

Partnership Management for Emergency Preparedness and Response

04 July 2024

Key points

- Review existing partnerships and stakeholder mapping, to identify potential gaps during contingency planning to respond to the envisaged emergency scenario
- Preselect a pool of potential partners during contingency planning, through an expedited call for expressions of interest where the results are assessed by the multifunctional Implementation Programme Management Committee (IPMC)
- Ensure that the registration, due diligence and verification on the UN Partner Portal (UNPP) for new partners in an emergency are completed no later than three months after both UNHCR and the partner have signed the project workplans
- For new partners in an emergency, create a Partnership Framework Agreement (PFA), a Data Protection Agreement (DPA) if applicable and a project workplan with basic information, using the standard template in Cloud ERP and a simplified financial plan (one budget line per output)

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](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) provide a unified internal framework and overall direction for partnership management processes throughout the three interlinked phases of the

programme cycle: PLAN for, GET and SHOW Results. An [external guidance note for UNHCR-funded partners](#) and the [UNHCR Programme Handbook for Partners](#) are also available externally.

Funded partners, who receive financial support from UNHCR, are referred to as “partners” in this document. [Non-funded partners](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) 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 persons, particularly in emergencies. 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, the 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 most suitable partner is ready to embark quickly on 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.
- In line with UNHCR’s commitment to localization, as is the case for all competitive partnership selection, it is recommended that operations do not incorporate weighted criteria surrounding the “contribution of resources”, but rather look at the overall cost-effectiveness in consideration of best value for money.
- 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 during its validity period, 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 most suitable implementation modalities, without an IPMC recommendation. This documented decision considers the needs, operational capacity, presence and availability of other stakeholders, and other context-specific parameters.

In line with standard procedures, even during emergencies, UNHCR aims to prioritize the following implementation modalities:

- Supporting the development and strengthening of national systems and related public institutions to include forcibly displaced and stateless persons in public service;
- Supporting national and local responders, including governments, in their efforts to become more sustainable and impactful;
- Giving the utmost consideration to individuals' and communities' capacity, agency and dignity in meeting their needs and reducing their barriers to accessing rights, assistance and services.

After the emergency declaration expires, the representative will revisit implementation modalities with the IPMC 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 extensions:

- 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 and proven capacity, and is willing to expand. The exceptional circumstances are documented in the operation's SharePoint and signed by the head of sub-office, representative or director.
- The representative holds the authority to temporarily suspend competitive selection for new partnership agreements established within the emergency period. This decision must be documented. The registration, due diligence and verification on the [UNPP](#) for new partners must be completed as soon as possible and no later than three months after both UNHCR and the partner have signed the project workplan. A partner self-declaration is required, covering discrimination, sexual exploitation, sanctioned entities, fraud, corruption, terrorism, trafficking, internal misconduct, bankruptcy, liquidation, tax and legal compliance. A participating United Nations organization reviews and conducts a due diligence verification. A "verified" status indicates that the organization meets minimal due diligence requirements to operate lawfully in the country, has a mandate that aligns with the United Nations' mission, has measures to safeguard resources and forcibly displaced and stateless persons, and poses no unacceptable reputational risks to the United Nations.
- All new partners' protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) capacity is assessed as soon as possible and no later than three months after both UNHCR and the partner have signed the project workplan. If the project workplan is extended beyond the emergency declaration period, where an Internal Control Assessment (ICA)/Internal Control

Questionnaire (ICQ) is required, the ICA/ICQ is to be completed before the emergency declaration expires. See the [Programme Handbook](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) for further details surrounding partner capacity-strengthening and risk management, as well as the applicable capacity assessment processes.

- For new partners, operations generate, sign and approve a standard PFA cover sheet, DPA (if applicable) and project workplan with basic information completed in Cloud ERP. A financial plan must be negotiated and documented in the Project, Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution (PROMS). The financial plan can be concluded on the basis of one account code (budget line) per output. When the project's implementation ends within the declaration period (including any extensions), it can be closed based on a PFA (and DPA if applicable) with minimum details of the project workplan and a financial plan. In such a case, the agreement is subject to a minimum of one Project Financial Report. The project workplan's liquidation, closure and audit can occur after the expiry of the emergency declaration. The creation and signature of a project workplan in an emergency can take place at any point during the year.
- An amendment to the project workplan is required in the case that the partnership is extended beyond the emergency declaration period (including any extension of the latter). The amendment is made to include all project workplan details, a results plan and a risk register. See [A Summary on Partnership Management in Emergencies](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) for more information.
- Partners are entitled to special supply procedures, including a ceiling increase for quotation requests and a shortened floating period for formal methods of solicitation. See the [Procurement entry of the Emergency Handbook](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) for more information on all the special supply procedures that automatically apply to UNHCR when an emergency is declared. See the [Programme Handbook](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) for further details on partners' procurement capacity, which is assessed during the ICA/ICQ.

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 assessment, monitoring and evaluation workplan as soon as possible and that it is revisited on an annual basis. The assessment, monitoring and evaluation workplan is informed by the overall monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan. This will enable the operation to determine the key M&E activities required for the emergency response. See the [Programme Handbook](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) for more information.

During an emergency, the partners' capacity to prevent, mitigate and respond to risks of sexual exploitation and abuse is regularly monitored by the UNHCR multifunctional 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 an exceptional extension, the partner should have reached full capacity. See UNHCR's [Procedures on Partnership Management](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) for more information about continuing partnerships with partners that are not able to reach full PSEA capacity for future 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, a 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 the risks identified (for further guidance, see the [Risk Management Toolkit](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) 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:

- There is significant expansion of the operation, with new protection and assistance needs and new priorities.
- Civil society is not sufficiently developed and there is a lack of NGO capacity in the operation.
- Partners lack the capacity/are unable to upscale to address growing operational needs.
- Key risks and opportunities go unidentified during an emergency since the project workplan risk register is not mandatory unless the project workplan is extended beyond the emergency declaration period.
- 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 occurs as a result of faulty internal control systems (see UNHCR's [risk management tool on fraud prevention](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) for further guidance).
- Resources provided are not used for their intended purpose.
- Funds are used inefficiently, reducing the quality or availability of the services that forcibly displaced and stateless people receive.
- Some partners do not fully account for funds entrusted to them by UNHCR.
- There is unethical behaviour by personnel, including risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Associated mitigating measures

- Ensure coordination mechanisms with partners and stakeholders.
- Encourage early engagement of partners in contingency planning.
- Engage complementary partner(s) in view of geographic coverage.
- Update the assessment, monitoring and evaluation workplan based on risk.
- Implement monitoring mechanisms, including remote monitoring (if physical access is not feasible).
- Verify partner controls, standard operating procedures and recordings of transactions, and ensure 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 persons.
- Establish effective complaints/feedback mechanisms in consultation with communities.
- Expand outreach monitoring and remain accessible to forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

Reporting and information management in an emergency

Regular narrative reporting – both internal and external – is strongly encouraged in emergency contexts to meet global information needs by donors, the media and other external audiences. External reports are posted on the relevant country and/or situation page on Global Focus.

The public and regular release of [CORE data products](#) are mandatory for all Level 2 and Level 3 newly declared refugee emergencies, as well as Level 1 declared emergencies involving people on the move (rather than heightened preparedness). Such products focus on population movements, humanitarian needs and delivery of assistance, and are designed to become more detailed and data-centric over time. As the emergency operation establishes regular systems, CORE products should be phased out and replaced by standard UNHCR-branded information products.

Post emergency phase

From the beginning of an emergency declaration, a country operation initiates planning for the post-emergency period. This planning underpins the transition from an emergency to a regular operational response. To ensure the continuity of coordination and/or response at the end of the emergency declaration, the country operation, together with the regional bureau and relevant headquarters divisions, review partnership agreements, the protection and operational strategies and the operational footprint to ensure continuity of the response. This includes a careful assessment of offices, staffing arrangements and resource mobilization in line with allocated financial resources and projected funding levels. In addition, the M&E plan is reviewed and updated based on lessons learned.

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.

Partnership agreements require partners to provide unhindered access to audit, monitoring and inspection teams, during or after the emergency. The monitoring, verification and audits must provide reasonable assurance that UNHCR funds are used for the intended purpose and 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 the Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR)/Implementation Management and Assurance Service (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 that new partners are registered and verified on the UNPP within three months of both UNHCR and the partner signing a project workplan.
- Sign a PFA, a DPA (if applicable) and a 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 prepayment is released based on the conditions of the contract and financial plan only.
- Assess the partner's capacity in PSEA within three months of both UNHCR and the partner signing a project workplan.
- Retrieve a new partner's latest ICQ risk rating from a United Nations project audit. If the partner does not have a valid ICQ risk rating and the partnership is extended beyond the emergency declaration period, conduct an ICA.
- Update (or develop) the 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 prepayments.

- 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