Community based hosting arrangements

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Key points

- The first step towards supporting host families and persons of concern is to identify their needs and where they live. Consider both persons of concern and host families.

- Consult and coordinate closely with host communities, persons of concern, local authorities, NGOs, and relevant UN agencies.

- Assess the absorption capacity of host communities. Make sure that hosting arrangements will not cause harm to persons of concern or host communities.

- Assess vulnerability (in terms of income, security of tenure, and special needs) and set criteria of eligibility for the hosting programme.

- Prepare a comprehensive strategy; set out in detail the arrangements for the hosting programmes; update the arrangements as circumstances evolve.

1. Overview

The term 'hosting arrangement' describes how persons of concern are sheltered in host communities. Persons of concern may settle with and amongst local households, on land or in properties that local people own. Hosts may be relatives, distant family members, friends or acquaintances, or people previously unknown to those who have been displaced. Hosting arrangements can exist in urban and rural contexts.

Hosting arrangements can be positive; persons of concern can settle with families with which they share cultural ties; increase solidarity and collaboration between refugee and local population; persons of concern have a greater say in where and with whom to live; there is a greater sense of self-reliance when persons of concern make arrangement for themselves.

As with all other settlement types hosting arrangements do not meet the needs of all the

displaced population. One solution does not fit all. Hosting arrangements are rarely sustainable with overcrowding conditions and insufficient resources for all, straining the relationship between host and displaced families.

In hosting arrangements different shelter support can be provided:
Shelter materials provided to build an extension or additional structure in the host's property:

- Plastic sheeting (combined with other locally procured materials).
- Shelter kit.
- Local construction (one room)
- Cash or voucher based intervention.

Landlord-renter relationship:

- Cash based intervention
- Rental subsidies.

Whenever possible, some level of support should be provided to the host community. Both groups often have similar needs (water, food, sanitation, etc.). It is important to ensure that scarce resources available to the host community are not depleted.

2. Main guidance

Context characteristics and risks associated

Whether in urban or rural context often a combination of approaches is needed; hosting arrangement can be an appropriate temporary solution. Host population may have limited resources; often already living below the poverty line. Absorption capacity will be limited and competition for resources is often fierce in urban areas.

Risk associated with hosting arrangement are primarily driven by overcrowding, lack of privacy, limited resources, lack of trust, discrimination, tenure insecurity. Specifically:

- In protracted situations, deteriorating living conditions of families hosting large number of persons might lead to health and psychosocial problems, as well as risks of stigmatization, harassment, economic or sexual exploitation, and violence against the displaced families.
- Housing may already be substandard; host families may be in need of improved shelter. Inadequate housing can forced families to live in overcrowded conditions, or to separate. Children may be sent to live with other neighbours, increasing the potential for exposure to neglect and abuse.
- Host families may have limited resources and basic domestic items, mattresses, mats, blankets, cooking utensils, etc. would have to be shared. A situation that can rapidly erode hospitality.

- In areas where refugees are not welcome, both host and displaced families might become targets of retaliation by parties to the conflict or by surrounding communities.
- Persons of concern may be accused and blamed for neighbourhoods' problems such as conflict between families, criminal acts – often despite lack of evidence, thefts, etc. Verbal abuse or accusations can become physical abuse, and persons of concern may not receive protection from the authorities.
- In urban environments the economy is primarily cash based; agriculture is non-existent; water points require payment. Access to food, water, and other necessities will come at a cost, which may force persons of concern to adopt negative coping mechanisms.
- Displaced children in urban areas face great risks. Lack of access to education can be caused by lack of resources, fear of the local community, or the need for children to complement household income. Lack of parental supervision and access to schools, and the overall poverty can lead girls and boys to try and fend for themselves and exposing them to child labour, sex work and theft. For girls especially the risks of early sex, exploitative sex and sex work is greater in cities and towns.
- Host families can become overburdened by the responsibility of caring for persons of concern, and eventually it may create conflict. To reduce this risk, every effort should be made to work closely with the community, local government and NGOs when programmes are designed and implemented, and to support displaced families in hosting arrangements in order to lessen the burden on the host family.

Context-specific protection objectives

- To provide a secure and healthy living environment with privacy and dignity to persons of concern.
- To protect persons of concern from a range of risks, including eviction, exploitation and abuse, overcrowding, and poor access to services. Threat of eviction is greater and often constant in urban areas when persons of concern settle in land and property without permission (dispersed settlement without legal status)
- To support self-reliance, allowing persons of concern to live constructive and dignified lives.
- To recognize, and encourage other actors to recognize, that every person, including every refugee, is entitled to move freely, in accordance with human rights and refugee law.
- To assist refugees to meet their essential needs and enjoy their economic and social rights with dignity, contributing to the country that hosts them and finding long term solutions for themselves.
- To ensure that all persons of concern enjoy their rights on equal footing and are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives. (AGD approach)

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

- Inclusive and meaningful participation of all persons of concern in accordance with UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity approach, is essential to ensure that men, women, girls and boys have their voice heard, identify their needs, and have the opportunity to

contribute to the search of adequate solutions.

- Durable solutions are the ultimate goal, taking into consideration appropriate technology, capacity-building of both refugees and local communities, and use of local skills, materials, techniques and knowledge.
- Refugees and the affected population should be empowered to participate actively in decisions that concern them at all stages. An inclusive approach fosters ownership and acceptance of programmes and improves maintenance of shelters and settlements. It facilitates communication and can generate information and support that may be crucial to a programme's success and sustainability.
- [Shelter solutions](#) should be appropriate to the context in which they are provided. They should reflect the needs of the affected population, their cultural habits and their capacities, but should also attempt to build on existing resources and enhance access to infrastructure.

Priority operational delivery mode and responses in this context

Identify host communities, engage with them, and assess their absorption capacity

Identify host communities that might be able to accommodate persons of concern; assess their absorption capacity. Map the location of persons of concern and potential host communities.

Consult host communities and persons of concern; include representatives from relevant UN agencies, local Government and partner organisations.

Assess the most pressing needs of persons of concern and host communities

Itemize and assess local resources and coping mechanisms. Decide what UNHCR support is necessary to make the hosting arrangement feasible and successful. Prioritize the most in need of support people, but make clear what criteria have been used.

Establish the profiles of persons of concern and host communities. Assess the resources available to both groups (water, sanitation, health facilities, schools, livelihoods) and locally available materials that might be of value to persons of concern and hosts.

Make sure that issues of security of tenure are addressed to the satisfaction of host communities and persons of concern; cross check the arrangements with local authorities.

Agree the assistance model and implement

Drawing on your analysis (the first two steps), agree with partners the most appropriate shelter solution (shelter kits, cash, etc.). Prepare a clear plan with goals and outcomes, attribute roles and responsibilities, and set a timeline and budget

Select program participants by applying the agreed targeting criteria. Agree who owns shelters or materials that are distributed by the programme; do so before distribution starts. If possible, arrive at a legal agreement.

Monitoring and evaluation

Put in place a monitoring mechanism and agree standards and indicators that you and other local actors will use to monitor and evaluate the programme's outcomes. Ensure they are in accordance with national and international standards (Sphere Project).

Ensure that assessments made at the start of the programme are used as a baseline.

Monitor the quantity and frequency of all material or financial distributions, the procurement of goods, and the implementation against timeline and budget.

Put in place mechanisms to ensure accountability to program participants at all stages, including communicating goals and progress, collecting, responding and adapting to feedback

Priority actors and partners in this context

Consult relevant national authorities, operational partners (UN, NGOs, and community organizations), the host community, and the population of concern in all phases of programme development. If strategic decisions require high-level advocacy, consult partners, including UN agencies, NGOs and donor representatives, as appropriate.

From the start of a response, collaborate closely with the technical offices of local authorities, and study local rules and regulations with respect to land tenure, public works and housing. To reduce the risk of conflict over land, ensure the programme complies with local building regulations.

Annexes

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

[UNHCR Policy on alternatives to camps, 2014](#)

3. Links

[IFRC: 21-36, Assisting Host Families and Communities after Crises and Natural D...](#) [IASC, Haiti Shelter Cluster Technical Working Group, Host families shelter resp...](#) [UNHCR emergency portals UNHCR's information management portal UNHCR, UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas, 2009. NRC/Shelter Centre, Urban Shelter Guidelines, Assistance in](#)

urban areas to popu... The Sphere Project (2018), Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humani... UNHCR, IFRC, UN-HABITAT - Shelter Projects (2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011-12). UNHCR Master Plan Approach to Settlement Planning UNHCR, Settlement information portal (SIP)

4. Main contacts

Contact the Shelter and Settlement Section, Division of Programme Support and Management. At: HQShelter@unhcr.org.