap or duplicate with other mechanisms.

Third, the catalytic role that UNHCR says it will play in the context of the GCR deserves further exploration and thought. We understand the GCR-related **catalytic role to be one that facilitates and supports a constituency, platform and/or initiatives that accelerate the search for durable solutions**. It does not exclude UNHCR's direct operational engagement, but it foresees a different role in terms of leadership and coordination, which implies facilitation, providing space and support. A facilitation role presumes a more horizontal process of collective decision-making with the wide range of GCR partners. While this catalytic role has particularly been put forward by UNHCR as relevant in the context of the GCR, we have reason to suggest that it could also benefit UNHCR in other contexts where it leads and coordinates the response to refugees. As noted, many of UNHCR's partners raised UNHCR's leadership style in the context of this review. Such a process implies change. UNHCR is used to vertical decision-making and coordination, especially with implementing partners. As noted above, contractual arrangements with NGOs have often turned into command-and-control relationships, at least in the eyes of the NGOs concerned. In the following sections, we will devote more attention to horizontal coordination processes and leadership styles that fit best with a facilitation role.

## 4.2 Expected changes in UNHCR's leadership and coordination

With the introduction of the cluster approach as part of the 2005 humanitarian reform process, leadership and partnership have been high on the agenda. As noted, the clusters brought a more horizontal type of participatory coordination. This may complicate or prolong decision-making, but it also increases ownership of collective decisions. UNHCR has found it challenging to adapt its internal decision-making to this new reality (see Box 3). **The participatory, horizontal style of coordination, however, fits well with UNHCR's current environment, not only in the context of the GCR, but also in the humanitarian sphere.**

The **trend of localization**, as called for by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain agreement among donors and major aid agencies, will continue over the coming years. Traditionally, UNHCR has had implementing partner arrangements with local NGOs, but this may rapidly change. Donors may start to fund local NGOs directly, or, even more likely, inspired by social media and increased internet connectivity, future refugee responses may see more spontaneous crowdfunded initiatives and informal civil society groups get involved. This will have significant implications for UNHCR and its coordination model. **The emerging coordination environment is one with a large variety of groups and networks, which may be more or less organized and formal; which may come together on a geographic or functional basis; and which may or may not be inclined to participate in collective coordination mechanisms.** These new actors are likely to be more interested in exploring complementarities and comparative advantages than in UNHCR's top-down way of working with implementing partners. If UNHCR is to adopt a catalytic role, it should involve reaching out and connecting to new civil society

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actors.<sup>50</sup> This is a leadership attribute and skill.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, UNHCR Representatives, who are expected to motivate and inspire others to take initiatives and deliver, should be rewarded for demonstrating such a supportive role.

A further incentive for change in UNHCR's leadership and coordination is the catalytic role that comes with the GCR and implies a **leadership style aimed at facilitating the work of others**. It follows that UNHCR will need to pay more attention to the leadership styles it employs as part of its way of working and its organizational culture. It should also consider investing systematically in leadership development as an institutional commitment. **The review has seen signs of UNHCR's understanding of the importance of making investments in leadership development in terms of tools, training, coaching and mentoring, but did not find an institutional vision as to what the organization expects from its senior staff in leadership positions.** Several interviewees noted that there is little attention to leadership behaviour in performance appraisals. Furthermore, as part of the attention to leadership, it is urgent that UNHCR reviews what attributes and skills its (senior) Representatives should possess with a view to addressing future trends and challenges. Crucially, UNHCR's leaders will need self-awareness so as to understand which leadership style to apply and when. It is not an "either/or" situation when it comes applying an authoritative or a more accommodating style, but a matter of "and/and".

As an institution, UNHCR will need to demonstrate that it can employ the catalytic as well as the directive mode as strategically and effectively as possible to match the complex, dynamic and varied situations that it faces. It will be called upon to act as the leader that employs an authoritative style in securing refugee rights and up against other external leaders that are resisting these rights, but also as an influencer and catalyst when supporting other actors to deliver on behalf of the collective. UNHCR's current systems reward Representatives for what they have done for the organization.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, it appears that UNHCR also needs to invest in expanding the numbers of staff whose main priority is the coordination of the collective refugee response as well as in ensuring that all (senior) UNHCR staff have coordination skills that benefit the collective response.

### 4.3 A systems approach to leadership and coordination

The wide range of variables in UNHCR's coordination environment require agility and flexibility and a different approach or interpretation of the RCM. This suggested change, however, should not be confused with proposing ad hoc solutions and mechanisms. Pointing to the interactive nature and interdependence of external and internal factors in UNHCR's environment, **this review suggests that UNHCR develop a more systematic approach by using a "theory of change" for each situation in which it provides leadership and coordination.** Theories of change are now commonly used by many UN agencies and other humanitarian and development actors to inform planning, programming and evaluation. The UN Evaluation Group has defined a theory of change (ToC) as a "model that

<sup>50</sup> Current efforts to reshape the annual consultations with NGOs and to hold them at the regional level demonstrate that UNHCR is busy developing new networks with civil society actors. UNHCR's partnership in action (PARinAC) process with NGOs in the 1990s, which included regional meetings and NGO focal points, could be seen as a precursor to such a networked approach.

<sup>51</sup> For a set of future leadership skills, see Humanitarian Leadership Academy, *The Future of Skills in the Humanitarian Sector*, (2019), [www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/pdf/the-future-of-skills-in-the-humanitarian-sector/](http://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/pdf/the-future-of-skills-in-the-humanitarian-sector/)

<sup>52</sup> This is seen across the UN system. While the system is expected to operate as such, incentive systems are agency-specific.

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explains how an intervention is expected to lead to intended or observed impacts”.<sup>53</sup> For the purposes of supporting and informing UNHCR’s role and the wider system’s effectiveness in protecting and assisting refugees, a ToC could help to identify drivers of change, inform strategy and policy direction, and help to measure progress in complex multi-actor systems such as refugee responses and broader humanitarian response and development engagement.<sup>54</sup>

In any given response context, developing a ToC encourages deep observation of the system, including how power is distributed; how decisions are made; the coalitions for and against any given change. It ensures that UNHCR has a strategy in place in terms of what it expects to achieve in leading and engaging in coordination platforms. A ToC is therefore a tool that can help to develop a common understanding and clarity in what UNHCR aims to achieve in a given country, benefiting UNHCR’s partnerships, organizational development and external communication – including with the wider UN system, particularly if its own ToC framework is effectively aligned with frameworks being used by other parts of the United Nations (including ToCs focused on delivering the SDGs in a given country).

With the main findings of this review in mind – in particular, the extent of variation, complexity and change in patterns of coordination and leadership across different response situations – a number of relevant features<sup>55</sup> of a ToC are worthwhile noting. These (in theory at least) distinguish a ToC from the more static and relatively rigid coordination model that UNHCR has sought to apply to its leadership and coordination roles to date:

- A ToC is intended to be flexible and adaptable over time, rather than prescriptive, and exploratory as well as descriptive in how it is applied, and supports a shift from static to dynamic modes of planning.
- By encouraging adaptive leadership and diversified approaches that are responsive to a specific context, a ToC enables more devolved and decentralized operational planning on the ground.
- It is also intended to capture complex systems of change involving a multiplicity of actors and processes with varying interests and influence, supporting context-specific approaches to address drivers of crisis and responses that are closely attuned to the specific dynamics of crisis and change in the context concerned. It enables UNHCR to work with a range of partners and other stakeholders to deliver collective impacts.
- Rather than simply describing “which” coordination arrangements and accountability mechanisms should be established, it focuses attention more on “how” effective protection and assistance can be achieved for refugees in a complex multi-actor system.
- It encourages the identification of key drivers of change at all levels – local, country, regional, global – and the interactions between them.
- Importantly, a ToC implies moving away from a top-down command-and-control approach to one in which the protection and assistance objectives for refugees can be pursued through catalysing and mobilizing key actors and processes that form part of the wider response system.

<sup>53</sup> United Nations Evaluation Group, “Impact evaluation in UN agency evaluation systems: guidance on selection, planning and management”, (2013), cited in J. Hendra and I. Fitzgerald, “Who wants (to) change? A ‘theory of change’ for the UN development system to function as a system for relevance, strategic positioning and results”, (UNU-CPR 2016), pp.2–3.

<sup>54</sup> Hendra and Fitzgerald, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

- By encouraging a move away from understanding response leadership in terms of command and control, it highlights the importance of the substantive capacities, knowledge, leadership and mindsets required of individual UNHCR leaders to catalyse and support responses which deliver effective protection and assistance outcomes for refugees through de facto dynamic, whole-system responses. As discussed further below, this may entail investments in the development of leaders and leadership skills – such as influencing and mediation skills – which differ substantively from the more top-down management skills that might be assumed most important for the implementation of a UNHCR-led refugee coordination model.
- A ToC encourages attention to the barriers and processes that may jeopardize (aspects of) refugee protection and assistance outcomes for which UNHCR is accountable, which UNHCR and partners will need to take into account and respond to.
- A ToC should be both participatory, interactive and iterative, involving a broad range of key stakeholders, and should therefore directly engage with the multi-actor systems and processes that it seeks to catalyse and support.<sup>56</sup>

Using the ToC as a tool in support of a more flexible and networked approach to leadership and coordination is likely to fit well with UNHCR's regionalization. At the time of writing, this regionalization process, which sees a move of the regional bureaux to regional hubs, is well under way. Further to a ToC, while this desk review does not consider a typology of coordination arrangements in terms of structures as useful, UNHCR should consider framing leadership and coordination accountabilities as noted in the RCM guidance in relation to a range of variables. These include:

- the degree of volatility of the situation – for example, number of parties controlling refugees, level of stability/security;
- the stance and responses of the host government – whether these are assertive, restrictive and so on;
- the nature of international political support – for example, any leverage on the host government, sensitivity of the situation;
- the level of international financial support – such as finances going through UNHCR, finances going through others;
- the presence of operational partners, like humanitarian, development and peace actors;
- connection with other international and national coordination arrangements – ranging from existing in parallel, without any interaction to having a close connection;
- the extent to which coordination arrangements are flexible enough to adapt to a changing environment;
- levels of trust among the various partners (existing or needed).

These dimensions all help to highlight factors that require reflection and strategic planning from UNHCR. They help to determine the level and type of intervention and investment from the organization in leadership and coordination. A framework that incorporates these would elevate the importance of UNHCR's leadership and coordination role to an institutional priority. This step would fit with UNHCR's recent decision to decentralize the bureaux to regional hubs. In a decentralized organization, leadership at the regional and country level is likely to become even more important. While the leadership and coordination of refugee responses should be in the organization's DNA, UNHCR has still a

<sup>56</sup> ToC features listed have been adapted from Hendra and FitzGerald, op. cit.

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way to go in ensuring that every staff member in a leadership and coordination position is sufficiently equipped to carry out their responsibilities.

## 4.4. Next steps

UNHCR's leadership role and coordination are inextricably linked. They are mandated responsibilities, but despite this clear legal foundation, UNHCR has to navigate and address many external variables to fulfil its mandate, as reflected in the wide variation in coordination and leadership arrangements found in this review. As the complexity and challenges of refugee responses are only set to intensify in future, our findings point to the need for UNHCR to adapt and develop its approach to the leadership and coordination of refugee responses. It needs to move from a focus on creating predictability by describing a model for refugee coordination and related accountabilities and investing in coordination mechanisms and structures, towards greater investments in leadership roles and functions. These new roles and functions need to enable agile and strategic forms of institutional leadership that are responsive to and best able to influence the full range of contexts and situations in which refugees will need assistance, protection and solutions in the future. The answer is not to seek more predictability, let alone uniformity, in refugee coordination mechanisms; nor is it to invest heavily in putting in place (more) coordination tools and information products. The main suggestion of this review is for UNHCR to strengthen its coordination by investing in its leadership role. The organization should become more agile, flexible and adaptive to the prevailing circumstances and adjust its leadership and coordination role accordingly. For this to happen, this desk review identifies five areas for consideration:

First, it is urgent that, as an institution, UNHCR **understands the varying nature of its coordination role in complex systems and highly networked environments**. The premise that UNHCR's partners can be brought under a single response strategy will not necessarily be shared by most other actors involved in many responses, and even less so by the growing number of "informal" or new actors that have been engaging in recent refugee situations. The catalytic role as foreseen under the GCR applies to all other coordination models and efforts led by UNHCR. This catalytic role should provide space and, indeed, accelerate other actors' initiatives for refugees.

Second, we suggest that UNHCR can **become more strategic and systematic in approaching its leadership and coordination function**. One avenue for the organization is to develop a ToC for each country situation as a useful step in arriving at a shared understanding on UNHCR's strategy and objectives. In developing a ToC, UNHCR will also need to clarify what it expects to achieve when leading and engaging in coordination platforms. Another route for a more systematic approach is to develop a framework for understanding and analysing the factors that influence external and internal factors in coordination contexts, coupled with UNHCR's leadership and coordination accountabilities. While external factors may present formidable barriers to the organization in exercising its mandate, the crucial issue is the type of leadership that it displays in addressing these challenges. Leadership behaviour must become an institutional priority.

Third, this desk review notes that UNHCR places great emphasis on the importance of coordination arrangements. While a significant level of attention has gone into coordination mechanisms and structures, problems persist

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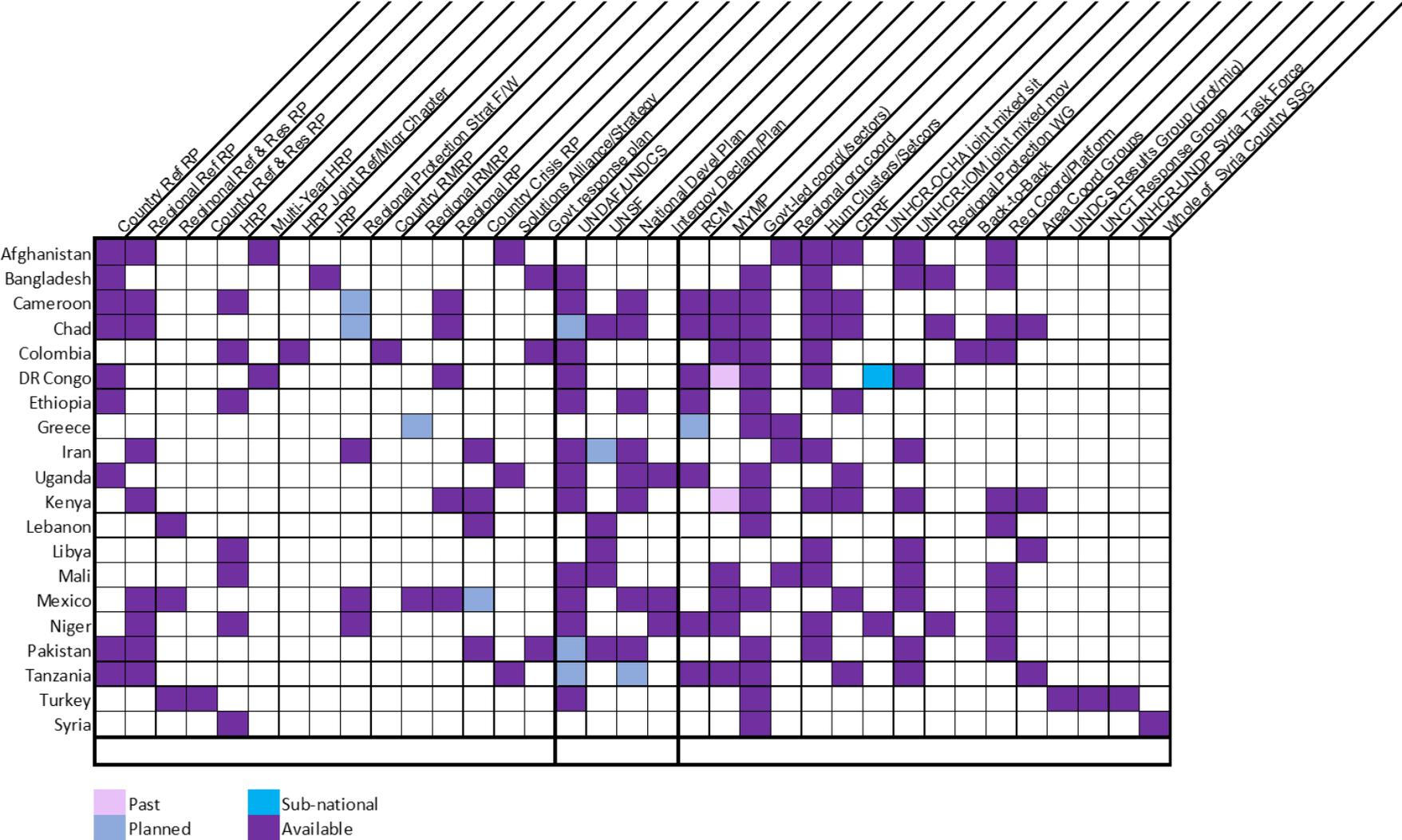
concerning the alignment of UNHCR's refugee coordination model with other "mainstream" coordination platforms, be they humanitarian, migration or development-oriented. This suggests that UNHCR might be well advised to rethink its focus on structures. Indeed, this desk review suggests that, **as an institution, UNHCR should give more attention to leadership behaviour in coordination efforts.**

Fourth, and linked to the previous point, UNHCR should ensure, as a matter of priority, that **its Representatives are rewarded for leading and undertaking coordination on behalf of the collective, with the focus clearly on ensuring the effectiveness of collective efforts to protect, assist and find solutions for refugees.** To enable UNHCR staff to work effectively in this way, facilitative and strategic coordination and leadership skill sets should become part of UNHCR's mandatory competencies.

Finally, when the authors of this desk review spoke with non-UNHCR representatives about the organization's leadership and coordination there was, without exception, a recognition of the significance and relevance of this topic. While there is clear appreciation of UNHCR's role, this is also an expectation on the part of many external stakeholders that UNHCR will further modernize its leadership and coordination role. Our findings indicate that this will be essential to UNHCR's continuing ability to fulfil its mandate in the turbulent, fast-changing and challenging political and security contexts that can be expected to dominate refugee responses in the future.

# Annexes

## Annex 1: Matrix of reviewed coordination structures



## Annex 2: Terms of reference

### Independent desk review of UNHCR's leadership and coordination role in refugee response settings

Key information at a glance	
Title:	UNHCR's leadership and coordination role in refugee response settings
Proposed countries:	Multiple
Time frame covered:	2014–2018
Type:	Independent desk review
Commissioned by:	UNHCR Evaluation Service
Location:	Home-based with some travel to Geneva
Time-frame of assignment:	March–May 2019
Contract type:	Individual consultancy

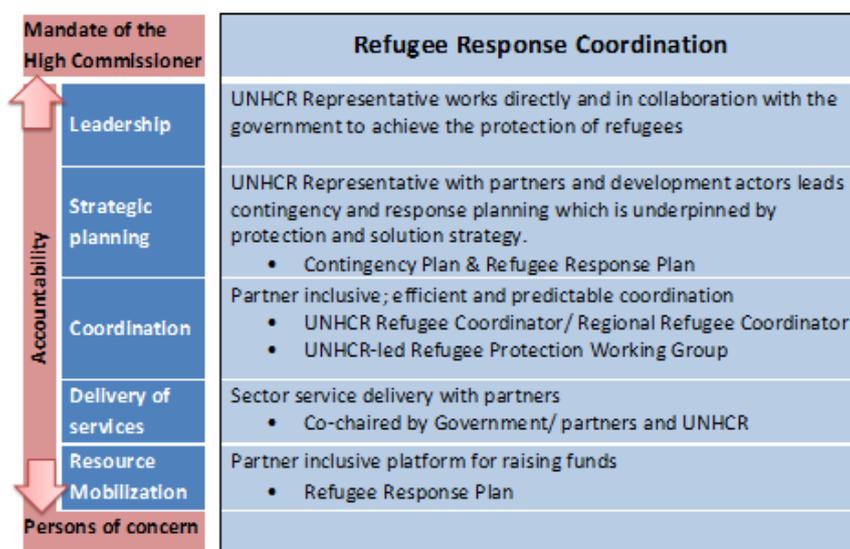
## 1. Background

While the primary responsibility to protect refugees rests with States, UNHCR is accountable for assisting States to ensure the international protection of, and assistance to, refugees and for seeking durable solutions.<sup>i</sup> UNHCR's obligations in refugee situations extend from preparedness and continue until durable solutions are identified. To assist States to advance the protection and assistance of persons of concern to UNHCR, the organization leads and manages refugee operations in countries where the State is unable or unwilling to do so, or where the magnitude of the crises exceeds the response capacity. The need for international cooperation in support of States has been a central component of UNHCR's role since it was founded in 1950, and is set out in the Statute and in subsequent General Assembly resolutions as including coordination of responses and provision for protection and assistance, as well as finding solutions. In line with global processes and agreements (GCR, UN reform, the Transformative Agenda)<sup>ii</sup> and in the spirit of the New Way of Working (NWOW), UNHCR is committed to ensuring quality coordination and recognizes that coordination has a direct impact on the delivery of protection and assistance to refugees.

Refugee and humanitarian responses have grown increasingly complex with a greater number of protracted and mixed situations, including mixed movements. This complexity along with the drive towards strengthened collaboration with development actors and governments as outlined in the UN Development Reform and the GCR, has brought renewed attention to strengthening field coordination structures, including through the United Nations country teams. The GCR and UNHCR's commitment to collective outcomes have also placed further emphasis on UNHCR's catalytic role in comprehensive responses and solutions, and to that end emphasizes enhanced engagement with development actors. Additionally, the GCR outlines the importance of ensuring coordination efforts work to strengthen and support national authorities where appropriate, all of which have implications for the types of coordination structures and approaches deployed.

In practice, the coordination and leadership architecture in a refugee situation vary across contexts, reflecting specific needs, operational context and the range of actors engaged in the coordination structure – and including regional, national and sub-national structures. Coordination structures may also evolve throughout the timeline of a refugee response, corresponding to contextual shifts and capacities of the host government.

## Refugee Response Coordination



Source: UNHCR Emergency Handbook

As set out in the “Refugee Coordination Guidance” (2019), coordination in refugee settings consists of the following components:

- Preparedness:** ensuring joint risk analysis and where necessary joint preparedness planning and action.
- Protection strategy:** to guide a comprehensive refugee response, drawing on contributions of partners.
- Resource mobilization:** for the coordination of immediate and ongoing inter-agency funding appeals; and to seek support from pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum and other support and applicable fundraising forums.
- Sectoral set-up:**
  - determining whether current government-led and/or inter-agency coordination mechanisms can be adapted to address the needs arising from refugee influx;
  - establishing, where necessary, sectoral coordination mechanisms, with government counterparts where possible, to lead sectoral specific needs assessments, planning, monitoring, reporting and information management within and across sectors at the national and/or sub-national levels;
  - leading the refugee protection working group; ensuring that protection dimensions are reflected in the work of other sectors; and ensuring the participation of refugees and host communities in an age-, gender- and diversity-sensitive manner; and,
  - ensuring that leadership of other sectors is undertaken by experienced technical sector leads, including from other agencies.
- Coordination forum:** to be established, as appropriate and if necessary, at the national level and co-chaired by the government where possible on the overall refugee response including, as appropriate, a support platform.
- Information management:** establish or reinforce information management capacity including through contributions from other agencies.
- Information-sharing:** regular information-sharing with the RC and United Nations country teams; updating and coordinating with HC and HCT where present; and regular information-sharing with donors.

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## UNHCR's role in situations with mixed movements

Although this desk review will not consider IDP situations, UNHCR and OCHA outlined a streamlined approach in the *OCHA–UNHCR Joint Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in practice (2014)*.<sup>iii</sup> In mixed situations, UNHCR maintains integral yet distinct refugee planning and funding tools as well as a direct line to the government, but should ensure coherence and interoperability with the other actors. The exact composition of UNHCR's leadership and participation in coordination structures varies in practice.

Similarly, in light of the increasing number of contexts with significant mixed refugee and migrant movements, UNHCR and IOM recently outlined a joint vision of engagement in mixed contexts, in line with the Global Compact for Migration and the GCR.

## 2. Purpose and scope

This independent desk review is intended to identify good practices and generate lessons learned on UNHCR's leadership and coordination of refugee responses, including in mixed situations and mixed movements over the period 2014 to 2018; and to consider some of the emerging coordination challenges and opportunities as UNHCR moves towards the catalytic and convening role envisaged in the GCR. It should reflect on a range of situations and contexts, although the review will not reflect on UNHCR's role in IDP settings.

The review should consider new initiatives such as the comprehensive refugee response framework, the GCR and the UN reform. The review will also reflect on the interface between UNHCR and refugee-focused coordination structures with broader humanitarian coordination structures.

The primary audience includes UNHCR HQ, specifically the Partnerships and Coordination Service (PCS) and Division of Emergency Security and Supply (DESS), and country-level UNHCR staff and managers participating in activities. The review will also be of specific interest to UNHCR partners and donors. The final report and stand-alone executive summary will be published on the UNHCR website.

Specifically the desk review will:

- map and, if possible, categorize the coordination structures, describing how UNHCR establishes and engages with coordination structures across the range of contexts in which UNHCR works, including new and protracted emergencies, urban and camp settings, and mixed situations;
- explore the factors that contribute to or constrain effective and efficient refugee coordination;
- outline potential future scenarios and options for coordination mechanisms in the context of the emerging reforms and developments; and,
- offer forward-looking recommendations on potential areas for organizational investment and adaptation.

## 3. Methodology

The review will draw on existing UNHCR documentation and data held in the field and at UNHCR HQ, including the New York Office, as well as on relevant published literature from external agencies and stakeholders. In addition, limited primary data collection through remotely conducted interviews or surveys with key UNHCR stakeholders is envisaged. Inception and validation visits to UNHCR HQ in Geneva will be considered.

### 3.1 Proposed lines of inquiry

Preliminary document review should consider how the following proposed lines of inquiry will inform a final set of review questions to be agreed with the UNHCR Evaluation Service in a brief approach paper.

#### **1) What, if any, typologies emerge in refugee coordination structures in which UNHCR plays a leadership or catalytic role?**

Possible sub-questions:

- a. What models for regional, national and sub-national refugee coordination have been established?

- b. What coordination roles and responsibilities has UNHCR performed, and which other actors have played a significant role in UNHCR-coordinated responses?
- c. How have UNHCR-led coordination mechanisms interacted with national governments, development partners and other relevant country coordination structures?

**2) How have UNHCR’s coordination capacities, tools and resources supported context-specific and efficient refugee response?**

Possible sub-questions:

- a. How has UNHCR resourced its coordination and leadership function in different refugee response settings?
- b. How has UNHCR’s refugee coordination and leadership managed risks of gaps and/or duplication in the delivery of protection and assistance to refugees?
- c. How has UNHCR supported the resourcing of UNHCR and partners’ responses as a whole?

**3) Looking forward, what are the emerging opportunities and challenges for UNHCR’s coordination and leadership role?**

Possible sub-questions:

- a. What potential coordination scenarios should UNHCR consider in light of emerging policy and practice?
- b. Reflecting on the above, where could UNHCR consider further investment or adaptation of current practice?

## 4. Organization and management of the desk review

The review will be undertaken either by an individual or a team (**maximum of two**) of qualified independent consultants. Individual contracts will be issued to the selected consultant(s) who will confirm their own respective level of effort towards the deliverables. The UNHCR Evaluation Service will designate a manager for the desk review, who will: (i) support with the day-to-day aspects of the review process; (ii) act as the main interlocutor with the team conducting the review, including with the reference group; (iii) provide the review team with required data – with the support of focal points in the concerned Divisions; (iv) facilitate communication with stakeholders; (v) review all interim deliverables and final reports to ensure accuracy and quality.

### 4.1 Expected deliverables and timeline

- A brief methods paper that includes a final set of review questions and describes how the proposed approach will address these.
- A mapping of the practical application of UNHCR-led coordination structures for the period 2014 to 2018.
- A PowerPoint presentation summarizing key findings and broad recommendations for validation and discussion.
- A maximum 25-page final report that responds to the final review questions, with a maximum 10-page stand-alone executive summary.

An indicative timeline is set out below for interested parties to consider.

Indicative date	Deliverable
7 April	Consultants contracted
18 April – 2 May	Briefings with the evaluation service and initial desk review
9 May	Brief approach paper to be agreed with Evaluation service
Mid May	Data collection workshop in Istanbul
9 May – 27 June	In-depth desk review and data collection (interviews)
Week commencing 1 July	Validation workshop Geneva
7 July	Draft mapping and report circulated for comment
21 July	Final mapping and report circulated

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## 5. Consultant profiles

### Skills and experience

Minimum qualifications required:

- At least 15 years of experience conducting or managing humanitarian evaluations, preferably at the strategic and policy levels.
- Demonstrable operational experience in humanitarian and, ideally, refugee response operations, particularly in areas related to coordination and management.
- Proven experience and institutional knowledge of the United Nations, and in particular UNHCR and our protection mandate, at both headquarters and field locations.
- Excellent English drafting skills (to publication standard).
- Extensive experience conveying complex evaluation analyses clearly and compellingly, including through the use of clear graphics and visual media.
- Excellent analytical skills and demonstrated understanding and analysis of the practical application of complex global-level policies or strategies.

<sup>i</sup> See:

<https://cms.emergency.unhcr.org/documents/11982/38222/Note+on+the+Mandate+of+the+High+Commissioner+for+Refugees+and+his+Office/561d4953-fb9b-4dfc-b4f1-46bd24487ac1>

<sup>ii</sup> See: IASC, *Transformative Agenda*, (IASC 2011), <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda>

<sup>iii</sup> Full text of the “OCHA–UNHCR Joint Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in practice” (2014), available at [www.unhcr.org/53679e679.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/53679e679.pdf)

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## Annex 4: List of individuals/institutions consulted

### UNHCR

- Hiroko Araki
- William Chemaly
- Xavier Creach
- Daisy Dell
- Miranda Gaanderse
- Martin Gottwald
- Jens Hesemann
- Maria Kiani
- Capucine Maus De Rolley
- Joel Nielsen
- Stella Ongunlade
- Sumbul Rizvi
- Philippe Sacher
- Annika Sandlund
- Jun Shirato
- Carol Ann Sparks
- Richard Towle
- Ana White
- Johannes Zech
- Leonard Zulu

### OCHA; HC/RCs

- Allegra Baiocchi
- Peter Grohmann/Samir Elhawary
- Phillipe Lazzarini
- Ramesh Rajasingham
- Najat Rochdi
- Marina Skuric-Prodanovic

### NGOs

- AHA
- DRC
- HIAS
- ICVA
- InterAction
- NRC

- 
- Oxfam
  - Save the Children
  - Women's Commission

#### Other international organizations

- World Bank
- UN Development Coordination Officer

#### Permanent missions – Geneva

- Australia
- Canada
- Denmark
- European Union
- Germany
- Iran (Islamic Republic of)
- Ireland
- Kenya
- Norway
- Pakistan
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Turkey
- United States of America (the)

#### Academics/ independent consultants

- Martha Maznevski
- Urban Reichhold
- Julia Steets
- Leah Zamore

---

**CONTACT US**

**Evaluation Service**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Case Postale 2500

1211 Genève 2

Switzerland

[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

Email: [hqevaser@unhcr.org](mailto:hqevaser@unhcr.org)