On 9 November, ICVA and PHAP will organize the sixth and last online session in the learning stream on humanitarian coordination. The event will explore how NGOs participation in government-led coordination systems during humanitarian response, and the role of NGOs in refugee coordination contexts.

The session will feature presentations from Paul Harvey (Humanitarian Outcomes), Vikrant Mahajan (Sphere India), Arafat Jamal (UNHCR), and Patriciah Roy Akullo (ACT Alliance, Uganda Forum).

As an introduction to the event, Arafat Jamal, Head of the Inter-Agency Coordination Service in the Division of External Relations at UNHCR HQ in Geneva, briefed PHAP and ICVA on the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM).

What is the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) and why do we need it?

A refugee is a stranger, forced from home and insecure in an alien sanctuary. Their needs are multiple – from legal to subsistence – and, without a government to turn to, their protection status may be uncertain. The 1951 Convention on Refugee Status fills a gap, providing norms for the protection of the forcibly uprooted, and nominating an international guardian for their protection – UNHCR.

The 1950 Statute of the Office 'calls upon Governments to co-operate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees', specifies that the High Commissioner shall provide for the international protection of refugees by, inter alia, 'facilitating the co-ordination of the efforts of private organizations concerned with the welfare of refugees,' and underlines that the 'High Commissioner may invite the co-operation of the various specialized agencies.'

The Refugee Coordination Model is the operationalization of international protection. It is the manner by which UNHCR ensures that governments and organizations work together and coherently to protect and assist refugees. Led by the High Commissioner's Representative in a given country or region, it provides a platform for inclusive coordination and leadership to ensure effective and accountable delivery of protection, assistance and solutions for refugees and persons of concern.

The RCM is about addressing refugee needs through a range of partners, not about sustaining UNHCR programmes. UNHCR runs the platform and the framework for all partners to participate in and respond to refugee situations. A refugee response is a collective effort – NGOs international and local are indispensable to UNHCR's work; and WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA, OCHA, IOM and other sister agencies are key stakeholders in this response.

The RCM's key components include leadership by the Representative, a multi-sectoral approach embedded in protection objectives set by a Refugee Protection Group and assistance provided through multi-agency sectoral coordination. UNHCR coordination for refugee response is:
1. guided by capacity and approach of the host government
2. responsive and agile with structures that expand and contract as required
3. agile, streamlined, efficient coordination that fills gaps and avoids duplication

4. places greatest focus and investment on coordination at the *point of delivery* in order to provide the best protection centred and accountable response
5. brings together and builds on the expertise and capacities of government, international and national partners.

Through annual consultations with NGOs and structured dialogues with key partners, as well as MOUs and LOUs with other UN agencies, other inter-governmental organizations and NGOs, UNHCR has established a solid network of collaboration for refugee protection. Inclusive processes such as Refugee Response Plans are key entry points for NGO partners as they bring together national and international NGOs, and sister UN agencies to provide a protection based emergency response. Currently we work with 955 partners in the field. Coordination is a means to an end: streamlined and effective delivery of protection and assistance that maximizes capacities of humanitarian actors is the priority. Coordination is context and needs driven, and the RCM expands and contracts accordingly.

Many people may not be familiar with this model. Why do you think this is the case?

While UNHCR has always deployed some form of an RCM, it has not always been good at articulating what it is, and why it is needed. While most partners working in refugee contexts understand its principles, not all aware of its status as such.

Humanitarian reform and the development in 2005 of the cluster system greatly increased the number of specialized humanitarian actors, whose point of reference is the cluster. The humanitarian approach embodied by this system constitutes a major, but not the sole, coordination mechanism.

Refugees, a symptom of the world's inability to broker peace, suffer from the deprivation of both basic needs and protection. In line with its global responsibilities, UNHCR must do more to highlight the specific and long-term needs of refugees, and to demonstrate how the RCM ensures that these needs can be met through a combination of UNHCR leadership and results focused partnership.

Perhaps the term 'model' is itself misleading. Refugee coordination is simply about getting the right people together to plan, fundraise and execute a series of actions that best meets the needs of a specific population. As UNHCR, we need to spread this message, and we welcome any opportunity to interact with interested parties on this. How can we work together, better?

How does refugee coordination interface with other coordination mechanisms?

A healthy and functioning humanitarian system is one that harnesses diversity and expertise to bring the best outcomes for affected people. Mandate alone does not guarantee a successful response, but it does provide the bases for responsibility, accountability and durability. True comparative advantage for more effective action must comprise of mandate responsibility, expertise and capacity.

Where refugee situations are distinct from other humanitarian situations, the response model used and accountabilities are clear. Where situations are mixed, we need to ensure that we are meeting needs in a way that maximized resources without diluting accountabilities and responsibilities. The 2014 OCHA-UNHCR Joint Note on Coordination in Mixed Situations is an example of a document that delineates respective responsibilities, underlining that the principle that refugee coordination led by UNHCR is an integral yet distinct component with a wider humanitarian response.

Several ongoing sector-wide policy discussions, such as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the New Way of Working, have a potential major impact on coordination in refugee response contexts.

UNHCR supports the greater integration of humanitarian with development issues, provided space is safeguarded for independent refugee and humanitarian action.

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) builds on existing mechanisms, including the Refugee Coordination Model, to more broadly ease pressure on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, and expand access to third country solutions. The Refugee Coordination Model provides the foundations for immediate and effective assistance, which is a part of the Comprehensive Refugee Response, working towards more durable solutions.

Interesting work is being done in Uganda, as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework is being pursued under the leadership of the Government and supported by UNHCR, using the Refugee Coordination Model as a foundational tool to reinforce delivery and meet immediate humanitarian needs and concurrently building up better outcomes for refugees and communities that host them. The New Way of Working (NWoW) approach similarly promotes national and local ownership of collective outcomes. The CRRF in Uganda can be seen as the new way of working approach in a refugee setting.

Read more about [Refugee Coordination](#) and [CRRF](#).

*Join us on **9 November** for the online session on [NGOs in government-led and refugee coordination contexts](#), and learn more about the Refugee Coordination Model and its implications for NGOs. [Register now](#)!*