

Collective centre strategy considerations

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Key points

- Provide support that enables the authorities to assume their responsibilities effectively.
- Provide necessary protection to displaced people and look after their welfare.
- In all collective centres, from set up to closure, strive to ensure that residents find durable solutions at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Ensure the participation of residents in decision making. Provide platforms for inclusive participation, build their confidence, and promote their involvement.
- Through an AGD approach, ensure the persons of concern are adequately represented and included in governance structures of collective centres.
- In both long-term and short-term collective centres, identify residents' needs and assist residents to address them.
- Ensure that residents of collective centres are informed of the services that are available to them and how to access them.
- Minimize the risk of violence, abuse and exploitation by ensuring that distribution points and mechanisms are secure, safe and accessible.
- Prepare contingency plans for a variety of possible displacement scenarios.

1. Overview

Persons of concern may seek temporary accommodation and protection in pre-existing buildings or structures commonly known as collective centres. These are generally defined as planned or self-settled, depending on the circumstances in which they were established.

- They are planned when a responsible authority (for example, a State) designates them as a space to be used by displaced populations. Such buildings may or may not have been

prepared for use as temporary shelters. Planned centres include pre-designated or purpose-built shelters such as cyclone, hurricane, storm and flood shelters.

- They are self-settled when displaced people occupy them at their own initiative, without formal approval or coordination with the authorities or owners.

A variety of facilities may be used as collective centres - community centres, town halls, hotels, gymnasiums, warehouses, unfinished buildings, disused factories. These facilities are seldom fit for habitation and must be rehabilitated and/or upgraded to meet the shelter needs of residents.

Collective centres can be an adequate temporary solution as long as they are appropriately serviced and maintained. The life span of collective centres varies widely and in many cases depend on when the building is due to return to its original purpose. Collective centres should generally be used only as short-term accommodation to gain time to provide more suitable shelter.

2. Main guidance

Context characteristics and risks associated

Persons of concern may be displaced for many years. It is therefore vital to ensure that settlement options within the shelter and settlement strategy are soundly planned and that the assistance they provide promotes as much self-sufficiency as possible. Persons of concern should play an active role in planning and developing settlement strategies and establishing governance and management mechanisms in their settlements.

Collective centres have certain advantages:

- They can accommodate refugees immediately without disrupting accommodation in the host area.
- Services such as water and sanitation are likely immediately available, although they may be inadequate or insufficient for the number of people using them.
- No new buildings need to be constructed specifically for persons of concern.

However, they also have disadvantages:

- They can quickly become overcrowded.
- Sanitation and other services can become overburdened.
- Equipment and structures may be damaged or in state of disrepair.
- The buildings are not used for their original purpose which may disrupt services to the host population.
- They often lack family privacy and protection risks increase.
- They lack flexibility and adaptability to changing or increasing needs of persons of concern.
- Collective centres may cause environmental problems often related to water and sanitation

and solid waste management. Environmental contamination may cause serious health problems for the residents and those living in close proximity.

Context-specific protection objectives

Both planned and self-settled collective centres should provide a secure and healthy living environment with privacy and dignity and protect their residents from internal and external hazards. Achieving this is often challenging particularly due to overcrowding and the unsuitability of the structure for habitation. Violence, drug abuse, sexual and gender- based violence may occur regularly. External hazards can include proximity to international borders, environmental contamination, or natural hazards such as flooding.

Principles and policy considerations for the emergency response strategy in this context

When it responds to refugee emergencies, UNHCR and partners should adapt settlement assistance to the context, notably the situation in host areas, and should take account of environmental, socio-cultural, and economic factors.

Inclusive and meaningful participation of all residents – men, women, boys and girls, is essential to ensure that persons of concerns have their voice heard, identify their needs, and have the opportunity to contribute to the search of improvements and solutions.

Assessments must be conducted to determine the conditions of the buildings and for how long they may be used. Be aware that UNHCR never offers rent, no matter who owns a building.

See UNHCR, **Global Strategy for Settlement and Shelter 2014-2018**.

Priority operational delivery mode and responses in this context

- Collective centres are categorized by type - planned or self-settled, and by lifespan - short- or long-term.
- Public buildings should only be used as short-term accommodation while more suitable shelter is arranged.
- Infrastructure and utilities should be well maintained from the onset.
- UNHCR's and Sphere shelter standards should be applied.

Priority actors and partners in this context

- Governments and their technical departments (planning, infrastructures, public works, housing, civil protection)
- The UN system (notably UN-Habitat, IOM, UNWRA)
- Non-governmental organizations
- ICRC and IFRC
- Relevant academic institutions
- Relevant private sector organizations

Annexes

[UNHCR, Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, Guidance Note 4](#)

[UNHCR, Global Strategy for Settlement and Shelter 2014-2018](#)

[UNHCR-IOM, Collective Centres Guidelines, 2010](#)

[Coordination and Management of camps and other collective settings- Guidance Note 12](#)

3. Links

[UNHCR Intranet: Shelter and Settlement](#)

4. Main contacts

Shelter and Settlement Section (SSS), Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM).
e-mail: HQShelter@unhcr.org