



Best Practices for Christian Ministry among Forcibly Displaced People

International Association for Refugees

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This document draws heavily from the document "Best Practices of Refugee Ministry" drafted in November 2001 during the Global Consultation of the Refugee Highway held in Izmir, Turkey, sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance Missions Commission.

This code of Best Practices for Christian Ministry among Forcibly Displaced People is designed to guide the policies and practice of Christian ministries serving refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people (IDPs) and stateless people.

This code promotes helpful practices that assure those serving forcibly displaced people do so with the highest standards possible. It is not intended to establish legal standards or liability.

The code does not necessarily reflect current practice, but encourages aspirations towards excellence. It is recognized that all practices listed in the code will not be applicable to every refugee context.

Glossary of key terms

Refugee

For the purposes of this document, the term "refugee" will be used to refer to the following groups of forcibly displaced people.

The UNHCR definition: "A refugee is someone 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."

Refugees are people who have been uprooted from their homes and forced to seek refuge in a foreign country. This document also includes people fleeing war or other armed conflict in our definition of refugee.

Asylum Seeker

The UNHCR states that "an asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated."

Asylum-seekers are people who request permanent refuge in a foreign country. If their case is approved, they receive refugee status – a status that includes the right to permanent residence and access to public services.

Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

Internally Displaced People (IDPs) have been forced to flee their homes, but not their country. IDPs and refugees are often uprooted by similar causes (e.g. war, persecution, violations of human rights, etc.).

Returnees

Returnees are forcibly displaced people that return to their homes in their country of origin. The majority of refugees plan to 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.

The Refugee Highway

The metaphor of “the refugee highway” (often referred to “the highway”) refers to the well-worn paths that refugees travel in search of safety and peace. See the “Map of the Refugee Highway” to learn more (available at www.IAFR.org/toolbox/map-of-the-highway).

Principle

A belief and commitment that determines ministry strategy and practice.

Key Indicator

An observable outcome that reflects the related principle.

Section 1: Ministry Policy and Practice

Principle 1

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

Key indicators that this is happening

- Those serving refugees are motivated by love for God and for people.
- Those serving refugees extend relationship and not only services.
- Prayer is an integral part of effective refugee ministry.
- Refugees are being encouraged to seek and call upon God.
- Refugees have opportunity to hear the story of Jesus.
- Refugees are being reconciled with both God and humanity.
- Reconciliation is being promoted among all peoples.

Principle 2

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

Key indicators that this is happening

- Refugees feel respected and feel that their concerns are understood.
- Refugees are participating in identifying and pursuing durable solutions to their plight.
- Refugees are becoming increasingly integrated and self-sufficient.
- Refugees are participating in ministering to others.
- The vulnerability of a refugee is not exploited for any objective, including religious purposes.
- Refugees are given access to ongoing training and education.
- Those serving accept hospitality from refugees.

Principle 3

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

Key indicators that this is happening

- Policies and structures are set in place to ensure that assistance is provided to refugees without regard to their race, religion, color, 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

Organizations and churches develop ministry strategies based on sound research and assessment.

Key indicators that this is happening

- Ministries have a good understanding of the host country and refugee context.
- Ministries are aware of other initiatives serving refugees.
- Ministries identify and pursue durable solutions for refugees.
- Ministries have clear short and 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

Organizations engage in effective and honest communication.

Key indicators that this is happening

- Organizations serve with integrity in reporting the outcomes of particular initiatives.
- Organizations are viewed with growing respect by churches, NGOs, government and the public.

Principle 6

Effective refugee ministries are learning entities.

Key indicators that this is happening

- 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.
- Organizations 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 that this is happening

- Advocacy is done in partnership with refugees.
- Advocacy considers what is best for the refugee.
- Christians are becoming increasingly aware of refugee realities.
- Misplaced fears and assumptions related to refugees are being addressed and abandoned.
- Churches and Christians are increasingly recognizing the value of refugee ministries.
- Marginalized groups among refugee populations are receiving special attention.
- Advocacy work does not produce paralysis, but rather provides practical and appropriate ways to respond.

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 that this is happening

- Public advocacy initiatives leave refugees feeling understood, respected and cared for rather than exploited and pitied.
- Accurate and thorough information is used in advocacy work.
- Communication is not sensationalized.
- 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 refugees and other advocacy groups.

Key indicators that this is happening

- Ministries give refugees a voice to advocate for themselves.
- Ministries and refugees are aware of local, national, regional and international networks and resources to assist with advocacy.
- Ministries and refugees are knowledgeable about the appropriate role of international advocacy networks and know how to access them.
- Refugee, Immigration and Human Rights lawyers, along with related Christian legal associations, are participating in advocacy work on behalf of refugees.
- Christians and churches 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 that this is happening

- Local churches are seeking to understand and teach the biblical principles for refugee ministries.
- Local churches increasingly embrace the divine mandate to *love the alien as we love ourselves* (Deut. 19:34).
- Refugees feel invited, welcomed and respected by local churches.
- Local churches are increasingly known as communities that welcome and care for refugees.
- Local churches are equipping others to extend relationship and services to refugees.
- Local churches know where to find ministry consultants, training opportunities and effective resources to assist their refugee-related ministries.
- Church leaders are motivating their communities to pray for those traveling and serving on the Refugee Highway.
- Churches are engaged in ministry at every point along the Refugee Highway (e.g. countries of origin, countries of refuge, countries of transit and countries of resettlement).

Principle 11

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

Key indicators that this is happening

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

Section 4: The Role of Refugees

Principle 12

Refugees are involved as partners in ministry.

Key indicators that this is happening

- Refugees are helping to define, lead and participate in refugee ministries.
- Refugees feel a sense of ownership of ministries created to help meet their needs.
- Local churches and ministries recognize the contributions that refugees make to the life of the community and to the success of their ministries.

Section 5: The Role of Organizations

Principle 13

Agencies are assisting refugee churches in accomplishing their vision and mission.

Key indicators that this is happening

- Refugee churches do not feel isolated or abandoned by the church at large.
- Refugee churches feel that they are valued partners.
- Refugee churches are increasingly empowered to effectively serve fellow refugees.
- Refugee churches are increasingly empowered to effectively reach out to their host country population.
- Refugee churches have sufficient Bibles for their people.
- Refugee churches are developing effective contextualized resources to accomplish their mission.
- Refugee churches have access to Bible and pastoral training opportunities.
- The church-at-large is actively praying for our forcibly displaced brothers and sisters.
- Agencies are helping refugee churches and their ministry initiatives gain credibility among others (UNHCR, NGOs, government authorities, host country churches, etc.).

Principle 14

Agencies are empowering local host country churches in refugee ministry.

Key indicators that this is happening

- Local churches view agencies as a helpful ministry resource.
- Local churches feel they are valued partners.
- Local churches are increasingly empowered to effectively serve refugees.
- Local churches are developing effective contextualized resources to serve refugees.
- Local churches have access to refugee ministry training opportunities.
- Agencies are helping local churches and their ministry initiatives gain access and credibility among others (UNHCR, NGOs, government authorities, refugee churches, etc.).

Principle 15

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

Key indicators that this is happening

- Agencies are networked with other organizations serving refugees in their context.
- Agencies are making their resources available to others.
- Agencies are aware of available resources beyond their own.
- Agencies are building bridges between refugees, local churches, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments and the public.
- Organizations demonstrate respect for the contribution and personal needs of local workers.

Principle 16

Agencies are networking with other ministries along the "highway".

Key indicators that this is happening

- Agencies are participating in local, regional and international refugee ministry networks.
- Organizations are offering their unique (and often specialized) contribution to collaborative refugee ministry initiatives.
- International organizations are helping to connect and build relationships among churches and ministries all along the "highway".
- Organizations are sharing information about their best practices, challenges and learning with others on the "highway".

Principle 17

Agencies seek to resource their ministries from host country economies.

Key indicators that this is happening

- Host country governments recognize agencies as an asset to their own economies.
- Ministries are developed without creating dependencies upon foreign economies.

Section 6: Ministry Context

Principle 18

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

Key indicators that this is happening

- Agencies participate appropriately in the programs of local churches, conferences and other larger groupings of churches, in non-competitive ways.
- Agencies orient workers to the regional, cultural and historical context of their place of service.
- Agencies consult with refugee, local and national expressions of the church during ministry assessment, planning and evaluation.
- Local, regional and/or national Christian coordinating bodies exist to help agencies and churches deliver services to refugees.
- Agency workers participate as healthy members of local churches.

Principle 19

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

Key indicators that this is happening

- Evaluation strategies are in place to assess effectiveness and implement needed improvements.
- Agencies are aware of political, social and environmental issues related to the contexts in which they are serving refugees.
- Organizations are using forecasting as a tool for anticipating potential changes along the "highway".
- Organizations have developed systems to prepare for an influx of refugees, where anticipated.

Principle 20

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

Key indicators that this is happening

- Organizations understand the unique cultural, historical, political and environmental context in which they serve.
- Agencies are aware of potential risks and crisis in specific ministry contexts.
- Organizations act responsibly in light of danger to Christians and other groups in hostile environments.

Section 7: Partnership**Principle 21**

Partnership is necessary among all those involved in refugee ministry.

Key indicators that this is happening

- Agencies and churches are exploring opportunities to collaborate together.
- 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.
- Where conflict exists, reconciliation precedes collaborative ministry.
- National and global efforts directed to a specific refugee movement (or region) are being coordinated.

Principle 22

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

Key indicators that this is happening

- Collaboration involves all stakeholders including refugees, churches, local and international agencies, business communities and government.
- Effective partnerships utilize trained facilitators and/or facilitating teams.
- Effective refugee organizations are creating links between churches and other ministries along the Refugee Highway.
- Organizations demonstrate respect for the contribution and personal needs of local workers.

Principle 23

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

Key indicators that this is happening

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

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