UNITING FOR PEOPLE FORCED TO FLEE AND THEIR HOSTS:

Lessons learned and future directions for Support Platforms

Cover photo:

Ana Iris, 35 years old, and her children Jeimy Abigail, 16 years old and Joel Edenilson, 14 years old, from El Salvador.
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Executive summary

The Global Compact on Refugees, which was affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018, provides for the establishment of 'Support Platforms' to 'enable context-specific support for refugees and concerned host countries and communities'. At the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, three such Platforms were launched for the displacement situations in South-West Asia (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan), Central America and Mexico, and the East and Horn of Africa.

Three years after their launch, this report enquires into the Platforms' achievements, evolution and lessons learned, and makes concrete recommendations of actions that could enhance the effectiveness of the three existing Support Platforms, as well as others that may be launched in the future.

The report addresses five central questions.

1. What is a Support Platform?

There are a range of perspectives, as well as a lack of clarity, on what a Support Platform is. Taking into account the range of answers given to the question 'What is a Support Platform?', this report describes a Support Platform as follows:

> *A Support Platform is a mechanism for international cooperation in relation to a specific displacement situation, established pursuant to the Global Compact on Refugees, that seeks to align the efforts of the international community in supporting the displaced and their hosts with host government priorities and the Global Compact itself.*

Whilst the variation in structure and operating methods amongst the three existing Platforms allows for situation- and region-specific adaptation and experimentation, more coherence across the Platforms would be beneficial, where this is possible. This could be achieved through the development of a 'model structure', which builds on the lessons learned to date by the three existing Support Platforms and which could be adapted as necessary to the specific circumstances being addressed by a particular Platform.

2. What value do Support Platforms add?

The Support Platforms add considerable value to existing displacement responses in the situations concerned, including by:

- providing a forum to convene key actors that would not otherwise exist;
- using this convening power to create space—including at the political level—to make important advances on protection and solutions;
- keeping large displacement situations on the international agenda and send important messages about the centrality of refugee and IDP protection; and
- considering and coordinating a wide range of assistance to countries affected by displacement.

Although showing direct impact is challenging, each of the Support Platforms launched in 2019 has made important progress, as the report details.

3. When do Support Platforms work well?

The Platforms' first three years of operation have revealed a number of key factors that create a conducive environment for progress to be made. These include:

- When the work of the Support Platform is aligned with the priorities and commitments of host and country-of-origin governments, and with the Global Compact on Refugees;
- When the Support Platform promotes direct interaction between host and country-of-origin governments and other Support Platform members;
- When Support Platform activities take place at both the situational and national levels;
- When the Support Platform focuses on key themes or sectors; and
- When a high-profile 'champion' is able to bring additional attention and engagement to the work of a Support Platform.

4. How could Support Platforms be more effective?

The report explores a number of ways in which the Support Platforms could be made more effective, namely:

- Ensuring clarity and consistency around the Support Platform concept;
- Developing a strategy for each Platform;
- Using the Platforms for pledge matching ahead of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, and future Forums;
- Considering the development of situational compacts;
- Fostering engagement and a sense of ownership amongst Support Platform members, including in Geneva, New York and capitals;
- Enhancing the tracking of and reporting on achievements and outcomes;
- Strategically expanding Support Platform membership;
- Judiciously engaging other actors;
- Communicating effectively; and
- Ensuring cross-fertilisation across Platforms.

5. What is the future of Support Platforms?

The three Support Platforms launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019 have established themselves as mechanisms of international cooperation that convene key players to discuss ways to enhance displacement responses in the three regions concerned.

There is now an opportunity to take the Platforms 'to the next level', including in the ways discussed in this report. If this opportunity is not seized, there is a risk of stagnation and declining interest in the Platforms.

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Introduction

The Global Compact on Refugees was affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018,[1] following a two-year period of multilateral and multi-stakeholder discussions and consultations.[2] In affirming the Global Compact, the General Assembly highlighted its 'importance as a representation of [the] political will and ambition of the international community to operationalize the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing, to mobilize the international community as a whole, and galvanize action for an improved response to refugee situations'.[3]

Aiming to advance international cooperation in addressing refugee issues and to promote burden and responsibility sharing in a spirit of solidarity with refugees and the countries and communities hosting large numbers of them, the Global Compact has four interrelated objectives:[4]

I.   Ease pressures on host countries;
II. Enhance refugee self-reliance;
III. Expand access to third country solutions; and
IV. Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

In order to support the achievement of these objectives, Part A of the Global Compact's 'Programme of action' establishes a number of 'Arrangements for burden- and responsibility-sharing'. Whilst many of these operate at the global level—such as the quadrennial Global Refugee Forum, provisions for enhanced financial support for refugee responses, and the multi-stakeholder approach—others are intended to operate in relation to specific refugee situations, particularly from a regional perspective. The most prominent of these in the first four years of the implementation of the Global Compact have been the so-called 'Support Platforms'.[5]

Drawing inspiration from the 'group of friends' concept that is utilised in a number of diplomatic contexts,[6] Support Platforms are designed to 'enable context-specific support for refugees and concerned host countries and communities'. The Global Compact envisages that their functions will include:[7]

- galvanizing political commitment and advocacy for prevention, protection, response and solutions;

- mobilizing financial, material and technical assistance, as well as resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries…;

- facilitating coherent humanitarian and development responses, including through the early and sustained engagement of development actors in support of host communities and refugees; and

- supporting comprehensive policy initiatives to ease pressure on host countries, build resilience and self-reliance, and find solutions.

Whilst the Global Compact provides for Support Platforms to be activated, deactivated and assisted by UNHCR,[8] it emphasises that 'the leadership and engagement of a group of States' will lie at their core, as will the participation of other relevant stakeholders as appropriate.[9]

At the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019,[10] the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees launched three Support Platforms:

- The Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR Support Platform), which seeks to support Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, and to support conditions for return to Afghanistan when that is possible;[11]

- The Support Platform for the *Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones (MIRPS Support Platform)*,[12] which seeks to support displaced populations and their hosts in Central America and Mexico;[13] and

- The IGAD Support Platform, which addresses the challenges faced by refugees, internally-displaced people (IDPs) and their hosts in the countries of the East and Horn of Africa that are Member States of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).[14]

After three years of operation, what have these Support Platforms achieved? How have they evolved? What lessons have been learned, and what changes could be contemplated to maximise their effectiveness? What is the future of the Support Platform concept? These are the core questions that lie at the heart of this report.

About this report

To mark the first three years of the Support Platforms' operation, UNHCR commissioned Patrick CJ Wall, an independent consultant based in Geneva, Switzerland, to conduct a 'lessons learned' exercise with a view to:

- taking stock of progress made;
- informing the continuing evolution of the three Platforms; and
- guiding the establishment of future Platforms.

The exercise sought to explore five key questions:

I.   What are the key lessons about the formation, structure, membership, engagement strategy, and impact that have been learned from the first years of operation of the Platforms?

II. How have the Platforms been able to support affected countries, communities, and displaced people?

III. How can the achievements of the Platforms be demonstrated against the objectives of the GCR?

IV. How have the Platforms been able to support UNHCR in fulfilling its mandate?

V.   How should Platforms be used in the future?

The lessons learned exercise sought to address these questions through a three-pronged methodology that comprised of:

- An extensive review of relevant documents relating to the three Support Platforms, including concept notes, terms of reference, websites and notes from meetings and events;
- Confidential, semi-structured interviews with thirty-seven individuals with personal experience of one or more of the three established Platforms (both UNHCR staff and staff of relevant governments and organisations); and

- A workshop for UNHCR staff working on the Support Platforms that was held in May 2022 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Whilst Patrick Wall performed the document review, conducted the interviews and facilitated the workshop in Bangkok, this report could not have been produced without the support and input of a wide range of contributors. The author would like to thank in particular Caroline Lensing-Hebben and Clara Schöpfel in UNHCR's Global Compact on Refugees Coordination Team, as well as those who agreed to be interviewed, provided relevant documents and information, and commented on draft versions of this report.

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An introduction to the SSAR Support Platform

The SSAR Support Platform seeks to generate stronger political and financial engagement from the international community to achieve solutions for Afghan refugees, in particular those living in Iran and Pakistan.

The Platform originates in the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), which was adopted by the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan in 2012. The SSAR advances a regional approach to the challenges of displacement from Afghanistan and seeks to make concrete progress in three key areas: voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries.

The SSAR Support Platform was launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. It pursues three interrelated objectives:

1. Enhance capacity for voluntary return and sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan by leveraging humanitarian and development partnerships in the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs);

2. Create conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation, including by supporting the Government of Afghanistan in land distribution to returnees and investing in the human capital, resilience and portable skills of refugees in host countries; and

3. Channel additional investments into the national public service delivery systems in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan to support inclusive policies of the Governments, benefitting both host communities and refugees.

The SSAR Support Platform is led by a Core Group of partners who demonstrate sustained engagement and solidarity with the Afghan refugee situation and who intend to make concrete commitments in support of solutions; its current members are the Asian Development Bank, Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Italy, Japan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United Nations Development Programme, the United States of America, and the World Bank. The European Union was the inaugural chair of the Core Group from October 2020 until March 2023.

The Core Group operates at two levels, with the 'Global Core Group' being supplemented by 'Local Core Groups' in support of the displacement responses in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. UNHCR acts as secretariat for the Support Platform, both at the global and country levels.

The SSAR Support Platform operates under a decentralised model, with the majority of activities being undertaken by the Local Core Groups. Each of the Local Core Groups operates in a manner that is adapted to the specifics of its country context:

- The Core Group for Afghanistan fosters support for the PARRs and seeks to mitigate further displacement and build resilient communities by improving access to essential services in the country under the United Nations Afghanistan Transitional Engagement Framework.

- The Core Group in Iran meets regularly to consider key challenges facing the refugee response in Iran, in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to generate further support. The Core Group has also recently commenced collective engagement with the government.

- In Pakistan, the Local Core Group meets regularly at the working and ambassadorial levels. Whilst retaining a strong focus on supporting the protracted refugee population in Pakistan, including through the reinforcement of public services in affected areas, it has also looked to strengthen emergency response preparedness in view of developments in Afghanistan since 2021. The group regularly meets with the Minister for States and Frontier Regions, which has a leading role in the government's refugee response.

More information on the SSAR Support Platform can be found at ssar-platform.org

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An introduction to the MIRPS Support Platform

The MIRPS Support Platform seeks to facilitate protection and solutions for the forcibly displaced in Central America and Mexico by leveraging support from a wide range of States, international financial institutions, the private sector, regional bodies, and other key stakeholders.

The MIRPS Support Platform contributes to the implementation of the *Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones* (MIRPS), a regional initiative to encourage cooperation amongst countries of origin, transit and destination on matters of prevention, protection and durable solutions. By signing the San Pedro Sula Declaration in October 2017, Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama agreed to jointly implement the MIRPS; El Salvador joined the initiative in 2019. The MIRPS aims to improve mechanisms for the reception and admission of displaced people across the participating States, enhance responses to humanitarian and protection needs, support host countries and communities, and enhance opportunities for durable solutions.

Each MIRPS country has developed a National Action Plan that includes commitments that the government has made to enhance its response in key areas, including protection, jobs and livelihoods, education, and health, and serves as a tool for informing the international community of where support is needed. MIRPS States participate in four Regional Working Groups, which

strengthen protection responses and solutions through cooperation and peer-to-peer learning on strengthening asylum systems, internal displacement, jobs and livelihoods, and local governance. MIRPS is led by a rotating Pro-tempore Presidency currently held by Panama in 2023. Further information on the MIRPS can be found at mirps-platform.org.

The MIRPS Support Platform was launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. Its base of membership has expanded since its establishment, and currently includes Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, the European Union, France, Spain, Switzerland, Uruguay, the United States of America, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank Group, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. UNHCR and the Organisation of American States jointly form the Technical Secretariat for the MIRPS and the Secretariat of the Support Platform.

Support Platform members support the MIRPS countries in a variety of ways, including by providing technical and financial support aligned with MIRPS National Action Plans and through the MIRPS Working Groups, increasing the availability of resettlement and complementary pathways for asylum-seekers and refugees from Central America and Mexico, and encouraging other actors to become engaged to broaden the base of support.

The responsibility for chairing the MIRPS Support Platform rotates annually; Spain was the inaugural Chair, followed by Canada and the United States. In 2021, Canada established the Troika Model of Leadership, in which the Chair-in-Office, Past Chair and Future Chair work together to promote stability and programming coherence. Each Chair identifies key objectives and activities for its tenure as leading the Support Platform. The United States, as the current Chair-in-Office, has identified the theme 'The Benefits of Successful Integration - Valuing the Contributions Forcibly Displaced People Bring to Host Communities' and three objectives:

1. MIRPS Support Platform governance and accountability mechanisms are reinforced;

2. Refugees and internally displaced persons in MIRPS countries benefit from private sector, multilateral development bank, and civil society collaboration to support successful local solutions; and

3. MIRPS countries have increased capacity and resources to facilitate successful local solutions, including child and adolescent-specific integration needs.

The activities of the MIRPS Support Platform focus on bringing international attention to the displacement situation in the region, generating concrete support, and facilitating technical exchanges to enhance national and regional responses. In 2021 and 2022, the MIRPS Support Platform convened a 'Solidarity Event' wherein Platform members and other interested stakeholders were encouraged to make political, financial, technical and material commitments in response to the needs identified by MIRPS countries in their National Action Plans. A number of regional technical meetings are convened throughout the year, bringing together MIRPS States and Members of the Support Platform to exchange good practices and jointly address topics including reception and admission of persons with protection needs, labour market access, and third country solutions.

Djibouti meeting with IGAD
ES, Feb 2023

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An introduction to the IGAD Support Platform

The IGAD Support Platform brings together the Member States of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, as well as other international partners, to support refugees, IDPs and their host communities in the East and Horn of Africa.

The seeds of the Platform were planted in Nairobi in March 2017, when the Heads of State and Government of IGAD Member States adopted the *Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Refugees in Somalia*. Building on the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,[15] the Nairobi Declaration called for strengthened regional cooperation to address the impacts of displacement and to expand the search for solutions, including through the increased engagement of development actors. Although initially focused on Somali refugees, the so-called 'Nairobi Process' has subsequently been expanded to include all displaced people on the territory of IGAD Member States, regardless of their country of origin.

To give practical effect to the Nairobi Declaration in key sectors, three subsequent declarations have been adopted by IGAD Member States at ministerial level: the *Djibouti Declaration on Regional Refugee Education*, the *Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD Region*, and the *Mombasa Declaration on Refugee and Cross Border Health Initiatives*. Each of these has a regional-level plan of action, as well as national plans of action in a number of IGAD Member States.

Launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, the IGAD Support Platform has four stated objectives:

1. Sustaining and galvanizing the political momentum of the Nairobi Process;
2. Mobilizing additional support for the Plans of Action, particularly in the education, livelihoods and health sectors;
3. Strategically engaging more actors in particular additional States, development partners, civil society and the private sector; and

4. Following up on Member States commitments through an IGAD Secretariat-led process supported by the core group.

The members of the IGAD Support Platform are the IGAD Member States and a number of international partners who form the 'Core Group'. At present, the Core Group consists of the European Union, Germany, UNHCR, UNDP and the World Bank. The IGAD Chair—currently Sudan—is also the chair of the Support Platform, and the IGAD Secretariat serves as secretariat of the Platform.

The activities of the IGAD Support Platform focus on political dialogue and policy development at the regional level, primarily through the development of the declarations and associated plans of action. A key focus of the Support Platform's work at the time of writing is the Solutions Initiative for the Displacement Situation in South Sudan and Sudan, which seeks to galvanize international support towards the early recovery and longer-term peacebuilding and resilience needs of over seven million internally displaced people, refugees and returnees, as well as their host communities, in those two countries.

In addition, the Core Group meets monthly to discuss progress in the implementation of the declarations and action plans, and to consider ways to support such efforts.

It is envisaged that a follow-up summit to the Nairobi Summit will be convened for IGAD Heads of States and Government in the near future to consolidate the progress that has been made and to set future directions for the Platform.
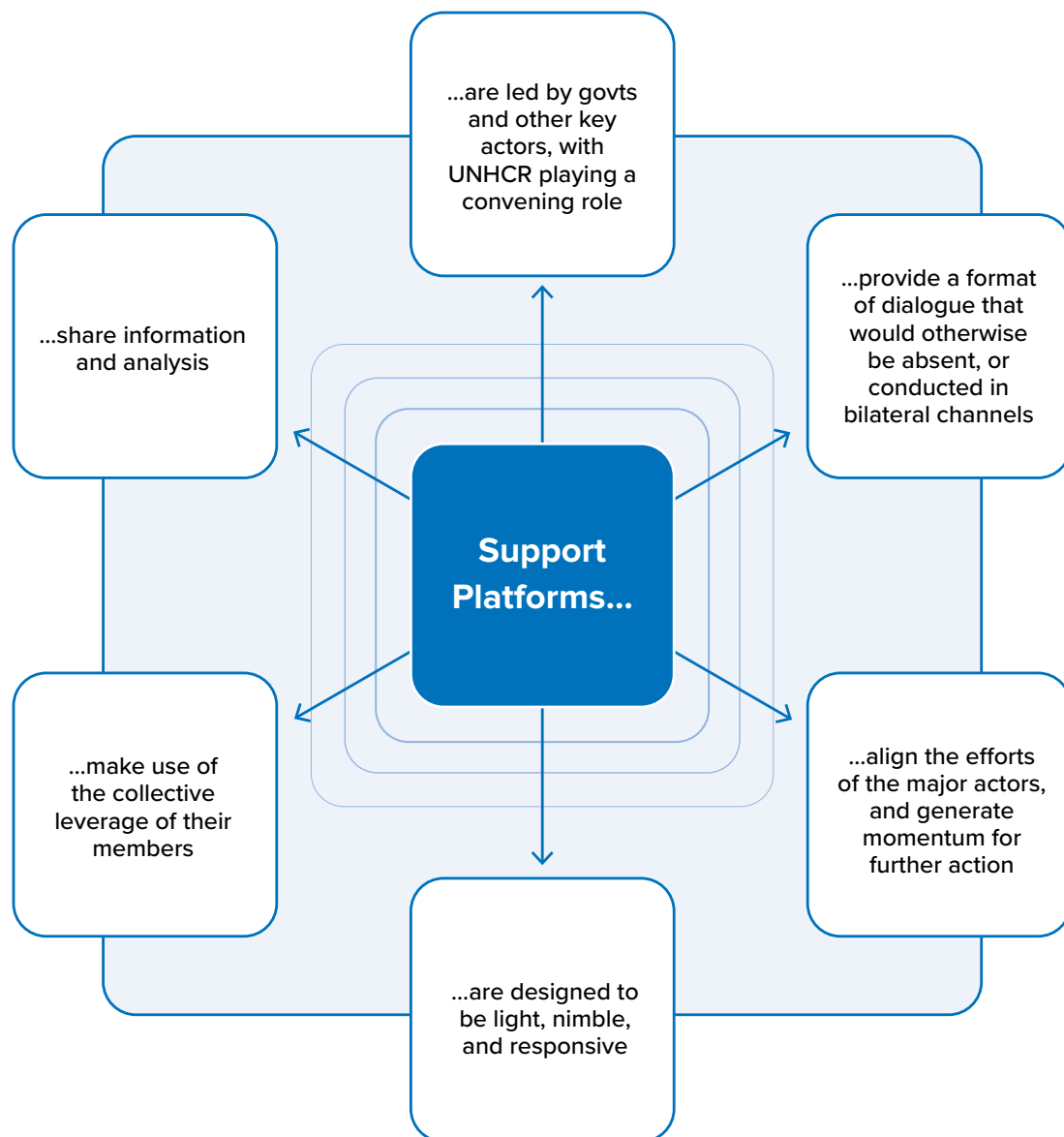
1. What is a Support Platform?

There are a range of perspectives—and for some, a lack of clarity—on what a Support Platform is

It is one thing to describe a concept—such as a Support Platform—over six paragraphs in a document that has been the subject of intense multilateral consultation and has been drafted with the hope of enjoying the support of the highest possible number of United Nations Member States; it is quite another to operationalise such a concept in three different complex displacement situations in three vastly different regions of the world. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that a range of perspectives emerged when those who have worked closely on the operationalisation of this concept were asked to describe a Support Platform in their own words. A number of recurring themes emerged, however, in response to the question 'What is a Support Platform?'

A Support Platform is a mechanism to...

- ...translate the Global Compact on Refugees into action
- ...promote solidarity with and political support for refugees and the countries and communities hosting large numbers of them
- ...promote burden and responsibility sharing, in particular by generating further financial and technical support for large refugee situations
- ...bring the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to life
- ...find regional solutions to regional challenges, and to bring support for those solutions from beyond the region
- ...promote a strategic, multilateral dialogue between key players
- ...facilitate coordination between donors, including with host countries and countries of origin
- ...promote South-South cooperation

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None of these perspectives are incorrect, of course. Their diversity, however, does point to a certain lack of clarity on the part of many who are engaged in the work of the Support Platforms as to their essential nature. This is related to the sense of some—discussed further below—that the Support Platforms would benefit from the development of more concrete objectives and a clearer strategic direction.

Taking all of these perspectives into account, a clear answer to the question 'What is a Support Platform?' could be the following:

A Support Platform is a mechanism for international cooperation in relation to a specific displacement situation, established pursuant to the Global Compact on Refugees, that seeks to align the efforts of the international community in supporting the displaced and their hosts with host government priorities and the Global Compact itself.

Each of the three existing Platforms has a different structure and *modus operandi*; this allows for situation-specific adaptation and experimentation

The wide range of perspectives on what a Support Platform is may also be a result of the wide variety of structures and operating methods that have been adopted by the three Support Platforms that were launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019.

Guided by just six paragraphs of the Global Compact on Refugees, each of the Platforms has been allowed to evolve in its own way. For example:

- The three Platforms each take a different approach to membership:

  » IGAD Member States are considered full members of the IGAD Support Platform, with donor governments and international agencies forming a 'Core Group' that is a sub-set of Platform members.

  » The countries of Central America plus Mexico that established the MIRPS are not considered members of the MIRPS Support Platform, though of course they also have their own grouping (the MIRPS itself).

  » Similarly, the SSAR Support Platform membership consists of donor governments and international agencies. Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan are not considered members of the Platform itself. Within the Platform membership, there is a sub-group of particularly engaged actors—known as the 'Core Group'—who have agreed by way of *note verbale* to participate in the Core Group. Furthermore, there are country-level Core Groups for each of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

- Whilst the SSAR Support Platform is highly decentralised, with most engagement and activity occurring in the country-level Core Groups, the activities of the IGAD and MIRPS Support Platforms are more focused on the regional level (perhaps unsurprisingly, given the larger number of States in these regions).

- Each of the Platforms has different leadership arrangements. The IGAD Support Platform is permanently chaired by the IGAD Secretariat, and the SSAR Platform was chaired by the European Union since its inception for an initial period of 1 year which was then extended until March 2023 (consideration is now being given to the next Chair). By contrast, the MIRPS Support Platform has a one-year rotating Chair, a position that has been held thus far by the governments of Spain, Canada and the United States.

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There appear to be three main reasons for these and other divergences. First, the foundation, operation and evolution of each Platform has been overseen by a different regional bureau in UNHCR's newly-decentralised management model.

Secondly, each of the three Platforms have needed to develop in a manner that is consistent with the dynamics of the pre-existing regional processes that each was intended to support, namely:

- The Nairobi Process for the IGAD Support Platform;
- The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees for the SSAR Support Platform; and
- The Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones for the MIRPS Support Platform.

Finally, each of the Platforms has needed to—and has been able to—adapt to changing circumstances. The clearest example of this over the last three years has been the change of authority in Afghanistan from the internationally-recognised government to the *de facto* authority that came to power in August 2021. As a result of these events, the focus of the work of the SSAR Support Platform shifted from creating conditions conducive to return in Afghanistan (most notably through investment in the Priority Areas for Return and Reintegration) to focusing on guaranteeing asylum space in Pakistan and Iran. Key actions in this regard included direct advocacy by ambassadors from SSAR Support Platform Core Group members with the Pakistani Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), which is discussed in further detail below. Although issues of return and reintegration did not disappear completely from the Platform's radar, those involved in the work of the Platform did find that its adaptability to changing circumstances was useful.

These factors have allowed considerable room for each Support Platform to be adapted to the circumstances of the situation for which it was established. It has also allowed for considerable experimentation in the operation of the Platforms. As this report seeks to demonstrate, this experimentation has led to a number of key lessons being learned that can be cross-fertilised across Platforms and applied to new Platforms, as and when they are launched.

The Platforms would benefit, however, from a greater degree of coherence where possible

It is also fair to say, however, that these divergences have led to some confusion amongst those who are trying to follow the work of more than one Support Platform. Whilst it would be inadvisable to adopt a 'one size fits all' approach to the design and operation of the existing and future Support Platforms, many of those interviewed did advocate for a degree of standardisation across the Platforms in key areas, including:

- basic structure (and the terminology used for key structural elements);
- criteria and process for determining membership (in particular, whether host and country-of-origin governments are considered Platform members or not); and
- key modalities for operation.

It was suggested that this would allow for greater cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches across Platforms, and would make it easier for governments and agencies that are members of—or are otherwise trying to follow the activities of—more than one Platform.

Some suggested that a model Platform structure could be developed, building on the lessons learned during the first three years' of the Platforms' operation and including templates of key documents that could then be adapted as necessary to the specific circumstances being addressed by a particular Platform. The model could be applied to new Platforms, and each of the existing Platforms could consider for itself the degree to which it could or should adjust its structures and procedures. The specifics of this approach are discussed further below.

2. What value do Support Platforms add?

The lessons learned exercise identified a number of key ways in which Support Platforms add value to existing displacement responses in the situations concerned. In particular:

- they provide a forum to convene key actors that would not otherwise exist;
- they use this convening power to create space—including at the political level—to make important advances on protection and solutions;
- they keep large displacement situations on the international agenda and send important messages about the centrality of refugee and IDP protection; and
- they are a venue for considering and coordinating a wide range of assistance to countries affected by displacement.

Although showing direct impact is challenging, each of the Support Platforms launched in 2019 has made important progress. Subsequent chapters will consider ways in which this progress can be built upon and magnified.

Support Platforms are important convenors of key actors

As a foundation for all other activities, Support Platforms are important convenors of key actors in response to displacement situations. It was emphasised that, whilst donor coordination mechanisms do exist in many displacement contexts, the Support Platforms are distinct in that they:

- bring humanitarian and development actors together to discuss ways of aligning their efforts;
- engage directly with host and country-of-origin governments; and
- are underpinned by a strong, internationally-agreed policy framework—the Global Compact on Refugees—that gives a clear direction to their work, alongside the various regional frameworks.

Support Platforms are thus able to serve as forums for meaningful strategic and operational exchanges that would simply not exist otherwise. Although some of those interviewed considered that, at times, the Platforms were unduly focused on issues of event management, it was also recognised that convening regularly was key to maintaining the power to convene.

The Support Platform is a place where we have real discussions about real issues. These discussions take place at the senior levels, yes, but also amongst the people who are involved on a day-to-day basis in designing and implementing programs. These are the people who really understand the situation and know how to improve the response. Being able to have open and honest exchanges with them is invaluable.

The convening power of a Support Platform has proved particularly useful when it comes to maintaining momentum for the underlying regional processes. A number of those interviewed, for example, credited the IGAD Support Platform with maintaining momentum for the Nairobi Process, including by facilitating the negotiation of further declarations on key topics, and by creating space for the development of the Sudan-South Sudan Solutions Initiative.

Support Platforms create space—including at the political level—to make important advances on protection and solutions

Convening power means little, however, if it is not used effectively and to appropriate ends. Building on their convening power, the three Support Platforms launched in 2019 have become important spaces for making advances on protection and solutions in the countries concerned.

The Global Compact on Refugees emphasises the importance of government leadership and political will, and the Platforms have proven effective in bringing together a coalition of important actors to support that leadership. By participating in—or engaging with—the work of the Platforms, host and country-of-origin governments demonstrate their willingness to create a better protection environment for displaced people and—importantly—to work towards solutions. Other Platform members, such as like-minded governments and international organisations, explicitly recognise this goodwill and demonstrate their willingness to bring their support to leverage better outcomes for the displaced and their hosts.

Within this context, the Platforms have become an important tool to create space for dialogue with a range of actors on refugee and IDP protection and solutions. Those interviewed from UNHCR in some countries noted that the relevant Platform had opened up space for outreach and engagement that had previously been closed. They emphasised the value of consistent advocacy on protection coming from a range of Support Platform members, including ambassadors, supported by the diplomatic weight that they bring and that UNHCR does not have. They also emphasised the deep relationships that many Support Platform members have with a wide range of government ministries, well beyond those that UNHCR typically engages with.

By facilitating dialogue amongst Platform members and with host and country-of-origin governments, the Platforms have helped to build political will and support for initiatives designed to enhance protection and solutions. In particular, the Platforms have played a key role in promoting inclusion and self-reliance, as well as the development of norms and policies that support refugee and IDP protection. A clear example of this can be found in the discussions concerning the various declarations that have been negotiated and adopted by IGAD Member States, namely:

- the *Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Refugees in Somalia;*
- the *Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education;*
- the *Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods, and Self-Reliance;* and
- the *Mombasa Declaration on Refugee and Cross Border Health Initiatives.*

Although some of these declarations were adopted before the launch of the IGAD Support Platform, discussions concerning implementation and follow-up form a central part of the work of the Support Platform; this ongoing work has been credited with changing the narrative around refugee issues in the region to focus on solidarity, refugee protection, *non-refoulement,* and the importance of securing asylum space. Governments in the region have embraced the spirit of inclusion set out in the Global Compact on Refugees, and many credit the Support Platform and the declarations with laying the groundwork and building the momentum for these advances.

The Platform sends a very important message to the host countries: that we see and acknowledge the challenges that you are facing, and that we are here to support you to pursue—or to continue to pursue—inclusive and welcoming policies.

Support Platforms also keep situations on the international agenda and help to guide international responses

A further key achievement of the Support Platforms cited by many of those interviewed was that they help to keep the displacement situation to which they relate on the international agenda.

Those engaged with the work of the MIRPS Support Platform, for example, cited the role played by the 'International Solidarity Events' that the Platform organises as playing a key role in ensuring that the Central American displacement situation does not 'fall off the radar' and in mobilising political, financial, technical, and in-kind commitments from a diverse range of actors.

Perhaps the biggest achievement of the MIRPS Support Platform is that the international community still talks about displacement in Central America. I am sure that, without it, attention would have moved elsewhere and this region would have become another forgotten crisis.

Not only does this help with ensuring ongoing political, financial and other support for displacement

responses to the situations in question, it also helps to guide the international response. Following the fall of the internationally-recognised government of Afghanistan in August 2021, for example, the SSAR Support Platform quickly became an important forum for the sharing of information and analysis relating to the real and anticipated further displacement of Afghans, and the protection responses in Pakistan and Iran. As such, it became a useful guide for members' responses to that new displacement, in financial, operational, political and other terms.

By regularly convening governments and other key actors in the East and Horn of Africa, including at the highest levels of seniority for the negotiation and adoption of declarations relating to action in key sectors, the IGAD Support Platform has also given greater prominence to displacement issues there.

Support Platforms are a venue for considering and coordinating a wide range of assistance to countries affected by displacement

The clue is in the name, however: the key objective of any Support Platform must be the provision of support to the displacement response in a particular situation.

We must be mindful of the possibility that the Platforms will become advocacy platforms. They are **Support** Platforms, and support must be their focus.

Although financial support—through both humanitarian funding and development financing— is an important element of this, those interviewed emphasised the breadth of the concept of 'support' in this context. In particular, they emphasised:

- political support, such as through expressions of solidarity that are a regular feature of events and conferences attended by ministers and senior officials;
- technical and capacity-building support, as has been generated through twinning arrangements between government officials working on asylum systems in countries participating in the work of Support Platforms; and
- access to third country solutions, which protect vulnerable refugees whilst expressing solidarity with—and easing pressures on—host countries and communities.

An important element of these alternative forms of support is that they are not in the exclusive domain of donors. Countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay, for example, are non-donor members of the MIRPS Support Platform who are themselves hosting large numbers of displaced people from Venezuela. They see the Support Platform as an important opportunity to express solidarity with the people of Central America and Mexico, and to exchange good practices that have emerged from their own responses.

Although showing direct impact is challenging, each of the Support Platforms has made important progress

The Support Platforms, then, can convene, create space, keep situations on the agenda, guide responses and consider a wide range of assistance. But what impact have they had?

It is inherently difficult to measure the impact of a diplomatic initiative like a Support Platform, given that it is impossible to say with any degree of precision what protection and solutions environment would have emerged if not for the initiative. This is particularly the case when the initiative seeks to bolster pre-existing work and calls for the contributions of a wide range of actors.

It is also worth noting that it is relatively early to measure the impact of the Support Platforms established in 2019, given the complex nature of the displacement situations that they seek to address and the fact that the attention of key actors was diverted for a large amount of that time to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those interviewed did, however, credit the Platforms with a number of important achievements that, in their view, would not have occurred without the Platform in question.

The IGAD Support Platform has made important policy advances at the regional level, including by building and maintaining momentum for the various declarations that have been negotiated and adopted by IGAD Member States. These are also being nationalised through, for example, the costed education plans that have been developed as part of the implementation of the Djibouti Declaration. The Regional Qualifications Framework is also supporting the portability of qualifications for refugees and returnees in the region.

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In addition, the Solutions Initiative for the Displacement Situation in South Sudan and Sudan has been a flagship activity of the IGAD Support Platform since being launched October 2020. It seeks to galvanize international support towards the early recovery and longer-term peacebuilding and resilience needs of over seven million internally displaced people, refugees and returnees as well as their host communities in the two countries.

The SSAR Support Platform has supported key protection advances in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Its work has enabled further investment in the Priority Areas for Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan, whose number has been expanded from 15 to 80 since the Platform was established. In Pakistan, the engagement of Support Platform members was seen by many of those interviewed as being critical to the success of the Document Renewal and Identification Verification Exercise (DRIVE), and the Support Platform was central to the provision of secondary and tertiary healthcare insurance to 240,000 vulnerable Afghan refugees in Iran in 2021-2022. UNHCR estimates that the Platform has also mobilised nearly $600 million for its operations in the three countries since its establishment, in addition to the financial and non-financial contributions that Platform members have made through other channels.[16]

A key achievements of the MIRPS have come through the sharing of technical knowledge and experience in working-level discussions and exchanges, including through the four MIRPS Working Groups.[17] Twinning initiatives have taken place with the objective of strengthening asylum systems, and several technical workshops and other forms of practical knowledge exchange have addressed issues including:

- resettlement, complementary pathways and integration;
- reception and admission;
- internal displacement;
- vocational training and labour market participation;
- local governance; and
- private sector partnerships.

Resource mobilisation has also been a key achievement of the MIRPS Support Platform, with solidarity conferences in 2021 and 2022 raising $110 million and $210 million respectively.

Across all Platforms, there are further impacts that are harder to quantify, in particular the deepened engagement of development actors in displacement responses. Representatives of the World Bank and the European Union's development arm acknowledged the role of the Support Platforms in guiding their work, in particular the selection of projects, specific funding and financing decisions and—in the case of the World Bank—making the case for eligibility for financing under the International Development Association's Window for Host Communities and Refugees.

Demonstrating the achievements and impact of the Support Platforms remains a challenge, however, and is discussed in greater detail below.

3. When do Support Platforms work well?

The interviews conducted for this report indicated a number of circumstances that appear to create a conducive environment for progress to be made by a Support Platform, namely:

- When the work of the Support Platform is aligned with the priorities and commitments of host and country-of-origin governments, and with the Global Compact on Refugees;

- When the Support Platform promotes direct interaction between host and country-of-origin governments and other Support Platform members;

- When Support Platform activities take place at both the situational and national levels;

- When the Support Platform focuses on key themes or sectors; and

- When a high-profile 'champion' is able to bring additional attention and engagement to the work of a Support Platform.

When the work of the Support Platform is aligned with the priorities and commitments of host and country-of-origin governments, and with the Global Compact on Refugees

Many of those interviewed emphasised that political will and buy-in from host and country-of-origin governments is central to the success of any Support Platform, and that a central way to achieve this is by aligning the work of the Platform with the priorities and commitments of those governments. Each of the three Support Platforms seeks to achieve this in its own way:

- IGAD Member States have developed high-level declarations promoting refugee inclusion in education, livelihoods and health, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, and national costed plans have been developed to implement these in a number of IGAD Member States. A key focus of the Support Platform's 'Core Group' of donors and international agencies is to work to support the

implementation of these declarations and plans.

- Likewise, the countries of Central America and Mexico have each developed their MIRPS National Action Plans, through which MIRPS States articulate their own commitments, priorities, and needs, and which allow Support Platform members to focus their assistance accordingly.

- The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees agreed to by the Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran is the blueprint for the response to forced displacement in the region, and the associated support from Platform members.

This approach—of aligning international support with governmental priorities—is consistent with the Global Compact on Refugees, which provides that:[18]

> Support [provided pursuant to the Global Compact] will be put in place upon the request of the host country, or country of origin where relevant, in line with country ownership and leadership and respecting national policies and priorities.

More could be done to implement this principle in the context of the Support Platforms, however. Although present and effective in some circumstances, this element appears not to have been sufficiently emphasised in the work of the Platforms, meaning that direct support to the implementation of national priorities has not occurred as systematically as it could have been. Donors have their own priorities and agendas, of course, but many of those interviewed felt that more could be done to use the Platform to align host and country-of-origin government priorities with those of donors where possible.

The Support Platform would be a great place for this alignment to take place, to allow hosts and donors to better understand one another's priorities, and to align efforts accordingly. This has occurred sporadically, but not systematically.

The second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023—and, in particular, the process for pre-matching of pledges—would be an ideal focal point for efforts of this nature.

When the Support Platform promotes direct interaction between host and country-of-origin governments and other Support Platform members

There was also broad agreement amongst those interviewed that the Support Platforms are a useful site for direct interaction between host and country of-origin governments and other Platform members. This is particularly important for Support Platforms to align their work with the priorities of host and country-of-origin governments.

Direct interaction is also increasingly occurring across all Platforms. In October 2020, the Inaugural Meeting of the Global Core of the SSAR Support Platform took place together with the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, to agree on common priorities. In Pakistan and Iran, ambassadors from SSAR Support Platform Core Group members met as a group with the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) following the fall of the internationally-recognised Government of Afghanistan in August 2021 to discuss the approach that the Government of Pakistan planned to take to the issue of new arrivals, to advocate for protection principles to be upheld, and to provide assurances of their ongoing support to these efforts. Consideration is also being given to similar meetings occurring with other ministries with responsibility for relevant issues, such as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Health and Education. In Iran, meetings have taken place between Core Group Ambassadors and representatives of the Iranian Government. MIRPS Support Platform Members interact with MIRPS States in the MIRPS Annual Meetings, International Solidarity Events, Meetings of the National Coordination Groups, meetings of the MIRPS Working Groups and other high-level events and technical workshops; direct interaction also takes place between the Chair of the Support Platform and the MIRPS Pro-Tempore Presidency.

Not all Platform meetings and discussions need to involve direct interaction between host and country-of-origin governments and other Platform members, of course. There is still utility in these groups having separate discussions, but there was a sense amongst many of those interviewed that the right balance between these may not always be struck, as well as an appetite for more direct interaction. Some suggested, for example, that some Platforms would benefit from a more regular structured dialogue between host and country-of-origin governments and other Support Platform members.

When Support Platform activities take place at the situational and national levels

A core insight that drove the establishment of all three Platforms—and, indeed, their underlying processes—is that refugee situations that are regional in nature and require regional responses.

At the same time, however, States are the key actors. The host countries are the ones that provide protection, and it is the stabilisation of the countries of origin that is needed for voluntary repatriation to take place. Protection and solutions require action at the national level, therefore, be it through legislation, policy, or programming, and these are the efforts that are likely to require the greatest support. Commitments made at the regional or global level also require implementation at the national level.

In addition, many key donor decisions are made in-country, in particular the financing decisions of development actors.

As such, engaging at the country level is key to aligning the work of the international community with government priorities. Amongst the Support Platforms, however, only the SSAR Platform is regularly active in-country. Those engaged in the work of that Platform described regular in-country engagement as playing an important role in mobilising relevant delegations and socialising them to the Global Compact. It also helps to make discussion more concrete, given that in-country engagement allows for discussions to be tailored to the specific circumstances of the country in question.

The IGAD Support Platform appears also to be moving in this direction, with IGAD having plans to hire a national focal point for the Nairobi Process

to be located in the capital of each IGAD Member State. Whilst localised chapters of the MIRPS Support Platform are not currently planned, the MIRPS itself has commenced the formation of National Coordination Groups in MIRPS countries; alongside in-country representatives of Support Platform members and other relevant actors, these hold discussions with the various relevant Ministries to jointly advance the implementation of the MIRPS National Action Plans.

When the Support Platform focuses on key themes or sectors

In addition to having some kind of engagement at the national level, the benefits of focusing on specific issues or sectors of relevance have also become clear. Each of the three Platforms have come to focus on specific themes in different ways

- As noted already, the IGAD Support Platform has supported the development of thematic declarations at the regional level on education, livelihoods and health. The Core Group, however, has been less engaged than it might have been on supporting the implementation of these (though individual Core Group members have contributed considerably to this effort).

- Each year, the MIRPS Support Platform Chair develops a workplan, which typically focuses on key themes of interest to the chair, in line with the priorities of MIRPS States . For example, as Chair-in-Office, Canada identified the theme 'Protection and Empowerment of Women and Girls on the Move,' to frame key events and activities during its tenure, and convened a 'Signature Event,' in Ottawa where discussions were held on resettlement, inclusion, and complementary pathways, engaging delegations from the MIRPS countries and Support Platform members.

- In Pakistan, the SSAR Support Platform has developed thematic working groups for key sectors, and has used the concept of a 'thematic champion' for each of these (with the United States volunteering for this role for documentation, livelihoods and education).

- It appears to be the experience of all three Platforms that sector-specific approaches of these kinds drive engagement, and can also be

a useful tool for drawing in relevant ministries beyond those focused on displacement issues.

When a high-profile 'champion' is able to bring additional attention and engagement to the work of a Support Platform

Although only the IGAD Support Platform has a formally-recognised 'champion'—namely Ambassador Mohamed Abdi Affey, UNHCR's Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa—those engaged in the work of that Platform noted the valuable role played by the Special Envoy in engaging with governments in the region at the political level. They spoke of his unique convening power, his capacity to engage as an equal with the political leadership in IGAD Member States (and, indeed beyond), and his role in helping to negotiate language for the various declarations that have been adopted in that region.

Indeed, many of those interviewed from other Platforms suggested that a similar role could be envisaged for the other two Platforms, or wondered whether a global champion for the Platforms as a whole might be found.

Ideally, the role of 'champion' for one or more Platforms would include:

using their networks, convening power and political acumen to raise and amplify key issues;

driving interest and engagement in the work of the Platform(s);

putting forward concrete proposals to expand the protection space and find solutions; and

leveraging opportunities as they arise to make progress on key challenges.

4. How could Support Platforms be more effective?

In addition to identifying the important value that they add and the circumstances in which they work well, the lessons learned exercise also identified a number of ways in which the Support Platforms could be made more effective. These include:

- Ensuring clarity and consistency around the Support Platform concept;
- Developing a strategy for each Platform;
- Using the Platforms for pledge matching ahead of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, and future Forums;
- Considering the development of situational compacts;
- Fostering engagement and a sense of ownership amongst Support Platform members, including in Geneva, New York and capitals;
- Enhancing the tracking of and reporting on achievements and outcomes;
- Strategically expanding Support Platform membership;
- Judiciously engaging other actors;
- Communicating effectively; and
- Ensuring cross-fertilisation across Platforms.

Ensure clarity and consistency around the Support Platform concept

As noted above, there is a certain lack of clarity around the Support Platform concept, even amongst those deeply engaged in their activities. This is, in part, due to the wide variety of structures and activities pursued by the different Platforms.

A clarification of the Support Platform concept would be useful for all involved: it would let host and country-of-origin governments know what they can expect from a Support Platform, and clarify for other members or potential members what is expected of them.

As noted above, the following description appears to be apposite:

A Support Platform is a mechanism for international cooperation in relation to a specific displacement situation, established pursuant to the Global Compact on Refugees, that seeks to align the efforts of the international community in supporting the displaced and their hosts with host government priorities and the Global Compact itself.

More is required, however. A number of those interviewed suggested that the development of simple guidelines on the establishment and operation of Support Platforms would be of use. Such guidelines could address a range of topics, including the following:

- Clarity on the process and criteria that would be used to activate future Platforms, and wind Platforms down. (Further consultation would be required on this specific question, but it seems clear that the decision to activate a Platform should ultimately come down to an assessment of whether or not it would add value to the existing response, including consideration of possible objectives and the level of support from relevant States and organisations. A decision to deactivate could be considered when a Support Platform's objectives had been achieved and had not been replaced by others, or when Platform members agree that the Platform is no longer adding sufficient value to the overall response.)
- An articulation of the various scenarios in which Support Platforms might be considered and the role that they could play in such scenarios, including in new emergencies and where opportunities arise for solutions on a sufficiently large scale.
- Key steps for the establishment of new Platforms, including a suggested structure and templates of

key documents (such as terms of reference and governance arrangements) that can be adjusted as needed to suit specific circumstances.

- Clarity on membership, including whether host and country-of-origin governments should, as a general rule, be considered Platform members, as well as the process for admitting new members.

- Clarity on leadership, with clear rules of engagement and expectations, together with succession planning.

- Guidance and suggestions for ensuring the smooth operation of a Platform, drawing *inter alia* on the lessons reflected in this report.

It would be unwise for such guidelines to be overly prescriptive, or for their provisions to be inflexibly applied. The flexibility of the Support Platform concept has been key to the situation-specific evolution that has occurred across the three existing Platforms since the 2019 Global Refugee Forum. Rather, such guidelines would provide a broad framework that can be applied flexibly and adjusted to meet the circumstances of a particular displacement situation.

Develop a strategy for each Support Platform, focusing on concrete and results-oriented objectives, areas of focus, and modalities

In addition to further clarity around the Support Platform concept, it appears that there is also a desire for each of the Platforms to define their objectives more clearly, and more strategically.

Some of those interviewed expressed a degree of frustration that the Platforms are not having the operational value that they believe that they could have. Whilst it is clear in the Global Compact that the Platforms should not themselves be operational, they must have operational value to be useful. The previous chapter gives examples of ways in which the Platforms are of operational value for some actors in some contexts (for example, the European Union and World Bank using the insights gained from Platform activities to guide their development investments); for others, however, the Platforms are in need of more concrete objectives, as well as a clearer results orientation. Depending on the Platform in question, these objectives could include specific measures to operationalise the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in refugee-hosting areas and in possible areas of return, and to explore ways to prevent further displacement where relevant.

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One way that this challenge could be addressed would be through the development of a concrete strategy for each of the Platforms to guide their work. This idea was discussed with a number of those interviewed and appears to enjoy the support of a critical mass of key players.

The next step for the Support Platform is to make it more strategic. We have a workplan, but it is very broad. If we really want to move it forward, we need to pick a few key areas, define specific goals, and direct our focus there.

Such a strategy would aim to set a clear strategic direction for each Platform; in the case of a decentralised Platform—such as the SSAR Platform today—a clear strategic direction could be developed for the activities of the Platform in each country. Such a strategy could include the following elements:

- An overall statement of purpose for the Platform that situates its work in the wider context and reflects the priorities of Platform members, including host and country-of-origin governments where relevant;
- Key modalities by which the Platform seeks to fulfil this purpose;
- Specific, time-bound objectives focusing on the most tractable issues in the short to medium term; and
- Key initiatives for achieving these objectives, with clear roadmaps and timeframes.

In the case of Platforms with rotating leadership—especially the MIRPS Platform, which rotates chairs every year—it will be important to strike the right balance between ensuring the longevity of such a strategy and giving the chair space to inject their own ideas and priorities. A troika model has been introduced to the MIRPS Support Platform governance structure to promote continuity over a longer time frame. The MIRPS Support Platform is guided by its overall objectives and other parameters outlined in its 'Note on Governance,' while Chairs are able to define other elements of its yearly strategy (such as time-bound objectives and key initiatives), in consultation with other Platform members.

Such an approach would seem to be useful in generating a clearer results orientation for the Platforms, in moving away from some of the vagueness that some of those interviewed described, and in giving members and potential members a clearer understanding of what the Platform is and does, and of what is expected of them.

Use the Platforms for pledge matching ahead of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, and future Forums

An obvious, immediate focus for the strategic direction of each of the Support Platforms is, of course, the second Global Refugee Forum that will be held in December 2023.

A number of those interviewed emphasised how well the Platform approach is suited to engage key actors (including host and country-of-origin governments and Platform members) on situation-specific pledges for the Forum, and for pledge matching. In particular, they highlighted the potential to use the Platforms for a structured discussion about the needs of displaced people and host communities in a particular country and they ways in which these could be addressed through Forum pledges. Building, as they do, on regional and national priorities, the Platforms are also the ideal place to discuss the potential for pledge matching.

Consider the development of situational compacts

Beyond the second Global Refugee Forum, the strategy of a Support Platform could also consider the development of a situational (or regional) compact of interlocking and mutually-reinforcing commitments that aim to make advances on protection and solutions, and to support host countries and communities.[19] Such situational compacts could build on the lessons learned from similar previous initiatives, such as the so-called 'Jordan Compact'.[20]

Indeed, the Global Compact on Refugees itself foreshadows this possibility when it identifies one of the functions of a Support Platform as being 'supporting comprehensive policy initiatives to ease pressure on host countries, build resilience and self-reliance, and find solutions'.[21]

Foster engagement and a sense of ownership amongst Support Platform members

Maintaining the engagement of Support Platform members appears to be an ongoing challenge experienced across all Platforms. A key symptom of this is inconsistent participation in Platform activities, and a lack of evidence that the Platform is influencing their activities.

There appear to be a number of factors driving this:

- For many Platform members, engagement tends to be based on personal interest and has not been institutionalised. High levels of staff turnover in many of the countries covered by a Support Platform thus requires ongoing effort to engage new arrivals.
- Ambassadors and other senior representatives of Platform members have a wide range of issues that they need to engage on, and it is often the case that displacement issues are not high on that list.
- Some diplomatic missions and other representative offices are small and do not have staff dedicated to displacement issues; the 'refugee file' thus tends to be a small part of their wider responsibilities. When other issues intervene, displacement issues slide down their list of priorities.

Those interviewed suggested a number of approaches that could be considered to drive deepened engagement from Platform members.

The first of these is to identify and leverage the reasons why individual Platform members would want to engage. Some of those interviewed explained frankly that it was not clear to them why some Platform members had joined the Platform, and expressed the view that it would be useful to have a clearer understanding of the motivations of all Platform members. A number thought that bilateral discussions with individual Platform members would be useful in clarifying the reasons for engagement and identifying ways to leverage these.

Secondly, Platforms could identify and tap into the reasons why individual diplomats and other officials would engage in the work of a Platform. These can include a personal interest in displacement issues,

access to information that is otherwise difficult to come by, engaging activities (such as trips to the field to see the impact of their work, identify still-outstanding needs, and to meet with displaced people), and the opportunity to be involved in something new and innovative (such as the negotiation of a situational refugee compact, as discussed above).

The results of both of these processes could feed into the process to develop a strategy for each Platform, as outlined above. Indeed, the development of a clearer outcome orientation for each Platforms through such a strategy is also likely to help drive engagement. Those interviewed emphasised that clearer objectives for the Platform, and for individual activities and meetings, would drive interest and engagement, in particular from ambassadors and other senior officials.

...including in Geneva, New York and capitals

Many of those interviewed encouraged particular attention be given to enhancing the quality of the engagement on Support Platforms in Geneva, New York and capitals around the world.

In particular, it was emphasised that the inconsistent approaches to engagement with key players in Geneva—led by the different Regional Bureaux—can lead to confusion amongst those who are trying to keep track of the activities of more than one Platform. It was suggested that a common engagement plan for all Platforms in Geneva would be useful in ensuring that States and organisations represented there have regular and consistent information about all Support Platforms. This could include regular joint briefings on the activities of all Platforms, though this would not preclude Platform-specific communications or events.

Likewise, it was suggested that more systematic engagement with capitals, especially of those States and organisations that are engaged in the work of multiple Support Platforms, would be useful. Many of the key decisions relating to the work of the Support Platforms are made in capitals, of course. Direct engagement with capitals allows for direct messaging and, in the experience of some Support Platforms, often leads to capitals instructing embassies to deepen their engagement in the work of the Support Platform and report back.

The Support Platforms have had limited engagement in New York to date, but several of those interviewed encouraged consideration of the value that discussions in New York could add. Given that Geneva is the UN's humanitarian capital, a unified approach to New York does not appear to be necessary; each of the Support Platforms could consider individually, however, the degree to which discussions in New York are relevant to their situation (such as whether they are on the agendas of the Security Council, or Peacebuilding Commission, or relevant to the work of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs or a Special Representative of the Secretary-General or other relevant bodies) and the ways in which the Support Platform could engage in such discussions (through briefing the New York representatives of Platform members at appropriate intervals, for example). UNHCR's New York Office would be an important partner in making such an assessment.

Enhance tracking of and reporting on achievements and outcomes

All actors engaged in the work of the Support Platforms appear to be eager to have a better understanding of their achievements, including through tracking of and reporting on achievements and outcomes. Although there is no obvious ways to overcome completely the impact measurement challenges identified above, enhancing the capacity to demonstrate the achievements, outcomes and impact of the Support Platforms in some way will be essential to maintaining the engagement of Platform members.

To this end, UNHCR convened in December 2022 an expert consultation on the use of data in the context of the Support Platforms. The experts assembled noted that good progress had been made in enhancing the availability and quality of data, but that more remained to be done. Areas for further work that were discussed included:[22]

- Using the Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Framework as a tool to gather data and other evidence of relevance to the Support Platforms;
- Enhancing ongoing efforts to track both humanitarian and development support to refugees and host communities, and to overcome the methodological challenges that arise when funds are not channelled through UNHCR;

- Focusing also on outcomes for refugees and their hosts, and not just financial flows, including because these are invaluable in demonstrating return on investment;
- Supporting national capacity and coordination when it comes to collecting and analysing data on displaced populations; and
- Revitalising the effort, called for in the Global Compact on Refugees, to measure the impact arising from hosting, protecting and assisting refugees.[23]

A key first step in this regard would be the clarification of each Platform's priorities and objectives through the kind of strategy development process that has been discussed already. This would, at the very least, point to the areas in which impact is most likely to be demonstrated.

Be strategic about expanding Support Platform membership...

Whilst an expanding membership was seen by many of those interviewed as a sign of growing interest in the Support Platforms and engagement in the displacement situations that they seek to alleviate, it was also stressed that new members should only be added to a Support Platform when it makes sense for this to occur. There was a concern, in particular, that—beyond a certain size—a Support Platform would become too unwieldy and risk becoming a 'talk shop'. It was not suggested that any of the existing Platforms had yet reached this threshold.

Expanding the membership also increases the workload on the Platform secretariat in terms of introducing representatives of new members (in capitals, Geneva and in-country) to the Support Platform concept and the expectations on them as members, as well as following up on invitations to ensure participation in meetings at an appropriate level. Bilateral engagement is often key to ensuring the success of many Platform events, an activity that becomes more burdensome with each new member.

This does not mean, however, that Support Platform membership should be limited to host and country of origin governments and major donors. The importance of diversity in the Support Platform membership—and the value of Platform members who do not bring financial resources but rather

political support and technical assistance—was regularly emphasised.

Ultimately, there is a fine balance to be struck when deciding whether to expand the membership of a Support Platform, and Support Platforms should be strategic when inviting new members and not expand membership simply for the sake of it.

...and be judicious in engaging other actors

Beyond the question of expanding membership, a number of those interviewed also encouraged Support Platforms to find appropriate modalities to engage with a wider range of relevant actors, including;

- UN agencies beyond UNHCR, as relevant (though this already occurs to differing degrees in the three existing Platforms);
- Peace actors, such as the Peacebuilding Commission in New York;
- Parliaments, including the parliaments of the host countries and countries of origin as appropriate;
- The private sector and private foundations;
- Civil society; and
- Refugees and IDPs themselves.

There are a range of modalities that could be considered to engage these actors in the work of the Platforms without making them full members and giving rise to the size-related challenges discussed above. These include:

- The establishment of reference or consultative groups for other stakeholders (either collectively or in different stakeholder groups), wherein the Platform chair and/or UNHCR could provide regular updates on Support Platform activities and explore opportunities for further collaboration; and
- The inclusion of other actors in the activities of specific thematic working groups of relevance. The International Labor Organization, for example, is not a full member of the MIRPS Support Platform, but does participate in the working group on labour. This approach could be expanded to other organisations without making them full Support Platform members.

Communicate effectively about the Support Platforms

A number of those interviewed encouraged the Platforms to be more strategic in their communications, but there were a range of perspectives on what exactly this meant.

It is important to recognise that, as a diplomatic tool, it is not essential that the Support Platforms are at the front and centre of UNHCR's public communications relating to the situations concerned. Their existence should not be kept a secret, but nor do they need to feature in every tweet or Instagram post.

For audiences with a particular kind of interest in the situations concerned, however, a strategic approach to communicating about the Support Platforms could be useful in raising awareness of—and interest in— the work of the Support Platforms. These audiences likely include:

- Governmental officials and parliamentarians from the States engaged in the work of a Support Platform, and those who may give consideration to engagement;
- Representatives of relevant international organisations;
- NGOs and other civil society organisations, and
- Academics and researchers in think tanks and similar organisations.

To engage these audiences, those interviewed encouraged the Platforms to consider:

- Establishing a similar web presence for each Platform, with easy access to key data and documentation. At present, there are websites for the SSAR and MIRPS Platforms,[24] but these are not uniform, and some of those interviewed suggested that uniformity would be of use.
- Regular updates (possibly by email) for those interested in the work of the Platforms (including representatives of governments and other organisations in capitals, Geneva and in-country).
- Regular briefings for government representatives in Geneva and in capitals where this is assessed to be advantageous.

Ensure cross-fertilisation across Platforms

Finally, many of those interviewed stressed the value of an ongoing exchange of experience between the Platforms to share lessons and ideas for improvement. This exchange would also be invaluable if and when further Platforms are established.

This process is of course already underway, including through the side event at Standing Committee in 2021,[25] the internal workshop for UNHCR staff working on the three Support Platforms held in May 2022 and the expert consultation on data in the context of the Support Platforms held in December 2022. It is also hoped that this report will make a meaningful contribution to this effort.

Consideration could also be given to identifying ways to continue this process, including through the regular exchange of experiences between Platform members, combined briefings for States and other key stakeholders in Geneva, and possible meetings between Support Platform Chairs.

Representatives of other Platforms could also be invited to participate as observers at key events such as side events, roundtable discussions, and solidarity conferences.

Such exchanges could facilitate the exchange of good practices in the functioning of Support Platforms, but also in various aspects of refugee and IDP policy, as well (such as the benefits of inclusion in national systems or the practicalities of systems for the recognition of qualifications).

As a key player in all Platforms, it would also be useful for UNHCR to continue to bring its focal points for each of the Platforms together on a regular basis to exchange experiences and share ideas.

Conclusion: What is the future of Support Platforms?

Now that they are well-established convenors for key actors, it is time to take the three existing Support Platforms to the next level

After three relatively short years (made shorter by the pandemic), the three Support Platforms launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019 have become-well established mechanisms for international cooperation in relation to the displacement situations in the East and Horn of Africa, South-West Asia and Central America and Mexico.

Amongst those interviewed, there was a relatively widespread sense that there is now an opportunity to take the Platforms 'to the next level' by making them more innovative and creative, and maximising their effectiveness and potency as a tool for protection and solutions. If this opportunity is not seized, many feared, the Platforms risk stagnation and declining interest.

This report has sought to highlight some of the ways in which the work of the Platforms could be enhanced, in particular through:

- the development of guidelines that seek to embed the lessons learned over the past three years in the existing and future Platforms;
- the development of Platform-specific strategies that seek to set specific objectives for the Platforms and identify initiatives to achieve them;
- the development of matching pledges for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum; and
- where appropriate, the development of situational or regional compacts of interlocking and mutually-reinforcing commitments aimed at strengthening refugee protection and enhancing the search for solutions.

The period leading up to the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 presents the ideal opportunity for the Platforms to consider such issues, agree upon a way forward and to present the next phase of the evolution of the Support Platforms in December.

Endnotes

1 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 73/151 (17 December 2018), [23]. See also UNHCR, The Global Compact on Refugees and The Global Compact on Refugees Digital Platform.

2 See, generally, Gillian D Triggs & Patrick CJ Wall, ''The makings of a success': The Global Compact on Refugees and the inaugural Global Refugee Forum' (2019) 32 International Journal of Refugee Law 283.

3 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 73/151 (17 December 2018), [23].

4 Global Compact on Refugees, [7].

5 Global Compact on refugees, [22]-[27].

6 See, for example, Jochen Prantl, 'Informal Groups of States and the UN Security Council' (2005) 59 International Organization 559.

7 Global Compact on Refugees, [23].

8 Global Compact on Refugees, [24].

9 Global Compact on Refugees, [25].

10 See, generally, UNHCR, Outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum 2019.

11 See https://ssar-platform.org/

12 In English: Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework. The MIRPS States are Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama.

13 See https://mirps-platform.org/en/

14 See IGAD, The IGAD Support Platform Launched at Refugee Forum Is Proof of Commitment to Progressive Refugee Policies by Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda (2019).

15 See UNHCR, New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

16 As noted elsewhere in this report, the tracking of contributions by Platform members that do not flow through UNHCR—in particular development work—remains a challenge.

17 MIRPS Working Groups are regional forums to strengthen protection responses and solutions through bilateral cooperation and peer-to-peer learning. Working Group activities engage various Ministries of MIRPS States, as well as Members of the MIRPS Support Platform, UN agencies, and other stakeholders.

18 Global Compact on Refugees, [50].

19 See, for example, Centre for Global Development & International Rescue Committee, Refugee compacts: Addressing the crisis of protracted displacement (2017).

20 See Veronique Barbelet, Jessica Hagen-Zanker & Dina Mansour-Ille, The Jordan Compact: Lessons learnt and implications for future refugee compacts (ODI, February 2018).

21 Global Compact on Refugees, [23].

22 See UNHCR, Experience sharing on the use of data, including financial tracking, for GCR Support Platforms.

23 Global Compact on Refugees, [48].

24 See https://ssar-platform.org/ and https://mirps-platform.org

25 See UNHCR, Regional solidarity with displaced populations and host communities: the three Support Platforms.