First Global Meeting of the Asylum Capacity Support Group Dialogue Platform
Summary Report
30 March 2023, 9:00-11:00 CET and 15:30-17:30 CET
Online format

Introduction

The first global meeting of the Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG) dialogue platform was held virtually on 30 March 2023 over two sessions. The meeting brought together over 300 representatives of States (national asylum authorities, Geneva-based Permanent Missions), inter-governmental and regional organizations active in asylum capacity development (ACD), key civil-society organizations and UNHCR.

The session, moderated by the ACSG Secretariat,[1] introduced participants to the objectives of the meeting and set the scene for the discussion. This was followed by an update and overview of the dialogue platform and its workstreams (see note on the ACSG Dialogue Platform, FR, ES) and remarks on the preparations for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF). During the discussion that followed, representatives of States and inter-governmental organizations, made comments about their engagement on asylum capacity issues linked to the workstreams as well as their work in this area more broadly.

Opening

UNHCR welcomed participants and introduced the ACSG Dialogue Platform, set up to increase the effectiveness of the ACSG, and to support capacity development of national asylum systems. UNHCR acknowledged the efforts to strengthen asylum systems, occurring at many different levels and fora's and highlighted the important role the dialogue platform will play at the global level without duplicating existing regional networks and platforms.

The increasing trend in applications for international protection and backlog of pending cases among others present significant challenges for asylum systems globally. In keeping with this, UNHCR stressed the need for solidarity among States and different stakeholders more than ever to help address the challenges facing national asylum systems in the spirit of responsibility-sharing and using a "whole-of-society" approach.

UNHCR highlighted the message it received during the past events that there is a need to discuss and more actively exchange good practices and expertise by engaging more often, in more ways and with more stakeholders to find a mutually reinforcing way to address the challenges to asylum systems.

UNHCR announced that it will share a survey with States and other stakeholders to express interest in the different workstreams. UNHCR indicated that in expressing interest, the focal points will be kept informed of developments in relation to the workstreams, will be invited to attend follow-up meetings, and could be requested to provide input for documents and discussions, and/or otherwise be part of consultations.

Presentation on workstream: Mobilizing asylum capacity support and preparing for and following-up on the 2023 GRF

This workstream is dedicated to the preparation in the area of asylum capacity for the GRF, the next large milestone in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) implementation. The workstream will focus on mobilizing pledges, both for improvements and offers of support on asylum capacity, which are implementable and of high-quality, by being joint and preferably pre-matched to avoid matching

---

[1] The ACSG activities are coordinated by the ACSG Secretariat, established in UNHCR's Division of International Protection. For information on the coordination role of the Secretariat, see the ACSG Guide to Working Modalities.

challenges. In this workstream, States and other stakeholders are encouraged to contribute to the development of pledges and to engage as advocates towards other stakeholders to make pledges.
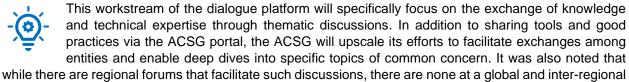
The ACSG Secretariat is developing a pledging guidance to identify strategic focus areas to encourage stakeholders to align their pledges to maximize impact. The guidance will be based on the outcomes of the 2019 GRF, the High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM), as well as issues commonly observed in asylum systems that reduce their effective functioning. The guidance will highlight four strategic focus areas (i) Strong institutional capacities; (ii) Legislative and regulatory frameworks that facilitate asylum processing; (iii) Procedures, systems and practices that enhance efficiency and quality; and (iv) Quality and efficiency through diverse expertise, innovation and research.

The GCR Coordination Team at UNHCR stressed that the GRF is a catalyst for the implementation of the four objectives of the GCR and that asylum and documentation are essential metrics to create an enabling environment for the objectives of the GCR. The team highlighted the preparations underway for the 2023 GRF and referenced the next formal briefing in May 2023. The team indicated that the focus of the GRF is on quality above quantity and called on all stakeholders to align pledges around the 20 recommendations developed during the HLOM. It was furthermore recommended that pledges are concrete, quantifiable in relation to beneficiary data, or a clear-cut contribution or policy pledge, and ideally pre-matched or joint to accelerate implementation.

Presentation on workstream: Expanding engagement in asylum capacity support through diversifying the ways of matching and highlighting matches already undertaken

The ACSG Secretariat recalled that while over 60 pledges on asylum capacity were made at the first GRF, many remain to be fulfilled. The goal of this workstream therefore is to create flexibility to ensure that these pledges can be implemented. It was proposed that this workstream takes stock of the work ongoing on asylum capacity that has remained outside of the ACSG so that additional opportunities can be identified, additional similar engagement mobilized, and duplication prevented. Such engagements could take place without the requirement of a formal pledge or match. The first example under this workstream is the support provided by Georgia in line with its 2019 pledge to North Macedonia and Tajikistan in the form of a study visit. Find out more on the ACSG portal.

Presentation on workstream: Enhance sharing of technical expertise through thematic events

This workstream of the dialogue platform will specifically focus on the exchange of knowledge and technical expertise through thematic discussions. In addition to sharing tools and good practices via the ACSG portal, the ACSG will upscale its efforts to facilitate exchanges among entities and enable deep dives into specific topics of common concern. It was also noted that while there are regional forums that facilitate such discussions, there are none at a global and inter-regional level. The topics of the thematic events will be linked to the four priority pledging areas in the upcoming GRF pledging guidance.

Presentation on workstream: Five-year strategy on asylum capacity development

This workstream will focus on UNHCR's efforts to develop a five-year strategy on asylum capacity strengthening as a blueprint for UNHCR's global action to prioritize ACD. The workstream is expected to provide a framework for consultation with States and different stakeholders who will be invited to contribute towards the development and implementation of the strategy which would be launched during the 2023 GRF. States and different stakeholders will be invited to comment by mid-June with a further opportunity to share written input to the draft strategy around mid-September. It was noted that many States present at the dialogue platform meeting were consulted or were part of the Reference Group that supported the evaluation on UNHCR's support to ACD and whose continued engagement and contribution would be sought in developing UNHCR's strategic approach to supporting national asylum systems.

Comments, feedback and discussions by States and other stakeholders

Different entities present in the morning and afternoon sessions provided updates on their ongoing work in the area of asylum capacity and engagement on asylum issues. Generally, States welcomed the establishment of the ACSG dialogue platform and its proposed workstreams. There was a broad commitment towards strengthening burden- and responsibility-sharing and there was a call to join in these efforts.

Morning session

France expressed its commitment to continue supporting Niger, which was identified in 2019 as a country to support, with a diverse set of activities including training sessions on drafting asylum decisions, the role of country of origin information (COI) in decision making as well as initiatives to enhance the efficiency of the filing systems. The second pilar of support is legislative reforms relating to asylum, statelessness, and immigration through the collaborative work with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), Belgium and UNHCR. France emphasized the need for coordination to ensure complementarity and minimize duplication. It highlighted its partnership with Chad which is in a scoping phase.

New Zealand shared progress on its support to the Philippines on enhancing COI information research to strengthen asylum decision making. The Philippines and New Zealand are identifying the priority needs and have planned a visit to observe COI use in first instance asylum decision-making (the procedure, legal framework, management of office and information security). New Zealand committed to continue engaging in capacity strengthening in the Asia-Pacific region through experience sharing in bilateral exchanges. New Zealand commented that partnerships lead to two-way learning and appreciated such exchanges to confront common challenges.

Georgia highlighted the relatively recent nature of its asylum system and shared progress on the implementation of its pledge. Georgia recalled that it hosted the governments of North Macedonia and Tajikistan to present the developments of the asylum system in Georgia as part of a study visit. The study visit provided an overview of how the asylum system has developed in Georgia including the development of its relatively recent institutions, legislations, processes and infrastructure, the challenges it faces, the role of judiciary, civil society, and quality assurance initiatives in strengthening asylum processes. Georgia further highlighted its experience on adaptability during the Ukraine emergency which required a doubling of caseworkers and COI staff with the required needs to induction and training.

Southern African Development Community (SADC) highlighted the situation in the region, including the drivers for displacement, activities in relation to providing protection to refugees and migrants and ensuring the integrity of refugee status determination (RSD). SADC, with support of UNHCR, has spearheaded an action plan on improving asylum systems, capacity support and comprehensive solutions in Southern Africa. SADC shared a brief overview of the recently developed Regional Migration Policy Framework and recognized that concerted efforts and robust programmes are needed to achieve sustainable interventions in the management of asylum issues and ensure access to asylum procedures.

Philippines highlighted its role in the ACD evaluation as a member of the reference group and stated that it will continue to be actively engaged in activities undertaken in the implementation of the management response to the evaluation and to UNHCR's five-year strategy on ACD. The Philippines appreciated the efforts to work alongside other States to identify good practices and in particular stressed that they look forward to the implementation of the match with New Zealand.

Afternoon session

Canada welcomed the initiative to establish the dialogue platform to strengthen the ACSG, expressed its commitment to contribute to the workstreams, emphasized the importance of responsibility-sharing around asylum capacity issues and invited other States to also join in these efforts. Canada highlighted its work on asylum capacity under the Regional Asylum Capacity-Building Initiative (RACBI) and emphasized the need

to ensure complementarity between the ACSG and regional initiatives to better coordinate and align both the needs and capacities of different players.

Mexico shared key developments being pursued in the transformation of the asylum system through the digitization of files, enhancement in the COI research systems, improvements in the reception procedures and creation of field posts through experience sharing with USA, Canada, Brazil and Guatemala. Mexico indicated that the developments in the Americas with the MIRPS platform, the Quito Process and the Los Angeles Declaration could be an example to other regions.

Brazil referred to the five good practices which have been shared through the [ACSG portal](). Brazil highlighted two measures it undertook to enhance efficiencies in procedures and file analysis: (1) the introduction of an online application system (known as SISCONARE) that allows asylum-seekers to update their information and the motivation to seek asylum; and (2) making effective use of the Cartagena Convention, Brazil used the SISCONARE system to triage for groups who can be granted refugee status through a prima facie process. Brazil also highlighted its contribution to the regional MIRPS and Quito (current president) processes, and the efforts that are ongoing in relation to setting up a regional COI working group and platform for COI sharing.

Ecuador informed that it had undertaken a regularization campaign for asylum-seekers from Venezuela and highlighted its online system, set up during the COVID-19 pandemic, that allows refugees to submit an asylum request or update information electronically due to an interoperability with UNHCR's ProGres v4 and biometrics systems. The system helps asylum-seekers to access documentation to support their inclusion throughout the country.

Interventions from the Floor

Interventions from the floor during the morning session were made by Burundi, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Chad, The Gambia, Egypt, and Kenya. The afternoon session had contributions from Liberia, Malawi and the SADC. States highlighted recent progress to strengthen their asylum systems, the multi-stakeholder and partnership approach that was used and outlined the challenges currently facing national asylum systems and the need for solutions. For example, Egypt updated on its efforts to develop national asylum legislation and highlighted its partnership with UNHCR and the EUAA in developing institutional capacity and its continued interest in cooperating with other partner countries. States recalled the different case processing methodologies being implemented to improve efficiency and manage backlogs, e.g. use of prima facie procedures by Uganda and use of accelerated RSD procedures and verification by Malawi. States also highlighted regular training as critical to strengthening asylum capacity and further mentioned a range of issues where asylum capacity strengthening efforts are ongoing or needed e.g. archive and filing, digitalization, database and registration.

ACSG Secretariat
May 2023