Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

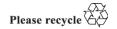**Standing Committee**
76th meeting

Progress toward implementing the "grand bargain" commitments

Summary

This conference room paper summarizes the progress made in implementing UNHCR's commitments under the "grand bargain" since the oral update at the seventy-third meeting of the Standing Committee in September 2018. Financial figures in the report have been updated, following the closure of the 2018 accounts.

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Contents

1.   Greater transparency

UNHCR's commitment: publish open data allowing traceability of donors' funding throughout the transaction chain.

1.   UNHCR began publishing data in accordance with the standards of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) in September 2018, and can be considered as having met this particular commitment. It has also made further efforts to improve the quality of the data it publishes by automating the process as of April 2019. The IATI data files are updated monthly, and as of June 2019, full data on expenditure for 2018 has been published.

2.   More support and funding tools for local and national responders

UNHCR's commitment: transfer at least 25 per cent of programme expenditures to local and national responders by the end of 2020.

2.   In 2018, UNHCR allocated $1.048 billion to 1,077 partners, which included national and international NGOs, governments and United Nations agencies. Of this, $752 million was allocated to local responders, national NGOs and governments. UNHCR moved closer to its target by transferring 21 per cent of its annual programme expenditure ($3.453 billion) to local responders.

UNHCR's commitment: expand investment in institutional capacity-building for national partners to support effective emergency preparedness.

3.   On 1 June 2019, UNHCR adopted a new policy to redefine its contributions towards partner integrity capacity and support costs. The changes comprise a contribution of 4 per cent for national partner programme support costs, as well as greater discretion in the way in which partners can make use of this additional resource.

4.   UNHCR also undertook four preparedness missions to Burundi, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia in 2018, as well as facilitated four situational emergency trainings in Burundi, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Libya and Tajikistan with the participation of local government and NGO partners. In 2018, out of 54 updated contingency plans, 42 (77 per cent) included the participation of local authorities or governments, 37 (68 per cent) included local or national NGOs and 6 (11 per cent) included local communities.

3.   Increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming

UNHCR's commitment: double the amount of funds programmed for cash-based interventions (CBIs) in aid delivery by the end of 2020 as a proportion of its overall assistance.

5.   In line with its grand bargain commitment to double the use of cash as a proportion of its assistance by 2020, UNHCR has delivered $2 billion since 2016. Of this, $568 million was delivered in 2018, representing 20 per cent of the overall assistance against the 2015 baseline of 11.82 per cent. Cash assistance has now almost doubled from the baseline and exceeds in-kind assistance. There has also been a marked growth in the training of UNHCR staff to deliver CBIs; over 4,500 staff have been trained since the release of the policy on cash-based interventions in October 2016.

6   Monitoring and evaluation in operations reflect that cash, together with in-kind assistance and services, can contribute to preventing displaced populations from resorting to negative coping strategies, such as removing children from schools, child labour and begging, survival sex, early marriage and returning prematurely to conflict zones. Overall, post-distribution monitoring of UNHCR operations suggest that the majority of beneficiaries are content with the distribution process and could find what they needed in the local markets

and services. Evaluations on cash assistance have been conducted in Greece, Jordan and Lebanon.

7.   Furthermore, in December 2018, UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) committed to delivering cash assistance through a common cash system. This step forward aligns with UNHCR's common cash delivery approach, which promotes collaboration on cash transfer mechanisms that maximize efficiency and predictability, ensure effective coordination, leverage the expertise of all partners and maximize economies of scale.

8.   UNHCR also expanded its common cash delivery, notably through the Common Cash Facility (CCF) in Jordan, the Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organisation System for E-Cards (LOUISE) and the Greece Cash Alliance. In Jordan, the CCF includes 28 partners and provides cash assistance to the most vulnerable refugees in the country. There, the pursuance of a common approach with an increased number of partners led to the reduction of banking fees from 5 per cent to 1.15 per cent, demonstrating that UNHCR's cash-based programming is not only growing in size, but also in efficiency. Several other good practices on cash collaboration, in particular with WFP, have emerged in operations such as in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Niger, Uganda and Zambia through joint field support missions, strategies for cash, harmonized transfer mechanisms, assessments, feedback mechanisms, as well as targeting and post-distribution monitoring. In Greece, a similar approach is being employed with UNHCR and five international NGOs using the same service provider and a common monitoring system.

9.   In addition, UNHCR is increasingly leveraging cash partnerships with the private sector to promote financial inclusion and is facilitating access for refugees to formal bank and mobile money accounts in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Niger, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia.

4.   Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews

UNHCR's commitment: expand the use of biometrics for refugee registration to a total of 75 country operations by 2020.

10.   The use of biometrics in refugee registration continued to be expanded during 2018 with an additional 2.4 million refugee registrations using biometrics. UNHCR has now deployed biometric registration systems to 62 country operations, compared with 52 during 2017, and is on track to meet its target of 75 operations by 2020. As a result of these efforts, 8 in 10 UNHCR registered refugees over age five now have a biometric identity.

11.   Beyond its use in registration, UNHCR has also expanded the use of biometrics at food distribution sites to ensure that rightful beneficiaries have equitable access to assistance through improved integrity of distribution data and controls. This has reduced waiting times as well as the overall cost of delivering assistance. Over 100 food distribution sites now use biometrics across eight countries. UNHCR is also collaborating with WFP in the context of a global data sharing addendum to the memorandum of understanding in order to improve data flows and efficiencies between the agencies.

UNHCR's commitments: use technology and innovation to reduce the costs of delivering assistance; reduce the costs of procurement and logistics by 10 per cent by the end of 2020 through the use of shared services with partner agencies.

12.   UNHCR has established 74 Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) with other UN agencies. Of these, 30 were used by other agencies for IT and procurement of non-food items. Four agencies – the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and

UN Women – used UNHCR's light and armoured vehicle fleet contracts. UNHCR used 28 GFAs from other UN agencies.

13.   As co-convenor of this workstream, to reduce the costs of procurement and logistics, UNHCR, together with WFP, is leading the Business Innovation Group in the context of the UN reform. This group is working to increase common back offices, global shared service centres, as well as common premises.

14.   Taking into account the increased requirements resulting from the number of persons of concern, the relative procurement cost of goods and services decreased by 7 per cent in 2018 and 10 per cent in 2017, compared to the 2016 baseline.

15.   In addition, UNHCR has contributed to success on harmonizing cost structures via the "UN data cube" project, which was launched to meet new demands for harmonized and transparent UN system-wide financial information. In the lead-up to its launch, an ad-hoc UN data cube team was formed in 2017 as a joint initiative between the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG); UNHCR joined the team in 2018. Following an extensive consultative process in 2018, the team released six UN data cube data reporting standards which were approved by the HLCM and UNSDG in October 2018 and entered into effect on 1 January 2019. The approval of the standards by all UN entities and organizations effectively demonstrates the provision of transparent and comparable cost structures.

16.   Furthermore, together with UNICEF and WFP, UNHCR launched the UN Partner Portal in November 2018, thereby reducing duplicate information submissions by partners, including information for due diligence purposes.

5.   Improve joint and impartial needs assessments

UNHCR's commitment: undertake coordinated joint needs assessments and continue sharing evidence-based needs assessment data.

17.   UNHCR made consistent efforts in 2018 to strengthen the coordination and streamlining of data collection. During the year, it participated in 128 joint multi-sectoral assessments, 46 per cent of which it either led or co-led (representing an increase from 32 per cent in 2017).

18.   This growth was reflective of an ever-widening engagement; in 2018, 43 UNHCR operations participated in multi-sectoral or protection assessments compared to 35 operations in 2017. UNHCR also strategically positioned itself to increase joint needs assessment capacity through partnership, including: (i) the joint targeting guidance developed with WFP to prioritize needs and beneficiary eligibility for assistance, (ii) the World Bank to establish the Joint Data Centre for socio-economic analysis and open data, and (iii) the closer relationship fostered with other partners. Furthermore, UNHCR created a structured data library for the external sharing of anonymized data, including needs assessment and survey microdata. Collectively, these initiatives have offered greater capacity and transparency for joint needs assessments and have helped to regularize assessment reports. Furthering its efforts in 2018, UNHCR also launched a needs assessment e-learning that provides training on systematic joint analysis, benefitting over 600 staff.

19.   On data sharing, the bilateral sharing of needs assessment data is part of the scope of the 2018 data sharing agreement between UNHCR and WFP to support responsible, predictable, and reciprocal sharing of data. UNHCR is also a leading agency in opening datasets publically on the Humanitarian Data Exchange, uploading 1,553 datasets in 2018. Of the multi-sectoral joint needs assessments that were conducted during 2018, some 85 per cent resulted in publically available reports.

6.   A participation revolution

UNHCR's commitment: ensure equal (50 per cent) and meaningful participation of women and adolescent girls in all decision-making processes and structures in forced displacement contexts by 2020.

20.   In 2018, UNHCR launched an updated age, gender and diversity policy. The policy includes two core actions for UNHCR operations related to this commitment: (i) country strategies will detail the operation's approach to communicating with women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds, and (ii) country operations will employ participatory methodologies to incorporate the capacities and priorities of women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds into programmes. Based on assessments and feedback provided by persons of concern in a number of regions, UNHCR was able to include measures to strengthen the link between feedback and programming in a two-year implementation plan.

UNHCR's commitment: continue to strengthen engagement with and accountability to the communities affected by crisis.

21.   UNHCR's updated age, gender and diversity policy mandates the establishment and promotion of feedback and response systems, including for confidential complaints across all UNHCR operations. In this regard, UNHCR has created and is testing operational guidance to strengthen such mechanisms across inclusive communication channels. The Office continues to engage with interagency initiatives to strengthen collective accountability mechanisms, including through its co-chairmanship of the interagency standing committee (IASC) group on "Accountability and inclusion" and membership of the "Communicating with disaster affected communities network".

22.   Under the Connectivity for Refugees initiative, in September 2018, UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with GSMA, a trade association representing mobile network operators. Through this partnership, UNHCR carried out research to examine legal barriers for forcibly displaced persons to accessing digital communications in 20 priority countries. The findings will be used to establish country-level platforms to advocate the inclusion of displaced groups with governments, humanitarian and development agencies, mobile operators, and financial service providers.

23.   In addition, the UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council has been involved in preparations for the Global Refugee Forum, including as a co-sponsor, after its previous involvement in the development of the Global Compact on Refugees. In June 2019, the advisory council also participated in the annual NGO consultations. Through diversified representation of youth leaders, the advisory council has become an empowering channel for the future generation and an important voice in the refugee policy-making process.

7.   Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding

UNHCR's commitment: pursue the institutional changes needed to facilitate multi-year protection and solutions strategies, as well as programming in partnership with humanitarian and development actors.

24.   UNHCR has developed multi-year multi-partner (MYMP) strategies in 22 operations. These strategies focus on working towards longer-term protection and solutions outcomes for refugees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons (IDPs), including through support to host communities.

25.   Multi-year approaches are being encouraged through the adoption of MYMP strategies, country support for implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, and collaboration with the World Bank International Development Association. Five countries have adopted all three of these compatible approaches: Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Rwanda.

26.   An internal lessons learned exercise was conducted for the pilot MYMP strategies. The exercise concluded that the strategies provided an added value in facilitating strategic planning with partners, and also highlighted the need to continue investment in the alignment of planning tools, revision of systems, as well as evidence, monitoring, and evaluation. In addition, UNHCR has enabled operations to sign multi-year agreements with partners, when conditions allow. Due to the planning cycle, the benefits of this should be more visible by 2020. Ultimately, UNHCR intends to introduce multi-year planning approaches to all operations following the revision of its results-based management framework.

27.   Regarding the amount of multi-year funding that UNHCR received, while the amount increased to $539.8 million in 2017 (13.7 per cent of contributions), it returned to 2016 proportions in 2018. In 2016, the funding amounted to $263.4 million (6.7 per cent of contributions), compared to $269.3 million (6.4 per cent of contributions) in 2018.

8.   Reduce the earmarking of donor contributions

UNHCR's commitment: increase the visibility of unearmarked and softly earmarked funding, recognizing the contributions made by donors.

28.   In 2018, UNHCR received $617.4 million in unearmarked funding from 81 donors. This was an increase of nearly 5 per cent on the $588.7 million received in 2017. Contributed without restriction on how it can be used, some 56 per cent of UNHCR's unearmarked funding was received in the first quarter of the year, a vital indication of timeliness and providing the Office with valuable flexibility. In addition, UNHCR received $754.6 million in softly earmarked funding, allowing it to be used across a range of countries and activities in a given region or situation. This was a decline of nearly 2 per cent from the $768 million received in 2017.

29.   UNHCR's "Report on use of flexible funding in 2018", published in June 2019, offered enhanced visibility on how UNHCR allocated its flexible funding— unearmarked and softly earmarked funding—both by quarter and geographically. The geographical clarifications provided insight into where flexible funds were used, allowing a more complete analysis of support and taking into account other funding streams. It was coordinated with the release of new funding dashboards on Global Focus enabling greater visibility, accountability and information on unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions (see section I below).

30.   In addition, the creation of a Donor Visibility Officer position in the Donor Relations and Resource Mobilization Service has coincided with an increase in the monthly average number of impressions on the official twitter account for UNHCR's government partners (@UNHCRgov), which recognizes donor contributions. The number of impressions rose from 16,000 to 426,000 between October and December 2018.

9.   Harmonize and simplify reporting requirements

UNHCR's commitment: harmonize and simplify reporting requirements by the end of 2018.

31.   With a view to harmonize donor reporting, UNHCR participated in pilot testing the common narrative "8+3 template" between 1 August 2017 and 30 April 2019. The pilot use of the template was conducted for UNHCR partners in Iraq, Myanmar and Somalia. From 2018, all UNHCR partners have been using the template.

32.   During 2018, UNHCR also invested in improvements to the functionality of the Global Focus website. The upgraded Global Focus uses graphs to show donor funding and different types of earmarking information in an interactive manner. These new functions were launched in May 2019 to coincide with the publication of the 2018 Global Report.

33.   For UNHCR operations around the world, the respective country portal in Global Focus is an entry point for external relations and advocacy at the country level. It ensures that key messages are harmonized at both the field and headquarters levels.

10.   Enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors

UNHCR's commitments: cooperate with multilateral development banks (MDBs) to facilitate their active engagement in situations of forced displacement where their technical and financial comparative advantages can contribute to improved socio-economic outcomes for refugees, IDPs and affected host communities; support efforts that enable economic participation of forcibly displaced persons and access to finance, in collaboration with partners.

34.   Under this commitment, the World Bank and UNHCR strengthened their collaboration to address forced displacement. At the global level, the World Bank and UNHCR focused on providing strategic and technical support to the countries that have been considered eligible under the International Development Association (IDA) 18 sub-window for refugees and host communities and the Global Concessional Financing Facility. The two organizations are also collaborating in the context of the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, the Multilateral Development Bank platform on economic migration and forced displacement, and the Joint Data Center on forced displacement.

35.   At the country level, the World Bank and UNHCR collaborated closely on advancing policy dialogue on refugee protection, analytics on forced displacement situations, and projects addressing the mid-term social and economic dimensions of refugee situations and supporting the resilience of host communities and refugees. The World Bank's IDA18 sub-window has been approved for Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, the Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Niger, Pakistan, Rwanda and Uganda. A large part of the $2.2 billion sub-window has been pre-allocated among the 14 eligible countries with some 20 projects targeting refugee-hosting areas already approved. The Global Concessional Financing Facility covers operations in Colombia, Jordan and Lebanon.

36.   Regarding other partnerships, the UNHCR-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) partnership continues to focus on rule of law projects in over 20 countries. UNHCR also forged new collaborations with other development actors to expand economic and financial inclusion of refugees, including with the UN Capital Development Fund, the International Labour Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Fair Trade Organization, the Small Enterprise Evaluation Project (SEEP Network), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, as well as financial service providers in more than 40 countries. Collaborating with the World Bank, UNHCR facilitated the establishment of a Poverty Alleviation Coalition[1] working with 11 NGOs in refugee-hosting areas to apply the "graduation approach"[2].

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[1]   See www.alleviate-poverty.org.

[2]   Pioneered by BRAC, the graduation approach enables refugee and local families to progressively move out of extreme poverty and access sustainable livelihood opportunities.