

**Outcome report of the virtual Asylum Capacity Support Group Stocktaking Event –
*Promoting partnerships to build asylum systems that operate with fairness, efficiency,
adaptability, and integrity, 12 October 2021, 15:00 to 16:30 CET***

Background

The Asylum Capacity Support Group Stocktaking Event took place on 12 October 2021, bringing together over 100 participants representing States (both Geneva-based Permanent Missions and technical State counterparts), inter-governmental entities, international organisations, and civil society organisations.

A special initiative under the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG) was launched at the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in 2019, as a mechanism to provide more targeted support to States in improving the fairness, efficiency, adaptability, and integrity of national asylum systems and further State-responsibility.

Within the ACSG framework, UNHCR, States, regional partners, civil society, and other stakeholders aim to support national asylum systems by matching State requests for asylum capacity support, made at or after the GRF, with corresponding offers of support by States or other stakeholders. During and since the first GRF, around 50 State pledges linked to asylum capacity strengthening have been recorded by UNHCR. In addition to State pledges, over ten pledges of support have also been made by other stakeholders, including by civil society organisations that have pledged to support capacity strengthening efforts in their area of expertise.

Stocktaking Structure

Against this backdrop, the ACSG Secretariat¹ in coordination with the GCR Coordination Team, held a virtual ACSG Stocktaking Event. The event was the first focused gathering on the ACSG since its launch at the 2019 GRF and provided an opportunity for collectively reflecting on the progress made towards achieving the objectives of the GCR through the operationalisation of one of its special initiatives, the ACSG Mechanism, and identify areas where more support is needed from States and others for the ACSG to enable national asylum authorities meet old and new needs, in the context of the pandemic as well as new displacements taking place globally.

The session was divided into two parts. Part one included opening remarks by UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, who introduced the participants to the background and the objectives of the stocktaking event and setting the stage for the discussions. An overview of the ACSG Mechanism, ongoing activities, progress, and challenges was shared with the participants by UNHCR's Deputy Director of the Policy and Law Pillar in

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, kindly see the [ACSG Guide to Working Modalities](#).

the Division of International Protection. This was followed by two ‘mini panels’ discussions moderated by the ACSG Secretariat.²

The first ‘mini-panel’ consisted of four State representatives at senior policy and operations level and touched upon different areas of their respective countries’ engagement with the ACSG and focussed on what has been achieved so far, as well as lessons learnt during the first two years of the implementation of the matches within the ACSG framework.

The second ‘mini-panel’ involved four representatives of States, intergovernmental institution and civil society that focused on matches that are in the works and, equally importantly, on unmet needs and how the ACSG can be better utilised. After the panel discussions, States and other entities took the floor to make brief interventions following which the session was closed by UNHCR. This structure of the event allowed for updates, as well as positive dialogue and recommendations described below.

Update on ACSG Activities

Since 2020, the ACSG Secretariat set up in UNHCR’s Division of International Protection together with UNHCR’s Regional Bureaux and Country Operations has been pursuing matching discussions at various levels with State counterparts to assess interest and willingness to be matched under the ACSG framework. The Secretariat has also been proactively approaching States with expertise in asylum to make a pledge offering support through the ACSG.

As a result of these continuing engagements, five matches have been officially welcomed by States and other stakeholders namely: **Chad/France, France/Niger, Canada/Mexico, New Zealand/Philippines, and EASO/Niger**³, while several other matches are under discussion. To further enhance the ACSG Mechanism and give visibility to relevant projects and initiatives, the ACSG launched its online portal in April 2021. In addition to matching, the portal is envisioned as a tool to share good practices and tools to facilitate the technical exchange of knowledge and expertise on key asylum issues. Since its launch, the portal has received almost 14,000 page views (April to September), and on average receives 2,300 page views monthly. The most frequented page is the page on good practices and tools followed closely by matches, demonstrating interest in these areas. There are currently about 20 good practices and tools on the portal shared by national asylum authorities and civil society organisations that speak to key issues facing asylum systems.

Two years on, although progress has been made, gaps remain in terms of unmet needs, the limited number of matches as well as the small number of offers of support in comparison to the requests for support .

² In line with the ACSG Stocktaking [Concept Note](#), references to individual States and other participating entities in the panel are not made, as findings from the panel discussions are intended to inform the strategic direction of the ACSG Mechanism.

³ Information regarding matches and the support provided through the ACSG Mechanism is available on the [ACSG Matches](#) page of the ACSG online portal.

Outcomes from Panel Discussion and Floor Interventions

The presentations by speakers and the interventions from participants led to the following observations and recommendations. These points will guide ACSG's work in 2022 and beyond, and will be raised in the preparatory roundtable in November 2021 as well as the High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021:

Increased Support through Matching

- In general, the strengthening and development of national asylum capacities requires long-term vision and solid partnerships. Matching is a core component of the ACSG mechanism— and one of the most effective ways to create longer-term and sustainable engagement in asylum capacity development. As observed through discussions on existing matches, the ACSG framework supports existing partnerships to build on past activities and mature into future collaborations.
- While some States have moved forward in implementing their pledges on asylum strengthening, others are yet to show meaningful engagement. Although, national authorities have the ultimate accountability to implement the pledges and commitments made at the GRF, they may need support (technical, material and financial) in doing so. States are encouraged to move forward with their pledge implementation and make use of the ACSG Mechanism.
- Presently, there are more requests for capacity support than offers of capacity support available. This situation has resulted in unmet needs. Additionally, some current offers of support are difficult to operationalise as they are limited in their geographical scope. Therefore, pledges that are flexible and without geographic limitations are especially welcome, as these will effectively respond to the unmet and emerging capacity requests of States.
- There is an urgent need for States, donor entities and other stakeholders to pledge new offers of support – technical, material or financial. States with appropriate expertise are particularly encouraged to make additional pledges or offers of support, including in areas identified to be of common interest, e.g. processing modalities, backlog management, country of origin information and needs assessments.
- Going forward, the ACSG Secretariat and partners concerned will need to expand partnerships and eventually consider a menu of options for a more effective engagement.
- As demonstrated through the EASO pilot project, it is strategic to continue exploring the establishment of clear and robust interface between the ACSG and other bilateral or multilateral projects/initiatives in order to respond to needs effectively, ensure complementarities and manage risks of duplication. As the example of the EASO pilot project illustrates helpfully, the ACSG projects/initiatives can play a complementary role to other mechanisms and modalities of developing/strengthening national asylum capacities.

Ensuring Effective Partnerships

- While current projects under the ACSG Mechanism relate to different areas and types of capacity development support. It is noted that matching is most effective and sustainable

when capacity support is aimed at more institutional capacity development factors rather than individual capacity development or training needs of States. The ACSG particularly supports initiatives that are aimed at addressing institutional issues.

- The ACSG's approach through its matching mechanism is to ensure that asylum capacity support leads to a longer term and sustainable impact on the asylum system. Matching under the ACSG framework is seen to be particularly effective when asylum capacity development efforts are linked with a State's existing capacity development plan.
- The ACSG will continue to hold dialogues and seek to expand on diverse and multi-stakeholder collaborations as they can result in greater impact by addressing capacity strengthening issues in a more comprehensive manner. The 'whole of society' and multi-stakeholder approach of the GCR will be critical to expanding partnerships within the ACSG framework and bringing in diverse actors to meet asylum capacity needs of States.
- Going forward, the ACSG is proposed to consider facilitating other forums to discuss asylum strengthening activities, including through multi-stakeholder groups on thematic or geographic situations.

Role of Non-Governmental/Civil Society Organisation including Refugee-led Organisations

- Although asylum capacity is primarily a matter of State responsibility, it is well recognised that refugee protection is operationalised with support from diverse stakeholders. It is proposed to innovate and look beyond state-to-state collaborations and bring the expertise of civil society organisations, legal aid organisations and refugee-led organisations in strengthening asylum capacity development.
- Legal aid is essential to ensuring asylum-seekers' access to fair procedures. In particular, legal aid can also play a key role in asylum capacity strengthening as illustrated through the GRF pledge made by the legal community.
- Going forward, ACSG priorities will include piloting of projects involving civil society organisations and including refugee-led organisations in relevant projects and initiatives. This could take the form of capacity and needs-assessment of the national asylum system, and/or provision of information and legal aid to asylum-seekers and refugees.

ACSG Online Portal

- Although acknowledged as a good source of information, it is recommended that if the [ACSG portal](#) is to expand its reach and become a more authoritative source on asylum capacity strengthening, it will need to focus on incorporating contributions from diverse actors. It will also be important to make the portal complementary to other asylum strengthening activities.
- Going forward, it will be critical to make use of the portal and contribute to establishing more collaborative ways of enhancing national asylum systems as well as working closely with States and other entities to shape and further enhance the portal.

Conclusion

The event has successfully demonstrated how asylum capacity needs of States can be effectively addressed through both State-to-State collaborations as well as through

collaborations between States and other expert entities. It highlighted the unmet needs of States in the area of asylum capacity development and the importance for more State pledges offering support. The event also encouraged sharing of technical knowledge and expertise, through highlighting good practice approaches and tools via the ACSG online portal and reflected on how the ACSG Mechanism can be made more effective, including through innovative and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

**ACSG Secretariat
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