

JOINT ASSESSMENT MISSIONS – TECHNICAL GUIDANCE SHEET NO. 1 – REFUGEES IN URBAN AREAS

'[UNHCR] ... considers urban areas to be a legitimate place for refugees to enjoy their rights, including those stemming from their status as refugees as well as those that they hold in common with all other human beings.'
(HCR Urban policy, 2009)

'They may choose to be displaced in cities rather than in camps but they did not choose to be displaced.'
(FMR 34, Feb. 2010)

More than half of the refugees in the world are living in urban centres. Refugees in urban centres encounter specific food security and protection risks. They may wish to remain anonymous and invisible to minimise protection risks.

Identifying refugees in urban centres can be difficult, as assisting them could be challenging and could put them at risk.

This TGS provides an overview of the challenges faced by urban refugees and basic guidance on how to plan and implement a JAM in an urban centre. This guidance aims to support JAM teams to:

- Organise an assessment;
- Assess the food security and nutrition needs of the urban refugees considering the particular issues brought by their urban environment; and
- Identify appropriate recommendations taking into account the specific constraints and opportunities present in an urban environment.

References to other materials are provided at the end of the document. Additional support is also available from the UNHCR and WFP regional offices, UNHCR HQ Division of Programme Support and Management and WFP HQ VAM Unit.

1.1 THE URBAN SETTING

The urban context presents several challenges in terms of food security needs assessments which are mainly linked to its “complexity”. In the context of a JAM, particular attention should be brought to livelihood analysis, food consumption and risks analysis and how they differ in an urban setting.

Livelihood Analysis

Rural populations and refugees are drawn to urban centres for a variety of reasons. Urban centres typically have a large number of economic (e.g. industries, businesses and services), political, social and cultural activities that offer a wide range of opportunities. Living in an urban centre also offers close proximity to a variety of goods and services.

While there may be significant opportunities of living in an urban centre, there are also several constraints. As an example, the cost of living is often much higher than in a rural setting; urban household expenditures include: housing/rent, utilities, food, fuel, transport, health, education, taxes among others. The availability of goods and services (including health, education, power, etc.) may be greater but access to these services is limited to those who can afford it.

It is common for urban households to be involved in several activities and have multiple income sources (including credit) in both the formal and informal sectors; with the poorest households generally relying on unstable and risky income sources. Livelihood analysis is therefore much more complex in an urban setting.

Urban food consumption patterns

Access to food in urban areas differs significantly from rural settings. Urban dwellers purchase most of their food in the market with limited own production (except for the few households who have access to sufficient space to grow a garden or maintain livestock). While the food available in the market is more diverse, the consumption of a diverse diet depends on the ability of the household to purchase a range of goods.

Due to time, storage and cooking constraints, urban dwellers are often more attracted to already prepared or processed foods. Certain processed foods available are likely to be high in calories and can be low in nutrients. There are also food safety risks in consuming prepared foods, particularly from food stalls.

With the shift in foods available and related food consumption patterns, a growing number of urban populations are experiencing the double burden of malnutrition, characterised by the presence of both under-nutrition and over-nutrition in the same population.

Urban refugees face similar challenges as all urban dwellers, but they also face additional constraints related to their specific legal and social status.

Risks in urban centres

Urban populations are often confronted with increased risks.

- **Security.** Violence is particularly acute in urban centres¹. Over the past 5 years, 60% of urban dwellers have been victims of violence. Insecurity and violence are exacerbated by poverty and inequality. Poor refugees are at risk of social violence (gangs, corruption, and family violence) as well as political violence if their protection space is insufficient. Discrimination can also manifest itself in various forms of violence.
- **Health.** Health issues are more acute in urban areas², especially for the poorest. The urban poor are more vulnerable to ill health as they often live in poor quality, crowded housing with varying access to clean, safe water sources, and waste management services. Often these areas are unplanned, illegal (slums), and have limited or no access to formal health services. Additionally, the high population density in these areas increases the risk of epidemics.
- **Natural disaster.** There is a greater risk that natural disasters (e.g. flooding, earthquake, cyclone, tsunami, etc.) can provoke large damages in poor urban areas as they are often unplanned and overcrowded. At the same time, dwellings are often located on marginalised land, not built to withstand heavy rain or earthquakes.

1 World Disasters Report 2010 – *Focus on urban risk*

2 World Disasters Report 2010 – *Focus on urban risk*

1.2 REFUGEES IN URBAN AREAS

Today more than 50% of the refugees under UNHCR's mandate are living in urban areas. Refugees are drawn to urban areas for a variety of reasons including:

- The perception that an urban centre is safe;
- The perception that there will be numerous opportunities to earn income;
- To reunite with a part of their family already settled in an urban centre;
- To pursue a more exciting way of life, particularly for young refugees; and
- The lure of being anonymous.

At the same time, the urban context may exacerbate food security and protection risks.

Main Issues:

- ✓ STATUS;
- ✓ DISCRIMINATION;
- ✓ DISPERSED SETTLEMENT;
- ✓ LANGUAGE BARRIERS;
- ✓ ECONOMIC POWER; AND
- ✓ LIMITED SAFETY NETS.

The situation of a refugee in an urban centre is highly dependent on his/her legal status and the specific policies and programmes supported by the host government. If a refugee's legal status is officially recognised, he/she may benefit from the authorities' protection. If it is not, he/she will face the risk of being expelled.

A refugee's overall access to services is also dependent on their political status. Refugees that have had their basic rights of asylum denied have very limited access to income and services. Registered refugees rarely have the legal right to work.

While an urban setting can offer anonymity due to its large, diverse population, stigmatisation and discrimination towards refugees remains. Additionally, authorities are usually more present in urban settings, and can exert control (and restriction) on refugee movement, which can impact access to income and basic services.

In general, research has shown that urban refugees are economically poorer than the surrounding urban communities. Refugees often arrive impoverished economically, due to the loss of assets, and socially, by the loss of traditional social networks. Additionally, they often face language barriers and stigmas which hinder them from accessing employment, public services and conducting economic activities.

Refugees rely significantly on the informal economy, thus they are more vulnerable to police control and corruption. With no legal right to work, they fear detention and deportation. Refugees may also become victims of exploitation due to the language barrier, lack of documents, or their lack of awareness of their rights with their employers (often from the same community), landlords or neighbours.

Refugees often have limited safety-nets to assist them during the difficult times. Additionally, the social support network for refugees is often weak or inexistent.

1.3 CHALLENGES IN CONDUCTING A JAM IN AN URBAN CONTEXT

Addressing urban refugee needs, as per the UNHCR mandate and urban policy, is a priority. This section highlights the key challenges when conducting a JAM in an urban centre and suggested solutions. The JAM team should be ready to adapt both the timing and the methodology to overcome difficulties linked to the urban settings.

1. *Lack of sufficient secondary information*

Despite the rapid urbanization in developing and middle income countries and the increasing attention given by humanitarian organisations to urban issues, information on urban populations and particularly their food security and nutritional status is still limited. Very few organisations are specifically dealing with refugees issues within urban areas. Beyond UNHCR data, disaggregated information specifically on refugees is often difficult to obtain.

Information will have to be sought from various governmental and non-governmental institutions. Relevant information may be available but it might not be shared widely due to lack of means or to protect sensitivities. Utilise all the staff in the UNHCR and WFP office to help facilitate access to relevant information. Staff can have useful contacts or know how to access sensitive information. Use the macro-economic and non-disaggregated information to understand the context and identify trends. In developing countries, information systems usually suffer from a lack of resources. It is likely that some macro-economic information will be collected only in the capital or in the few major urban centres. Consequently, some of the following macro-economic information could be relevant to JAMs in an urban context:

- Prices and consumer prices index that includes all basic goods and services, including housing and fuel;
- Minimum wage, average wages;
- Economic trends, which could influence the refugees' food security ; and
- Poverty data or other relevant information included in routine assessments, such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), implemented by UNICEF and the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). However, remember to see if these include urban areas in the sampling, it is not always the case.

While data are not disaggregated for refugees, it will provide useful information on the context, the potential risks and shocks and on the national trends. The refugee population could be affected by the same trends as the whole population or not at all. Triangulation through informant interviews and field visits will confirm this.

The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG)ⁱ research on urbanisation (Damascus) 2011

HPG conducted a study on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees residing in urban areas in several cities, including Damascus, in 2011.

Primary data could not be collected and thus the analysis had to be based solely on secondary information. HPG researchers identified all the information they could from multiple sources, mostly found by searching the web on the following issues:

- Organisations concerned with urban displacement and humanitarian action;
- UN agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations working in Syria;
- Government policy documents and other materials available online; and
- Press sources such as the BBC, Al Jazeera and the New York Times.

The keywords used in the search included: *urban displacement, urban vulnerability, urban poverty, Damascus, Iraq refugee, IDPs, Syria, Palestinian refugee, humanitarian law, human rights, informal settlements, living conditions, security, services, livelihoods, drought and urban growth.*

Additionally, a number of organisations provided grey literature, mostly university student research.

The findings from the review were then triangulated and complemented with a small number of telephone interviews with representatives of international organisations, researchers and experts on displacement in Damascus and the Middle East more broadly.

i Humanitarian Policy Group <http://www.odi.org.uk/programmes/humanitarian-policy-group>

Urban centres offer a great deal of opportunities for assessments, particularly through the use of innovative methods. The population is dense and there is potential to meet many people within a limited geographical area. But most of all, urban refugees have access to more services and technologies. For example, if a hotline exists, it could be a very good source of information on refugee concerns and priorities and could also be used to explore specific issues. Information on the JAM and call for contributions could be disseminated through TV, radio or text messages. Risks and biases involved with such methods should be considered.

You may also need to allow more time and resources for the field visit. If, despite all efforts, the information collected is still insufficient, allow more time than usually advised (2 weeks) to collect information through the field visit.

2. Accessing refugees

Urban refugees are a dispersed and busy population. They are often very mobile for protection, legal and economic reasons. They may also change identity and nationality to avoid discrimination or access particular trade or employment. Due to all of these issues, it can be difficult to gain physical access to urban refugees. Refugees may specifically not want to be identified as such.

Identifying the sites and activities where refugees may gather such as churches, associations, markets, support groups or community centres, could provide a first entry point to their communities. These groups and people involved with refugees can also be useful key informants. A religious centre, a square or a particular location in the city where refugees meet, a market place where they preferably go, a phone centre or a money transfer place, which is the day of the week when they are likely to be free are all useful information to gather. Any potential risks to meeting refugees in these places must be understood.

Identifying these sites and 'communities' should be done prior to the JAM using existing information or interviewing staff and organisations who are knowledgeable about refugees' habits.

JAM in Lomé (Togo) 2011

Considering the wide dispersion of the refugees within the city of Lomé, the JAM team recognised that they did not have the resources to visit refugee households. Instead, refugees were gathered in specific sites, where they felt comfortable and safe:

- Health Centres usually visited by the refugees;
- Schools attended by refugee children; and
- Markets and shops used by refugees.

3. *Obtaining sensitive information*

Considering the protection and legal issues surrounding refugees and the fact that most urban refugees are engaged in the informal economy, some information sought by the JAM could be viewed as sensitive. Refugees as well as informants may be unwilling to share information, provide falsified information or even react aggressively to the question. Generally, information on income and trade are sensitive, but in an urban context and with urban refugees other information such as nationality and protection could also become sensitive. In this particular example, the refugees could fear retaliation or eviction if they do not have the right to work.

While organising interviews, discussions or other activities during the JAM, assess the risks involved in gathering refugees or in being seen with them or with informants. The JAM team should pay particular attention to the way the information is collected. Using remote access methods should be considered. People can be contacted by mobile phone and text messages to set up meeting place and time; interviews can also be conducted through mobile phone.

Use key informants, proxies and focus groups discussions rather than refugee individual interviews, especially to collect sensitive information. Sensitive information should be gathered from key informants rather than in refugee interviews to avoid:

- Embarrassing people;
- Obtaining falsified or unreliable information; and
- Generating aggression.

Another way to avoid asking sensitive questions directly to refugees is to use proxies. For example, types of activities and sources of income are good proxy indicators of the level of income. Information on income provided by the various activities and jobs in an urban centre can and should be obtained in preparation to the JAM. Focus group discussions are also a method that can be used to engage refugees on sensitive topics.

It is important to ensure that the refugees and informants participating in the JAM activities are well aware of the JAM objectives, its process, how the JAM team deals with the information and confidentiality. They should be reassured that their anonymity and security are of high concern. Information should be given in the language that is most familiar and by a person they trust to improve access to them and their willingness to share information.

Examples where focus groups and key informants have been used

JAM in Lomé (Togo) 2011

Due to the large dispersion of the refugees within the host population and the lack of information on refugees' locations, it was difficult to access refugees directly in their homes. The partners participating in the JAM collected the necessary information from the refugees through focus group discussions instead of individual interviews.

HPG research on urbanisation (Nairobi) 2011

In order to encourage a higher level of participation and frankness, all interviews were confidential and interviewees were advised there would be no attribution in this report. Only focus group discussions and key informants interviews were conducted.

4. Security

Security is a key issue to consider during an urban JAM, both for the urban refugees and for the JAM team. Security risks to the refugees and to the JAM team should be reviewed during the planning stages of a JAM. Based on this analysis, appropriate sites, times and methods should be identified to minimise risks. Remote access methods can be utilised to reduce security risks.

5. *Estimating the number of refugees*

Another key constraint in conducting JAMs in urban contexts is how to estimate numbers. If the protection space of the refugees is adequate, they will be inclined to register, especially if registration is providing them some benefits. In this case, a realistic estimation of the number of refugees can be obtained. However, if there are protection issues, it is often difficult to accurately estimate the number of refugees because they do not want to register with UNHCR.

These kinds of limits should be acknowledged in the JAM report; nevertheless it is important to triangulate different sources to get an idea of the numbers. For example, people accessing health infrastructures could be a proxy for the concentration of refugees in a given area.

6. *Capturing the diversity of an urban refugee population*

Urban centres attract refugees with various skills and from different social and economic backgrounds. Some urban refugees may have highly refined skills and sufficient economic means. Other urban refugees may have limited assets and skills and may be seeking opportunities that an urban economy can offer. All refugees will not have the same food security and nutrition needs. Their capacity to meet their food security and nutrition needs also differs dramatically.

It is imperative for the JAM team to highlight these differences in the report and use any existing data on refugee profiling in the JAM work. Even more than in a rural setting, refugees in urban areas have different levels of needs. The team should collect as much information as possible on the urban refugee profile. Different wealth /food security groups should be identified using:

- Status in the country of asylum;
- Location and the type of area they are living in;
- Assets, activities and sources of income;
- Level of wealth; and
- Social and cultural indicators.

Profiling enables identification of the neighbourhoods in which refugees are living and/or working, and provides information on the main areas of concentration of the urban refugees, i.e. the main areas to assess. Information can come from key informants or documents on the urban lay-out, urban zoning or wealth divide. NGOs, charities working with refugees or even estate agents can often provide information on areas of concentration of poverty and wealth in the city and where refugees are concentrated.

An example of profiling People of Concern

The Tufts University Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) conducted a profiling study on IDPs in 2008 to develop research tools to estimate the number and distribution of IDPs living in urban settings, and to gather information about their assistance and protection needs.

An IDP profile is an overview of an IDP population that shows, at a minimum:

- Number of displaced persons, disaggregated by age and sex (even if only estimates); and
- Location/s.

It is not a needs assessment but it can provide additional information on the living conditions for the IDP and non-IDP populations. It uses different quantitative and qualitative methodologies including:

- Area survey using aerial or satellite imagery;
- Flow monitoring;
- Dwelling count;
- Headcount;
- Registration;
- Census; and
- Household surveys.

Resources: IDMC/NRC and OCHA (2008) Guidance on Profiling Internally Displaced Persons.

JIPS/ACAPS (2011) Profiling and Assessment Resource Kit. www.parkdatabase.org

Urban refugees also have a great variety of income sources and expenditures. Urban centres offer a wide range of economic opportunities and trades. Urban dwellers typically have to pay to meet most of their basic needs. The range of economic activities and expenditures should be explored and documented in the JAM. The assessment check-list should include relevant questions so that the necessary information is available for analysis. Information should be sorted by category, based on the wage level, to facilitate the analysis.

Famine Early Warning System (FEWS Net) : Urban baseline, Port-au-Prince, (Haiti) 2009

This study is a useful example of how to profile urban population into wealth groups based on their main activities and using the Household Economy Approach (HEA). The assessment took place only in the city's shanty-towns, known as bidonvilles. Based on various sources of information (30 interviews with community key informants and 110 focus group interviews with representatives of households from the slums), income levels were deduced for the four wealth groups identified - very poor, poor, middle and better-off. This information was extensively used in 2010 as a baseline for the assessments conducted after the earthquake of January 2010. It provided a very useful proxy to identify the level of income and vulnerability depending on the activities conducted by the households.

http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/ht_baseline_urban_Port%20au%20Prince_en.pdf

All refugees, whatever their level of wealth, are in need of assistance. They could face for example legal issues, stigmatisation and discrimination, family violence exacerbated by the displacement or malnutrition related to changed food habits after displacement. However, it is important to remember that the objectives of a JAM are to assess food security and nutrition needs of the refugees with an aim to provide essential support to refugees suffering from acute food insecurity and malnutrition, and this will require some prioritisation.

Various sub-groups of refugees might have different needs of assistance. For each group, the JAM should develop specific analytical questions. At an early phase of the JAM process, the team and the senior staff in charge, should identify (with a wide range of refugee groups, all living in the same urban centre) if prioritising some groups is required. Prioritising groups, based on their ability to fulfil their food and nutrition needs, is not mandatory but is advisable if resources are limited.

Targeting refugees in an urban context? The UNHCR and WFP mandates regarding host communities.

The WFP mandate does not make distinctions between food insecure people be they refugees or hosts. The UNHCR policy regarding host communities is favourable to offering assistance to vulnerable populations welcoming refugees, concurrently to the assistance to refugees. Distinctive assistance can be a source of tension between refugee and host populations, especially in urban areas where physical proximity is high, needs similar and situations interlinked.

In the context of a poor, vulnerable, urban area where refugees and hosts are mixed and both facing the same socio-economic difficulties, the JAM team should consider interventions that do not specifically target refugees.

7. Finding an adequate sample of refugees

The JAM uses mostly qualitative methods, such as interviews, to obtain primary data. However, to ensure the reliability of findings, information should be collected from a 'representative' sample of informants. It is, however, very challenging to identify a representative sample of refugees in an urban area because urban refugee population is often very diverse. Access to groups and individuals within this population varies and some groups are more visible than others (less visible traditionally are the poor living in marginalised areas). In addition, there is often a lack of data on the overall refugee numbers and characteristics of the refugees.

Mapping tools should be used, among others to identify different geographic areas where refugees are staying. The JAM team should try at least to visit all the different areas/locations in order to have a better understanding of the different situations the refugees may be experiencing.

Sites are often selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling targets a particular group of people. It is particularly relevant when the targeted population for an assessment is rare or very difficult to locate and recruit, as is the case for urban refugees. This method samples with a purpose; it does not aim to be representative of the overall population and the findings should not be used as such. Purposive sampling selects specific groups, geographical areas / sites in the affected area based on information collected prior to the assessment. The JAM team uses best judgement to select locations and informants according to the assessment objectives.

To complement this type of sampling, other techniques such as snowballing³ can be used to access more informants. Again, the findings from purposive sampling including snowball sampling must be interpreted cautiously as they are not representative and may be biased.

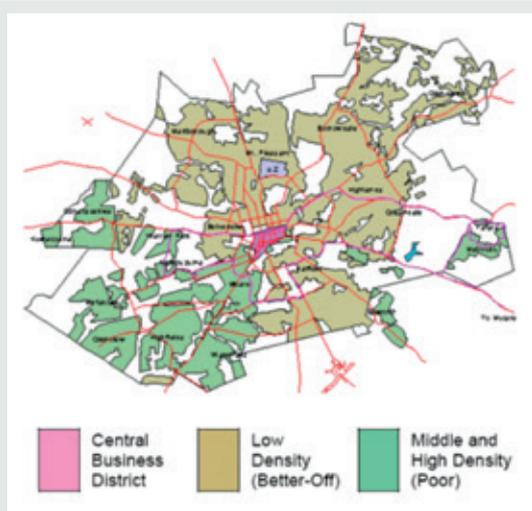
³ Households and individuals are selected according to recommendations from other informants, each informant recommends the next set of informants.

Sampling Techniques: a Few Examples

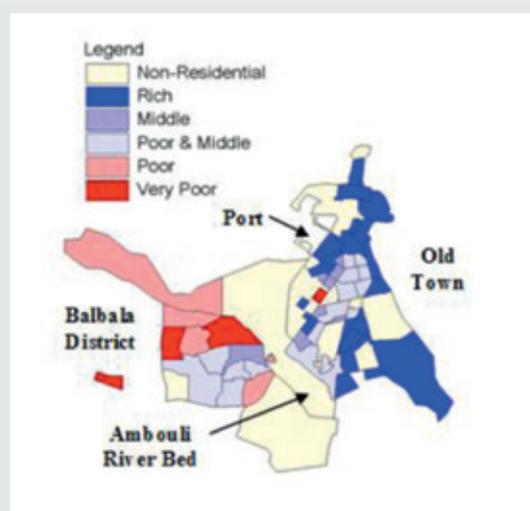
- 1) Quantitative and qualitative data provided by IDP profiling, literature review and key informant interviews indicated areas of the urban centre hosting large mixed poor populations, including IDPs. (HPG research on urbanisation (Nairobi) 2011).
- 2) The above methodology could be used to further create a sampling based on “density” of IDPs and refugees; “high density areas” would be prioritised. The survey utilised GIS and geographic waypoints in the sampling strategy; Google Earth was used to supplement map information. (Internal Displacement to Urban Areas: profiling IDPs (Tufts-IDMC) 2008).
- 3) Key informants were used to identify the areas of concentration of the refugees in Lomé. (JAM in Lomé (Togo) 2011).
- 4) Adapting the Household Economy Approach to Urban Areas:
 - In Harare - existing zoning into areas of high-, medium- and low-density housing was adopted, supplemented by further information on employment (key informants) and on rent levels throughout the city (estate agencies); and
 - In Djibouti - a combination of a preliminary mapping exercise through Key Informant interviews with arrondissement authorities was used to classify different quarters of the city according to their overall level of wealth.

Figure 1: Urban zoning based upon the wealth of different areas

Harare City and Suburbs



Djibouti City



REMEMBER:

Food access and utilisation are more critical issues than food availability. In urban centres, very few households rely on their own production, gathering, fishing or hunting, as their main sources of food. The market is the main source of food for most refugees. It is also an important source of essential non-food items such as water and fuel, which impact food utilisation and ultimately nutritional status. It is crucial to assess and analyse food access, food utilisation and markets in an urban JAM.

To fully understand food access and utilisation in the context of urban refugees you need to also understand the following key issues:

- ✓ Legal status, right to work and access to basic services;
- ✓ Urban policies, urban planning and provision of basic services to the population; and
- ✓ Risks and shocks: Health, nutrition, protection and natural factors.

1.4 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

UNHCR POLICY, 'REFUGEE PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS IN URBAN AREAS', 2009.

This policy document replaces the UNHCR's policy 'Refugees in urban areas' (1997), taking into account the dramatic changes which occurred in urbanisation over the past 15 years.

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ab8e7f2.html>

FORCED MIGRATION REVIEW (FMR) 34 'ADAPTING TO URBAN DISPLACEMENT',
FEBRUARY 2010.

This issue of FMR includes 26 articles on urban displacement by a wide range of authors – practitioners, policymakers and researchers. It also includes 13 articles on other aspects of forced migration, including a 'spotlight' on Haiti after the earthquake.

<http://www.fmreview.org/urban-displacement/>

WFP TECHNICAL GUIDANCE SHEET 'URBAN FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION
ASSESSMENTS', 2008.

Guidance for addressing substantive and methodological issues associated with conducting food and nutrition security assessments in urban areas.

<http://www.wfp.org/content/technical-guidance-sheet-urban-food-security-nutrition>

THE PRACTITIONERS GUIDE TO THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY APPROACH (HEA) –
URBAN (MODULE 6) 2008

The HEA Framework was developed by Food Economy Group (FEG) and Save the Children UK. Over the past several years FEG, Save the Children UK and HEA practitioners have expanded the use of the HEA and developed a user friendly guide to assist HEA practitioners, field staff and program planners. Chapter 6 of this guide discusses adaptations of the HEA to consider issues such as urban livelihoods.

<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/practitioners%E2%80%99-guide-household-economy-approach>

ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM (ACF) 'IDENTIFICATION OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN URBAN
ENVIRONMENTS', 2010.

This guide provides information on how to identify vulnerable people in urban environments. It is designed for use by field practitioners, and was conceived in response to the proliferation of food crises in urban environments.

http://www.actionagainsthunger.org/sites/default/files/publications/2010_acf_identification_of_vulnerable_people_in_urban_environments_guideline_en.pdf

WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION 'DAWN IN THE CITY - GUIDANCE FOR ACHIEVING URBAN REFUGEE SELF-RELIANCE' AND THE 'HOW TO GUIDE', OCTOBER 2011.

This guidance document aims to help improve the understanding of the reality faced by urban refugees. It highlights the livelihood and protection challenges as well as potential opportunities for urban refugees.

http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/doc_download/782-dawn-in-the-city-guidance-for-achieving-self-reliance-for-urban-refugees

A framework accompanies this guidance document which outlines how to address urban poverty and increase refugee's self-reliance through a graduated approach.

http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/doc_download/783-framework-for-urban-refugee-self-reliance-a-how-to-guide