

The High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on NGOs – UNHCR Partnership

Partnership in Support of Urban Refugees

Introduction

As the world has become increasingly urbanized the number of urban refugees has also increased, with the majority of refugees now living not in camps but in cities, towns and other non-camp environments. The protection of refugees in urban settings poses new challenges, yet affords new opportunities for partnership between UNHCR and the NGO community as well. Since the publication of UNHCR's revised urban refugee policy in 2009, UNHCR and NGOs working in urban areas have begun to explore new ways to meet refugee needs.

Access to safe and affordable housing, health care, education, legal aid, and livelihoods are all serious issues for urban refugees. Given the many barriers to protection and other assistance refugees face in urban environments, outreach, identification, assessment, and response to the needs of the most vulnerable must be a priority for both UNHCR and the NGO community. There have been many examples of good practices in this regard, in which both national and international NGOs have brought their knowledge of the urban refugee community to bear, working closely with UNHCR to expedite registration of those most at risk, to advocate for services, to refer cases to durable solutions, and to address protection issues. Partnership between UNHCR and the NGO community has also been of particular value in the effort to engage existing local institutions in meeting the needs of refugees, a key objective in urban settings. Many of these interventions, however, could be more comprehensive and systematized, and could also involve a wider range of local institutions in order to meet a wider range of needs.

UNHCR acknowledges that over the past two decades the relationship with the NGO community has evolved and grown significantly. A key component of UNHCR's work in urban areas is that of partnership, requiring the Office to establish effective working relationships with a wide range of different stakeholders. The Office will continue to seek to augment its own resources by means of collaborative action with other actors, including UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector. Innovative approaches have already led to gains.

The following actions are additionally recommended:

- 1. Supplement the 2009 UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas.** UNHCR and NGO partners should collaborate on a revision or addendum to the urban refugee policy which would emphasize and expand on the critical need for partnerships with international and national NGO actors in urban areas. This might take the form of a guidance note or documentation of good practice.
- 2. Map the Urban Refugee Environment.** UNHCR and NGO partners should engage in the mapping of the location, demographic characteristics and vulnerabilities of refugee populations in individual urban areas, and the availability of community services and government institutions that do or could meet their needs. The purpose of such mapping exercises would be to identify resources, assets, gaps and threats existing in particular urban settings, so as better to enable all parties to plan an effective and efficient response. All the

information collected will be shared between NGOs partners and UNHCR and should be used for budgetary and programmatic planning.

- 3. Assist Vulnerable Persons through Outreach and Referral.** UNHCR and NGOs should collaborate to establish mechanisms that improve outreach to vulnerable refugees, and to ensure that such refugees are aware of and have access to sources of assistance and services available to them. These could include the development of a menu of options for strengthening partnership and referral, such as joint assessment missions, joint action plans and regular coordination meetings, , which could be adapted to take into account the varying circumstances pertaining in different urban environments. UNHCR headquarters should support this process through the collaborative development of a standard partnership template developed through the Age Gender and Diversity initiative. In its development of the Urban Refugee Learning Programme, the Global Learning Center should ensure that important partnership aspects are fully considered. A training course including all aspects of collaboration in the urban context should be developed by UNHCR.
- 4. Provide Social Support through such Mechanisms as Community Centers, Mobile Outreach Units and Satellite Offices.** UNHCR and the NGO community should work together in the establishment of community centers in urban areas where a significant number of refugees reside. These can serve as reception centers for newly arrived refugees seeking immediate assistance and orientation, and can also be one tool to facilitate mapping and the identification of persons in immediate need. UNHCR and NGO partners should work to identify existing examples of successful community centers and support their replication in new urban settings.

Where community centers are not appropriate or practical, other approaches such as the deployment of mobile outreach units, and the establishment of satellite offices in refugee communities should be considered as alternative ways to provide access to psycho-social support to the refugee community.

- 5. Strengthen a Positive Relationship between the Host and the Refugee Communities.** UNHCR and the NGO community should seek to establish partnerships with local institutions, such as legal aid societies, human rights organizations, faith based organizations, and organizations which serve the local poor, and with refugee self-help organizations in order to promote improvements in laws, policies and social attitudes, to address xenophobia and to foster coexistence and tolerance. A local meeting opportunity or forum should be established at which all parties can come together at regular intervals to air issues and concerns and to plan joint action to address them.