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High Commissioner's Programme**

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**Update on the coordination efforts of UNHCR to
measure the impact arising from hosting,
protecting and assisting refugees**

Summary

This update details the efforts coordinated by UNHCR in response to the request by the United Nations General Assembly to measure the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees (A/RES/76/143). It provides an update on developments since the previous report was presented to the eighty-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee in 2022 (EC/73/SC/CRP.15).

I. Introduction

1. The global number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons has now surpassed 100 million. This staggering figure should be seen in the context of the protracted nature of many displacement situations and modest progress made in advancing solutions. Refugee-hosting States have long drawn attention to the lack of recognition given to their contributions to addressing the consequences of forced displacement, emphasizing the need for greater burden- and responsibility-sharing.¹

2. Drawing from the 2020 “Progress Report: Measuring the Impact of Hosting, Protecting and Assisting Refugees”, this update details the efforts coordinated by UNHCR, with technical inputs from the World Bank and the Joint Data Center in response to the request by the United Nations General Assembly to measure the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees. In particular, it documents the approach and advances made since the affirmation by United Nations Member States of the Global Compact on Refugees in December 2018 (A/RES/73/151). It also responds to the requirement in the Global Compact on Refugees that the process coordinated by UNHCR, with inputs from the World Bank and the Joint Data Center, should inform the stocktaking at the second Global Refugee Forum to be held in December 2023, together with a mechanism for tracking implementation of pledges and contributions.² This mechanism is supported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

3. Whereas the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing has met with broad acceptance, it has not yet been matched by international practice.³ Efforts thus far have focused on defining how gaps could be measured, what mechanisms could be defined for sharing progress, and how international cooperation could be made more equitable and predictable. A considerable debate has been generated about how the costs and broader impact of the presence of refugees on host communities/countries could be assessed, taking into account the many variables that typically characterize refugee situations.

4. There is broad recognition that burden- and responsibility-sharing in hosting, protecting and assisting refugees has so far been inequitable and that there are important gaps in international cooperation. The large majority (69 per cent) of refugees are hosted by neighbouring countries, and only a few donor countries provide the bulk of financial and technical support. Host countries take on the greatest burden, as repeatedly acknowledged by UNHCR and recognized in the Global Compact on Refugees. Not only should the absolute number of refugees hosted be considered, but also their number as compared to the hosting population, as well as in the ability of States to host refugees based on differences in level of development, economic growth and local and regional contexts. It is, therefore, essential to find ways to broaden the support base and enlist the active engagement of a greater number of stakeholders to promote burden- and responsibility-sharing that is more equitable, predictable and sustainable.

¹ The United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/72/150 from 2017, para. 20, requests UNHCR to “coordinate an effort to measure the impact arising from hosting, protecting and assisting refugees, with a view to assessing gaps in international cooperation and promoting burden- and responsibility-sharing that is more equitable, predictable and sustainable, and to begin reporting on the results to Member States in 2018”.

² Global Compact on Refugees, paragraph 103.

³ One helpful articulation of the importance of the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing can be found in para. 8 of the December 2001 Declaration of States Parties to the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees: “...respect by States for their protection responsibilities towards refugees is strengthened by international solidarity involving all members of the international community... and the refugee protection regime is enhanced through committed international cooperation in a spirit of solidarity and effective responsibility and burden-sharing among States”.

II. Objectives of the work on measuring the impact

5. Central to efforts to measure the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees is the shared recognition of the importance of international cooperation for refugee protection and the need for additional States and stakeholders to contribute to easing the pressure on host countries. To encourage an increase in burden- and responsibility-sharing, host countries can also contribute meaningfully by planning and evaluating efficient and effective responses to address the needs of host communities and refugees. With a shared commitment to advancing the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, a collective assessment of gaps in international cooperation can make a significant contribution, but quantifiable data and evidence are also needed. At the same time, quantification is only one tool to achieving this shared objective. Taking into consideration existing discernible inequalities, early action towards more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing should not wait for a full assessment of impact and gaps.

6. With the aim of developing a common methodological approach to measure the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees, UNHCR, with the technical support of the World Bank, organized three workshops in February, April and November 2019. Participants included representatives from a range of Member States (both refugee-hosting and donor countries) from Geneva-based missions and capitals. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring a participatory process to develop the methodologies jointly.

7. This exercise sought to develop a “common language” of shared experiences by achieving consensus on the approach(es), scope and identification of methodologies for measuring the impact, which may be suitable for broad application to create momentum for practical commitments made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

III. Achievements to date

8. A key achievement was reaching agreement on a phased, multi-year approach that emphasized participation and practicality. The voluntary nature of participation in the process aimed to involve as many hosting countries as possible. It was agreed that a practical approach was required to ensure simplicity, transparency and consensus on the development of the proposed methodologies while: (a) maintaining quality standards; (b) relying on official and cross-referenced data sources, wherever possible; and (c) recognizing the need for adaptations where necessary for comparability.

9. The workshops that were held in 2019 identified and examined different sectors and their complexity for assessing impact in the short, medium and long term. It was agreed to start with the more easily quantifiable, but nevertheless considerable task of assessing fiscal costs, with a focus on education, as a basis for the discussion relating to the challenges and opportunities of potential methodologies. Participants recognized that translating the provisions in the Global Compact on Refugees into action comes with practical challenges that include, among others, the need for capacity-building with necessary resources to aggregate required data, improved coordination and engagement of involved partners, and the need for a methodology and strategy on the management of resources and reporting.

10. As also referenced in the 2020 progress report, in addition to challenges related to process, implementation and accountability, participants acknowledged there were important technical issues that required further reflection. Member States recognized the complexity inherent in measuring the cost of the inclusion of refugees in the education sector as well as other possible sectors.

11. Based on the discussions held during the workshops in 2019, the World Bank, together with UNHCR, developed a methodology for measuring the cost of the inclusion of refugees in host countries’ national education systems.⁴ The findings were presented to Member

⁴ See UNHCR-World Bank, “The Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education”, available from <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/159281614191477048/the-global-cost-of-inclusive-refugee-education>.

States in February 2022, and UNHCR and the World Bank invited hosting States to use this methodology to measure the costs of including refugees in their national education system. The methodology was also highlighted at a side event during the World Bank's Annual Spring Meeting in 2022.

12. At a meeting in February 2022, Member States expressed appreciation for the work done thus far, including on the methodological work of the World Bank and UNHCR in the education sector and the final report. However, they underscored the need to develop methodologies for other sectors, such as health. UNHCR and the World Bank put forward housing and social protection as other possible sectors for consideration.

IV. Summary of the fourth technical workshop

13. On 11 and 12 January 2023, UNHCR, in collaboration with the World Bank and the Joint Data Center, organized the fourth technical workshop with Member States from Geneva-based missions and capitals. Over 110 participants registered to attend the meeting, which had a hybrid format (i.e. both in-person and online). Its main objectives were the following: (a) taking stock of progress on the assessment of the fiscal cost of assisting and hosting refugees in the education sector and proposing a way forward for responsibility-sharing; and (b) proposing a potential new sector for assessment (shelter/housing and/or social assistance) and discussing methodological options for the implementation of their relative fiscal cost estimation.

14. With respect to the proposed way forward for responsibility-sharing of the fiscal cost for the inclusion of refugees in the education sector, suggestions were put forward by participants on the modelling approach. They also underscored the importance of using less technical language that better reflects the human rights component of access to education.

15. The idea of expanding the fiscal costing exercise to the social assistance sector was received with interest, and participants suggested that the proposed methodological approaches continue to be explored. Discussions on the expansion of the fiscal costing exercise to the housing and shelter sector highlighted political, economic and social challenges, also identified in the Joint Data Center review.

16. One of recurrent themes emerging during the meeting was the inherent complexity of the measurement of the fiscal cost of including refugees in sector plans. In particular, participants stressed the need to involve technical representatives from relevant line ministries at capital level, in addition to the representatives from Geneva-based missions. A possible way forward to address these concerns would be to organize the next workshops at the regional level or ensure virtual participation from capitals.

17. Despite technical complexities, participants were unanimous in acknowledging the importance of continuing this work, despite the questions that were raised in relation to the costed plan and whether it would lead to responsibility-sharing. In addition, participants indicated that having a solid costed plan, which builds on a commonly agreed methodological approach, is a necessary – while not sufficient – condition for responsibility-sharing. In this respect, continuing the work on the development of a commonly agreed responsibility-sharing framework in education would be an important contribution to the discussion at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum.

18. In preparation for forthcoming technical workshops, a short survey to assess interest, priorities, sectoral preferences was prepared and shared with member states on 3 April 2023.⁵ The findings of the survey aim to inform the workplan in the lead-up to the Global Refugee Forum and help guide engagement with Member States in future workshops. UNHCR will also organize focus group discussion meetings to seek further feedback.

⁵ For reference, the short survey is available from <https://enketo.unhcr.org/x/NOh61sEe>.

V. Next Steps

19. It was agreed that future workshops would seek participation from representatives from Geneva-based missions as well as the relevant line ministries at capital level to ensure more detailed deliberations. The next workshop will be held in Jordan in September 2023. The purpose of the workshop is to discuss the financing of education, building on the joint World Bank-UNHCR report on “The Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education”, and to deliberate on the next topic of engagement. A detailed agenda be circulated in due course.

20. It was also agreed that the World Bank would refine the methodology proposed for responsibility-sharing in the education sector, incorporating comments received during the workshop held earlier this year. Member States underscored the need for a stronger link between the costing methodology and financing for education. As such, the next workshop will be an opportunity to further delve into this issue.

21. The World Bank agreed to undertake an initial desk review of a basic methodological approach to measuring the impact of the inclusion of refugees in national social protection/assistance systems. This will be presented for feedback and discussion at the next workshop.

22. Since the summary note of the fourth technical workshop was circulated in early April, UNHCR has received requests from several Member States for an additional meeting to discuss the prioritization/selection of sectors for this work, and follow-up is under way.
