Step 5: Facilitating discussions

Before initiating discussions with refugees and other persons of concern, teams should review the **systematization form** outlined in Step 6. The form will help teams ensure that the information gathered is well structured and organized.

Focus group discussions

Preparation:

5

- Organize separate meetings each one comprising up to ten girls, ten adolescent girls, ten women aged 18 to 40, ten women over 40, ten boys, ten adolescent boys, ten men aged 18-40 and ten men over 40 from the different ethnic groups. The selection of participants will depend on the review carried out under Step 1 and the mapping exercise conducted under Step 2. In meetings involving women, at least one facilitator should be female (in some cultures, only women can meet with women and men with men). Women and girls usually feel more comfortable speaking among other women, and men and boys may also feel more comfortable talking to men;
- UNHCR staff or implementing partners should inform participants a few days in advance so that they can prepare for a meeting, but some spontaneous meetings should also be held to ensure people who may not be in regular contact are included. This is relatively easy in a camp setting,

where spontaneous groups, such as unemployed youths, can be brought together;

- Ensure that only two members of the multifunctional team are present for a group no bigger than 10 women, girls, boys or men: ideally, one to act as a facilitator and one as a note-taker, along with an interpreter, if needed. Interpreters/ translators need to be thoroughly briefed and trained together with the teams ahead of time; multifunctional teams should explain to interpreters the importance of translating sentence by sentence and **not summarizing what people of concern have to say**. Teams should help interpreters by asking only one short question at a time and by reminding them about confidentiality of the discussions;
- Organize a meeting space in a safe and comfortable environment. Make every effort to ensure that non-participants (e.g. male leaders or curious bystanders) are not present or within hearing distance, particularly as this can give rise to subsequent protection risks;
- Inform community leaders of the purpose of the meeting;
- To create a friendly environment, it is best to hold the meeting sitting in a circle, with the facilitator at the same level as the refugees;
- Where appropriate, use visual materials, such as drawings, maps, charts, pictures and photos, which can greatly enhance the discussion;
- Allow approximately two hours per focus group.

Facilitating the discussion

a. Introduction

- Start the meeting with a brief introduction that should include:

- Who you are;
- The purpose and objectives of the participatory assessment;
- Why people's participation is important and an outline of the process;
- Respect for confidentiality and use of the information;
- What the assessment may or may not lead to in terms of outcome;
- How participants will receive feedback later (see Ethics of participation, page 13.)

For example, the assessment might not lead to additional resources but may lead to reallocating resources to particular issues. Multifunctional teams should discuss before beginning the assessment what key messages should be delivered in the introduction;

- Ask for permission to take notes. Explain that the written notes are for office use only and for recording key discussion points;
- Invite the group members to introduce each other. For example, ask every person to introduce her/himself by mentioning name, displacement details (e.g. where she/he is from—**if no security risks are involved in answering**—how long she/he has been displaced) and family situation;
- Establish ground rules, e.g. respect for different viewpoints, privacy of information shared in the meeting, there are no wrong answers, only one person to speak at a time, everyone has the right to speak without being interrupted, to be respected, and to be listened to;
- Introduce a culturally appropriate ice-breaker, if needed, especially if you are dealing with young people (see box on next page and Annex 2 on Communicating with children).

Communicating with children

Children and youth should always be included in participatory assessments. Girls and boys have needs and abilities which are significantly different from those of adults and from each other. Communicating with children has some particular requirements which include the following:

- Being at ease with children, engaging with them in whatever style of communication suits the individual (e.g. by sitting on the ground, through play, going for a walk) and tolerating expressions of distress, aggression;
- Using simple language and concepts appropriate to the child's age, stage of development, and culture;
- Accepting that children who have had distressing experiences may find it extremely difficult to trust an unfamiliar adult. It may take time and patience before the child can feel sufficient trust to communicate openly;
- Understanding that children may view their situation in distinctly different ways from adults: children may fantasize, invent explanations for unfamiliar or frightening events, express themselves in symbolic ways, emphasize issues which may seem unimportant to adults and so on;
- Being sensitive to gender, culture, ethics, and the power relations between adults and the child;
- Encouraging the involvement of colleagues/ partner staff who are familiar with working with children in a participatory way.

b. Theme discussion

- Introduce the theme selected for the focus group discussions;
- Before raising protection risks, ask questions about the background of the individuals participating in the focus group or semi-structured discussion (such as what they do, how they earned an income before they fled, who they live with, where they live and how old they are);
- Ensure that everyone has a chance to speak on the theme, encourage everyone to expand on certain points and avoid moving quickly through a list of questions. It is important to be sensitive to cultural norms when conducting the sessions to ensure that no one feels rushed or excluded;
- Ask open questions, such as how, what, where, why as much as possible, especially to clarify or to check understanding. Do not judge people who speak; accept what they say;
- Avoid leading statements and questions; questions should guide the discussion rather than solicit direct answers from each of the participants;
- Avoid dominating the discussion; ask simple questions and only one question at a time;
- Steer the group towards analysing the causes of the risks, the skills they have at their disposal to resolve them, and the role of the community in developing solutions;
- Ensure that the protection risks discussed and analysed are linked to possible solutions that can be formulated in recommendations and follow-up activities;
- Ensure time for refugees to raise their own questions and concerns;
- Ask the participants which of the issues raised they consider to be the most pressing;

- See Annex 3 for sample questions to ask during theme discussions.

c. Follow-up and next steps

- If pressing protection problems emerge from the discussion, communicate them to appropriate staff and partners or take action as needed;
- Wrap up by thanking all the people who participated for their time and by explaining the next steps and follow-up action (see Ethics of participation, page 13).

Semi-structured discussions

Semi-structured discussions are conducted in the same way as focus group discussions, though with smaller numbers of people, usually individuals or groups of three to four, and for a shorter amount of time, usually an hour. They can be held at the household level, with families or with people who have shared similar experiences. Semi-structured discussions can take place with individuals to cover sensitive, confidential issues and with households or small groups to gather detailed information on specific themes and risks.