

Mass Information in Northern Iraq

Best Practice in Outreach to Beneficiaries in Emergencies

The information campaign for newly arriving refugees in Northern Iraq is the worldwide best example of an outreach strategy conducted in a refugee emergency from very onset of a mass influx.

This quick and professional response is due to two factors: When the refugees started arriving, a draft communication strategy had already been prepared by the

Regional Mass Information Unit. An experienced Mass Information Officer was assigned and could start implementing with immediate effect. The new UNHCR Mass Information Toolkit enabled field staff to produce publications on their office computers right away, without a need for special software or external designers.

During their mission to Kawergosk Camp in Erbil end-August both the High Commissioner and the Director of MENA congratulated the Mass Information Officer on his work. They said they never saw this quality of outreach work in any other camp before.



Outreach workers informing a newly arrived family and distributing brochures.

Mass Information Strategy customised to target audience

The Mass Information strategy in Northern Iraq is customized to match exactly the profile, culture, media habits and information needs of the target audience:

- Relatively high literacy levels;
- Kurdish and Arabic speaking;
- High social cohesion among refugees and willingness of previously arrived refugees to assist new arrivals;
- Habitual reliance on oral transmission in the Kurdish society, whereby the shortcomings of purely oral information (inaccuracy, fragmentariness) were evened out by leaflets and brochures disseminated.

**Information
flow in
emergencies:
fast and
reciprocal**

In an emergency, information needs are. Information needs to be simple and repetitive taking into account that the recipients of information may be physically and mentally exhausted and disoriented in their new surroundings. Furthermore, communication flows need to be reciprocal, so refugees can ask questions, be they on the general issues or pertaining to their individual circumstances.

Oral information has to be supported by written text. Printed information, in turn, has to be complemented by images to help guide (semi-)literate readers through the information and help illiterate audiences understand the context as well.

Volunteers assist with outreach at the initial phase of emergency

For immediate action, some 150 refugee volunteers were recruited with the support of the KR Government and our implementing partner ACTED. The main criteria of recruitment are high education and a reasonable command of English to make sure that messages provided by UNHCR are understood and transmitted correctly.

The use of outreach workers is a quick and efficient solution during a mass influx but not sustainable over longer periods due to costs and demanding logistics. In the long term, a much smaller number of volunteers will be retained to assist UNHCR with Mass Information.

**Face-to-face
outreach
methods**

The volunteers wear visibility vests so they are immediately recognizable and can also be approached by refugees. They go from tent to tent, talk to groups or address crowds with the help of megaphones.

All volunteers were handed stacks info leaflets on Registration procedures and FAQ in Arabic language. All FAQ were cleared with the respective Mayor in every municipality.

Stable phase requires different MI methodology

Once the volunteers complete their initial job of informing refugees face-to-face, mechanisms for continuous Mass Information will be established in all permanent camps (Darashakran, Kawergosk and Bazirma).

- Camp info centre, which will also be suitable for community activities;
- Public announcement system in the entire camp;
- Dissemination of information through text messages on mobile phones.

**Collaboration
with local
governments**

In addition, MI is working on the establishment of a Coordination Mechanism Group with the KR Government). The CMG will have staff from all major actors (UN and NGOs) working in camps/sites to meet and discuss the messages and modalities of Mass Information.