Inter-agency UNHCR-led refugee response plans

27 August 2023

Key points

- Involve Government from the start of an emergency, in the Contact Group and in preparing the RRP;
- Be flexible, transparent and inclusive; involve participating agencies and key stakeholders;
- Make arrangements that enable all actors to communicate clearly and transparently;
- Make sure that RRPs take account of the requirements of all agencies involved in the response;
- Ensure that agencies' requirements are realistic, match agencies' presence and capacities in the country, and can be implemented before the RRP's term ends;
- Avoid duplication or overlaps in budgeting. When agencies issue their own appeals, take account of requirements that might be included in the budgets of UNHCR or other UN agencies;
- Consult the UNHCR Emergency Information Management Toolkit when you prepare an RRP. It contains useful tools for communication and information management;
- Draft RRPs in language that is agency-neutral;
- Do not change planning scenarios, planning figures or priorities unilaterally;
- Do not focus on agency-specific planning.

1. Overview

Refugee Response Plans (RRPs) are UNHCR-led, comprehensive inter-agency plans for responding to refugee emergencies. An RRP contributes to the application of the Refugee
Coordination Model ensuring accountable, inclusive, predictable and transparent coordination in responding to large-scale or complex refugee situations. It provides the vehicle through which UNHCR together with a broad range of key actors, including representatives of the host Government (where possible), members of the UN/Humanitarian Country Team, other international organizations, civil society, development and financial institutions and the private sector, seeks to foster joint humanitarian and development programming initiatives in the country of asylum. See Refugee Coordination Model.

The RRP articulates the protection and solution priorities and describes the needs of refugees, impacted host communities, and other persons of concern, states how and by whom these needs will be addressed, and defines the financial requirements of all the partners involved. It builds on national preparedness measures and prior contingency plans. See Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies for inter-agency contingency planning in a refugee situation.

The development of an RRP is coordinated and led by the UNHCR Refugee Coordinator, who is often the UNHCR Representative in medium-sized emergencies and a senior staff member in the Regional Bureau concerned in larger ones, with the aim of ensuring an overarching vision and the coherent engagement of all actors in pursuit of protection and solutions.

An RRP is based on protection and assistance assessment findings. The needs assessment for refugee emergencies (NARE) is designed to assist UNHCR operations with the guidance and tools required to undertake an initial multi-sectoral needs assessment when there has been a significant sudden, forced displacement of populations across borders. In addition, RRP partners should step up cooperation by exchanging information, carrying out joint assessments and analysis in line with the 'new way of working' to jointly understand the challenges on the ground and better identify actions and sectors for intervention. Assessments should consult refugee and host communities about their needs, capacities and possible solutions.

2. Main guidance

When and for what purpose

An RRP is prepared in situations where the scale of a refugee crisis requires a formal coordinated inter-agency response plan. The RRP sets out a detailed strategy and implementation plan that provides a framework for all the partners involved. The planning process should be inclusive, building on each key actor's comparative advantage to produce a complementary combination of interventions in multiple contexts to respond to various types of refugee crises from the onset of emergencies to more protracted situations.

Given that the host Government is the primary duty-bearer in any refugee situation, the RRP supports Government leadership and coordination, through mobilisation of international support and funding, while it seeks to broaden the scope of partnerships to mobilise additional resources and increase visibility for the needs of refugees and their host communities.

The RRP serves as the base from which to implement and advocate for refugee situations. The
inclusiveness of UNHCR’s RRP approach brings agencies together: they share their analysis of protection risks and the needs of refugees and host communities, and jointly elaborate a strategy to address them. In addition to deciding who is responsible for what, and financial requirements, the RRP is also a fundraising tool for agencies involved in the response.

An RRP does not cover UNHCR’s involvement in IDP and natural disaster response situations. A separate planning process exists for these situations which is led by the Humanitarian Coordinator, supported by OCHA, and with the active involvement of Cluster Coordinators. UNHCR takes an active part in this planning process as a member of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), and as a cluster lead. If a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is already in place when a refugee influx occurs, a high-level summary of the RRP for a newly emerged refugee situation along with any on-going refugee response(s), and presentation of related resource requirements are included in the HRP as a separate refugee chapter.

In response to the many challenges inherent in identifying and protecting refugees within broader movements of persons, an RRP could also be developed for mixed refugee-migrant displacement situations. In such cases the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), which is typically co-led by UNHCR and IOM, seeks to ensure humanitarian, protection and integration interventions to address the needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, as well as to support host communities in response to mixed population flows.

The RRP plays a key role in:

- Providing partners in the refugee response with a platform and tools to properly coordinate an inter-agency response, as well as to engage new partners;
- Raising the profile of refugee assistance among the various inter-agency plans, as well as enhancing refugee inclusion in national and local development plans and policies;
- Mobilizing resources for partners, which are operationally engaged, by providing donors with a jointly agreed plan;
- Providing the host Government with an overview of who-is-doing-what in support of the refugees, ensuring an overarching vision and coherent engagement in pursuit of protection and solutions.

Summary of guidance and/or options

In line with UNHCR’s Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, country operations shall from the start of an emergency elaborate resource requirements and mobilization strategies together with partners and ensure that these are reflected in Refugee Response Plans.

The duration of an RRP depends on the nature of the emergency situation. However, ideally it should be aligned with the calendar year, particularly UNHCR’s "financial biennium", which is the period from 1 January of one year to 31 December of the following year.

Within the framework of the RRP partners have to work together to develop and implement responses in the immediate, medium and long-term to assist and empower refugees, as well as
to support host communities and the host Government. The inter-agency activities included in an RRP, should aim to provide protection and multi-sectoral assistance, and to increase the focus on building the self-reliance and resilience of refugees. Advocacy for the inclusion of refugees in national developments plans and labour markets shall also be included.

Depending on the context of the displacement situation, as well as the capacity of host communities to support the impact of massive numbers of refugees, the RRP should focus on reinforcing and supporting national structures wherever conditions permit.

The response plan should be pillared on broadening partnerships and operationalizing the Global Compact on Refugees (GRF), underpinned by the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and incorporating the humanitarian-development and peace nexus into the response.

An RRP includes:

- A situation analysis, including contextual information and maps;
- Planning figures;
- An overview of the needs and vulnerabilities of the refugees, host communities and other persons of concern as relevant;
- Protection and solutions priorities;
- Strategic objectives and main priorities;
- Key sector specific responses by involved partners, and their responsibilities;
- Indicators with baselines and targets for each planned result;
- Inter-agency budget;
- Coordination arrangements.

Where refugees from a country flee to more than one country of asylum, a Regional RRP is prepared. This sets out a regional strategy that incorporates the country-level inter-agency response plans of all refugee-receiving countries affected by a particular refugee situation. A Country RRP is prepared to reflect the needs of an entire refugee population in a country of asylum. The Country RRP includes the inter-agency response delivered by partners in the country.

See UNHCR / DER Guidance Note on 2020-2021 Refugee Response Plans, aimed at ensuring consistency in the preparations of RRPs and promoting best practice.

**Regional RRP**

Where refugees from a country flee to more than one country of asylum, a Regional RRP is developed. This presents the inter-agency response plans of all refugee receiving countries in separate sections, together with a regional overview. Coordination of a regional RRP is led by the Regional Refugee Coordinator, or the Regional Bureau Director’s Office of the relevant bureau. UNHCR offices in coordination and consultation with relevant partners, should work with the Regional Bureau or Regional Refugee Coordinator and agree:

- A timeline for preparing the RRP;
- Planning figures and a planning scenario, in close consultation with the operation in the
Regional RRP

While Regional RRPs continue to be essential for the coordination of refugee crises with regional implications, when possible, operations are encouraged to develop Country Refugee Response Plans (Country RRPs), consisting of a multi-year inter-agency plan covering all refugee populations in a country.

The development of a Country RRP is coordinated by UNHCR, under the leadership of the UNHCR Representative, including the plans of all multilateral organizations for humanitarian assistance and beyond it could pave the way for the development of comprehensive plans for refugees led by the host Government.

The Country RRP, follows the structure of the Regional RRP and supports interventions from humanitarian assistance to medium and long-term responses, focused on resilience and solutions. In this regard, the Country RRP includes activities based on a two-year inter-agency budget (in line with UNHCR's and partners' biennium), while the protection strategy covers a three to five-year period.

How to implement this at field level?

When developing an RRP, the following steps are recommended.

Step 1: Convene a core strategy group and set up coordination structures for the planning process

Under the leadership of the UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator a core strategy group should be convened to help establish priorities and strategic objectives of the RRP.

This group should be composed of representatives of agencies involved in the response (including UN agencies, as well as international and national NGOs), and the head of the Refugee
Protection Working Group. As appropriate, the host government should also participate.

Coordination arrangements for Sector Working Groups should be reviewed and confirmed as early as possible in an emergency (ideally before the planning process starts) and should be informed by contingency plans and preparedness actions. Sector co-coordinators should be drawn from UN agencies, NGOs and, where applicable, Government.

If not already in place, it is particularly important to establish a UNHCR-led Refugee Protection Working Group that represents a wide range of agencies, to ensure that all sectors integrate cross-cutting protection priorities and align their plans accordingly.

**Step 2: Develop planning assumptions and broad strategic objectives**
Under the leadership of the UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator supported by the Head of the Refugee Protection Working Group, the core strategy group undertakes a joint analysis of the situation and develops the overall planning assumptions that should guide the response. They also jointly review the protection and solution priorities and establish the corresponding strategic objectives to guide the response.

**Step 3: Development of sector level response**
The UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator convenes the sector co-coordinating agencies and the head of the Refugee Protection Working Group to provide high-level guidance for sector-level planning, based on the protection and solution priorities and strategic objectives set by the core strategy group to ensure a collective response that meets the needs of refugees and leverages the capacity of all actors. Taking account of the protection priorities, the overall strategy, and working with partners in their sectors, sector co-coordinators determine sector-specific objectives and key activities (based on sector-level assessments) and identify gaps and priority needs.

Sector plans should provide:

- A situation analysis for the sector;
- Overall planning figures for targeted populations (broken down by region or location where relevant, and disaggregated as a minimum by gender and age);
- An overview of needs and vulnerabilities;
- List of key geographic locations in which partners should develop interventions;
- Key assumptions that affect the work of the sector (such as government policies, refugee specific needs and protection related risks, security issues, etc.);
- Financial requirements, with a break down by partner and sector, in each country of asylum.

**Step 4: Consolidate and Review the plan**
When sector-level plans are complete, the Representative or Refugee Coordinator convenes the sector co-coordinating agencies and the head of the Refugee Protection Working Group to review the plans and identify areas of overlap or duplication. The UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator should then confirm overall needs, priorities and requirements with the core strategy group, as well as partners involved in the response and the concerned Regional Bureau.
Step 5: Launch the plan
Once the response plan has been validated and agreed by all the partners involved, including at their Headquarters or Regional Director level, the UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator organizes the formal launch of the RRP, in coordination with the host Government, partners and relevant stakeholders.

Step 6: Monitor the plan
A monitoring framework should be set during the development phase of the RRP with clear responsibilities as to who should monitor, what and when. Data on progress should be collected from partners and regular progress reports on key indicators and RRP objectives should be coordinated and published. For Country RRPs, operations are responsible for putting in place a monitoring system. For Regional RRPs, the Regional Bureau/ Refugee Coordinator’s Office is responsible for coordinating the monitoring and reporting. Mechanisms and tools are necessary to allow country operations to monitor the collective results and report on the collective achievements on a regular basis. Establishing an information management system early on is critical.

Information Management: In an early stage in the RRP planning process, UNHCR will reinforce its country data and information management capacity. Data portals are created to facilitate coordination and information sharing among stakeholders engaged in the response. An on-line inter-agency RRP portal (operational data-portals: http://www.data.unhcr.org/) should be established with the support of UNHCR HQ. In addition, UNHCR has an information management role and field operations should produce external Inter-Agency Operational Updates to report on the progress achieved by all agencies in the Country and Regional RRPs, as well as UNHCR-specific updates.

Step 7: Fund tracking

- As the lead coordinating agency, UNHCR is responsible for tracking funding received by all agencies for the RRPs and sharing Inter-Agency Funding Updates. The Refugee Response Financial Tracking (RRFT) was developed by UNHCR and rolled out in 2019 as a "One stop shop" platform compiling all financial data related to refugee programmes. Data available includes funding received by agencies involved in refugee response. It includes funding and budgets for refugee-related appeals and plans such as Country and Regional Refugee Response Plans (RRPs). See UNHCR, Guide to the Refugee Funding Tracker.

- Timeframe and action plan
  Depending on the emergency of the situation, a new RRP should be finalized within a timeframe of not more than 20 working days. Given the importance of inter-agency consultations and understanding the complexity of the challenges facing partners involved, including organizing appropriate needs assessments, this timeframe may be extended further to ensure a higher quality response plan especially in more protracted situations where revisions of annual plans are concerned.

Action Plan: what and by whom
Following a decision to develop an RRP, the UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator and the Regional Bureau agree draft timelines and the period the RRP will cover.

- UNHCR agrees a detailed timeline with the Government and participating actors in the host country and establishes a coordination mechanism for preparing an RRP.
- The UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator forms a small core strategy group composed of senior representatives of key agencies involved in the response and convenes a strategy meeting.
- This group prepares a situation analysis, develops the planning scenario and assumptions, reviews the protection and solutions priorities and establishes the strategic objectives. These are communicated to sector co-coordinators and other actors involved.
- Based on established criteria and in consultation with key agencies the UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator identifies sector co-coordinating agencies.
- Prepare a draft RRP. It should also include the financial requirements of agencies participating in the response by sector. The RRP is based on available evidence and a needs analysis.
- Circulate a consolidated draft for review to the core strategy group and all agencies participating in the response as well as to Government counterparts.
- The UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator conclude the process of feedback from core strategy group, partners and Government counterparts and provide a consolidated RRP draft to UNHCR HQ and to the Regional Bureau for review.
- Thereafter, the UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator shares the draft with the HQs of participating agencies for information and further feedback. At that stage, a validation meeting could be organized among all the partners involved.
- The UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator, in cooperation with UNHCR HQ, reviews and integrates the comments of other agencies and prepares the final document for launch. Upon approval by the UNHCR HQ and the Regional Bureau Director, the RRP is finalized.
- The UNHCR Representative or Refugee Coordinator, in cooperation with UNHCR HQ, launches the RRP and presents it where possible with the host Government, partners, as well as donors and other stakeholders.
- UNHCR coordinates the collection of data from partners and offices and regularly publishes progress updates.

**Annexes**

UNHCR, Guide to the Refugee Funding Tracker

**3. Links**

UNHCR, Guidance Note on 2020-2021 RRPs (access with password) UNHCR, Templates for Regional RRP Narrative and Budget, and Country RRP Narrati... RRP s on the online refugee data portals

**4. Main contacts**
Contact the UNHCR DER/DRRM, Humanitarian Financing and Field Support Unit: Rachel Manning: manning@unhcr.org and Stylianos Kostas: kostas@unhcr.org