

UNHCR-UNICEF Partnership

Guidance Package for field-level collaboration

January 2015

UNHCR and UNICEF have been strengthening their partnerships at the country level and striving towards more predictable forms of collaboration, based on complementarity, to provide more effective, predictable and consistent support to populations of concern, in particular refugees. The partners aim at more coherent joint planning and effective leveraging of each agency's expertise, skill sets and other partnerships and contacts.

The Global Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and UNICEF (March 1996) outlines the respective mandates and roles of each organisation with respect to different population groups, recognising their comparative advantages and establishing cooperation modalities which result in "value-added". As stated in the MoU, while the roles and responsibilities are distinct, they are inter-related, and both UNHCR and UNICEF seek to assist national authorities with regard to the well-being of children.¹

With a mandate for international protection and the pursuit of durable solutions for refugees, UNHCR leads and coordinates the overall refugee response, and is accountable for this regardless of whether refugees find themselves in camps or in non-camp settings. UNHCR carries out this role for refugees in support of the host Government and in close partnership with operational UN agencies and NGOs. UNICEF is a vital and significant partner in refugee contexts. Its commitment to all children in a country ensures that its strategies and country programmes focus resources and expertise on the protection of the most vulnerable children

This Guidance Note updates that of August 2013, is based on accumulating practical experience in field collaboration, takes account of recent policy developments and incorporates the outcomes of further partnership discussions at global and regional levels.

Background

In November 2011, UNICEF Executive Director Mr. Anthony Lake and the High Commissioner for Refugees Mr. Antonio Guterres, signed a Joint Letter acknowledging the still valid MoU of 1996 and a long history of effective collaboration between UNHCR and UNICEF. They strongly encouraged efforts to strengthen and update the partnership to meet current challenges in refugee settings, and advised colleagues to develop field-level agreements on the full range of issues around cooperation, including the timeframe of commitments, funding and fund-raising modalities, joint initiatives for advocacy and communications, information management, staffing modalities, and coordination

¹ In 2005, the 'cluster approach' was developed to establish stronger and more predictable inter-agency collaboration in IDP situations. The cluster approach, under the leadership of a Humanitarian Coordinator, is now usually the organising framework for emergency responses for IDPs, including the respective roles and responsibilities of UNHCR and UNICEF.

mechanisms. Colleagues were urged to engage early – at the stage of contingency planning and preparedness.

In 2012 the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) Janet Lim and the Deputy Executive Director Yoka Brandt sent a communique urging staff in their respective agencies to translate this letter into action. They provided some initial parameters for collaboration, and followed this in August 2013 with guidance on developing a country-level LoU, with a template. UNHCR and UNICEF should develop an automatic reflex to sit down together to assess, plan, and implement programmes for refugees, in a closer relationship built on transparency and trust. In this way, the enormous gaps and needs of refugees in the short and long term, in camps and in non-camp settings, would be addressed through complementary approaches and resources.

UNHCR is strengthening its approach to refugee response coordination² and is committed to predictable engagement with key partners in strategy development and response planning, beginning with contingency planning and preparedness. UNHCR is also committed to resource mobilisation and advocacy for partners in a refugee response.

Emerging lessons from recent field experience

During the past 3 years, several countries have worked hard to strengthen collaboration and 8 country-level LoUs developed during this period are being implemented in major refugee operations. A small informal field review was conducted earlier this year by both agencies to find out how each had found the experience. The main points were:

- The process of developing the LoU has been helpful in clarifying areas of cooperation and responsibilities;
- The more specific the Joint Action Plan attached to the LoU, particularly with respect to timeframes and funding, the more smooth the cooperation that ensues;
- When engagement begins early at the contingency planning and preparedness stage, cooperation flows better.
- Frequent interaction at senior management level as well as expert and working level positively influences collaboration;
- In other areas, collaboration is more problematic due to misunderstandings and differences in processes such as fund-raising, budgeting, targeting and reporting on beneficiary numbers;
- Policies and approaches to refugee education and child protection do differ and may require clarification and support from HQs;
- More guidance is requested from the HQs level on the complementary expertise and resources of each agency in the four main fields of collaboration: WASH, health/nutrition, education and child protection. One issue here concerns applicable technical standards in refugee settings.

² **UNHCR's Refugee Coordination Model (RCM)** can be found at <http://www.unhcr.org/53679e2c9.html>. It explains how refugee response coordination should work, and outlines an effective interface with the cluster approach in mixed situations where there is an international humanitarian response underway for refugees, IDPs and other population groups.

The two organisations have tried to address most of the above – as far as is feasible at global level -- in revised LoU Guidance (Annex A) and believe that discussion and clarity at country-level is the key to mutual understanding and removal of obstacles to the partnership.

The Guidance Package

In the light of the issues raised above, UNHCR and UNICEF have expanded and revised guidance for country-level collaboration in refugee contexts. The annexes to this note address the following:

- a) Guidance for LoU development (updated from August 2013)
- b) Guidance for bilateral collaboration in technical areas (WASH, health/nutrition, education, child protection).
- c) the LoU Template with Joint Action Plan (unchanged from August 2013).

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