Strategic Collaboration Framework
between
The United Nations Children’s Fund
and
The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Introduction:

1.1 The purpose of this Strategic Collaboration Framework (the “Framework”) is to set out the overall vision for the strategic collaboration between the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with a view to encouraging and facilitating cohesive, predictable and cooperative action between the two organizations. It seeks to build on the mandates and recognized comparative advantages of each organization and to establish operational modalities of cooperation. This Framework supersedes the 1996 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the 2015 Letter of Understanding (LoU) Guidance between the two organizations.

1.2 This Framework re-emphasizes and contributes to the realization of both organizations’ joint commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1954 and 1961 United Nations Statelessness Conventions, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, international instruments governing the rights of refugees, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2018 reform of the United Nations Development System and its call to achieve efficiency and effectiveness gains; and the principles and policies of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. It also builds on commitments made by both organizations at the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in 2019.
1.3 This Framework is based on the established history of successful collaboration between UNICEF and UNHCR, often in the context of wider partnerships, in areas including but not limited to: Education, WASH, Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, Gender Equality, Health, Nutrition, Statelessness, Cash-Based Interventions, and Data. The agreement also takes into account the commitments made under different reform processes, such as the Grand Bargain.

1.4 UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is mandated on the basis of its Statute of 1950, the 1951 United Nations Convention related to the Status of Refugees, and subsequent resolutions of the General Assembly to provide international protection, assistance and solutions to refugees, returnees, and other categories of displaced and stateless persons¹ and to prevent and reduce statelessness. UNHCR works together with governments, non-governmental organizations and other United Nations organizations to fulfil its mandate.

1.5 UNICEF is the world’s leading organization working for children and their rights, with a mission anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Like all children globally, refugee and returnee children and their families are entitled to have their rights upheld, have inclusive access to basic services; and be protected from abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect. UNICEF works to ensure a dignified future for these children whose lives have been disrupted by violence, exclusion and/or displacement. UNICEF’s commitment to children in humanitarian situations is set out in its Core Commitments to Children (CCCs).

1.6 In the context of these respective mandates, UNHCR and UNICEF will continue to work together proactively in prevention and responses across the humanitarian and development spectrum, in multiple sectors and in all settings where both organizations are present, in cooperation with all relevant governmental institutions – including local government and subnational authorities; the private sector; and non-governmental actors at the community, country, regional and global levels.

1.7 This Framework aims to facilitate UNICEF and UNHCR’s joint efforts to protect, assist and support solutions for refugee² and returnee children, their families and the communities

¹ ‘Displaced and stateless persons’ refers to asylum seekers, refugees, returnees, stateless people and internationally displaced people.
² In this document, the term “refugee” also refers to persons in refugee-like situations, and to asylum seekers.
that host them. Under this Framework, both organizations commit to support and promote the inclusion of refugees in national systems; and strengthen these systems. In this endeavor, the two organizations will collaborate to leverage development capacities and advocate jointly for policy changes, adequate financing for refugee-hosting countries, and other enablers for strengthening and expanding national systems and services.

1.8 Under this Framework, UNICEF and UNHCR will work to secure jointly defined outcomes (as set out in the technical annex to the Framework) for refugee and returnee children, their families and the communities that host them with a focus on education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection, social protection, data and ending childhood statelessness. This Framework is also intended to enhance and support collaboration in other areas of common interest, such as nutrition, health, and cash-based interventions.

1.9 The Framework draws on lessons from the Blueprint for Joint Action initiative in ten countries which has run from 2020 to 2022 as well as complementary approaches and best practices from other countries. Considering the lessons learned as well as future development and changes brought about by global crises and conflicts, it may be modified or terminated at any time by mutual agreement.

1.10 This Framework is fully aligned with UNICEF's Strategic Plan and with UNHCR's Strategic Directions.

2. Guiding principles and key parameters

A number of principles underpin this Framework:

2.1 UNHCR and UNICEF are committed to further strengthening their strategic partnership in line with the Principles of Partnership\(^3\), adopted by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007, at global, regional, and national levels. In doing so, the two organizations will place specific focus on joint and complementary policy, programming, advocacy and resource leveraging and mobilization efforts in support of the objectives of this Framework.

\(^3\) The Principles of Partnership include equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. The principles are applicable to UN and non-UN humanitarian signatories.
2.2 UNICEF and UNHCR will adhere to the 2016 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Protection Policy to reaffirm the importance of protection in humanitarian action and emphasize its significance as a collective responsibility of all humanitarian actors. UNHCR and UNICEF uphold their commitment to promote and adhere to this policy, and to elevate protection to a system-wide responsibility.

2.3 UNHCR and UNICEF will prioritize human rights and child-rights based approaches cognizant of the ultimate accountability of national duty-bearers, including governments, for humanitarian and development outcomes.

2.4 UNICEF and UNHCR reconfirm their commitment to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. UNICEF and UNHCR will integrate their gender equality commitments as set out in the UNICEF’s Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs), UNICEF Gender Policy 2021–2030 and the UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity Policy (2018) throughout all areas of joint work with an accelerated focus on gender transformative programming to address the structural and normative drivers of gender inequality. UNICEF and UNHCR will strengthen the use of sex-disaggregated data, gender analyses and gender data reporting to inform programming priorities.

2.5 UNICEF and UNHCR reconfirm their accountability to affected people, including women, children and youth; and recommit to ensure that programming promotes accountability to affected people including participation and inclusion, communication and transparency, feedback and response mechanisms to allow affected populations to participate in programming in a safe and meaningful way.

As part of this approach, UNICEF and UNHCR commit to promoting and supporting the meaningful engagement of refugee children and youth, their families and the communities that host them in the decisions that affect their lives. In this area the agencies will draw on their complementary strengths which include UNICEF’s expertise in safe and meaningful participation of children and youth; and UNHCR’s expertise in inclusion and engagement of diverse segments of the refugee population in line with its Age, Gender and Diversity approach.

2.6 In line with their commitments to child participation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to youth participation under the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian
Action, UNHCR and UNICEF undertake to ensure that the priorities of children and young people are identified and addressed; and that children and young people are consulted, and meaningfully engaged throughout all stages of the organizations' work with refugees, returnees and the communities that host them.

2.7 UNICEF and UNHCR commit to carrying out all their activities with the highest ethical and professional standards, both within their respective organizations and externally, in respect to refugees and the humanitarian and development nature of their work. The two organizations have a policy of zero tolerance to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and agree to collaborate in prevention, protection from, and response to SEA, in coordination with partners, including to advance their shared vision that is outlined in the IASC PSEA Championship Strategy.

2.8 UNICEF and UNHCR fully commit to safeguarding children from all harmful acts and omissions, deliberate and negligent, whether the effects are physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, economic, or privacy related.

2.9 UNHCR and UNICEF commit to support and cooperate with States and other stakeholders to achieve the objectives of the GCR, affirmed on 17 December 2018, including to: (i) ease pressures on host countries; (ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; (iii) expand refugees' access to third country solutions; and (iv) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. The two organizations will do their utmost to mobilize support for the GCR and the achievement of its objectives through supporting refugees and host governments and to ensure a more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing.

2.10 Collaboration between UNHCR and UNICEF builds on their respective leadership roles and active membership in relevant global, regional and field-based refugee and displacement coordination, policy and advocacy forums. This collaboration recognizes and does not seek to change the respective roles of the two organizations under the UNHCR Refugee Coordination Model. It also recognizes and fully respects their roles in situations of internal displacement in which the Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster system is used. The Framework recognizes the continued relevance and applicability of the Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on

4 The Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action is a global call to prioritize the needs and rights of young people throughout all stages of humanitarian action.
Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice. This Framework does not prescribe coordination arrangements in situations where neither the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM)\(^5\) nor the cluster system is in place, noting that in these situations appropriate coordination mechanisms should be agreed between all stakeholders at the country level.

2.11 UNICEF and UNHCR commit to keep each other abreast of plans for major policy or advocacy initiatives, including research and publications, which are in the areas of collaboration outlined in this Framework.

2.12 UNICEF and UNHCR recognize that appropriate and consistent use of terminology and definitions of key concepts in internal and external documents is vital to the effective collaboration between the two organizations. UNICEF and UNHCR commit to issuing joint internal communications clarifying terminology as might be necessary to foster effective collaboration.

**The following parameters** define the commitments of the two organizations under this Framework:

2.13 **Predictability:** By respecting the jointly agreed goals and ways of working set out in the technical annex to this agreement, UNICEF and UNHCR aim to increase the predictability of their actions.

2.14 **Efficiency:** UNICEF and UNHCR commit to achieving efficiencies wherever possible through enhanced collaboration on programming, human resources, operational arrangements such as shared facilities and processes; and partnership arrangements.

2.15 **Inclusion:** UNHCR and UNICEF agree to work towards the inclusion of refugees in national systems in line with the GCR and with a view of jointly providing the necessary support to host communities and host governments, including at the subnational level.

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\(^5\) The Refugee Coordination Model provides the framework and principles through which refugee and mixed situations are to be approached to make refugee coordination more predictable, inclusive, and collaborative.
2.16 **Transparency**: To ensure smooth cooperation at the field level, UNICEF and UNHCR agree to share information at country, regional and global level in regard to any planned activities within the focus areas of their collaboration, such as refugee and returnee numbers, needs assessments, situation analyses, global reports, and subsequent analysis and activities, with analytical work being undertaken jointly where appropriate.

2.17 **Environmental sustainability**: All transformative actions, particularly in WASH, will be taken in an environmentally conscious manner that reduces damage and waste, leaves a light footprint and brings efficiencies through the use of innovative green approaches.

2.18 **Joint advocacy**: UNICEF and UNHCR agree to conduct joint (or mutually reinforcing) advocacy at the country, regional and global levels with a view to effect positive changes for refugee and returnee children and their families, as well as for children and families who are stateless.

2.19 **Coordinated resource mobilization**: UNHCR and UNICEF recognize the varied and diverse funding mechanisms and sources in place in support of refugee and returnee children and their families, including the increasingly important role of domestic financing. The two organizations will actively support one another’s efforts to mobilize resources to meet their respective funding needs through regular exchange of information and early warning on resource gaps. They will seek funds through their respective regular channels and will strive to attract new funding, including from non-traditional donors, in a complementary manner. The two organizations will actively work to identify opportunities at all levels for joint resource mobilization, particularly in areas of priority focus.

3. **Scope and objectives**

3.1 UNHCR and UNICEF will focus the collaboration under this Framework on the *inclusion* of refugees\(^6\) and returnees in national plans, budgets (including sector strategies, plans and budgets) and service delivery systems focusing on:

- Education,
- WASH,

\(^6\) In this document, as stated above, the term “refugee” also refers to persons in refugee-like situations, and to asylum seekers.
- Child Protection,
- Social Protection,
- Statelessness, and
- Data.

3.2 Jointly agreed-to goals and approaches in each of these areas, and on the inclusion of refugees and returnees more broadly, and joint efforts to end childhood statelessness are set out in the technical annex to this Framework.

3.3 Further, the enhanced collaboration between UNICEF and UNHCR set out in this Framework and its annexes aims to transform the quality of life for the target population by increasing access to education; ensuring access to clean, sustainable and environmentally sound WASH services; addressing protection concerns and ensuring quality, gender responsive, disability- and diversity-inclusive and child-friendly prevention and response services; working to overcome context-specific barriers to inclusion in national systems to enable joint advocacy for policy change; facilitation and advocacy for universal birth registration and access to other services. The Framework also aims to enhance collaboration on data sharing and protection, to strengthen national data systems and the interoperability of the two organizations’ data systems (as agreed under the Global Data Sharing Framework), and to support the strengthening of national availability and accessibility of non-identifying data on the situation of refugee and returnee children, to inform timely resourcing and programmatic preparation and response.

3.4 Whilst the key focus of the collaboration under this Framework is on refugee and returnee children, their families and the communities that host them, both organizations have operations in contexts with mixed movements. Given this, and both organizations' commitment to the Global Compact on Migration and to the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, the Framework may therefore also apply to internally displaced people, migrants and any other groups upon mutual agreement at country level.

3.5 In line with the organizations’ existing collaboration on statelessness both organizations will work to ensure no child is born stateless and to advocate for protection, access to services, and solutions for children who are stateless or are at risk of being stateless. Work also includes
advocacy for gender equality in civil registration and nationality laws. Work will be guided by the Guidance Note of the UN Secretary-General: The United Nations and Statelessness (2018).

3.6 Both organizations are committed to the principle of non-discrimination and will also work with groups often at heightened risk or vulnerability, including children living with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children, adolescent girls and persons with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. In addition, the organizations will continue and potentially strengthen their collaboration in all other areas where feasible such as, but not limited to, nutrition, health, and cash-based interventions.

3.7 The geographic scope of the Framework is global and applies wherever both organizations are present, including in high-income countries. In line with this, UNICEF will endeavor to ensure refugee considerations are adequately reflected in relevant country programming documents and UNHCR will endeavor to ensure child specific considerations in relevant country programming documents. The Framework also seeks to bolster existing cooperation including under broader planning documents and appeals such as the United Nations UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and/or Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF); and to promote enhanced collaboration at all levels of the organizations.

3.8 This Framework is intended to further enhance the two organizations’ work with host countries and host communities as they interact and support refugees and returnees. UNICEF and UNHCR will strengthen their joint efforts to build on and further develop national capacity, and support efforts to systematically plan, develop, and support national systems, services and budgets that are inclusive of refugees, returnees and other relevant target groups. UNICEF and UNHCR will continue and strengthen their close collaboration with host countries and key partners to prevent, respond and assist in humanitarian crises. Their joint response also transcends this, taking a holistic approach that encompasses action to prepare for outflows, to undertake programming activities and to engage development actors from the outset to ensure that children and their families can enjoy their rights and access national services.
4. Specific programmatic areas of collaboration

In support of the Sustainable Development Goals, we will jointly work towards the following outcomes:

4.1 By 2030 all refugee, stateless and returnee children, their families and the communities that host them are included in national/subnational strategies and plans, systems and services without discrimination, their rights respected, have access to accountability mechanisms and are systematically and meaningfully engaged.

4.2 By 2030, all refugee, returnee and host community children including children and youth of early childhood education, primary and secondary school age, girls and boys, have access to relevant, accredited quality education focusing on inclusion into national systems; and refugee and returnee youth will have expanded access to accredited vocational training at post-secondary and tertiary level, and to tertiary education opportunities.

4.3 By 2030 all refugee and returnee children, their families and the communities that host them have access to safe, dignified, affordable WASH services all the time, everywhere.

4.4 By 2030, all refugee, returnee and host community children are protected from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect; and have their birth registered.

4.5 By 2030, childhood statelessness will have been brought to an end.

4.6 By 2030, refugee and returnee children, their families and the communities that host them have more equitable and full access to social protection, as a result of protection-informed technical support to governments, international and local actors working across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.

4.7 By 2030, the availability, accessibility and quality of comparable, reliable, timely and age, gender and diversity-disaggregated data on the situation of refugee and returnee children, their families and the communities that host them has improved, to enable the necessary evidence base for transforming the quality of life for these populations.
5. Implementation: Oversight and operational modalities

Strategic guidance and oversight:

5.1 Senior (Assistant Secretary-General) level staff in UNICEF and UNHCR will provide the overall vision, strategic direction and delivery of this collaboration; taking responsibility for implementing the Framework, ensuring support, addressing challenges, and adjusting the Framework as needed by mutual agreement; supported by their Headquarters and Regional Directors.

5.2 Leadership meetings will be organized as needed, and at least on an annual basis, to jointly review progress as reported by country and regional-level teams, and to address specific challenges in the implementation of the Framework. A formal review of progress and the partnership as a whole will be held in 2030.

Operational modalities of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation:

5.3 UNICEF and UNHCR will each be responsible for the manner in which they carry out their collaboration under this Framework. Implementation of this Framework will build on strong collaboration at all levels across sectors and teams. Both organizations will align and streamline elements of this Framework where relevant into country-level planning and other corporate processes in order to avoid additional planning, monitoring and reporting burdens.

5.4 Regional Directors in each organization will, in line with their regular oversight and support functions, lead on and have primary responsibility for operationalizing this Framework at the regional and country levels. Regular contact and joint strategic planning between the Regional Directors is encouraged.

5.5 Headquarters Directors with relevant portfolios in each organization will lead on and have primary responsibility for operationalizing this Framework at the global level. Headquarters divisions will ensure policy coherence, develop global goods and foundational assets where needed, such as in data systems, and collaborate closely, as needed, to support and complement country and regional-level efforts to implement this Framework.

5.6 Representatives at the country level of each organization will be responsible for ensuring practical and incremental implementation of the Framework and monitoring of progress at the country level, where close cooperation and regular exchange of information between UNICEF and UNHCR are essential. The Letter of Understanding (LoU) template annexed to the
Framework provides a reference and practical tool for country-level collaboration. UNICEF and UNHCR will build accountabilities relating to the operationalization of this Framework and the realization of jointly agreed goals outlined within it, into the workplans and deliverables at all levels of the organization. UNICEF and UNHCR Country Representatives will report regularly to their respective Regional Directors, highlighting positive achievements and challenges faced by both organizations during implementation. Commitments relating to this Framework can be incorporated into other, multi-stakeholder plans at country level.

5.7 Each organization will meet its own costs and resource requirements for activities implemented under this Framework, except to the extent agreed otherwise through any separate agreement(s) or arrangement(s). Any transfer of funds between the Parties will be documented using standard agreement as per guidance from the Fiduciary Management Oversight Group of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group for facilitating transfer of resources between UN agencies.

5.8 UNICEF and UNHCR will coordinate their efforts in evaluation, including undertaking joint evaluations, where deemed appropriate by both organizations, in order to assess the extent to which the collaboration is translating into the desired outcomes.

6. Dissemination and duration

6.1 Whilst the goals included in this Framework are focused on 2030, and progress towards them will be regularly reviewed, with a formal review taking place in 2030, this Framework is open-ended and has no expiry date. It will be disseminated to teams at all levels in both organizations.

7. Annexes and compendium

7.1 The following documents are annexed to this Framework and should be used in conjunction with it:

(A) a technical annex setting out agreed joint goals and ways of working in the specific areas of focus covered by this Framework; and
(B) a template Letter of Understanding (LoU) to inspire and guide country-level agreements between the two organizations. This template can be adjusted as needed at the country level.

7.2 Further details on agreed areas of and approaches to collaboration are set out in a compendium, which is a companion document to this Framework. The compendium contains chapters on the focus areas of this Framework, as well as Health and Nutrition, and is a living document, which can be updated at any time on mutual agreement, as expressed in a joint decision by the relevant Assistant Secretaries-General (ASGs) of both organizations.

On behalf of the United Nations Children’s Fund

Ms. Catherine M. Russell
Executive Director

Date: 21/05/2022

On behalf of UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Mr. Filippo Grandi
High Commissioner

Date: 15/01/2023