

**UNHCR-UNICEF Letter of Understanding Template  
Guidance Note  
August 2013**

1. Background

In November 2011, UNICEF Executive Director Mr Anthony Lake and the High Commissioner for Refugees Mr Antonio Guterres, signed a Joint Letter stating that the two largest humanitarian agencies, UNICEF and UNHCR share a long history of effective collaboration in humanitarian action in operational contexts and in policy development. The letter called for greater collaboration in refugee contexts through increased joint efforts in planning, preparedness and information-sharing. The letter stated that field-level agreements should take into consideration the full range of issues regarding cooperation, including the timeframe of commitments, how activities will be funded, joint initiatives for fundraising and communications, information management, staffing modalities, and coordination mechanisms. The Principals recognized the importance of continuing strategic dialogue, while also moving forward in key thematic areas.

UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director have personally engaged in strengthening the longstanding partnership, noting that a reinforced joint approach at the country level will enhance the collective response to populations of concern. In late 2012, Janet Lim and Yoka Brandt agreed over the medium term to take advantage of opportunities and address persistent challenges in the broader partnership at the HQs level, dedicating senior management attention and support to further enhance mutual understanding. They also committed to disseminating a standard template for country-level Letters of Understanding (LOU), aimed at providing a clear framework for country level partnership and engagement. This Note, produced jointly by UNHCR and UNICEF, accompanies and provides guidance on the country-level LOU.

2. The purpose of the LOU Template

Building on the global Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and UNICEF dated 14 March 1996, the country-level LOU template provides the legal basis for the relationship between UNHCR and UNICEF at the country or regional level. It is based on LOUs developed by Country Offices in 2011 and early 2012 and has been pre-approved by the legal offices of both organizations.

The template aims to reduce the time required to develop the agreement so that more time can be spent on substantive discussions. It should facilitate country-level coordination and partnership, and should be used flexibly per the country context. The goal is to establish predictable partnerships at the country level that are complementary and mutually beneficial.

The LOU facilitates and formalises, bilateral coordination between UNHCR and UNICEF in assisting refugees and host populations. It does not address the cluster approach or resources designed to assist IDPs or other partnership settings. The LOU, however, should be contextualised and make reference to coordination and response for other vulnerable populations to ensure complementarity. Refugee emergencies rarely take place in isolation, and many operational contexts are mixed situations, sometimes with refugees dispersed among other vulnerable populations in need of humanitarian (and

development) assistance. The complexity of such situations must be taken into account. While focusing primarily on the bilateral relationship between UNICEF and UNHCR, the course of action and respective roles of the two agencies must relate and link appropriately to other relevant humanitarian and development initiatives, actors and coordination structures.

While ensuring a mutually enforcing partnership between UNICEF and UNHCR as part of good contingency planning for an initial onset of an emergency, the LOU can apply to longer term collaboration. The engagement should take into consideration longer term impact and longer term needs, including durable solutions for refugees, and the linkage to the Country Programme of UNICEF. The template is also designed to enable flexible adaptation in response to a change in situation.

The template is intended to help field colleagues develop a reflex to discuss key issues, particularly around joint planning, visibility and public information, resource mobilisation and overcoming joint challenges. As such, it should also calibrate UNHCR and UNICEF advocacy and messaging with partners such as host government and donors.

### 3. Joint Plan of Action

The Joint Plan of Action is an integral part of the agreement between the two agencies and is annexed to the LOU. The Plan should be used as a tool to clearly articulate a division of labour in terms of support activities such as logistics and supply, and joint activities such as contingency planning, resource mobilisation, risk assessment, preparedness, advocacy and communications. Most importantly, the Joint Plan of Action should give further definition to the type of partnership and leadership within thematic areas laid out in the LOU (i.e. technical support, service delivery, sector coordination), and describe the roles and responsibilities of each agency. The Plan and related activities/results should have a specific timeframe, and mechanisms should be put in place to jointly review progress.

Capacities and functions outlined in the Plan represent UNHCR's and UNICEF's accountability to one another. The Plan should ensure that technical tools such as standards, indicators, methodologies are agreed between the two agencies and key partners in the refugee operation.

### 4. Endorsement and Review

As the template and process have been approved by each agency's senior management, and the language has been vetted by each Legal Department, there is no further endorsement procedure required for signing the LOU by the Country Representatives. However, it is recommended that the substance of the Plan is shared with technical specialists within each agency. This consultation is at the discretion of the agency.

### 5. Implementing and monitoring the Joint Plan of Action

The head of each Party's country office will meet at least twice per year and when there is a significant change in the situation to discuss and review the Joint Plan of Action and its implementation, including, any policy, strategic security, operational and implementation issues that have arisen or may arise.

#### 6. Tips for the successful development of the Joint Plan of Action:

- **Stay modest and build incrementally.** Be clear on timelines. The higher the degree of certainty, the more useful the Plan of Action and the LOU will be in providing predictability to the collaboration and the response – and vice versa.
- Engagements **should largely be funded or clearly fundable.** Each agency is responsible for the resources associated with their agreed interventions. Funding challenges must be discussed jointly as early as possible and in order to identify a mutually-agreed solution.
- Give due credit to both agencies and calibrate **communications and visibility** activities accordingly.
- UNICEF and UNHCR should **consult with each other on selection of implementing partners and management of partnerships** in the technical areas in which they collaborate, since this has a direct bearing on the coordination of capacities across the refugee response and for longer term strategy and hand-over following the emergency period.
- **Information and data-sharing** around assessments and technical specifications in all areas is important; as well as agreeing on methodologies for collecting and analysing data and on reporting. While overall guidance from HQs will be needed and useful (and will be forthcoming!), these issues also must be sorted out and agreed at country level.

#### 7. Questions and Problem-solving

If colleagues meet difficulties in agreeing on certain issues at country-level and would like support or advice, the Inter-Agency Unit/ DER (UNHCR) and the Humanitarian Partnership Unit/EMOPS (UNICEF) are the identified focal points within each agency's headquarters to facilitate discussion and/ or help clarify questions relating to the overall partnership. If expected progress is not being met, or the Joint Plan of Action is not being implemented as agreed, concerns can be raised with the focal points. For more challenging policy issues, both the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and the Deputy Executive Director have agreed to engage directly. If modifications are made that entail risk of financial exposure or legal obligation, the country level in agreement with the identified focal points within each agency's headquarters should consult with the respective legal departments.