

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION?

All coordination should be government-led, as affirmed by [UN commitments and international law](#) which assert that “(the) state has the primary role in the initiation, organisation, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory”.

However, in practice, government leadership is often marginalised, and, within coordination systems, the government-NGO relationship may become dysfunctional, due to

- The role of the state being neglected by international humanitarian actors;
- Government officials not being appreciative of or overwhelmed by the presence of international aid agencies;
- Lack of guidance and support around humanitarian principles for NGOs and state authorities;
- The existence of parallel coordination systems; and
- Language problems.

HOW CAN NGOS SUPPORT GOVERNMENT-LED COORDINATION?

NGOs can make use of different means:

- **Supplement government coordination and action in pre-disaster times** by building partnerships with the government and engaging in joint delegations and missions;
- **Strengthen government systems during peace times** by developing emergency and disaster preparedness plans; and

- Develop common tools and consensus on processes by investing in a mapping of who does what where.

THE REFUGEE COORDINATION MODEL EXPLAINED

A framework of predictability, inclusion and shared responsibility, the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) is UNHCR's means of operationalizing international protection for refugees. In detail the RCM,

- Clarifies how UNHCR leads and coordinates a refugee response in support of the host governments;
- Delivers timely, effective and quality protection and solutions for refugees;
- Offers an inclusive platform for planning and coordinating refugee operations; and
- Preserves accountability for and to refugees and persons of concern.

Why is the RCM important?

Refugees are people with specific vulnerabilities and a set of rights because of their particular status. While they are people in need of humanitarian assistance, they are not exclusively subjects of humanitarian aid as they have wider needs.

What are RCM's key principles and approaches?

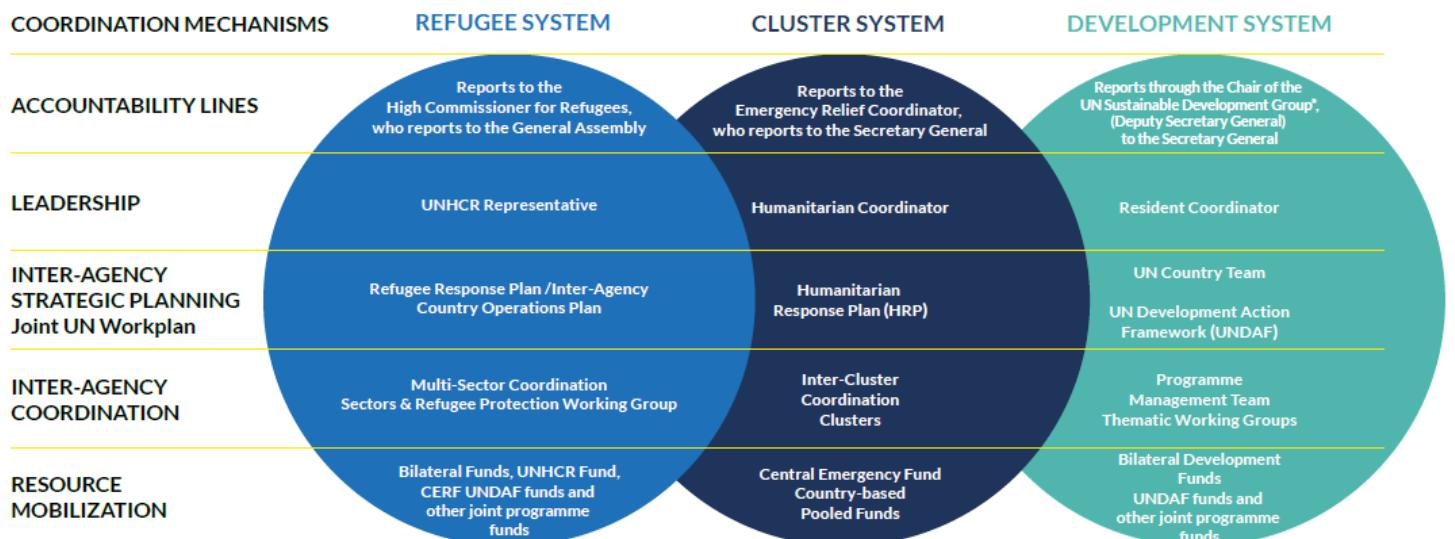
- Primary responsibility for international protection and the refugee response rests with the Government;
- Coordination should be concentrated at the point of delivery, promoting efficiency and preventing duplication;

- Coordination and operational delivery are accountable for and to refugees. Refugees should be an integral part of the coordination structures and must be able to influence the decision-making processes through the involvement of community groups and representatives;
- *Integral yet distinct:* The RCM is an integral to the humanitarian response, yet, independent so as to ensure protection and accountability for refugees. In this sense, the RCM and other coordination models are distinct, yet overlapping.

UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations

A particular attention has been given to mixed situations through the establishment in 2014 of the [Joint Note on refugee coordination in mixed situations](#). A mixed situation arises when, within the same country, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and other humanitarian responses exist with a refugee response and both OCHA, through the cluster system, and UNHCR, through the RCM, intervene. The Joint Note determines how UNHCR coordinates in mixed situations and delineates respective responsibilities.

For more information, please visit [UNHCR's RCM website](#).



* the UN Development System is under reform

Source: <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/78932>

THE RCM IN UGANDA: A CASE STUDY

In Uganda, the government plays a prominent role: Jointly with UNHCR, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) plays a dominant and critical role in the refugee response. In the decision-making process, such as the selection of which NGO can operate in which area and sector, it is the government that takes the final decision. UNHCR supports the government in the response and takes a lead in funding with the implementing and other operational partners.

Challenges

Within this system, NGOs face certain challenges:

- **Planning and programming projects in advance:** NGOs have limited freedom in choosing areas of operation as it is the government which decides the NGO's sector of engagement. NGOs need to have a high level of flexibility in terms of geographical coverage and sector;
- **UNCHR guidance required:** it is required that UNHCR guides the NGOs, which can take up much time and intervene with the NGOs work;
- **Encounter problems with authorities:** as the final list of operating NGOs is approved by the government, pressure can be exercised on NGOs or corruption may increase and they may even be dropped completely if they do not comply with government officials' requests. NGOs need to be careful when dealing with government.

Opportunities

There are, however, also opportunities for NGOs when working in a government-led coordination model:

- **Service delivery and resource mobilization:** As the government has ensured the operational environment by deciding where and how NGOs work, these in turn can concentrate on service delivery and resource mobilization;

- **70/30 policy for host and refugee communities:**

With this policy, 70% of services go to refugees and the remaining 30% are reserved for host communities. In Uganda, refugees do not live in camps but in settlements, which are often integrated within host communities. This policy is regulated by the government and may relieve community tensions that might arise and grant more integration. This policy of host community satisfaction nurtures the relationship between host communities and refugees, granting the refugees access to government facilities like public schools and hospitals;

- **Influence best practices and models:** within this process, the best practices are more likely to be influenced. With great practices and innovations, the government can easily buy into them and promote them simultaneously;
- **Government corporation & goodwill:** this model gives a lot of room for discussion between the government and NGOs. Since the government is engaged, development actors are better able to act. With its knowledge of the geographic region, the state can guide better the development actors to reach areas in need. This model guarantees that all areas hosting refugees are covered and not just one settlement is benefiting;
- **NGOs good use of resources:** The government regulates the efficient use of resources. With UNHCR's direct role, guidance and experience are brought forward. As an UN agency, in this kind of model with a high level of authority and immunity, a level of check and balances for NGOs to implement their activities exists. UNHCR can also check on the government and assign tasks.