Advancing Asylum Capacity Development through the GCR:
Reflecting on Current Challenges and State Responses
Outcome Report
10 December 2024, 09:00-10:30 and 15:30 to 17:00 CET
Online Format

Introduction

The third global meeting of the Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG) Dialogue Platform was held on 10 December 2024 on the topic "Advancing Asylum Capacity Development through the GCR: Reflecting on Current Challenges and State Responses". The two sessions were moderated by the ACSG Secretariat.[1] The meetings brought together 86 participants representing States (national asylum authorities and Geneva-based Permanent Missions), regional entities, civil-society organizations, academics and UNHCR.

The meeting allowed UNHCR to introduce the theory of change in UNHCR's forthcoming strategy entitled "Strategy on strengthening national asylum systems (2025-2030)" and launch the Asylum Capacity Self-Assessment Tool. States and stakeholders shared their experiences in advancing asylum capacity development focussing on the law and policy framework (with presentations from Iraq and Burundi), performance of asylum institutions (presented by Ethiopia and Chad), implementation of differentiated procedures (presented by New Zealand and Canada) and aspects related to the workforce (addressed by France and the EUAA).

The below summarizes and highlights key considerations brought forward by the presenters, participants, and facilitators during the two sessions.

UNHCR's strategy on strengthening national asylum systems

UNHCR introduced its forthcoming strategy on strengthening national asylum systems, which has as an objective that a larger proportion of asylum-seekers receive decisions on their asylum applications through fair and efficient national asylum systems. The strategy clarifies the role of UNHCR in achieving the objective and outlines requests to States and other stakeholders to achieve this overall objective.

UNHCR highlighted the current context, including the increased displacement drivers such as conflict, persecution, and environmental changes that are causing more people to seek asylum. In addition to increased displacement drivers, mixed movements of both refugees and migrants is a factor complicating the management of asylum processes. The increases in asylum applications result in many States struggling with the resources and infrastructure needed to handle asylum claims efficiently even though the number of decisions by asylum institutions globally has gone up. A further factor is the public scrutiny and reactive responses through the growing attention and often criticism from politicians, the public and media regarding a perceived asylum crisis.

UNHCR emphasized that the strategy is firmly rooted in international legal frameworks, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), UNHCR's strategic directions, which guide the organization's efforts in protecting and assisting refugees, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By aligning itself with these international frameworks, the strategy seeks to advance fair, effective, and adaptable

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[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.

asylum systems which function with integrity, that can better serve those in need while maintaining public trust and support.

The strategy aims to achieve the objective by addressing challenges across five strategic areas of engagement, which were spoken to by different stakeholders:

Supportive law and policy frameworks were identified as essential for the fairness and efficiency of asylum systems, covering actions relating to accession to the refugee conventions as well as withdrawing reservations, adoption and improving legal frameworks for asylum, and the availability of adequate legal migration pathways or mechanisms to provide protection sensitive, legal entry or stay arrangements that complement the asylum procedures. Additionally, budgeting and planning processes for asylum systems were discussed, emphasizing the need for predictable long-term funding mechanisms. Discussions highlighted a recent example of approaches to developing national legislation and experiences with the implementation of a new refugee law. The importance of a supportive legal framework was stressed and its positive impact on efficiency and fairness in the asylum procedures demonstrated.

The second area of engagement addresses **Performing Institutions**. Several sub-issues and topics were highlighted, including the comprehensive operationalization of all parts of the national asylum procedures, addressing geographic and procedural limitations, the alignment of organizational structures, including back-office structures, strengthening oversight and quality assurance mechanisms, as well as physical and technical infrastructure. It was emphasized that the support of asylum institutions for registration and RSD teams are crucial for handling asylum applications effectively and efficiently. Efforts to streamline the asylum process were highlighted, including through the use of technology, to better handle asylum cases and address existing backlogs. This involved not only procedural adjustments but also organizational changes to improve overall efficiency and responsiveness.

The third strategic area of engagement addresses the **effective implementation of asylum procedures**, introducing the importance of designing asylum procedures that are efficient for different types of claims while maintaining fairness and integrity. This included group processing modalities, such as prima facie recognition, and individual case processing strategies. The effectiveness of case and file management procedures, robust registration datasets, and the use of technology in asylum procedures and digitalization of procedures were identified as crucial enablers for implementing differentiated procedures. The importance of tailored approaches to different types of asylum claims in the implementation of differentiated procedures and efficient asylum processes was emphasized. This leads to more efficient and quality outcomes by ensuring that each claim is handled appropriately based on its specific characteristics. A mapping exercise conducted under the Los Angeles Declaration Asylum Action Package was presented. This exercise involved a detailed analysis of current asylum procedures at the national level. The methodology for the mapping exercise, included compilation of public information, country-expressed needs, and consultation with UNHCR. The findings highlighted the need for continued innovation and adaptation in asylum procedures to address emerging challenges related to backlog management, case management, case processing modalities, contingency planning, as well as language interpretation. The exercise identified regional information-sharing and promotion of best practices as future steps.

As the fourth strategic area, the meeting covered human resource issues to arrive at a **capacitated workforce**, including human resource planning, emphasizing the importance of effective recruitment procedures, retention strategies, and the continuous development of staff skills and competencies. It underscored the necessity of aligning staff resources across different stages of the asylum procedures, with appropriate balance between supportive and substantive functions, to ensure a seamless

process. It further highlighted the critical role of good internal training capacity. The strategy also addresses the challenges posed by high staff turnover, stressing the need for adequate compensation, clear career prospects, and measures to promote staff well-being. The discussion highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to human resource management within national asylum systems. This includes strategic planning to anticipate future needs, creating attractive career paths to retain skilled staff, and fostering a supportive work environment that prioritizes staff well-being. By addressing these areas, the strategy aims to build a capacitated workforce that can effectively manage the complexities of asylum procedures, ultimately leading to more efficient and fair outcomes for asylum seekers.

Participants elaborated on their country's human resources policies, detailing their recruitment processes, adjustments made to reach out to staff profiles, and capacity-building efforts. They shared valuable lessons learned from their experience, which included innovative approaches to staff training and development, including through regional support interventions, equally highlighting the role of organizational culture. They discussed the sustainability of these interventions, emphasizing the importance of well-planned interventions to ensure long-term effectiveness, in the national procedures, including in situations of mixed movements.

UNHCR briefly highlighted that providing **accessible information and legal assistance** is the fifth strategic area for engagement. Legal information provision should be through formats and locations which are accessible including for vulnerable groups. The strategy emphasizes the role of third parties, such as NGOs and refugee-led organizations, in enhancing information accessibility and addressing misinformation. Legal assistance and representation are also critical, with the strategy highlighting the gaps in access to free legal aid and the need for reliable, high-quality legal services throughout the asylum process. For further information regarding the positive impact of legal advice on the efficiency of the asylum process, please refer to the outcome report from the third technical meeting [Boosting the effectiveness of asylum systems: the impact of legal advice and representation](#).

UNHCR informed that the draft strategy will be shared on the ACSG portal providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to provide written inputs. Members of the ACSG will be notified by an email from the secretariat.

Asylum Capacity Self-Assessment Tool

UNHCR launched the [Asylum Capacity Self-Assessment Tool](#) designed to support national asylum systems in developing sustainable responses and to enhance their capacities. The Tool comprises two main components: the How-to Guide and the Self-Assessment Questionnaire. The How-to Guide provides a detailed and pragmatic methodology for assessing various areas of an asylum system. The Questionnaire comprises nine modules, including five optional ones, and 20 sub-modules, with a total of 564 statements designed to assess various aspects of the asylum system. These aspects include normative framework, stakeholder engagement, institutional considerations, organizational structures, planning and resource management, case processing and management, material assets and infrastructure, operational considerations, oversight, feedback mechanisms, and risk mitigation. The Questionnaire employs a dedicated ranking system, allowing users to indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement. It can be completed by a multi-stakeholder team or as a survey and includes a tagging function to facilitate broader comparisons across the Questionnaire.

The Guide and Questionnaire are designed to be flexible and adaptable to different types of asylum systems and contexts, allowing users to adjust the self-assessment process to the local needs. Providing a strong evidence-base, the outcome of the assessment process facilitates the development of an asylum capacity development response. The results can be used to attract funding.

The Self-Assessment Tool has officially been published and is now available as an interim product for field testing. This marks an important milestone in its development. Several States have already expressed their interest in using the Tool which will then be improved based on their feedback. With questions about the Tool or in contexts where there is an interest in using it, stakeholders can reach out to the ACSG Secretariat or their UNHCR counterparts at country level.

Closing

Looking ahead into 2025, there are three key highlights: The ACSG Secretariat plans to convene three meetings, between technical and dialogue platform meetings, with dates to be announced soon. UNHCR will initiate external consultations for the strategy on strengthening asylum systems in preparation for its launch, with information to be shared on the ACSG Portal. Finally, in preparation for the High-Level Officials Meeting set for December 2025, stakeholders will be brought together to reflect on progress made on their pledges and towards achieving the Global Compact's objectives more broadly.

Asylum Capacity Support Group Secretariat, January 2025