

## Update on Decentralization and Regionalization in UNHCR

### Background

In January 2019, the High Commissioner announced that UNHCR would move its Regional Bureaux to the field, setting in motion the most far-reaching and consequential transformation in its nearly 70 year history.

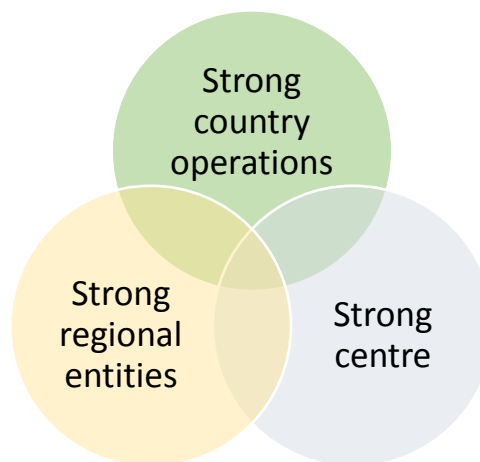
The impetus for UNHCR's internal change process was driven, in part, by new developments in a rapidly evolving international context. At the global level, there has been an appetite for new approaches that go beyond traditional humanitarian action, and a realization that forced displacement is not just a humanitarian but also a political and a development challenge. The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted by world leaders at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, and its commitment to 'leave no-one behind' provide a powerful basis for the inclusion of refugees, the internally displaced and stateless people in economic development planning, as well as in all other measures taken by States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Likewise, *The Global Compact on Refugees* (GCR), adopted in December 2018, is widely regarded as a 'game changer' that will promote a stronger, more predictable and more equitable international response to large-scale refugee movements.

Achieving these broad aspirations will require innovation and creativity, renewed commitment, and collaboration with a range of new and traditional partners and other stakeholders. Most importantly, it will require UNHCR to work differently. At its core, *The Grand Bargain (2016)* commits aid organizations to work collaboratively to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action—and to include populations of concern in all aspects of decision-making. In many respects, UNHCR's decentralization is part of this larger narrative.

By the start of 2020, a new organizational design and way of working will be in place. The new model will better position UNHCR to protect populations of concern, work with others to find solutions, and address future challenges and opportunities. A decentralized UNHCR will enable UNHCR to:

- **Ensure more effective protection** to refugees and people of concern in ways that promote the exercise of fundamental rights, facilitates access to opportunities and assistance, and empowers them to seek their own solutions.
- **Respond faster and in a more flexible way**, especially at the onset of emergencies;
- **Align with UN system reform and the presence of sister agencies and partners;**
- **Better integrate regional dynamics into annual and multi-year strategic planning and work more effectively with regional stakeholders, sister UN agencies and partners**, in particular development actors and private sector interlocutors, towards inclusion of refugees and others of concern within host communities;
- **Ensure consistent support to country operations**, including the ability to course-correct in light of new challenges and opportunities, translate global priorities into regional and country-specific strategies, and foster greater programmatic integrity and value for money;

UNHCR’s transformation seeks the right balance between HQs and the field—between agile country operations, empowered regional entities and a strong centre to drive the HC’s Mandate and his *Strategic Directions* to protect; to respond; to include; to empower, and; to solve.



## Strong Country Operations

The primary objective of the decentralization and regionalization process is to ensure UNHCR is strengthened where it matters most—closest to refugees, IDPs and stateless people. The strengthening of country operations, with enhanced authorities and additional capacities—has been a constant, paramount objective of UNHCR’s nearly two-year Change process. As part of the Annual Programme Review for 2020, UNHCR repositioned or created more than 150 new technical positions to strengthen country operations and capacitate the new Bureaux structures with the requisite expertise. More than 100 of these positions, including much needed Development capacities, will be placed within country operations.

## Strong Regional Bureaux closer to Populations of Concern



**UNHCR’s Seven Regional Bureaux** will cover the full spectrum of setting regional strategies and priorities, managing performance and compliance, identification and monitoring of emerging issues and risks, and the provision of technical support and guidance to country operations. For implementing and operational partners, the new Regional Bureaux are anticipated to become critical hubs for collaboration and strategic

engagement, as well as for addressing any cross-cutting operational challenges if and when they emerge within a given region. Regional Directors will have primary accountability for strategic decision-making, regional prioritization, and quality assurance—and enhanced delegated authorities to effectively manage their respective regions. Technical experts, with functional links to the Divisions at HQs, will be fully integrated within the regionalized bureau structures and lines of authority. Each Bureau will cover the following key areas:

- 1) Strategic Planning and partnerships: ensure the region’s overall coherence with UNHCR’s global objectives and HC’s Strategic Directions; set regional bureau-wide priorities, manage

and direct all regional resources and assess contextual changes in order to adjust regional operational priorities.

- 2) Protection: elaborate and empower regional approaches to UNHCR’s global protection priorities; monitor and support the exercise of UNHCR’s core protection mandate at country level.
- 3) Operations support: engage at a transactional level with country presences, including Human Resources support, Supply, Finance and Information and Communications Technology (ICT).
- 4) External engagement: implement regional strategic communications strategy and oversees daily communications and public information requests, manage relationships with external partners, coordinate reporting and information management.

## Retaining a Strong HQ in Geneva

The High Commissioner, with the support of the Senior Executive Team, will continue to drive the development of global strategies in respect of his Mandate, manage high-level strategic engagement with institutional partners and other stakeholders, and maintain regular communication with bureaux directors in the field. Headquarters Divisions will provide normative policy guidance, establish and update standards for protection and the provision of assistance and solutions, provide functional guidance to counterparts in the regionalized bureaux, maintain coherence, share best practices and lessons learned, and knowledge management.

The High Commissioner’s Strategic Directions (2017-2021) underscored the extent to which UNHCR collaborates with—and relies on—a broad range of partnerships to deliver on its mandate. The Global Compact on Refugees, with its emphasis on solutions, will increase UNHCR’s engagement in a range of national and international development frameworks and systems, and require new forms of partnership and engagement. To oversee UNHCR’s critical engagement in the Development sphere, a Division of Resilience and Solutions—which builds on the successes and lessons learned of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework Team—was created as part of the first tranche of Headquarters reforms in 2018. Other critical components of the HQ restructuring to date include:

- A **comprehensive Partnership Service** was established, merging the prior Partnership and Interagency Coordination units (IACS) into a single entity. This service will work closely with traditional partners to ensure collaboration and address corporate-level issues of mutual concern;
- A **separate, reinforced Governance Service**, reporting directly to the Executive Office, was enhanced to carry out the functions in relation to governance and secretary of the Executive Committee.
- A **Bureaux Liaison unit** will be established within the Office of the Assistant High Commissioner to ensure a continuous flow of information in real-time from the field to the Senior Management, Divisions and Permanent Missions in Geneva.