UNHCR
HANDBOOK FOR REGISTRATION

Procedures and Standards for Registration, Population Data Management and Documentation

Provisional Release (September 2003)

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This UNHCR Handbook for Registration was prepared by Project Profile and the Population and Geographic Data Section of the Division of Operational Support in close co-operation with the Department of International Protection, UNHCR.

— Foreword —

Registration of refugees and asylum-seekers is, first and foremost, a key protection tool. It can help to protect refugees from refoulement and forcible recruitment. It can ensure access to basic rights and family reunification, help to identify persons in need of special assistance, and provide information crucial to finding appropriate durable solutions. Registration is also a primary source of information about persons of concern to UNHCR: who and where they are, their problems, needs and strengths.

UNHCR has been registering refugees and asylum-seekers since it began its work more than 50 years ago. The problem has been that registration efforts have often fallen short of their goals of making available the comprehensive information about persons of concern needed to guarantee their protection. There have also been difficulties in ensuring the integrity of that information. Registration activities have been hampered by prevailing dangerous conditions and limited resources. During large-scale population movements, understaffing and fluid environments have proved major obstacles to registration—and therefore to protection of persons deserving of international protection. Pressure to improve registration possibilities has come from many different sources in recent years. Female refugees have urged us to ensure that identity documents are issued to every individual. Our donors demand credible and reliable registration data from us on which they can base their funding decisions.

In 2001, UNHCR's Executive Committee adopted Conclusion No. 91, which confirmed the fundamental principles on which all registration activities should be based. Translating that policy into practice, the Department of International Protection and the Division of Operational Support developed a "unified approach" to registration: a system for registering refugees and asylum-seekers and for maintaining and updating relevant information about populations of concern that can be adapted for use in virtually any setting.

In this Handbook, the Organization's staff and its government and non-governmental partners can find detailed and accessible information on how to set up registration activities, what data should be collected, and how to manage and protect the information gathered. We commend it as a valuable resource and an important tool of protection.

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