

COMMUNITY-BASED OUTREACH OUTSIDE OF CAMPS

Community-Based Protection in Action

Community-Based Protection Unit, Division of International Protection





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● WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

The rights of refugees¹ and UNHCR's mandated responsibilities towards them are not affected by their place of residence. Thus, non-camp settings are legitimate places 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. Life outside of camps may present refugees with additional opportunities, but it can also pose new challenges. In situations where significant numbers of refugees reside outside camps, the perception can be created among the host community that they are a strain on already inadequate public services and natural resources. Refugees who live outside of camps can face a range of protection risks, some of which are exacerbated or more difficult to address in non-camp environments: the threat of arbitrary arrest and detention, refoulement, harassment, exploitation, discrimination, inadequate and overcrowded shelter, as well as vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Refugees are often forced for reasons of poverty to live in peripheral or hard to reach slum areas, which imply increased transportation costs, security concerns, or limited mobility.

UNHCR's community-based approach to protection is an essential tool/method to overcome these challenges and

deliver protection to as many persons of concern as possible (see, for example the Policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas and the Policy on alternative to camps.) At the heart of this approach is mobilizing and building on the capacities of the refugee population, so as to preserve and promote their dignity, self-esteem, and productive and creative potential.

“Strong community outreach, communication with refugee communities and good information flow between UNHCR and refugees living in urban areas are key factors to facilitate appropriate protection, assistance and durable solutions for urban refugees and other persons of concern.”

UNHCR's policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas

¹ This briefing note refers to refugees. However, it should be noted that the content provided herein could equally apply to internally displaced persons and other persons of concern.

● WHAT IS A COMMUNITY - BASED OUTREACH PROGRAMME?

A community-based outreach programme, as a response to the protection and assistance needs of refugees and IDPs in urban contexts, seeks to build on the skills, capacities and knowledge of the wider community, including through trusted and diverse members of their own community. These outreach volunteer networks are structured and trained to conduct their activities in accordance with UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Policy and human rights principles. Close partnership and direct two-way communication between UNHCR and the communities, through the outreach volunteers, empowers those involved in the programme to play a central role as analysts, implementers and evaluators of their own protection. Outreach volunteers assist their own people in their own language.

● RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OUTREACH VOLUNTEERS:

Although the responsibilities of outreach volunteers depend on the local context, the following duties are common among outreach volunteers:

- Identification of the most at risk refugees in need of urgent assistance
- Referral of cases to UNHCR, partners or appropriate national service providers
- Regular reporting and meetings with UNHCR or partners
- Basic individual counselling, through home visits or at community venues, such as community centers
- Individual support to persons with specific needs who require regular follow up at their homes (especially for those with limited mobility)
- Community mobilization and awareness raising activities, including promotion of host community involvement
- Participation in training and information-sharing sessions with UNHCR and partners

In carrying out these duties, volunteers will be expected to respect confidentiality and promote the rights of all members of the community without discrimination.

“SPECIALIZED” VOLUNTEERS

When an outreach volunteer program was set up with Iraqi refugees in Syria in 2007, the volunteers were all “generalists”, working with the broader refugee community without focusing on a specific group or technical area. Since then, in a number of country operations, volunteers with relevant skills and capacities have been supporting interventions in specific sectors or targeting particular groups with specific needs, such as:

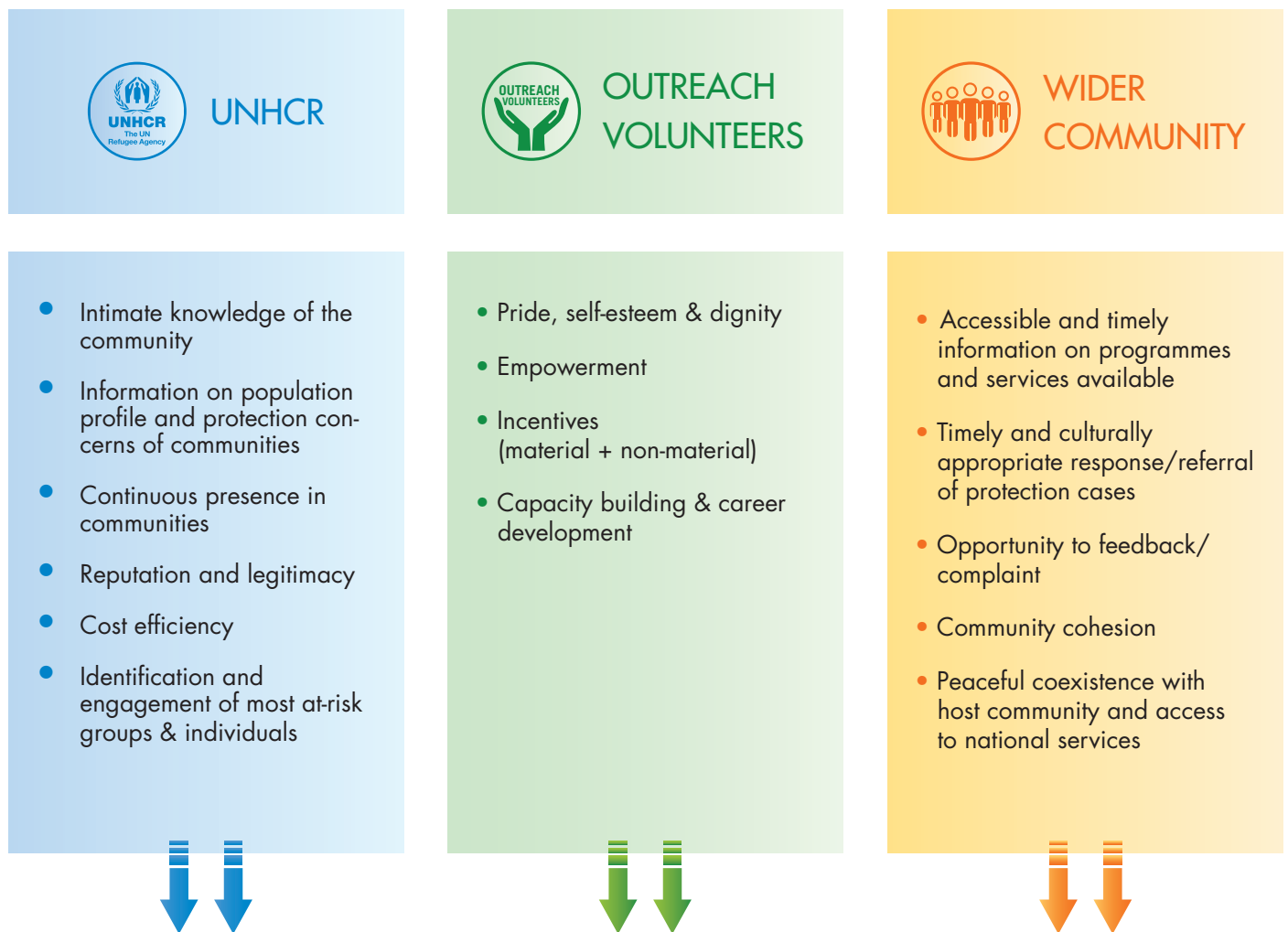
Education; paralegal support; child protection; psychosocial support and mental health issues; health; sexual and gender based violence (SGBV); persons with disabilities; elderly; youth.

Examples of activities carried out by specialized volunteers include:

- Identification of out-of-school children
- Homework support
- Sensitization on vaccination campaigns
- Provision of life-skills training
- Follow-up care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children
- Psychological first aid



- WORKING WITH PERSONS OF CONCERN AS OUTREACH VOLUNTEERS CAN BENEFIT ALL ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:



BETTER PROTECTION OUTCOMES THROUGH PROGRAMMES THAT:

- Are informed by **accurate** and up-to-date **information** on protection concerns
- Identify and **build on** the **capacities**, knowledge and skills of communities
- Promote **accountability** towards persons of concern:
- By empowering communities, through the volunteers, to **monitor** the quality and **impact** of programmes and provide **feedback** and suggestions
- By building mutual trust and transparency through efficient 2-way communication and partnership

● HOW TO SET UP A COMMUNITY-BASED OUTREACH PROGRAMME?

As an example, the UNHCR Operation in Syria identified the following steps to set up an outreach volunteer programme, some of which will be explored in more detail in this document:

1. *Situation analysis & needs assessment*
2. *Identification of persons of concern suitable as outreach volunteers*
3. *Conduct focus group and evaluation sessions*
4. *Selection process for volunteers & development of Terms of Reference for outreach volunteers*
5. *Introductory and follow up training sessions*
6. *Link volunteers to either specific areas / thematic fields according to strength*
7. *Support/coach and monitor outreach volunteers*
8. *Facilitate permanent two-way communication flow between UNHCR and the outreach volunteers*
9. *Inform the community about the role of the outreach volunteers*
10. *Promote a non-hierarchical and cooperative communication structure among outreach volunteers*
11. *Provide appropriate compensation or incentives*
12. *Ensure the safety of the outreach volunteers*

The different steps and elements to consider when setting up an outreach volunteer programme will inevitably vary from one context to the other. There is no “one size fits all” approach and the decision to set up such a programme in the first place should be taken in close consultation with persons of concern and preferably be based on their recommendations and suggestions. The considerations below are mostly derived from outreach programmes in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Kenya.

PRE-SELECTION

The selection of outreach volunteers can be carried out through the following ways:

- Identification of proactive community members during focus group discussions or outreach visits conducted by UNHCR and partners
- Use of UNHCR registration tool, ProGres, to identify people with relevant educational background and experience
- Coordinating with existing community-based organizations
- Asking persons of concern to put forward candidates that enjoy trust and legitimacy in the community
- Self-identification of candidates willing to provide support to others in need

The candidates identified should formally apply, providing an overview of their personal, professional, and educational background, as well as their interests.

Desirable criteria for volunteers could include: eagerness to help, team-oriented mentality, acceptance by the community, communication skills, willingness to engage in challenging work, mediation skills.

It is worth noting that the volunteers should be able to read and write. In some contexts, depending on the complexity of the work, completion of secondary education may be a pre-requisite. Candidates from different ages, genders and diverse backgrounds should be considered.

“Select community counterparts with care”

Key lessons from **Understanding Community-Based Protection: Protection Policy Paper, UNHCR**



RECRUITMENT

Due to the highly sensitive and challenging nature of the work of volunteers, candidates should go through a formal recruitment process, which includes at least one interview with UNHCR and/or partners. In Kenya and Egypt, a refugee is present as an observer during interviews for candidates for community volunteer work.

Successful candidates should sign a contract and UNHCR's Code of Conduct. They should have clear Terms of Reference, and their files should be properly stored.

WHAT STATUS?

In the case of Lebanon and Syria, outreach volunteers are not UNHCR or partner staff. So, they are provided with an identification badge to facilitate and legitimize their work.

WHAT KIND OF INCENTIVE?

Whether or not outreach volunteers should receive incentives for their work is important and should take into account the nature of the work, sustainability of the programme, local cost of living and wages, existing practices within the community and among similar programmes. Incentives should not undermine existing community practices performed on a volunteer basis and should be harmonized for all volunteers working with different humanitarian actors. Commonly used incentives include cash payments, transportation and communication costs or material support (i.e. mobile phones, bikes, office space, and clothing), but can also take other forms, such as:

- Training
- Certification
- Honors, awards and prizes
- Social events
- Public recognition
- Networking opportunities

In Lebanon, outreach volunteers receive support for transportation and communication. They can also receive other forms of incentives listed above. They are expected to work at least four hours per day, four days a week, and most of them have other jobs.

CAPACITY BUILDING & SUPERVISION

Upon enrollment in the programme, outreach volunteers should receive an orientation on the organization and initial training, tailored to the context. In Lebanon, for example, initial training covers the following:

- **WHAT TO DO:** What is expected of them as refugee outreach volunteers and what are their responsibilities.
- **HOW TO DO IT:** What are the different ways to undertake outreach, what to focus on and who to target.
- **WHAT NOT TO DO:** Confidentiality and code of conduct.
- **WHO TO CONTACT:** Especially in case of an emergency.

Beyond initial training, it is essential that outreach volunteers are provided with ongoing coaching and learning opportunities, through supportive supervision and regular learning/training sessions.

In Egypt, for example, refugees working as community social workers participate in a half day learning session on a weekly basis. They also have a "buddy system" of peer support and receive supportive supervision from team leaders as well as psychiatrists and medical doctors affiliated with the organization, to help them cope with the challenging work they carry out.

In Lebanon, in addition to regular meetings and training opportunities between outreach volunteers and UNHCR and partners, the volunteers are also supported by UNHCR and partner staff through joint home visits, followed by debriefings.

In Kenya, community volunteer workers are trained as trainers and are expected to train other community members.

The staff per volunteer ratio depends on the humanitarian situation and financial realities in any given context, but it is important to stress that community-based protection programmes promoting meaningful community engagement require significant human resources.

"Community work requires expertise and training"

"Supportive supervision is essential"

Key lessons from **Understanding Community-Based Protection: Protection Policy Paper, UNHCR**

COORDINATION

Although in many contexts outreach volunteers are affiliated with and managed by UNHCR's partners, it is important that UNHCR maintains direct contact with the outreach volunteers. They can be a crucial source of information for UNHCR on the situation of communities of concern and also for the communities on UNHCR's responsibilities and services, and what the organization can and cannot do. In order to maintain our accountability towards persons of concern and ensure protection delivery is effective and tailored to their needs, this direct link should not be broken.

In instances where outreach volunteers are managed and

supervised by partners, mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure regular interaction between UNHCR and the volunteers, through social media, websites or other means of communication. But, while these are very helpful, they should not replace essential face-to-face interaction.

*"We bring the voices of the refugees.
We live what they are living"*

Refugee Outreach Volunteer in Tripoli, Lebanon



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<http://www.unhcrexchange.org/communities/9159>



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