UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES


Standard Preparedness Actions, Contingency Planning

This document has been produced by UNHCR to serve as guidance on strengthening emergency policy and procedures

August 2013
Overview

The purpose of the Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE) is to provide guidance to UNHCR operations and partners on systematic preparedness for refugee emergencies at field level, followed by early context-specific response planning - before the refugee emergency occurs. It replaces earlier guidance for refugee contingency planning and is aligned with the new IASC Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP) approach for non-refugee emergencies.

The PPRE is based on the premise that operational readiness for a timely and needs-based emergency response is built upon routine preparedness work, done well before emergencies occur. This routine preparedness work is not risk-specific, thus enables a versatile approach, regardless of the actual refugee emergency scenario. This premise is widely recognised among emergency operations managers and, is already practiced in many UNHCR field operations. Once the risk level increases, the routine preparedness work forms the basis for scenario-specific planning, and eventually for the operations plan (see Figure 1).

Effective preparedness and contingency planning for refugee situations cannot be achieved in isolation and, therefore, must always be undertaken in partnership with government, UN agencies and NGOs. Partners must be brought into the process from the outset, as appropriate in the context. As the PPRE is founded on the concept of partnership, it provides guidance on how to lead and facilitate contingency planning processes with multiple partners.

*Figure 1: From Emergency Preparedness Actions to the Operations Plan.*
Components of the PPRE

<table>
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<th>Content</th>
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<td>This Guidance Note</td>
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<tr>
<td>Checklists for Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs)</td>
<td>Preparedness actions, non-risk specific; Management tool to self-assess preparedness status.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Checklist for Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs)</td>
<td>Preparedness actions, risk specific; step-by-step guidance on how to increase readiness for the response, including contingency planning; Management tool to self-assess preparedness status.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contingency Planning Toolkit</td>
<td>Standard templates for the annexes to a contingency plan.</td>
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All documents and tools, in their latest version, are accessible on the online Refugee Emergency Preparedness Hub: [https://portal.unhcr.org/emergency](https://portal.unhcr.org/emergency).

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The site is best viewed in the latest versions of the following browsers: Internet Explorer (8 or higher required), Firefox (v23.0 or later) or Chrome. When using Internet Explorer 8, the Native XMLHTTP support must be enabled manually (in IE8 navigate to: Tools / Internet Options / Advanced, and select the checkbox “Enable native XMLHTTP support”).
Part I - Accountability and Partnership

Partnership with UN agencies and NGOs is essential for effective refugee emergency preparedness. Therefore, UNHCR works with partners to fulfil its overall responsibility for supporting governments with effectively preparing for refugee emergencies.

This section briefly describes the form and extent of partnerships and the accountability of UNHCR in the preparedness process, including UNHCR’s role in inter-agency early warning systems and in “mixed” situations.

Refugee Emergency Preparedness Coordination

The UNHCR Representative in the country is accountable for initiating and leading timely preparedness, including contingency planning, when required. Once the refugee emergency risk level requires, a UNHCR-led contingency planning task force is usually put in place, with government, UN and NGO participation.

The Representative maintains a strong and constructive relationship with the Humanitarian and/or Resident Coordinator, who must be kept informed about preparedness in relation to a possible refugee influx. In view of the specific accountabilities for refugees, the IASC Cluster Approach does not apply.

Partnership in Preparedness and Planning

The form and extent of partnerships will depend on the country context, and on the existing emergency response capacities of government, UN and NGOs in the country. Partnership includes, in most cases, drawing on the capacity or technical expertise of UN and NGOs for providing humanitarian assistance services. It may also include relying on partners to carry out the coordination of specific assistance sectors.

For example, as per the global MOU between WFP and UNHCR, both agencies always collaborate on the coordination of the food sector if the refugee influx is larger than 5,000 individuals. The strengthening of UNHCR’s bilateral relationship with UNICEF is also important in this regard, as are other partnerships.

Early Warning (risk assessment and risk monitoring)

At the country level, UNHCR contributes refugee-specific analysis to the inter-agency early warning efforts. There is no separate inter-agency early warning process for cross-border refugee movements. At the HQ level, UNHCR, through its Emergency Capacity Management Service (DESS-ECMS), participates in the inter-agency Early Warning Early Action process. Twice a year, this results in an early warning report and recommended actions, shared with the UN RC/HC in each of the concerned countries. More information on this process can be obtained from DESS-ECMS.

Contingency Plans in “Mixed” Situations
In “mixed” situations, where an IDP and/or natural disaster operation is already in place (or planned for), a separate refugee influx specific contingency plan must be put in place, depending on the refugee emergency risk level (medium risk – to be considered; high risk – mandatory). Should there already be an IASC contingency response plan in place for other risks (natural disaster and/or internal displacement), the refugee contingency plan constitutes a separate document aligned with the IASC plan, to the extent possible.

**Part II - Components of the Preparedness Package**

**The Checklists for Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs)**

There are two MPA checklists:

- The HQ/Regional Office MPA checklist
- The Country Office MPA checklist

The Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs) are not risk or scenario-specific and usually do not require significant resources to accomplish. The MPAs are undertaken by UNHCR in support of government preparedness efforts. They are to be done by UNHCR offices as a minimum set of preparedness actions, many of whom refer to general management issues an office should have in place.

MPAs are the responsibility of UNHCR Representatives at country level, with the support by regional offices and the HQ Regional Bureaux. Refugee movement risk monitoring and triggering contingency planning constitutes a shared responsibility between country offices, regional offices and the HQ Regional Bureaux. The MPAs may be accomplished remotely in cooperation with the host government in situations where there is no UNHCR office and where the need has been identified.

The MPA Checklists are a management tool, and allow for recording of focal points and action status on key preparedness activities. These activities are to be updated regularly as such information changes frequently. See Annexes 7b for the complete MPA Checklists.

**The Checklist for Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs)**

The Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs) are to be considered when risk analysis indicates a “medium risk” of a refugee emergency occurring. When the risk is “high”, APAs are mandatory. Accomplishing the APAs will result in an increased level of readiness to respond quickly to the needs of large numbers of refugees. While not exhaustive, this checklist includes the essential preparedness actions that will facilitate the emergency response during the initial phase.

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2 Advocacy operations, such as for example the Belgium or Canada offices, do not necessarily need to undertake all MPAs. MPAs are to be undertaken by country operations who could possibly be affected by a larger refugee influx.
APAs include the development of a **scenario-based contingency plan (CP)**. It is expected that once the APAs are triggered, the development of a CP at country level will be accomplished within 2-4 weeks.

The APA checklist is a management tool that facilitates recording of focal points and action status in key categories of preparedness activities. Some APAs may require additional resources in the form of budgets, materials or personnel. The checklist serves as a step by step guideline for UNHCR and partners. See Annex 7c for the Checklist for Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs).

**Refugee Contingency Plan Templates (country and regional level)**

Governments can draw upon the support of UNHCR to facilitate a comprehensive refugee contingency plan with key stakeholders. Partnership is central to a successful contingency planning process. From the onset, UNHCR-led planning for refugee situations must involve the host government, UN and key NGO partners in the country. The implications of decisions taken early on during contingency planning should not be under-estimated. They may set the operation on a specific path, for example in relation to shelter and settlement options (non-camp or camp options), which may be difficult to reverse later on.

The Preparedness Package includes standard templates for scenario-based contingency plans, at the country and at the regional level. The annotated templates include practical guidelines for UNHCR and partners. The templates can be adjusted to the requirements of the situation. The underlying approach is that the CP will serve as the basis for the response plan, and the donor appeal to be launched in the first days of a refugee emergency. See Annexes 7c and 7d for the country and regional level CP templates.

**Part III – Assessing the Refugee Emergency Risk**

**Risk Analysis Tool - Trigger for Advanced Preparedness and Contingency Planning**

With the support of regional offices and bureaux, UNHCR country offices must monitor the risk of refugee movements, both in terms of the risk of a *refugee influx or outflow* (“early warning”). This assessment should be shared with key partners at country level, UNHCR offices in the region, and with UNHCR HQ.

Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs) are to be considered when the risk of a *refugee influx*, thus a potential refugee emergency, is “medium”. When the risk is “high”, APAs, including contingency planning, become mandatory. The final decision to activate contingency planning lies with the UNHCR Representative, usually after consultation with national authorities, regional UNHCR offices and Bureaux.

Similar to the IASC risk assessment methodology, the refugee emergency risk is measured by the level of **seriousness**. This is defined by the “**impact**” (number of refugee arrivals and
national capacities in place to handle this) multiplied by the “likelihood” of the influx, as per the tables below.

In order to measure the risk of a potential refugee emergency scenario in a uniform way, one value for impact, and one value for likelihood are selected. The values for Impact and Likelihood are each ranked on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the low end of the scale (least likely, and least impact) and 5 being the highest.

*Figure 2: Charting Risk seriousness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact (1-5)</th>
<th>Likelihood (1-5)</th>
<th>Seriousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

The seriousness rating of the risk of a particular refugee emergency is found by multiplying the Impact value (1-5) by the Likelihood value (1-5). The result will be a number between 1 and 25. For the sake of simplicity, the following three levels of seriousness of the risk have been established.

- **Low Seriousness (APAs not necessary)**
  - Score of 1-6
- **Medium Seriousness (APAs to be considered)**
  - Score of 8-12
- **High Seriousness (APAs mandatory)**
  - Score of 15-25
Figure 3: Impact Value Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Values</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical (5)</td>
<td>There will be a massive sustained refugee influx, with 1,000 + arrivals per day. Existing response capacity in-country is highly in-sufficient (government, UN, NGOs) in comparison with the need anticipated. A large scale new emergency response operation with massive additional resources will be needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe (4)</td>
<td>There will be a large refugee influx, with less than 1,000 arrivals per day. Existing response capacity in-country is in-sufficient (government, UN, NGOs) in comparison with the need anticipated. A new emergency response operation with major additional resources will be needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (3)</td>
<td>There will be a substantial refugee influx, with less than 500 arrivals per day. Existing programmes and resources may just cope, but need additional resources. Emergency response capacities in-country (government, UN, NGOs) are medium in comparison to the need anticipated, and require reinforcement. Possibly, a new emergency response operation may need to be established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor (2)</td>
<td>There will be a small refugee influx. Existing programmes can address their urgent needs. Emergency response capacities in-country (government, UN, NGOs) are fairly high in comparison to the need anticipated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligible (1)</td>
<td>No emergency. Very few refugees may arrive. Emergency response capacities in-country (government, UN, NGOs) are high in comparison to the need anticipated.</td>
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Figure 4: Likelihood Value Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Unlikely (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Likely (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Likely (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part IV – Contingency Planning

Good Practice Standards

A good contingency plan is characterised by the following elements. It:

- Reflects common agreement among key partners (government, UN agencies, key participating NGOs) on the refugee emergency planning scenario, response strategy and preparedness actions;

- Includes an adequate, context-specific and realistic protection response strategy which can readily be used as a basis for an operations plan;

- Includes specific estimates of refugee numbers, characteristics, and likely crossing points for the planning scenario, yet does not enter in details which may be hard to predict, do not affect general preparedness planning, and which may delay or derail the overall process;

- Results in specific actions leading to increased emergency response readiness;

- Is concise with a focus on the context-specific response strategy, coordination arrangements, and key strategic decisions;

- Is not seen as an end in itself, but reflects key operational decisions and commitments made during the planning process;

- Includes a realistic and timely logistics and procurement plan for relief items and/or cash assistance suppliers (vouchers, or transfer mechanism etc.) from local sources, and the anticipated need for international procurement from strategic stockpiles or directly from suppliers (depending on the items/quantities);

- Identifies committed first responders for all sectors, who will provide the services required for the designated sector during the first weeks of the response. It should be clear to participating partner agencies that such a commitment must be firm. If no suitable first responder partner can be identified, then UNHCR is the first responder and field offices must plan for that eventuality.

- Includes the budget and other resource needs for the first three months of operations, including the needs of all partners involved.

The Response Strategy in the Contingency Plan

- Refugee protection should be at the core of the response, starting with planning, advocating and facilitating an open asylum space. The following points should be considered and addressed in the overall response strategy:
  - Access to territory
  - Border monitoring
- Status determination
- Registration/documentation
- Freedom of movement
- Detention issues
- Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) sensitive approach in all assistance sectors
- Participatory assessment
- Community mobilization strategies
- Strategy for maintaining family unity
- Child Protection
- Civilian character of asylum
- Monitoring, mitigation and response to Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)
- Identifying and assisting persons with specific needs (PWSN)

1. The contingency plan should help to make the national authorities comfortable with allowing refugees to enter their territory, by offering the support of UN and NGOs to assist in managing the influx and in keeping the situation stable. As far as possible and appropriate, the response strategy should include the existing capacity of national authorities to provide assistance services, and give due credit to the government for agreeing to do so.

2. If there is an ongoing refugee assistance operation in the country, the strategy should consider adjusting these existing assistance systems, allowing the operation to make the “switch” to faster-paced emergency systems. For example, switching from individual registration to household registration etc.

3. The protection response strategy must include a clear vision for the rapid implementation of an achievable and appropriate emergency refugee registration system.

4. The refugee shelter and settlement strategy is another important element of the protection response strategy. Decisions in this regard are particularly hard to reverse. Camps are to be considered as the last resort option. The default strategy should first look into how refugees can be accomodated in the host community. Cultural and socio-economic factors, such as the livelihood patterns of the refugees (for example: cattle herders), should be considered.

5. The assistance strategies for non-camp and camp settings differ fundamentally. In some contexts, the response strategy may need to be two-pronged.

6. Depending on the existing capacities of the host country and the pace of the influx, camps may be the only feasible operational option. In such cases appropriate specific camp locations need to be identified with the host government as part of the response strategy. The response strategy should be based on field assessments of locations for camps. Before deciding on a camp location it must be determined if the site is fit for purpose and sustainable.
Contingency Planning Process Step by Step: Regional Level

At the regional level, contingency planning for a refugee emergency usually involves several countries affected by the same situation. Regional contingency planning is initiated either by the UNHCR Representative in the country of origin, or by the UNHCR HQ Regional Bureau, or a Regional Refugee Coordinator, or by the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations), depending on the situation.

1. Contingency Planning initiated (or update of existing plan);
2. Identification of focal points: A. Regional focal point; B. Country level focal points for each country involved;
3. Regional Planning Scenario drafted and entered into the regional CP Template (in consultation with UNHCR and partners in the country of origin);
4. Regional Strategic Objectives and Response Strategy drafted and entered into the regional CP Template;
5. Draft Regional Planning Scenario and Strategy shared with all affected country focal points for comments, together with the Template for the Country Contingency plan; Objective: Coherent regional planning in the same format;
6. Regional Planning Scenario and Strategy finalised and sent to all affected countries;
7. Country level contingency planning process (towards the same regionally agreed scenario);
8. Based on the complete country CPs and regional analysis, finalisation of the draft regional CP;
9. Regional Contingency Planning Meeting with key UN and NGO partners; objective: Review of final country CPs, and validation of regional CP;
10. Finalisation of regional CP and sharing with all concerned partners;
11. Timeframe for the next review of the regional contingency plan set.

Contingency Planning Process Step by Step: Country Level

Country level contingency planning, as one of the required Advanced Preparedness Actions, is initiated either by the UNHCR Representative, by the regional office, or by the UNHCR HQ Regional Bureau, depending on the situation.

1. Contingency Planning initiated (or update of existing plan);
2. Consultation with the government on scenarios and the national capacities to respond;
3. Nomination of a country level focal point; launch of a UNHCR-led inter-agency task force with UN and NGO participation (the RC/HC and UNCT/HCT must be kept informed throughout the process);

4. Planning Scenario drafted and entered into the regional CP Template (in consultation with UNHCR and partners in the country of origin);

5. Development of the coordination structure and draft of context specific response strategy (sections 3 and 4.1 of the CP Template)

6. Coordination structure and response strategy are discussed and agreed upon by the UNHCR-led inter-agency task force;

7. Development of sector level response strategies (if sector-specific coordination groups are already in place in the country, their input is requested);

8. Circulation of the complete draft refugee CP for comments, as appropriate, with key Government, UN and NGO partners;

9. Costing (three months) of the Contingency Plan, together with UN and NGO partners;

10. Finalisation and validation the CP. If the CP forms part of a regional CP, the final version must be shared with the regional focal point.

11. Next steps:
   - Identification of specific trigger(s) for the activation of the contingency plan;
   - Timeframe for the next review of the CP.
Annexes

Annex 7a: Checklists for Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs) – Country Level
Annex 7b: Checklist for MPAs – Regional / HQ level
Annex 7c: Checklist for Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs)
Annex 7d: Contingency Plan Template (Country Level)
Annex 7e: Contingency Plan Template (Regional Level)

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