



UNHCR's fifth meeting with NGO partners on preparedness and response to COVID-19 in refugee situations

15 April 2020

Online

Participants:

UNHCR:

- Dominique Hyde, Director, Division of External Relations
- Adrian Edwards, Head, Communication services
- Robert Hurt, Head, Implementation Management and Assurance Service
- Arafat Jamal, Head, Partnership, and Coordination Service
- Division of Resilience and Solutions
- Division of Emergency, Security and Supply.

NGOs:

- About 80+, mostly NGOs.

Arafat Jamal

- Welcome Dominique Hyde and Adrian Edwards. The meeting is about communications and messaging.

Dominique Hyde

- Thanks for the work you do in the field.
- This crisis has stretched all of us. Balancing real concerns, movements restrictions and all this affects our ability to do our work.
- Seeing a health crisis and unravelling socio-eco crisis . We need to look at this as well the socio-economic impacts on refugees, displaced and other persons of concern we support. We need to be looking at that as well as prevention and responding.
- Will start on fundraising and then on communications aspects with Adrian.
- Broadly on funding, as HC said last week, we push for flexibility on partnership, keeping in mind we also have to be accountable with our donors.
- UNHCR financing is optimistic for 2020, with a budget funded similarly to last year. However, there are concerns for 2021.
- Few operations where there are concerns, e.g. Venezuela (HC is very much involved and will speak this week with the Colombian President and others in the region). With IOM we are concerned about the appeal and how it is going.
- We were looking at a Venezuela pledging conference but this was disrupted by COVID-19. It may now take place virtually in May.
- There should also be a Syria conference in June.
- Concerns on the West Africa appeal.
- Want to hear from you on how to reach out together on specific humanitarian appeals where work needs to continue and where we will see impact e.g. on SGBV, livelihoods.
- We are hearing from different governments that they are going to reduce their ODA for 2021. In the past, we saw that this means reduction on development funding which would be a concern. UNDP is looking to rally UN agencies around this and maybe we can do something similar on the humanitarian side, with NGOs.



- On the OCHA GHA, we started revising the appeal launched a month ago which is calling for USD 2 billion and pushed to have the date extended to have more time for partners to be able to join much more extensively than before. The new appeal will be launched on May 7.
- 11 new countries have been added to the appeal, it is a positive sign.
- UNHCR is lucky at this point and gets 67% (USD 55 million) of its part of the appeal funded. But as of today, the GHRP is only 16% funded. There is a need for everybody else to be funded. We need to look at what the 16% of the GHRP means especially while launching a new appeal.
- Seeing IMF and WB coming in with a lot of money to their countries of concern. This will be essential in supporting governments.
- We are finding the financial architecture on COVID response very confusing, between HRPs, WHO-led appeals, etc. there is a plethora of financing instruments.
- Our team developed a mapping, indicating what exists, where there are overlaps and can maybe be shared with you to understand better.
- We developed a communication strategy at the beginning of the crisis balanced between calling attention to PoCs and stigmatizing risks.
- During the March appeal, our voice was a bit muted because of the health focus and WHO was in the lead. Now we try to be more visible and highlighting refugees' vulnerabilities, especially speaking more on socio-economic aspects.
- We have communication themes: this week on advocacy on children, next week on protection angle with human rights.
- This is firstly a sanitary crisis but also a humanitarian crisis.

Adrian Edwards

- Taking stock of what has happened over the last weeks and interested in hearing your views.
- The pandemic is the most intense moment in our careers, it is a massive health crisis and the biggest humanitarian crisis we face.
- We are combining all items in the communication toolbox: communication with refugees and host communities, in remote places, camps, towns, etc. in regular news updates; leading our leadership communication to show we are active and relevant and then how we jointly work in this context. Getting this right is important.
- Moreover, internal communication, staff engagement is an incredibly important part of what is happening now.
- Also monitoring who is reading you, etc. and all this from home, without access to PoCs.
- Worried about refugees possibly becoming scapegoats, so reputational risk management also part of all this.
- We need creativity especially as our audiences are focusing on issues closer to their daily lives and our colleagues focus on groundwork
- This is not about country operations anymore, it is global.
- Audience shows interest on cross-cutting issues more than on individual refugees or operation aspects. Issues of socio eco costs, impact on children., refugees taking matters in their own hands, working in medical sector in the north, etc. See much more interest on those issues.
- Slide 3: Issues of socio-economic costs impacts on children, education and refugees working in health sector. We see much more interest on those issues.
- Also different is: we are in an environment of anxiety and fear.
- Huge growth in employers' communication. 63% report more belief in their employer communication.
- Slide 4: a quick survey of trust in the context of the pandemic conducted in Brazil, Canada, France, Italy, Germany, UK, US, and other countries.



- Also, huge trust in major news organizations. To some degree, people move away, probably temporarily, from experimental news/communications channels. Looking for trustworthy news, from established news organizations.
- Slide 5: Social media remains nonetheless very important, except maybe for older population. So, need to pay attention to this especially if you are targeting younger audiences.
- Slide 6: Crucial that trustworthy information is out there. There was a statement from the office of the UNSG today on this.
- Slide 7: One other interesting thing is the degree to which experts are trusted once again. Doctors, etc. above governments.
- Seems to be strong expectation for teaming up. How do we find a way to team up, show consistency of messaging on issues we are all concerned about?
- Slide 8: The degree to which are trusted. A shift to uncertainty. Strong audience expectations.
- What we do or not do in this context? We are all highly anxious, IDPs, refugees are also. Refugees are listening to what we all say. Important to keep in mind in our communication, which may not be directed to refugees but which they listen to e.g. expressing fear of a COVID-19 outbreak in Cox's Bazar may transmit our anxiety to people we want to protect.
- All of us know the reality and the humanitarian competition as we need our brands out there, we need funds, we have specific messages and advocacy but it is now the moment to put it a bit in the back and not forget what we can do collectively. There is expectation for all to work together. All of us are partners in this.
- Joint communication is something we all try to attain. Caution on ideas of joint press releases as we see that language on closely joined up communication often ends up being over-institutionalized and doesn't work for our audience and for PoCs. We should reserve that for other occasions.
- Now is time for a collaborative approach, how to decide for joint advocacy opportunities, using our own language is certainly what UNHCR is keen to explore with those interested. How could we decide on common advocacy themes?
- Four main points:
 1. This is the biggest humanitarian challenge. Does not know borders, affects everyone everywhere.
 2. Prepare for the worst. Worried of what can come to refugees in the coming weeks.
 3. Ask people to think about exit strategy to restore human rights, refugee rights when we get out of this. Not time to speak about open borders but how do we prevent this being a long-lasting reversal of human rights and refugee rights.
 4. Social and economic costs are extremely worrying and could be big. Long term funding is the essential tool. What happened after? Linked to funding horizon of humanitarian sector. What happens as economies contract and shift inwards.

Q&A

Norwegian Refugee Council

- Does UNHCR have any projections on how this will impact donors' funding for next year? Quite early to understand it but HC mentioned this concern last week. How we could prepare for it? Any opportunity around joint advocacy on it?
- How lead agency like UNHCR will engage with the clusters to ensure the GHRP revision will include NGOs?

Save the Children

- Do you have more information on the virtual pledging conference on the Venezuelan situation in May?



ICVA

- Same question as Save the Children, and one suggestion: we heard that your communication team is covering specific themes each week. In terms of joint or complementary advocacy, it would be useful to know them in advance, e.g. we now know that next week will be on protection and human rights so we can prepare, amplify and maybe align.

Translators without borders

- In relation to the announcement made by UNSG on the UN communication initiative, how can UNHCR and NGO be involved in that?

Oxfam

- Could you explain more on UNHCR priority for COVID-19 and how much it matches with the new revised GHRP?
- Are you able to give an indication yet of how much of what UNHCR received through the GHRP has been transferred to NGO partners?

Global Refugee Led-Network

- We had the global conference of GRLN with the support of some NGOs, especially SSI, one week ago.
- We are hosting webinars involving medical refugee experts, every week. they provide advice in many languages with the aim of filling communication gaps.
- We are doing telephone surveys, especially for undocumented people.
- Also, we conduct telephone surveys with refugee women and girls and holding national summits on COVID-19.
- All that produced advocacy and report that we will be happy to share, and we put an emergency appeal to provide support to refugee initiatives in the Asia Pacific.

Dominique Hyde

- To NRC, on 2021 budget, we do not have a clear and scientific idea yet because 90% of fund is coming from governments or EU, UN sources, and they do not know already what their budget will look like in 2021. Not completed all the work yet but have some scenarios.
- We need to think out of the box, e.g. a few years ago, NGOs in the UK campaigned for ODA to remain at the level it was. This is the sort of things we can look at. The more we can all together and raise our voices, the more impact we will have.
- On a positive note, we are seeing the private sector providing fund for COVID response.
- On the GHRP and how this is going to work and how much will be allocated from us to NGOs: May appeal will include NGOs much more. UNHCR allocates 25% usually to NGOs. We will be applying same principles in our response.
- NGO funding under the RRP and RMRPs is counted separately.
- UNHCR will go through the usual RRP and RMRPs channels and will be involving all of you.
- RMRPs are done together with IOM; 3RPs with UNDP.
- All mechanisms with the HRP is under the leadership of the ERC.
- To Oxfam: our priority countries are the ones decided by the GHRP; the ones that were there initially, plus the 11 new ones. Philippines is not a priority for us but broadly others are.
- On the Venezuela situation pledging conference, current discussion between US, EU, and governments in the region to know who will host it. Hope to have news by next week and will ask Arafat to inform you. It looks it will be in May.
- The Syrians conference in June is hosted in Brussels by the EU.



Adrian Edwards

- To ICVA, sharing messaging in advance is something we work on. Happy to share our main global messages if it is useful, provided we have an understanding of how it will be used. Sometimes it is difficult due to disruption but happy to share a list. We tried to use our global trends and find ways to collaborate.
- To TWB, the UN communication response is still evolving. The UNSG involving himself in virtual media briefing each week. Next meeting will focus on children and will be looking to see how to feed in messages into this.
- Next week we will be looking at human rights in the context of COVID-19.
- Maybe look at whether this is opportunity to speak about similar issues than the SG.
- For UNHCR, we may look at IDPs issues as GRID IDMC report comes out.
- Things change of course. Rapidly evolving situation. Lot of uncertainty. But happy to share with you when possible.

UNHCR

- On the number of operations at high-risk. UNHCR is coming with 23 operations where some at high risk in terms of refugee camps, settlements, locations, high refugee population, density included in urban areas.
- Those are Asia - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran. West Africa - Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan. MENA - Lebanon. Europe - Greece. Americas - Colombia, Venezuela. We can always share that with partners in appropriate time.

Save the Children

- Is the global report still planned to be launched and is there any COVID plans for the world refugee day?
- For Rob: are we going to see written guidance to partners?

International Rescue Committee

- Tomorrow the preliminary ODA figures will be released, are you planning a press release? Is there anything we can do to amplify?

Adrian Edwards

- On global trends, we are hoping to go ahead on that before World Refugee Day.
- Some work internally to see what we can do with the global report. Open to collaborating with those of you who want to collaborate, with a usual embargo.
- To IRC, we do not have any press release planned on ODA tomorrow but we will look at different opportunities.

Robert Hurt

- Promised the guidance for several days and the last edits are taking longer than expected. Hoping to share the external guidance today or tomorrow morning.

Dominique Hyde

- To GRLN, it will be interesting to learn more on your work. Sounded very interesting.
- Let us know what more you need to hear from us and whether we need to maintain weekly calls. Your questions and themes are important.



- What comes out clearly is there is room for much more advocacy when it comes to financing and protection themes. Appreciate idea of sharing themes ahead to see how we can amplify messages.
- We will get back to you on the Venezuela conference as well as other pledging conferences.
- On the GHRP, please continue sending feedback on whether this is going in the right direction, what more or less we need to do. This is the first time we have a GHA of this size. Hopefully this second try will be better.
- There are concerns about the revision on a monthly basis and how to keep donors' interest. Is it necessary to have it revised on a monthly basis? Happy to get your ideas on this.

Arafat Jamal

- Hope to maintain the meeting on a weekly basis. Make sure it remains a true consultation.
- We seek your inputs on possible themes, possible guests, even maybe on how to involve other UN actors.