

# Community-Based Protection: Community Centre Concept

UNHCR Damascus, Syria



## ● OVERVIEW OF PROTECTION CONCERNS

1. The prolonged conflict has resulted in large scale displacement, increased family separation, the breakdown of traditional community protection structures and the large-scale destruction of basic infrastructure and livelihoods.
2. Roles within families are changing with many women having to assume the role of head of household and primary bread winner.
3. Protection concerns are increasingly inter-linked, between, for example, dependency on assistance, sexual exploitation, early marriage, child recruitment and labour, and need to be addressed comprehensively to ensure impact.
4. Lack/loss of civil documentation limits freedom of movement and exacerbates other protection risks such as access to safe locations, basic services, humanitarian aid and livelihoods, and increases the risk of statelessness.
5. The lack of livelihoods coupled with the depletion of resources forces affected populations to unsafe coping mechanisms such as child labor, child marriage, survival sex and recruitment by various armed groups.
6. One in three school-age children are not attending school due to the destruction or re-dedication of many schools, displacement or because they have to contribute to the family income.
7. Elderly persons and persons with disabilities are particularly exposed to protection risks including exploitation and abuse.

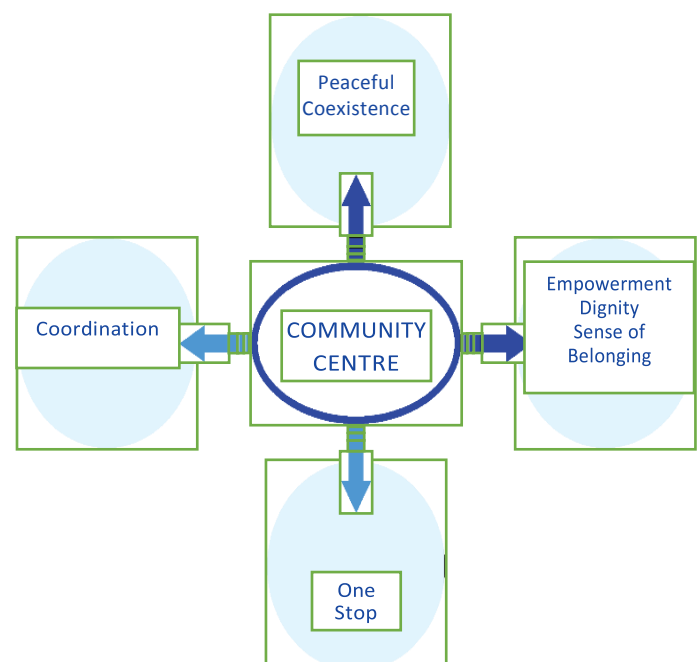
## ● UNHCR'S COMMUNITY-BASED PROTECTION STRATEGY

UNHCR's protection response strategy follows a community-based approach, including community mobilization and self-reliance components, and aims to reduce vulnerabilities and protection risks through psycho-social support, services for persons with specific needs, legal aid, in particular in relation to birth registration and documentation, education services and activities supporting livelihoods, vocational training with a view to improve skills and opportunities to generate income, SGBV prevention and response and child protection services. Community centres and, in a second layer, mobile units operating from the community centres, are a fundamental tool for the implementation of this strategy by helping to reach out to affected populations, assess protection risks and assess needs using a participatory age, gender and diversity approach, identify community resources, and offer services and support to the affected populations.

## ● COMMUNITY CENTRE CONCEPT

Community centres are safe public places where women, men, boys and girls of diverse backgrounds can meet for social and recreational activities and obtain integrated protection services ranging from legal aid, education and livelihoods training and start-up business grants to primary health care, psycho-social support, SGBV prevention and response activities, child protection interventions, to in-kind assistance to address the specific needs of persons with disabilities and the basic needs of vulnerable persons. In addition, the community centres reach out to populations of concern and carry out awareness-raising activities. The main objectives of community centres are:

- Mobilize and empower displaced people and affected host communities and provide them with a forum to promote their participation in decisions that affect their lives.
- Establish community interaction space where community members can meet, plan and organize activities.
- Help communities to identify needs, available community capacities and formulate and implement



practical solutions.

- Gather qualitative and quantitative data about the needs and profiles of IDPs and affected populations.
- Assess community's coping mechanisms and identify mitigation measures.
- Set up a community outreach system to facilitate community mobilization with a view to responding to the needs and the priorities of the communities.
- Map available services and develop a protection referral system, and thus strengthen the overall quality of the humanitarian response.
- Anchor a community-based protection approach in the community to ensure their ownership of the responses and increase sustainability.

## ● ONE STOP SHOP

The availability of a wide range of integrated services and programmes for people of diverse profiles and with diverse needs in one location is particularly important for displaced people, whose mobility may be hampered by distance, transportation costs or security concerns. This aspect of community centres as a "one stop shop" is therefore particularly relevant in remote areas where availability of services is scarce. Moreover, community centres cooperate with other facilities and service providers to ensure complementarity in service provision.

## ● COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Displaced people and affected populations are involved in the planning, implementation, assessment, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes and services provided in the community centres. In particular, the community plays a crucial role in (a) identifying the gaps in services, humanitarian needs and community capacities; (b) planning, implementing and monitoring of activities that shall strengthen the community's resilience, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence; (c) taking ownership of the protection response through different community committees and outreach volunteers; and (d) providing feedback on the quality of services and impact of activities.

## ● CONSIDERATIONS FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY CENTRES

- Location in an area with a high concentration of displaced people or returnees.
- Location in an area not covered by other agencies/organizations with similar interventions.
- Regular and unhindered population access is key.
- Careful assessment of the security and protection risks in the area (checkpoints, dangerous areas, mine fields etc.) and of the safety of the premises.
- Identification of a suitable partner with the required capacity/expertise which is authorized to implement a community centre in the area.
- Special considerations for persons with specific needs, elderly persons, persons with disability and children.
- Utility connections (e.g. water, electricity, sewage) available.
- Ideally there should be adjacent space for a potential expansion.
- Opportunities to contribute to local community development.

## ● MOBILE UNITS AND OUTREACH VOLUNTEERS

Each community centre is supported by approximately 25 outreach volunteers who inform communities of the services available in the community centres, identify needs, provide a first response and refer cases.

In order to increase outreach to the most vulnerable populations who do not have easy access to the community centres for a variety of reasons, including their residence in hard-to-reach locations, and to react flexibly to new displacement or return trends, mobile units have been created. These mobile units operate from the community centres and provide a prioritized basket of protection services based on the identified needs. The mobile services might be converted into a permanent structure (community centre) at a later stage if the identified needs are significant and the above considerations met.

## AVAILABLE SERVICES IN COMMUNITY CENTRES

The activities and services provided at the community centres depend on the local context, identified needs, availability of other services providers in the vicinity and the expertise of the partner running the centre. The following services are commonly available in UNHCR-funded community centres in Syria:



### Community Mobilization & Outreach

- Outreach volunteers (approximately 25 per centre)
- Mobile activities, including in collective shelters and schools
- Youth/disability/children/women/older persons committees and clubs
- Support of community-based initiatives and organizations



### Legal Aid

- Legal counselling and assistance, mostly on birth registration, civil documentation and personal status issues
- Legal representation before authorities and courts



### SGBV Prevention and Response & Child Protection Services

- Counselling and case management regarding children at risk
- Referrals to specialized services (as needed) for SGBV survivors and child protection cases



### Skills Development and Livelihoods

- Vocational and life skills training linked to on-the-job training and internship placement
- Small start-up business grants



### Awareness-Raising & Information-Sharing

- Lectures/focus group discussions/awareness campaigns on health, education, child protection, legal issues and SGBV
- Information dissemination on services and assistance provided within the catchment area of the community centres (information desks, information walls, brochures, leaflets, hotlines and updated maps of services)



### Education

- Remedial education programs
- Catch-up classes and other accelerated learning programs



### Recreation

- Summer camps, sports, musical and recreational activities
- Child-friendly spaces
- Cultural and social events



### Specialized Services

- Mental health and psycho-social counseling (group and individual)
- Services for persons with specific needs
- In-kind assistance for persons with specific needs
- Medical in-kind assistance for persons with disabilities



### Primary Health Care

- First aid
- Individual counseling and health promotion sessions
- Mobile health services

## ● UNHCR COMMUNITY CENTRE NETWORK IN SYRIA

By the end of December 2016, 74 community centres were operational in 11 governorates. Subject to humanitarian access and sufficient funding, UNHCR is planning to expand the network of community centres to 130 in 2017, including mobile units, and the number of outreach volunteers to 3,000 targeting in particular remote/rural locations with a large presence of IDPs or returnees throughout the country.

