

Guiding Principles for Urban Refugee Programming

The following are principles intended to guide the identification and formulation of good practices in urban programming for refugee protection. They are neither exhaustive nor rigid and do not need to be fulfilled in their entirety for a good practice to be shared. Rather, they constitute goals organizations should strive toward when designing and implementing their programs in favor of displaced persons in urban settings.

1. Human rights and equity

Although they may be adapted to the specific circumstances affecting refugees in a municipality or a particular neighborhood, urban refugee interventions should reflect the basic universal tenets of human rights law, humanitarian law, and refugee law. Taking into account the local contexts, urban refugee programs should aim to reinforce rights granted to all refugees through these instruments (e.g. the right to freedom of movement, the right to education, the right to recognition before the law, the right to work, the right to health care and the right to access public services,) and also seek to protect vulnerable individuals and groups who are at heightened risk of human rights violations. When targeting specific groups, urban refugee programs should be inclusive, equitable and non-discriminatory, consistent with the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming framework.

2. Advocacy

All the good practices below depend upon the establishment of an enabling policy and legal environment for urban refugees, which is necessary to maximize the protection space available to urban refugees and the humanitarian organizations that support them. Advocacy with the host government, local authorities, including law enforcement personnel, service providers, religious institutions and employers to improve the legal and policy environment is an essential part of urban refugee programming. Concerned organizations should advocate for increased protection for urban refugees and the recognition of the rights to which they are entitled (see paragraph above) in policy and practice.

Advocacy should focus on the gradual expansion and enforcement of rights and the improvement of living and working conditions, so as to protect urban refugee's safety and dignity. For example, in contexts where refugees do not enjoy full rights in a host country, this may mean working both at the legislative and policy level to expand the recognition of refugee rights, while at the same time working within existing constraints to improve existing conditions. In contexts where refugee rights are recognized in law but not in practice, this may mean working with local government, service providers and employers at the national, regional and local level to raise awareness and understanding of these rights, and address barriers to their full implementation.

3. Participation

Along with being non-discriminatory toward refugees, program participation should also be open to local urban residents sharing similar needs, both out of equity and in order to build bridges between local communities and the refugee population. Programs should strive for “accountable, pro-poor

service delivery models” through transparency, citizen participation, inclusiveness and demand-driven programming. This will often require special attention to outreach, identification, assessment and tailored assistance to those especially vulnerable individuals hidden within the urban refugee population. To monitor inclusivity and effectiveness, participatory assessments should be conducted that incorporate the different perspectives of beneficiaries and stakeholders and disaggregate data by age, gender and other relevant classifications.

4. Careful coordination

To the extent feasible, the design and implementation of urban refugee programs should be considered within a community of practitioners that includes municipal authorities, community-based groups such as faith organizations, refugee associations, local professional networks, business owners, academia, humanitarian organizations and program participants. These stakeholders should be invited to share information and to map their interventions in an effort to avoid both duplication and gaps in service delivery. It is also important to ensure the early engagement of practitioners with the cultural sensitivity and local knowledge needed to design respectful programming. To ensure transparency, accountability and effectiveness, urban refugee programs should be committed to the reflective practices of evaluation, audit, and other external review.

5 Building on available resources and capacities

Urban refugee programs should recognize and promote the capacity of municipal authorities and civil society groups to identify where and in what ways refugees and communities need support, and to mobilize a response to their needs. Ways in which programs can address issues of political will and institutional capacity should be considered in the program design phase. Mutually beneficial relationships within the community should be explored, for example the potential of refugees to become a new client base for businesses.

Program planning and execution should also recognize that urban refugees, as individuals and as a community, represent a resource in their own right, and have the potential to act to meet their own needs and aspirations and to be an asset to their host societies. Urban programming should involve refugees as all stages and should be so designed as to build on refugees’ existing skills and capacities, and to aid in their further capacity development.

6. Integrated support systems

The creation of parallel structures and service delivery mechanisms should whenever possible be avoided as they represent an unnecessary expenditure of resources, are unlikely to be sustainable, and could have negative effects upon the local economy. The establishment of separate systems targeting refugee needs alone can also stigmatize refugee communities or give the impression that they are unfairly singled out for preferential treatment. For these reasons, activities and programs should take advantage of existing services offered by local providers and be incorporated into municipal and national systems as far as possible. Exceptions to this rule may be necessary where legal, cultural or other barriers prevent refugees from accessing existing services or where the nature or severity of refugee needs require specialized or supplementary programming.

7. Relevance

Programs designed for and/or targeting urban refugees must be relevant and appropriate to their needs and capacities and take into account the local context and the opportunities and constraints therein (host government policy, markets, existing services, etc.). This necessitates tailoring programs to the unique needs and abilities of refugee individuals and families as well as the diversity that exists within the population and not assuming that one program is appropriate for all.

8. Mitigation of Risks

Participation in programs and even movement in urban environment can expose refugees to heightened risks, including risk of gender-based violence. All programs and services provided or accessed should be assessed for such risks and risk mitigation efforts should be included in program design and implementation.

9. A Sustainable and Solutions-Oriented Approach

Program and service delivery models accessed or implemented should promote refugee self-help and refugee self-reliance. Programs requiring ongoing donor resources will not be sustainable and may lead to dependence and longer-term harm, if the programs are eventually discontinued. For these reasons, programs and services should contribute to refugees' longer-term self-sufficiency.

*based on the "6 IASC Core Principles", *USAID's Sustainable urban services policy*, and "Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship", and Mary B. Anderson's "Do No Harm" principles and adapted for urban refugee situations, and input from members of the UNHCR-NGO Urban Task Team.