

# Reprioritization of Resources in Refugee Responses

## Recommendations from NRC and IMPACT Initiatives

### Context

Following the withdrawal of most US humanitarian funding and funding decreases by other major donors, UNHCR and other UN and NGO actors are having to make difficult decisions about where and how to prioritize the remaining resources across refugee responses. For UNHCR, these decisions have two dimensions: an internal piece that relates to how they prioritize and scale down their own operations, and an external piece as the lead of the interagency refugee coordination system.

On the internal dimension, UNHCR is in the process of undertaking its own downscaling. On the external side, UNHCR has indicated that the 2025 Regional Refugee Response Plans (RRPs) will be further prioritized through two separate but related processes, with 1) the creation of RRP prioritization factsheets and 2) operational business continuity planning.

As of late April, there is limited information available about what criteria will be used to support the reprioritization of resources within or across refugee responses. A similar reprioritization exercise has nearly concluded in OCHA-led (non-refugee) responses, guided by a pre-existing method of classifying severity of needs at country level, but this system is not used in refugee settings.

From the perspective of NRC and IMPACT Initiatives, it is essential that there be a common set of criteria and a collective approach to reprioritization in refugee responses to ensure we are reaching the refugees whose needs are most acute with the resources that remain. This document aims to support discussions on this issue and offers some initial joint reflections from NRC and IMPACT Initiatives. It includes a series of questions we would believe would be useful to understand from UNHCR.

### Reflections on a reprioritization approach

While all refugees have common rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Additional Protocol, not all refugees have the same material or legal assistance needs. Government capacities and willingness to meet refugee needs likewise vary and not all contexts require the same level of engagement by UNHCR and NGOs to ensure respect for refugee protections. Given that resources are now dramatically constrained, it is more important than ever to ensure that remaining funds are directed to where they are needed most. This will require a collective approach to prioritizing needs within and across operations (including across regions).

As a starting point, NRC and IMPACT Initiatives believe it is critical that this collective approach is developed jointly with peers to ensure there is common buy-in and understanding of the prioritization criteria. We are grateful that these discussions have now started in coordination with ICVA, and hope they will continue and be expedited.

#### Turning to the specifics of the approach:

- We recommend that criteria be developed, in consultation with partners, to identify the severity of refugees' material and legal assistance needs within and across contexts. Initial criteria could be used in the coming months to inform operational downscaling, and a more developed methodology to inform future collective planning.
- To the greatest extent possible, we encourage alignment of this methodology with the approach used to reprioritize within and across OCHA-led responses to avoid having a two-tiered system for refugee and non-refugee needs.

- This criteria-based approach would need to take into consideration some of the specific aspects of refugee responses and settings, including:
  - Specific functions carried out by UNHCR and its partners in refugee settings to ensure the protection of refugees' basic rights – e.g. refugee status determination.
  - The capacity and willingness of other actors to meet refugees' needs, recognizing that policy change (e.g. on refugees' right to work) may offer a more sustainable solution than continued provision of humanitarian assistance.
- Lessons can be learned from existing country-level prioritization approaches – e.g. the differentiated assistance approach in Kenya, the Proxy Means Test approach in Lebanon and Jordan, and the Vulnerability Assessment Framework in Jordan.
- NRC and IMPACT Initiatives are grateful for UNHCR's participatory approach in identifying refugees' priorities, which we believe can be combined with a more comparative methodology: standardized prioritization criteria will ensure we are responding to the most acute needs *across* contexts, and participatory approaches will then ensure that the response modalities align with refugees' preference.
- Sustainable, solutions-focused approaches can and should still be adopted wherever possible, where they can be the best response to acute needs.

#### Once criteria are established:

- We then encourage UNHCR to work with its partners at regional and country level to assess/analyze the severity of needs using the agreed criteria, and to consolidate the outcomes of this severity analysis into an updated overview.
- Ideally the above severity analysis should feed into the process of reprioritizing the current RRP, but if that process moves more quickly, it can be applied to future RRP cycles. In either case, these documents should then be reviewed at global level in collaboration with partners prior to finalization, to ensure coherence within and across operations.
  - This coherence check should also include OCHA/the IASC system. Recognizing that significant downscaling of refugee responses may increase the likelihood of returns, it will be important to coordinate plans across responses.
- In the longer term, we encourage UNHCR and OCHA to look at fuller integration of the refugee and non-refugee needs assessment and response planning tools to promote the strongest possible alignment and to avoid duplicate or parallel systems.

## Questions for UNHCR

The following questions would help establish a better understanding of what prioritization tools are already in use and what is possible in the immediate and longer term.

- What criteria are being used to inform UNHCR's decisions on where to downscale its own operations/prioritize remaining resources? Can these be shared as soon as possible to support coherence of partners' decision-making in the immediate term?
- Is there a plan to have a review of the reprioritized RRP appeals at global level to ensure coherence across refugee operations, and to coordinate plans (and impact of respective downscaling) with OCHA-led responses?
- Are necessary data systems and tools already in place to enable an analysis of severity across operations? If not, what resources (including partner support) would be needed to make this possible?

- Given the need to continue to work together to make difficult decisions on resource prioritization, how does UNHCR envisage leading an interagency process with partners to support this? What forums or platforms will be used for this purpose?
- Given the need for simple, cost-effective systems in this reduced funding environment, what is UNHCR's thinking toward fuller integration of refugee and non-refugee coordination and planning tools going forward?