

Partnership Management for Emergency Preparedness and Response

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Key points

- Review existing partnerships and stakeholder mapping, to identify potential gaps during contingency planning to respond to the envisaged emergency scenario
- Pre-select a pool of potential partners, during contingency planning, through an expedited call for expressions of interest where the results are assessed by the multi-functional Implementation Programme Management Committee (IPMC)
- Ensure that partners are registered on the UN Partner Portal (UNPP), no later than three months after signing their project workplans
- From 2024 onwards, create a Partnership Framework Agreement (PFA) for new partners with already incorporated waived emergency conditions and, in parallel, a project workplan with the mandatory requirement of a financial plan

1. Overview

This entry focuses on how UNHCR's engagement and actions, when preparing for and responding to emergencies, advance our delivery of life-saving protection and humanitarian assistance to forcibly displaced and stateless persons through partnerships.

UNHCR's partnership approach is guided by the [principles of partnership](#) endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform on 12 July 2007, which emphasize equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. The UNHCR [Procedures on Partnership Management](#) provide a unified framework and overall direction for partnership management processes throughout the three inter-linked phases of the programme cycle: PLAN for, GET and SHOW Results.

Funded partners, who receive financial support from UNHCR, are referred to as “partners” in this document. [Non-funded partners](#) are referenced as such. UNHCR disburses a significant part of its annual expenditure through over 1,200 partners, and effective implementation with partners is fundamental to any emergency response.

2. Relevance for emergency operations

UNHCR works closely with partners to protect and assist forcibly displaced and stateless people, particularly in an emergency. A partnership agreement is a mandatory instrument whenever UNHCR transfers funds to partners, including in declared emergencies.

Partnerships during emergencies make it possible to:

- Rapidly identify and swiftly respond to the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.
- Collaborate and coordinate in a principled manner with other humanitarian responders, mitigating the risk of duplication.
- Provide essential resources to partners, enabling them to deliver results for emergency programmes.

Demonstrate sound stewardship and accountability to partner organizations, donors, communities, individuals and other stakeholders.

3. Main guidance

Partnership contingency planning

As part of contingency planning, the existing project workplans and the stakeholder mapping are reviewed to identify potential gaps in expertise, the scope of required results, target population, and the geographical place of delivery during an emergency.

As part of contingency planning, if gaps are identified, a country operation can establish a pool of potential partners. This allows for timely due diligence while ensuring that the best-fit partner is ready to embark quickly in an emergency response when required. This can entail:

- Stipulating within the call for expression of interest the duration for which this contingency pool of partners remains valid. For example, a country operation may mobilize potential partners from the contingency pool until 20XX.
- If a pool of potential partners is recommended by the IPMC via a call for expression of interest, the UNHCR representative (or head of sub-office) may sign an agreement with a partner from the selected pool, whether or not an emergency of any level has been declared.

Partnering in an emergency

The representative or director has the authority to decide on the best-fit implementation

modalities, without an IPMC recommendation. This decision considers the needs, operational capacity, presence, and availability of other stakeholders, and other context-specific parameters. After the emergency declaration expires, the representative will revisit implementation modalities prior to the next year of implementation.

Once an emergency of any level has been declared, the following partnership management procedures apply for the duration of the declaration, including any extension:

- During an emergency declaration, the head of sub-office, representative or director can expand the scope of an existing PFA (for example, to cover a new outcome or geographical area) without a new recommendation from the IPMC – if the partner has prior experience, proven capacity and is willing to expand.
- The registration of a partner on the [UN Partner Portal](#) and all applicable capacity assessment processes are to be completed as soon as possible, and no later than three months after signing the project workplan. See the [Programme Handbook](#) for further details surrounding a partner's capacity strengthening and risk management, as well as the applicable capacity assessment processes.
- For new partners, a PFA is generated. In parallel, a project workplan is created with the mandatory requirement of a financial plan. The operation does not need to complete the project description, results plan or risk register ahead of the project workplan signature. The financial plan may be signed with one account code (budget line) per output. The first instalment is released based on the conditions of the project workplan and financial plan only.
- An amendment of the project workplan is then required in case the partnership is extended beyond the emergency declaration period, to include a project description, a results plan, a risk register and any further applicable project workplan components.
- Partners are entitled to special supply procedures, including a ceiling increase for request for quotations and a shortened floating period for formal methods of solicitation. See the Procurement emergency handbook entry for more information on all the special supply procedures that automatically apply to UNHCR when an emergency is declared. See the [Programme Handbook](#) for further details surrounding partner's procurement capacity assessed during the internal control assessment or questionnaire (ICA/ICQ).
- The project closure of a project workplan may be completed, within the emergency declaration period, having only released one instalment, with the PFA, project workplan, financial plan, one project financial report (PFR) and any other reports (as agreed by the operation).

Monitoring partnerships in an emergency

Monitoring partnerships is a crucial component of an emergency response. There are no reduced implementation and results monitoring requirements during a declared emergency. The frequency of monitoring activities for partnerships may in fact increase.

The humanitarian situation in a country is often fluid and subject to frequent change. Monitoring partnership projects is therefore essential to track and confirm their progress against agreed performance targets, adjust their direction and implementation as needed, and identify measures to improve their impact and quality. UNHCR, its partners and other stakeholders, i.e.

local authorities (as applicable), should jointly monitor and review partnership projects, share information and coordinate, to strengthen their collective ownership and joint responsibility for project results.

To ensure effective monitoring of partnerships, it is recommended that a country operation updates (or develops) the annual assessment, monitoring and evaluation workplan as soon as possible, that is revisited on an annual basis, which is informed by the overall M&E plan. This will enable the operation to determine the key M&E activities required for the emergency response. See the [Programme Handbook](#) for more information.

During an emergency, the partners' capacity to prevent, mitigate and respond to risks of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) is monitored regularly by the UNHCR multi-functional team and the PSEA focal point. For a partner who is in a high-risk environment and has previously been assessed as having a low or medium PSEA capacity and therefore has a capacity strengthening implementation plan (CSIP), the operation monitors the implementation of CSIP activities after three months and continues checking its progress throughout the emergency declaration and any extension period. Within six months of implementing a CSIP, or nine months in the case of extension, the partner should have reached full capacity. See UNHCR's [Procedures on Partnership Management](#) for more information about continuing partnerships with partners that are not able to reach full PSEA capacity for further years/project workplans.

Reasons for signing a project workplan with a partner despite its low or medium capacity during an emergency may include the partner's specialized technical expertise within a particular area, lack of viable alternatives in that sector or location, or a satisfactory risk assessment of the partner. Capacity-strengthening regarding PSEA is a key area of UNHCR's work with these partners.

Associated risks

Emergency preparedness is critical to be able to respond to the humanitarian crisis, mitigate the impact and reduce human suffering and loss of life. Risk management will help anticipate risks and opportunities that could impact the achievement of shared objectives. UNHCR and partners need to manage and effectively mitigate risks identified (for further guidance see the [Risk Management Toolkit](#) to help identify critical risks in an operation). There is a need to exercise due diligence as the following risks are heightened during an emergency:

- Significant expansion of the operation with new protection and assistance needs and new priorities.
- Civil society not sufficiently developed and lack of NGO capacity in the operation.
- Partners may lack capacity / unable to upscale to address growing operational needs.
- Security situation or other disturbances impact implementation and access to forcibly displaced and stateless persons.
- Competing priorities for limited staff impacts planning and implementation capacity.
- Fraud or other misconduct may occur as a result of faulty internal control systems (see UNHCR's [risk management tool on fraud prevention](#) for further guidance).
- Resources provided may not be used for their intended purpose.
- Funds may be utilized inefficiently, reducing the quality or availability of the services that

forcibly displaced and stateless people receive.

- Some partners may not fully account for funds entrusted to them by UNHCR.
- Unethical behaviour of personnel, including risk of SEA.

Associated mitigating measures

- Ensure coordination mechanisms with partners and stakeholders.
- Early engagement of partners in contingency planning.
- Engage complementary partner(s) in view of geographic coverage.
- Update annual assessment, monitoring and evaluation plan based on risk.
- Implement monitoring mechanisms, including remote monitoring (if physical access is not feasible).
- Verify partner controls, standard operating procedures, recordings of transactions, and that segregation of duties is followed.
- Raise awareness and conduct training on PSEA as well as fraud and corruption prevention and reporting, among partners, UNHCR personnel and forcibly displaced and stateless people.
- Establish effective complaints/feedback mechanisms in consultation with communities.
- Expand outreach monitoring and remain accessible to forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Post emergency phase

During an emergency declaration, the country operation should initiate planning for the post-emergency phase. This includes reviewing partnership agreements, together with the regional bureau and relevant HQ divisions, at the end of an emergency declaration, to ensure continuity of the response.

It is at the discretion of the representative to decide when the competitive selection process for partners recommences after an emergency declaration has expired. It is their responsibility to ensure that this decision is clearly documented.

For project workplans that were created during an emergency, if they are extended beyond the emergency declaration period, then an amendment is required. This amendment includes a project description, results plan, risk register and any further applicable project workplan components.

Partnership agreements require partners to provide unhindered access to audit, monitoring and inspection teams, during or post-emergency. The monitoring, verification and audits must provide reasonable assurance that UNHCR funds are spent for the intended purpose and used to provide protection and assistance in the manner intended. Among other safeguards and to remain credible with donors, UNHCR should verify the integrity of and data in partners' reported results and expenditure. All projects that UNHCR funds and implements with partners are subject to audit. Projects due for audit are identified by DSPR/IMAS through a risk-based approach.

Partnership Management in Emergencies

- Before an emergency is declared, onboard pooled partners during competitive partnership selection as part of contingency planning.
- Ensure new partners register on the UNPP within three months of signing a project workplan.
- Sign a partnership framework agreement and project workplan, entering as much information as is available at the time, with a financial plan only (one account code per output may be applied). The first instalment is released based on the conditions of the contract and financial plan only.
- Assess the partner's capacity in protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), within three months of signing a project workplan.
- Assess a new partner's internal controls or retrieve their latest internal control questionnaire risk rating from a UN project audit.
- Update (or develop) the annual assessment, monitoring and evaluation workplan to determine the key M&E activities required for the emergency.
- Verify all reported results and expenditure ahead of releasing instalments.
- Coordinate project audits accordingly.

4. Links

[UN Partner Portal Procedures on Partnership Management \(accessible to UNHCR staff only\)](#) [Risk management tool on fraud prevention \(accessible to UNHCR staff only\)](#) [Programme Handbook \(accessible to UNHCR staff only\)](#)

5. Main contacts

Head of Operational and Partnership Management Unit

Senior Programme Management and Support Officer

UNHCR Division of Strategic Planning and Results

hqdspr@unhcr.org