

COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

IN THE SYRIA AND IRAQ SITUATIONS

December, 2016



Communication with Communities

Communication with refugees and affected communities is a key element of UNHCR's protection and operational response in the MENA region, and an issue in which there is a growing level of interest within the organization and among external stakeholders.

Accountability to beneficiaries remains a priority for UNHCR and the partners in the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), who are committed to engaging and empowering refugees and affected populations to participate in the response.

Women, girls, boys and men are regularly consulted and engaged in the programme cycle from assessment of needs, to planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Two-way communication is vital to ensure that communities are not passive recipients of the messaging of agencies, but are active participants in the dialogue with those agencies on vital issues affecting their lives. Effective complaints mechanisms and two-way communication with communities help to maintain effectiveness, transparency and integrity of the programmes. UNHCR is using a range of mechanisms to ensure communities are included in decisions that affect their lives, and some of these are listed on this document.



New study finds internet, mobile connectivity a lifeline for refugees



According to the [new report](#) released by UNHCR and Accenture, entitled: "Connecting Refugees: How internet and mobile connectivity can improve refugee well-being and transform humanitarian action", refugees view access to mobile phone and internet as being critical to their safety and security, and essential for keeping in touch with their loved ones. This report was based on research and interviews undertaken by UNHCR offices in 44 countries on four continents (which collectively host more than 3 million refugees). The findings reflect how important it is for refugees to stay in touch with their families, and showed that this is a lifeline and critical tool for their self-empowerment.

Affordability is often a barrier to connectivity. Refugees living in urban areas tend to have similar access to mobile networks as other urban populations, while in rural locations, one in five refugees have no mobile coverage at all – significantly lower than for the population at large. This effectively prevents many refugees from participating in the cultural, educational, and economic activity that connectivity affords.

Therefore the report recommended additional investments in three main areas, which together form the basis of a new UNHCR Global Strategy for Connectivity for Refugees. These include increasing the availability of mobile networks, improving affordability, and providing access to training, digital content and services. For instance in Education, a connected refugee population would mean access to education remotely. At a time when many thousands of refugees are absent from schools, this would have a major impact.

Refugees
in **44**
countries
participated
in this research



A communications lifeline for newly-displaced families who've fled Mosul conflict

A new initiative has been launched by UNHCR to help families who've been newly-displaced as a result of the Mosul offensive in Iraq to get easier access to accurate and timely information.

Many of those displaced by the offensive have left with very few belongings and little information about what is going on and what the future holds for them.

Families, who spent more than two years under the control of armed groups, have spoken of tight restrictions and curtailed freedoms, as well as lack of access to impartial information.

The new initiative, which has started in Hasansham camp for displaced Iraqis, is aiming to give families a communications lifeline. An Iraqi radio station, Radio Nawa, will distribute two thousand small transistor radios, so that people can listen-in to unbiased, non-partisan information services, take part in radio phone-ins, raise questions or comments, and engage on-air with local and central government officials and the Iraqi security forces. The station, which operates in Kurdish and Arabic across Iraq, has installed a new transmitter to reach the camp.

This pilot scheme is part of a project, supported by BBC Media Action, intended to provide access to information and encourage the re-integration of communities who formerly lived under the control of militant groups, back into Iraqi society.





Social Media

“I am a Syrian in Lebanon” is a Facebook group that has been providing answers for Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. The information shared through this group are accurate and correct. The group provided and still providing refugees with so much help. This group is recognized now as a one-stop-shop for information for Syrian refugees with various subjects, such as: ways of reporting abuse, accessing services and services provided by UNHCR and partners.

Supporting information is provided through the 36,000 members group, which receive over 200 questions per day. The most frequently asked questions are related to residency permits, resettlement, food, cash assistance, health, education, livelihood. Responses are drafted from official sources and past experience, guided and monitored by UNHCR.

Information on Onward Movements

In Lebanon, a Q & A on onward movement for humanitarian workers was developed to provide directions and guidance for the face to face interviews with refugees, and when counselling them on specific issues associated with travelling outside Lebanon.

This Q&A specifically highlighted: the risks of onward movement, family reunification, onward movement to Europe through Turkey, agreement between European Union and Turkey on Syrian refugees and the re-admission to Lebanon.



Refugee Outreach Volunteer Programme extended in Turkey

A Refugee Outreach Volunteer (ROV) programme was initiated in Turkey in April 2016. This group complements and extends existing UNHCR coverage to refugees in 44 provinces through its presence and its implementing partners (68 community centers/partner offices/outreach teams). The aim of the ROV programme is to strengthen outreach to refugee communities in Turkey. ROV support UNHCR in identifying and assisting vulnerable refugees, informing refugees about their rights and the national services available to them, and to develop and strengthen existing capacities within the community. In doing so, ROVs also build trust and strengthen direct contact and dialogue with refugees.



Internet connection provided to four Community Centers in Jordan

Following a tripartite collaboration among UNHCR Jordan, Zain, and Facebook, internet connection has been provided to four Community Centers in Sahab, Karak, Tafileh and Mafraq governorates in Jordan for five years. The project funded by Zain and Facebook, will help Syrian refugees and people from the local communities to access internet for free.

The community centers also serve as a venue for UNHCR Help Desks for refugees and UNHCR to conduct counselling and registration work.



Successful Skype Technical testing calls have been conducted in Azraq, Jordan

In Jordan's Azraq Camp, successful skype technical testing calls were conducted at the UNHCR / CARE community center. The main objective of the skype call is to provide a zero cost tool with the clearest reception for refugees to communicate with their families. 12 families participated. Syrian refugees were able to call their families in Syria, Lebanon, Germany, Canada, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The testing has proven:

- Cost competitiveness
- Clearer reception
- More members of the family can participate in the call compared to regular calls; and
- Having the option to send written messages, if the recipient didn't answer.

NetHope is donating 20,000 skype vouchers to UNHCR in the Middle East, and elsewhere, to ensure a no cost communication for refugees.

Network infrastructure updates are essential for connectivity, therefore a 16mbps to 32mbps update was executed in Azraq camp, and up to 50mbps update was undertaken in Za'atari camp.



Mobile charging bank station installed in Raba'a Al Sarhan registration center and at Azraq reception area

A “Re-cycling of mobile chargers” campaign was launched in April 2016, in order to find mobile charging solutions in Azraq and Raba'a al Sarhan.

As a result, mobile charging stations were installed in Raba'a Al Sarhan registration center and at Azraq reception area. Installation by CARE in coordination with UNHCR took place at the CARE/UNHCR community center-at village 3 and 6 and likely to provide service to villages 2 and 5, for refugees to utilize to charge mobile phones, tablets, razors, flashlights and even mosque speakers.

These stations can be accessed during the scheduled opening hours of the centers.