

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
1 – 3 JULY 2015 - International Conference Center Geneva

THEMATIC SESSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

Session Title: Alternatives to Camps – Making it Work

Date: **1 July 2015**

Time/Room: **15h00 – 18h30 - Room 2**

Background

UNHCR released its *Policy on Alternatives to Camps*¹ in July 2014 to move away from traditional camp-based operational responses and create possibilities for refugees to live lawfully, peacefully and independently in communities. Today, four out of ten refugees worldwide still live in camps, the majority of whom are in Africa. While one of the purposes of the Policy is to progressively decrease this number, it also aims to improve the way camps are being set up and managed.

The Policy focuses on the ability to make choices, exercise rights and enable people to take care of themselves. The key is to harness the opportunities of displacement and seek to maximise the skills, productivity, and experience displaced populations bring to their host communities. In this way, with resilience as the overarching framework, refugees will be better able to contribute to the local economy and development and overcome future challenges than if they had spent years depending on humanitarian assistance, whatever solutions are eventually available to them.

To achieve this vision, an institutional shift in thinking and operational approaches is required among UNHCR and partners, with the adaption of systems and tools, legal frameworks and the development of new skills, capacities, competencies and partnerships.

Since its release, the Policy has been perceived as a welcome complement to the *Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*² and has received significant attention among partners, donors and host governments.

¹ Available from: <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5423ded84.pdf>.

² Available from: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ab8e7f72.html>

Implementation of the Policy

The Policy, however, is only as good as its implementation; and its implementation has legal, political and humanitarian implications. The implementation will always be defined in the framework of national laws and policies, which in some cases presents fundamental obstacles to implementation of the Policy.

In recent emergencies, for example, UNHCR and governments have set up camps. These unstable situations with massive influx of refugees highlight the many challenges that exist to making alternatives to camps work, most notably the scale of a crisis, the security situation and the willingness of host governments to allow refugees to enjoy the rights to which they are entitled. They also emphasize the need for innovative and sustainable approaches from the onset and substantiating the likely positive outcomes of implementing alternatives to camps for both refugees and host governments.

Nevertheless, UNHCR and partners have also achieved a great deal since the release of the Policy by applying the logic and lessons learned from the implementation of the *Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*. Achievements include, for example, mainstreaming refugees into national systems; developing and implementing new models for making settlement and livelihoods interventions more sustainable; and collecting data with an aim to establish baselines and road maps in country operations and to support advocacy for pursuing alternatives to camps.

One such example is the *Diagnostic Tool for Alternatives to Camps*, a self-assessment tool that UNHCR developed to help colleagues determine key priority actions needed at the country level to take forward implementation of the Policy. 92 UNHCR operations completed the tool exercise to inform their operational planning for 2016-2017. The global results call for reinforced action in such areas as advocacy and engagement in relation to national development planning and partnerships with development actors and host country governments at all levels, in addition to more focused efforts in the areas of self-reliance and community mobilization.

This session will discuss both the opportunities and challenges posed in the implementation of this new Policy.

Engaging in a discussion among a wide range of partners on this topic is very timely as pursuing alternatives to camps ultimately depends on the strengthening of partnerships. UNHCR and NGOs cannot do this alone and depends on strengthened collaboration with national line ministries, municipal and local government authorities, community-based organizations and other civil society actors, the private sector, as well as with development-oriented UN agencies.

Objectives of the Session:

- 1) Increase the awareness and understanding of the opportunities and challenges posed in the implementation of the Policy;
- 2) Advance the discussion and share learning on good practice from the field on how UNHCR and NGOs can work together to make alternatives to camps work, and how to address some of the challenges.

Session 1: Policy

The first part of the session will give an overview of the Policy, including providing a general understanding of the opportunities and challenges to its implementation from a legal, political and humanitarian perspective. In addition to a panel of speakers, participants will take part in a click survey of attitudes/knowledge towards the new Policy, organized by CARE and CartONG, and be presented a short film clip on alternatives to camps in Niger. Time will also be dedicated to Questions & Answers.

Moderator: Dr. Lucy Hovil, Senior Researcher, International Refugee Rights Initiative.

Introduction: George Okoth-Obbo, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations.

Speakers:

- **Steven Corliss, UNHCR (Director of the Division of Programme Support and Management): *The opportunities and challenges of implementation***
This presentation will highlight on-going efforts to implement the Policy.
- **Jeff Crisp, Refugees International: *Political implications and incentives***
This presentation will consider some of the political challenges to implementation of the Policy, and how to create incentives for governments to consider alternatives to camps.
- **Melanie Teff, Senior Emergency Response Team Advocacy & Policy, International Rescue Committee: *Real-Time Challenges in Iraq***
This presentation will consider some of the humanitarian challenges to the implementation of the Policy, through considering challenges from Iraq and how to possibly tackle them in other settings.

Session 2: Practice

The second session will create the space for NGOs and others to further consider the field realities in implementing the policy, and discuss challenges and potential solutions. It will also provide the opportunity for general questions around the implementation of the new Policy, and for raising concerns and putting forward innovative ideas. The results of the click survey will be presented at the end of this session.

Moderator: Dr. Lucy Hovil, Senior Researcher, International Refugee Rights Initiative.

Speakers:

- **Dr. Chris Dolan, Refugee Law Project: *Implementing the policy in Uganda***
This presentation will look at the implementation of the Policy from a human rights perspective.
- **Ziad Ayoubi, UNHCR Livelihoods Officer: *Making sustainable livelihoods a reality***
This presentation will consider the importance of sustainable livelihoods for the implementation of the Policy, drawing specifically on the graduation programmes in Egypt and Costa Rica, which aim to enable the most vulnerable to become self-reliant.
- **Ndayambaje Samuel, Education Manager, ADRA: *Mainstreaming refugees into public schools – a win-win situation***
This presentation will discuss mainstreaming refugees into public school system and the benefits refugees can bring to the local population.