

Refugee Highway Partnership

World Evangelical Alliance

Missions Commission

Refugee Ministry Best Practices

Introduction

The Code of Best Practices for Christian Refugee Ministry is designed as a benchmark document to guide the policies and practice of organisations regarding Christian humanitarian service and witness to refugees, internally displaced people and asylum seekers. It is not intended to establish legal standards or liability. Rather the motivation for the development of this code is based upon the responsibility towards all participants and partners in refugee programs, that they are served with the highest standards possible.

The code does not necessarily reflect current practice, but encourages aspirations towards excellence. However, minimum standards are implied in the code, and therefore, it should be seen as a step in a process rather than an end in itself. It is recognized that the code will not be applicable to all situations of refugee ministry.

At the Refugee Highway Consultation held in Izmir, Turkey November 15-2001, Christian leaders from around the world involved in refugee ministry initiated and drafted the code.

Glossary of key terms

For the purposes of this document, the term "refugee" is being used to define the following groups of uprooted people.

Refugee:

A person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."ⁱ

We also include people fleeing war or other armed conflict in our definition of refugee.

Asylum Seeker:

When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in a second state, they apply for 'asylum'—the right to be recognized as bona fide refugees and receive the legal protection and material assistance that status implies.ⁱⁱ

Internally Displaced Person (IDP):

Someone who has been forced from his/her home for refugee-like reasons, but remains within the borders of his/her own country. Because the person is still under the jurisdiction of a government that might not want international agencies to help him/her, an internally displaced person might still be vulnerable to persecution or violence.ⁱⁱⁱ

Returnee:

The majority of refugees prefer to and do return home as soon as circumstances permit, generally when a conflict has ended, a degree of stability has been restored and basic infrastructure is being rebuilt.^{iv}

Refugee Highway:

The "highway" symbolises the paths travelled by refugees seeking safety and protection.

Principle:

A broad statement of purpose.

Key Indicator:

An observable and measurable outcome related to a principle.

Core Values

The code has underlying core values, including the following:

1. A commitment to the dignity and worth of all individuals created in the image of God.
2. A commitment to understand and apply biblical principles and to fulfill the missiological mandate for refugee humanitarian service.
3. A commitment to address the underlying issues that cause refugees to flee.
4. A commitment to defend the legal and human rights of refugees.
5. A commitment to understand the root causes that uproot people and to denounce unjust and inhumane policies, practises and conditions which force people to flee.
6. A commitment to promote international standards that uphold the safety and dignity of refugees.
7. A commitment to peacemaking and conflict resolution.
8. A commitment to collaboration and partnership with churches and Christian organisations, demonstrating the biblical principle of unity in service.
9. A commitment to reliance on God as the ultimate source for wisdom, strength and love in all aspects of refugee work.
10. A commitment to the welfare of refugee workers—helping them minister effectively, while recognising the possible hazards, stresses and sacrifice inherent in refugee ministry.
11. A commitment to the appropriate and effective use of all available resources.
12. A commitment to ongoing biblical reflection and to teach the ethics of ministry to refugees.
13. A commitment to facilitate individual refugees to become both self-sufficient and active contributors to communal development.
14. A commitment to engage in holistic ministry, responding to the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs of refugees, while demonstrating a Christ-like life.
15. A commitment to integrity in all that we do and communicate.

Section 1: Ministry Policy and Practise

Principle 1

Effective refugee ministry has relationship with God and people at its core.

Key indicators

- Refugee ministry is motivated by love for God and for people.
- Reconciliation is being promoted among all peoples.
- Effective refugee ministry deals with the tensions that develop with governments.
- Prayer is an integral part of effective refugee ministry.

Principle 2

Refugees receive affirmation of their dignity, value and the contribution they make.

Key indicators

- Refugees feel respected and feel that their concerns are understood.
- Refugees are being reconciled with both God and humanity.
- The vulnerability of a refugee is not exploited for any objective, including religious purposes.
- Refugees are ministering to others.
- Refugees are given access to ongoing training and education.
- Refugees are participating in identifying and pursuing durable solutions to their plight.

Principle 3

Organisations and churches assist refugees in response to their needs without discrimination.

Key Indicators

- Policies and structures are set in place to ensure that assistance is provided to refugees without regard to their race, religion, colour, class, age or sex.
- Ministries develop in response to issues and needs of specific subgroups within refugee movements (e.g. women, children, ethnic groups, religious groups).

Principle 4

Some organisations and churches may forego responding to immediate needs to focus on development and implementation of durable solutions.

Key indicators

- Ministries have clear long-term objectives.
- Ministries have sustainable support structures in place.
- Ministries meet immediate needs in ways that do not create unnecessary dependencies or that undermine the pursuit of durable solutions.

Principle 5

Organisations engage in effective and honest communication.

Key indicators

- Organisations serve with integrity in reporting the outcomes of particular initiatives.
- Organisations are viewed with growing respect by Christian and secular communities.

Principle 6

Effective refugee ministries are learning entities.

Key indicators

- Refugee workers are informed of national and international policy and current research as it relates to refugees.
- Appropriate and culturally sensitive training is provided for refugees and refugee workers.
- Organisations have a system of periodic evaluation, monitoring and review.
- Systems are in place for agencies and churches to share what they are learning with one another.

Section 2: The Role of Advocacy

Principle 7

The motivation for advocacy is for the benefit of those represented.

Key indicators

- Advocacy considers what is best for the refugee.
- Advocacy deals effectively with the expressed fears and lack of awareness of Christians.
- Advocacy identifies and communicates the value of refugee ministries.
- Advocacy recognises the tension between protecting refugees from exploitation and avoiding complexity in people trafficking.
- Marginalized groups among the refugee population are receiving special attention.

Principle 8

Advocacy on behalf of refugees in the public square and within the Christian community will be grace-based, honest and performed with integrity.

Key indicators

- Accurate and thorough information is used in advocacy work.
- Communication is not sensationalised.
- Responsible advocacy work does not communicate in a way that produces paralysis, but rather provides practical and appropriate ways to respond.
- When advocating on behalf of a particular group, hostility is not created toward another.

Principle 9

Advocacy is most effective when done in collaboration with other advocacy groups.

Key indicators

- Those working with refugee ministries are knowledgeable about the appropriate role of international advocacy networks and know how to access them.
- Christian lawyers and their associations are integrated into advocacy work.
- Christians are being informed and encouraged to engage in all kinds of governmental and non-governmental services to refugees.

Section 3: The Role of the Church

Principle 10

The local church plays a vital role in ministry to refugees.

Key indicators

- Effective envisioning, equipping and enabling refugee ministries are facilitated in local churches.
- Effective ministries are developed, equipping churches for sustainable service.
- Churches are engaged in ministry at every point along the Refugee Highway.
- Churches are seeking to understand and teach the biblical principles for refugee ministries.
- Church leaders are motivating their communities to pray for those traveling and serving on the Refugee Highway.

Principle 11

Local churches will utilise appropriate external resources for effective refugee ministry.

Key indicators

- Churches are cooperating with one another to serve the refugee community.
- Churches are cooperating with other ministry entities.
- Churches are aware of the many different networks, agencies, ministries and resources available along the "highway."

Section 4: The Role of the Refugee

Principle 12

Refugees are involved as partners in ministry.

Key indicators

- Refugees are helping to define, lead and participate in refugee ministries.
- The value and the contributions that refugees make to the life and community of the local church and other ministries are being recognised.

Section 5: The Role of the Organisation

Principle 13

Agencies utilise resources beyond their own and are cooperating with other groups.

Key indicators

- Organisations are building bridges between refugees, local churches, non-governmental organisations and governments.
- An important role is being played by organisations in advocacy on behalf of asylum seekers who are denied status and assistance.

Principle 14

A commitment to networking ministries along the "highway."

Key indicators

- Organisations are offering their unique (and often specialised) contribution to collaborative refugee ministry initiatives.
- International organisations are helping to connect and build relationships among churches and ministries all along the "highway."
- Organisations are sharing information about their best practices, challenges and learnings with others on the "highway."

Section 6: Ministry Context

Principle 15

Refugee organisations collaborate appropriately with the church, giving careful consideration to the regional, cultural and historical context.

Key indicators

- A local, regional or national central Christian coordinating body is a necessary mechanism in delivering services to refugees.
- Agencies participate appropriately in the programs of local churches, conferences and other larger groupings of churches, in non-competitive ways.

Principle 16

Ministries are flexible, innovative and creative in responding to changing conditions along the R Refugee Highway.

Key indicators

- Evaluation programs are in place to assess effectiveness and implement needed improvements.
- Rapid response networks are in place.
- Organisations are using forecasting as a tool for anticipating potential changes along the "highway."

Principle 17

The local context will be understood in order to inform and influence all ministry activity.

Key indicators

- Organisations have developed systems to prepare for an influx of refugees, where anticipated.
- Organisations act responsibly in light of danger to Christians and other groups in hostile environments.
- Organisations understand the unique cultural, historical and environmental context in which they serve.
- International organisations recognise that there is often disparity between the western well-trained social worker/refugee helper and the crisis country local workers.
- Organisations demonstrate respect for the contribution and personal needs of local workers.

Section 7: Partnership

Principle 18

Partnership among all those involved in refugee ministry is necessary.

Key indicators

- National and global efforts directed to a specific refugee movement (or region) are being coordinated.
- Where conflict exists, reconciliation precedes collaborative ministry.
- Short-term, limited, achievable goals are established in the early stages of partnership.
- Agreed upon goals are monitored and future goals are continuously being identified.

Principle 19

For a partnership to function effectively, we recognise that each partner brings perspective and gifts to the process.

Key indicators

- Collaboration involves all stakeholders including refugees, churches, local and international agencies, business communities and government.
- Effective partnerships utilise trained facilitators and/or facilitating teams.
- Effective refugee organisations are creating links between churches and other ministries along the Refugee Highway.

Principle 20

Partnerships share work, risk, responsibility, accountability, decision-making and benefits.

Key indicators

- Partnership members take responsibility for the effect and consequences of their work.
- Partnership members share successes and credit.
- Evaluation and assessment tools have been developed and implemented.

- Organisations working in partnership have submitted to mutual accountability among partners.

ⁱ *The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*: UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.ch/>

ⁱⁱ UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.ch>

ⁱⁱⁱ USCR <http://www.refugees.org/world/glossary.htm>

^{iv} UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.ch>

For more information contact:

Mark Orr, Co-Facilitator, Refugee Highway Partnership,
(mark@globalmission.org)

Stephen Mugabi, Co-Facilitator, Refugee Highway Partnership,
(mugabi@infocom.co.ug)