



# UN COMMON PLEDGE 2.0 INNOVATION LAB READ OUT

March 2023

The UN common pledge 2.0 Innovation Lab was co-convened by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) in Geneva from 30-31 January 2023. Facilitation was supported by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Lab in Geneva.

The event brought together focal points from 15 UN entities, 21 United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), 7 public sector donors (The Netherlands, EU, FCDO, Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, Australia), the World Bank, the Joint SDG Fund, Anila Noor from the Global Refugee-Led Network as an informal refugee advisor and a group of 5 refugee experts representing 5 global Refugee-led Organizations (RLOs): Global Refugee-Led Network, New Women Connectors, Global Refugee Youth Network, DAFI Scholars and the Tertiary Refugee Student Network.

The Innovation Lab provided the opportunity to collectively develop the scope and shape of the UN common pledge 2.0 and to discuss possible commitments under the pledge, drawing on the expertise and perspective of the different stakeholders present. It was also a space to raise questions and make suggestions about the pledge, and led to several decisions on its content and parameters. In order to enable consultation with further stakeholders decisions and the other outcomes of the Innovation Lab were shared and discussed in webinars with the participation of over 200 people, on 9 February.

The UN common pledge 2.0 which will be announced at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, commits the UN family to systematically promoting and supporting refugees' inclusion in UN response plans and in national systems. It builds on a predecessor UN common pledge from 2019. Through the pledge UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and UN entities at the global level can showcase and generate support for concrete actions that they will take to advance refugees' inclusion.

# Points which emerged in discussion with UN Country Teams

UNCTs from the following countries were represented in the Innovation Lab: Bangladesh, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt Indonesia, Jordan, Honduras, Niger, Thailand, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Mauritania, Mexico, North Macedonia, Palestine, Türkiye, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Zambia.

Focal points from UNCTs, most of whom were from the respective Resident Coordinator's office, presented and exchanged on potential commitments that UNCTs could make under the pledge. Key points that emerged were as follows:

## The role of government

- Policy dialogue with government is essential to developing and implementing commitments under the pledge. It is particularly important to engage with governments on policy pledges made at the 2019 GRF, many of which remain in progress due to lack of support, financing, or other challenges.
- Even where governments have welcomed refugees and adopted inclusive policies, their medium term assumption can still be that refugees will return home. This brings opportunities (governments can be generous if they consider the situation to be temporary) and constraints (it makes longer term UN planning on refugee inclusion challenging).
- In contexts like Europe with strong political will and public support for refugee inclusion improvements can still be made – including adjusting policies on education, reducing delays in international protection procedures, and ensuring a systematic approach to refugees. In Europe it will be important to focus on areas where the UN system can bring clear added value. In other progressive contexts refugees may have access to national services but not the right to work.
- Commitments must be realistic given the context in which the UNCT is operating. In particularly constrained environments it may not be possible for the UN to progress refugee inclusion, and advocacy for more progressive policies may be slow to yield results.

## Resources and financing

- Supporting governments to strengthen national systems and extend them to include refugees requires resources - in particular human resources. It can be hard to mobilise funds for staff costs.
- Middle income refugee hosting countries (such as those in Central Asia or Latin America) tend to have little or no donor presence. This makes it challenging for the UN to mobilise the funds required for our work to progress refugee inclusion.
- To make progress on refugee inclusion, we will need to leverage development capacities and development financing.
- While individual UN agencies are successful in fundraising for specific projects and initiatives, this can undermine the opportunity for coordinated or joint efforts which mobilise the UN system as whole. How might donors incentivize and reward a joined-up approach?
- In some countries, access to basic services is limited for host communities as well as refugees – so development investment and measures to address poverty and promote the rule of law need to underpin inclusion efforts.

## Collaboration within the UN, and with other stakeholders

- In several countries there are already good examples of collaboration between multiple UN agencies to support refugee inclusion; these can be replicated and scaled under the UN common pledge 2.0.
- There is a need for a more harmonized approach to data on refugees within the UN, to support country level planning and prioritisation. We need to establish baselines in order to measure progress at country level under the pledge.
- A regional level dimension to the pledge might be helpful for UNCTs where they are working on the same refugee crisis, or if they face common challenges - such as gender issues in MENA.
- The UN cannot progress refugee inclusion on its own or simply through capital level action: cooperation with local government, NGOs, CSO, faith organisations, grassroots organizations and the UN system is essential.
- UNCTs should seek synergies and complementarities with other stakeholders' pledges (which are largely yet to be defined) to ensure mutual reinforcement whenever possible.

## The focus and parameters of the pledge

- It will be important to find ways to include UN action in support of mixed movement populations into the pledge, since many countries host refugee and migrants; and host communities may also include IDPs.
- The following were most commonly identified as possible themes for commitments by UNCTs under the pledge: Education, Health, Protection, Climate Action, Statelessness, Partnerships, Freedom of Movement, Registration & Documentation; and Livelihoods & Economic Inclusion.

# Points which emerged in discussion with UN entities

The following UN entities participated in the Innovation Lab: DCO, FAO, ITU, ILO, IOM, OCHA, UNDP UNHCR, UNESCO, UN Habitat, UNICEF, UNITAR, UNFPA, UN Women and WFP.

Focal points from UN entities at the global level presented and exchanged on potential commitments that their organisations could make under the pledge. Key further points that emerged, building on the discussion with UNCTs, were as follows:

- Commitments made by UN entities at the global level can be focused on supporting the achievement of country level objectives on refugee inclusion. At the global level UN entities can play an important role in promoting cohesion in the way that they guide and support their country level teams.
- It will be important to leverage the UN's Peace expertise and capacities in support of the pledge.
- One effective strategy to apply under the pledge is for UN entities to systematically mainstream refugees in their own programmes in all refugee hosting countries.
- As we design monitoring and reporting for the pledge, we must try to minimise process and mainstream wherever possible.

- The pledge is an important opportunity for the UN to match government pledges made in 2019 which remain in progress, and to encourage other stakeholders to also align their efforts in this way.
- The capacities of UNCTs vary, as individual agencies are not always present in every country - and yet the full range of UN capacities is needed to effectively progress refugee inclusion. How can we address this in the pledge?

## Points raised by other stakeholders

One of the members of the refugee expert group supporting the co-creation of the pledge ran an interactive session for all participants on meaningful participation of refugees in the process of drafting and implementing commitments under the pledge. The discussions surfaced different levels of commitment to refugee participation between different UNCTs, as well as concerns about the bureaucratic, practical and organizational constraints to engaging refugees from different backgrounds in a respectful, meaningful and sustained way in some contexts. A key challenge is the high access threshold to collaboration with UN entities as a result of bureaucratic and structural barriers. Members of the refugee expert group added their own reflections and suggestions, making a strong case that the UN common pledge is an opportunity to address some of these barriers to participation. Going forward, the refugee expert group is willing to support UNCTs and global level UN entities to meaningfully engage with refugees in the pledge co-creation process.

Donors and the World Bank also shared their reflections, expressing appreciation for the whole-of-UN approach that the pledge promotes, and putting particular emphasis on the important role that development financing will play in securing greater inclusion for refugees in national systems. The World Bank representative outlined the Bank's mechanisms for supporting refugee hosting countries, and encouraged UNCTs to engage with the Bank at country level and strategically align UN efforts to progress refugee inclusion with development investments. The focal point from the UN's Joint SDG fund gave an overview of this mechanism, which can be used to channel funding to support UNCT action under the pledge.

## The UN common pledge 2.0: one pledge, multiple commitments

### One pledge made by the UN, focused on refugees' inclusion in UN plans and national systems

#### made up of:

Specific, measurable commitments from 30+ UNCTs, generated through consultation with key stakeholders in each country.

Measurable commitments from 20+ UN entities at the global level which support joint UN action to progress refugee inclusion at the country level.

## Key decisions

- 1. The UN coming pledge 2.0 will be one pledge, made-up of multiple commitments from different UNCTs and UN entities.** The co-leads for the pledge will package and promote the commitments as one coherent whole, respecting the need for UNCTs to make commitments which are tailored to their specific contexts. As far as possible, commitments made by global level UN entities under the pledge should support joined up action by UNCTs.
- 2. The UN common pledge 2.0 will focus on the same two dimensions of refugee inclusion as in the 2019 UN common pledge: inclusion of refugees in UN plans; and inclusion of refugees in national systems.** In order for refugees to access national service delivery systems, they need to be included in national data sets, plans, and budgets; and social cohesion with host communities is a key enabling factor, as is access to decent work for refugees. These are all areas where the UN has valuable expertise and capacity to offer through its different agencies and entities.

The main rationale for maintaining a focus on refugee inclusion in the pledge is the transformative nature of this approach. Despite inclusive policies in many countries, many refugee populations are still served by decades old, under-resourced humanitarian systems designed for the short term. Supporting national and local government to develop expanded, quality services which refugees can access provides a more sustainable alternative. It also benefits host communities, and enables refugees to become self-reliant, productive contributors to society and the economy.

- 3. Only UNCTs and UN entities at the global level will be invited to make commitments under the UN common pledge 2.0.** The commitments, investments and efforts of many other stakeholders are necessary to achieve refugee inclusion, and these can be outlined in separate, aligned pledges; this pledge is a UN initiative with UN accountabilities.
- 4. We will use the sustainable development goals as an overall frame for the pledge.** Commitments under the pledge are likely to contribute to a range of sustainable development goals, and the pledge as a whole supports the global imperative to leave no one behind. Using the SDGs as an overall organising frame allows for country level commitments to speak to the specific priorities for each context whilst also articulating how the pledge aligns with the wider common purpose that the UN and the international community have committed to between now and 2030.
- 5. The primary focus of the UN common pledge 2.0 is on refugees; however, commitments under the pledge can be inclusive, aimed at achieving positive impacts for refugees, returnees, mixed populations including refugees, IDPs, and/or host communities. Commitments relating to the prevention of statelessness, and access to legal identity and civil registration can also be considered.**

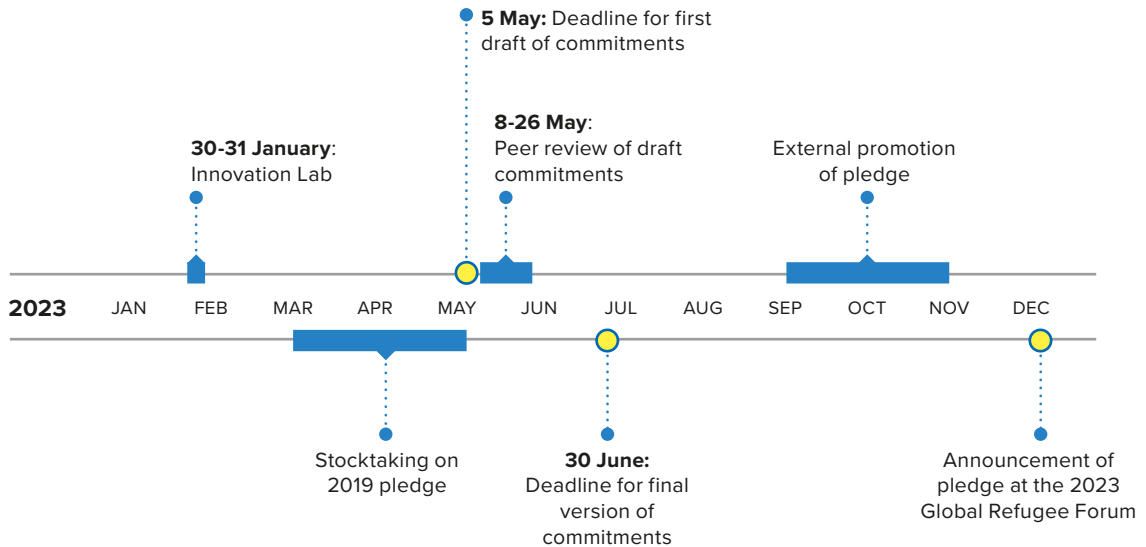
Noting that IDPs are the specific focus of the UN Secretary-General's Acton Agenda, the UN common pledge 2.0 seeks to be complementary to this and avoid confusion or duplication. For this reason, commitments specifically on IDPs (rather than on mixed populations or host communities which may include and benefit IDPs, for example) will likely not be included in the UN common pledge 2.0.

In a similar vein, commitments that focus uniquely on migrants should be incorporated into pledges supporting the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration rather than under the UN common pledge 2.0. Commitments under the UN common pledge 2.0 relating to mixed movements where both migrants and refugees are concerned should be approved by both UNHCR and IOM. Twin pledges are encouraged for commitments equally affecting refugees and migrants; meaning that commitments under the UN common pledge 2.0 which relate to mixed movements may also be reflected in pledges submitted at the next International Migration Review Forum.



- 6. UNCTs participating in the pledge will consult with government is an essential step in drafting their commitments under the pledge.** In contexts where government is resistant to refugee inclusion, it will not be possible for the UNCT to make public commitments in this area and deliver on them. Conversely, governments with progressive policies, including those who made inclusive policy pledges at the 2019 GRF, must be consulted so that UN action is as effective as possible in supporting governments operationalize those policies.
- 7. Consultation with the World Bank will be incorporated into the co-creation process, given the importance of development financing for refugee hosting countries to achieve refugee inclusion.** This consultation will take place in two ways: by UNCTs at the country level, and by the co-leads at the global level.
- 8. Given the importance of regional level UN structures for country action in some contexts, UNCTs are encouraged to consult with regional UN mechanisms and other UNCTs in their region on draft commitments.**
- 9. In order to track progress against the pledge and hold ourselves accountable, each UNCT/UN entity participating in the pledge will define success for their specific commitments, as well as how to monitor this through existing systems.** In a midterm stocktaking exercise and at the end of the four-year term of the pledge, co-leads will collect updates on progress as assessed by UNCTs/UN entities against their own defined measures of success. The Co leads will also draw on other relevant available data, such as the Global Compact on Refugees indicator reports and SDG data.
- 10. Where UNCTs / UN entities will need resourcing for their planned actions under their commitments, they are encouraged to cost these as they are integrated into existing planning frameworks.** Costing can be addressed as a second step in the process.
- 11. UNCTs and UN entities should engage refugees and other relevant groups as they reflect on and draft their commitments under the pledge, in the most practical and meaningful way possible in their context.** Ideally, at country level the process of engaging with refugees will build from existing Accountability to Affected People (AAP) mechanisms or establish new ones where these are not already in place.

# Next Steps



In Q2 2023 the co-leads will undertake a final stocktaking on progress and learning from the 2019 UN common pledge. This will involve a second systematic review of country level UN plans to assess how far they include refugees. It will also identify and showcase positive examples of UN efforts to progress refugee inclusion in specific contexts.

In the meantime, UNCTs and UN entities will engage with key stakeholders as necessary to develop and submit a first draft of their commitments under the pledge by 5 May, after which there will be a 15-day peer review period. The peer review will be coordinated by the co-leads and will see colleagues from UNCTs, UN entities and the refugee expert group review and comment on the draft commitments. Comments will be constructive, in the spirit of strengthening the pledge and offered for consideration only: UNCTs and UN entities will have full control over the commitments they submit.

Commitments will be finalised and submitted by 30 June. The co-leads will propose language and framing for the overarching pledge, based on the decisions listed above, and package the commitments as elements of one coherent agenda. The resulting pledge will be externally promoted at various events during Q3-4 of 2023, in preparation for the Global Refugee Forum on 13-15 December.

**As immediate next steps, focal points from UNCTs agreed** to brief their UNCT on the Innovation Lab outcomes, revisit the guidance on drafting commitments (which has been updated following the Innovation Lab), and begin relevant consultations in their context – e.g. with refugee led organisations the World Bank, and any other key development actors. UNCTs undertook to reflect on the current status of refugee inclusion in their context, the opportunities for progress and impact in the next 4 years (2024-2027) and to submit draft commitments by the 5 May deadline.

**As immediate next steps, focal points from UN entities agreed** to brief their colleagues (which may include senior leadership, technical colleagues, and country level teams on the Innovation Lab outcomes), revisit the guidance on drafting commitments (which has been updated following the Innovation Lab), and begin relevant consultations in order to submit draft commitments by the 5 May deadline. It may be particularly important for UN entities to ensure coordination within their own organisations during the drafting process. This includes briefing their country level Representatives to encourage them to collaborate in the process of drafting UNCT commitments and ensure a strong link between global and country level actions.



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