3RP National Protection Working Group

Meeting Minutes

Date & Location: Wednesday, 15 May 2025, 14:00 – 16:00 / Zoom

Moderator: Lara Özügergin Zeilstra – 3RP National Protection Sector Coordinator (UNHCR)

Participants: CARE, DRC, Expertise France, Genç Hayat Vakfı, GIZ, Human Appeal, ICMC, ICMPD, IFRC, İKGV, ILO, IOM, Maya Vakfı, MSYDD, Relief International, RET International, SEVKAR, SGDD – ASAM, Türk Kızılay, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN RCO, WFP, WHR, Yedi Başak

Meeting Presentation: English and Turkish

Meeting Agenda:

I. Welcome & Announcements
II. Presentation of the Results of the Communication with Communities Survey
III. Voluntary Return: Discussions on Observations and Needs
IV. AoB & Closure

Agenda Item #1: Welcome & Announcements

- **3RP National Protection Working Group 2025 Work Plan (English and Turkish):** 2025 work plan has been finalized based on partners' feedback to the prioritization survey. The plan may be adjusted throughout the year in line with contextual developments.
- **Community Pulse Survey:** The preliminary findings of the survey were presented by UNHCR to the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), which received positive feedback. PMM also noted misinformation and information gaps regarding the voluntary return process at the community level. In this context, the importance of continuing to promote UNHCR and inter-agency information/communication tools was emphasized. Additionally, the Protection Sector was recognized as playing a critical role in disseminating information shared by PMM across communities.
- **Inter-Agency Protection Needs Assessment (IAPNA) – Round 8 Report:** Round 8 report will be published shortly. Before initiation of preparations for the Round 9, consultation meetings are planned, particularly with partners who contributed to previous rounds.
- **Capacity Development Activities in May:** In May, capacity development efforts focused on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons in PSEA interventions, age-inclusive project design, and LGBTI+ inclusion.
- 3RP Inter-Agency Question Log on Returns: Although the number of entries into the tool decreased, the need for accurate information remains. Partners are encouraged to share their feedback and suggestions regarding the tool.
- **Türkiye PSEA Network Updates:** Inter-Agency PSEA Coordinator joined the meeting to introduce himself and share details regarding the 2025 PSEA Action Plan. Strengthening safe reporting mechanisms, oversight, and policy processes were highlighted as key priorities. The importance of enhancing inter-agency coordination and encouraging organizations to designate focal points was also emphasized. For further information, partners may contact the Türkiye PSEA Network co-chairs: Bora Özbek (boozbek@iom.int), Melis Kurucu (mkurucu@iom.int), and Lara Özügergin Zeilstra (ozurgergi@unhcr.org).
- **Ageing and Disability Inclusion Task Team (ADITT) Updates:**

- As part of the materials developed by ADITT, "Inclusion of Older People and Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Programming Checklist" was introduced. Relevant resources are available on ReliefWeb, including the ADITT page and the checklist itself.
- **Mapping of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities and Older People Association:** A mapping of organizations led by persons with disabilities and older persons has been conducted to strengthen their inclusion in humanitarian action. The map is currently active with regular updates. The mapping and dissemination survey can be accessed through the following links.
- **UNV Disability Inclusion Volunteer Programme:** Partners working in disability inclusion were informed about the opportunity to benefit from UNV's short-term volunteer deployment mechanism. For more information, organizations may contact UNV representatives: Ebru.Oksuz@unv.org, Pinar.Akpinar@unv.org, Buse.Ercan@unv.org.

Agenda Item #2: Presentation of the Results of the Communication with Communities Survey

During the meeting, the results of the survey conducted by UNHCR's Communication with Communities Unit were presented. Carried out in the first quarter of 2025, the survey provides key insights into refugees' information needs and communication preferences in Türkiye.

Key Findings:

- Findings of the Inter Agency Protection Needs Assessment and Community Pulse Survey show similarities, with both tools highlighting challenges in accessing information and reflecting community members' perceptions on this.
- The survey was conducted via phone using random sampling from the UNHCR Counselling Line database, targeting Arabic and Farsi speaking refugees. The sample included Syrian, Afghan, Iranian, and Iraqi individuals.
- Decline in perceived access to information was observed, particularly compared to 2021. In parallel, trust in NGOs and the UN as primary sources of information decreased, while trust in public institutions increased.
- WhatsApp and Telegram emerged as the most preferred platforms for accessing information. Telegram is more widely used among Farsi speaking refugees, while the use of WhatsApp has led to the creation of new WhatsApp channels.
- Decrease in the use of UNHCR's online tools was noted. The most frequently requested information topics by refugees from UNHCR included resettlement (64%), financial assistance (29%), education (26%), health (25%), and livelihood opportunities (24%).
- Awareness of complaint and feedback mechanisms has decreased. However, trust that these mechanisms will be taken into consideration has slightly increased. For participants of the survey, the primary channel for sharing feedback remains the UNHCR Counselling Line.

Discussion Summary and Recommendations:

- It was recommended to increase investment in digital communication channels while continuing to use traditional communication methods in a complementary manner. The growing trend of accessing information through social media and online platforms was particularly emphasized.
- While trust in public institutions is reportedly increasing, the role of NGOs as reliable sources of information appears to be declining. This shift was attributed to a loss of trust due to

inconsistencies between official announcements and field-level implementation. In this context, strengthening information-sharing and advocacy efforts with public institutions, as well as enhancing digital tools and improving coordination with community-based actors, were highlighted as key areas for action.

- It was noted that the lack of information on services does not happen due to misinformation, but from the unavailability of relevant information. In particular, in areas such as resettlement and financial assistance, when the information provided does not lead to meaningful changes in an individual's situation, it might negatively affect how people perceive the usefulness and accessibility of that information. Therefore, managing expectations in these areas through accurate and realistic information was highlighted.
- It was recommended to conduct more in-depth analyses to understand the reasons behind changes in preferences regarding sources of information.
  - Action Point: To better capture these dynamics, it was proposed future needs assessments, including the Inter Agency Protection Needs Assessment (IAPNA) to incorporate questions aimed at understanding the factors driving changes in information sources.
- Considering the limited availability of resettlement quotas, the need to intensify efforts toward complementary pathways was emphasized.
  - Action Point: It was recommended for the 3RP National Protection Sector Coordinator to engage with resettlement unit to review existing options, target groups, and communication methods. In this context, the development and dissemination of informative materials for NGOs and communities was also encouraged.
- During focus group discussions with key refugee groups, participants noted that while they did not experience difficulties in accessing information, there was a perceived lack of advocacy in areas where support was most needed.

Agenda Item #3: Voluntary Return: Discussions on Observations and Needs

During the meeting, partners shared observed trends, risks, and differences in implementation in the field in the context of voluntary returns. These observations are summarized below under thematic headings.

Information Needs and Differences in Access

- Variations in the implementation of voluntary return procedures negatively affects community perceptions vis a vis reliability of information disseminated and causes confusion among refugees.
- Lack of documentation (consent letters, issues related to restriction codes, and travel permits) and inconsistent interpretation of required documents were reported as major barrier at border crossings.
- Differences in procedures between the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) and law enforcement officers at airports and land borders were highlighted, with some cases involving restriction codes being accessible only by law enforcement, leading to last minute denial of exit.
- Lack of integration between systems (GöçNet and PolNet) results in delays or gaps in information sharing, reportedly causing issues such as flight ticket losses.

- In some provinces, persons pending registration or documentation with intention to return reported to be registered with pre-registration forms by PDMMs, facilitating the issuance of travel permits. However, this practice is not consistently applied across all provinces.
- In certain provinces, persons who are not registered under Temporary Protection have been advised by authorities to proceed directly to the border. These individuals are directed to border crossings without being registered or provided with travel permits, increasing the risk of irregular returns to Syria. In addition, in some cases, long waiting times for voluntary return appointments have led people to skip formal procedures and proceed directly to the border to return through irregular means.

Child Protection Observations at Cilvegözü Border Gate

- An increase has been observed in the number of children arriving at the border either unaccompanied or accompanied by individuals other than their parents. Although these individuals often claim to be relatives, the required legal documentation is frequently missing. Additionally, while some provinces do not process such cases without a court order, others proceed with return procedures even when this documentation is not available.
- Due to absence of required documentation, return processing are frequently denied, and in certain cases, decisions are left to the assigned personnel. This causes inconsistencies in implementation and practices that may not align with the legal framework.
- Single parent households are sometimes rejected at the border due to lack of documentation, which may cause some families to consider irregular crossings.

Social Cohesion and Security Risks

- Per information shared by partners in the GBV sub-working group meeting, cases are reported regarding individuals who returned to were abducted or targeted with ransom. These incidents were described as demotivating and damaging to trust within communities.
- Concerns were raised regarding potential social tensions between individuals who returned voluntarily and those who remained in Syria throughout the crisis.
- Concerns were also expressed that persons who reach the border but are unable to cross (particularly due to lack of documentation or financial constraints) may be exposed to risks such as human smuggling, human trafficking, and irregular returns.

Additional Recommendations on Voluntary Returns

- It was recommended that trends, practices, and case examples related to voluntary returns be regularly discussed during 3RP National Protection Working Group meetings, with the aim of addressing challenges before individuals reach border crossing points.
  - Action Point: In this regard, the 3RP National Protection Sector Coordinator will consult UNHCR's Policy Development Unit to allocate time in National PWG meetings for this exchange and will inform partners accordingly.
- It was noted that differing practices among PDMMs at border gates could be brought to the attention of the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM). In this context, the need for systematic advocacy was highlighted, and it was suggested that if no resolution is achieved at the national level, the issue could be referred to the Durable Solutions Working Group.

Agenda Item #4: AoB & Clousure

- Meeting planned for June, following the Eid holiday to include dedicated time for the detailed sharing of field observations and trends related to voluntary returns.
- Subject to UNHCR management approval, the findings of the Community Pulse Survey may also be presented during the June meeting.