

**REFUGEE CHILDREN:
GUIDELINES ON PROTECTION AND CARE**

Preface.....	5
Contents.....	9
1. Introduction.....	11
Who this book is for and how to use it.....	11
What these guidelines are and what they are not	12
How this book came to be written	13
Advocates for refugee children.....	15
2. Refugee Children and the Rights of the Child	17
Treaties set standards.....	17
Overview of the CRC.....	20
Adolescents are included in the CRC.....	25
Standards of Practice	27
3. Culture ;:	29
Why culture is important.....	29
How the refugee experience affects children.....	30
Restoring cultural normalcy.....	32
4. Psychosocial Well-being.....	37
Why psychosocial well-being is important.....	38
Helping children directly.....	40
Helping children by helping the family.....	43
Helping children by helping the community.....	44
Extended stay in camps.....	46
Suggested activities.....	47
Some children need specialized services	48
5. Health and Nutrition:	53
Water, environmental sanitation, shelter and clothing.....	54
Food and Nutrition.....	57
Health services	62
6. Prevention and Treatment of Disabilities.....	71
Most disabilities can be prevented.....	71
Plan of action.....	73
7. Personal liberty and security.....	79
Personal security.....	81
Abuse and exploitation	84
Military Recruitment.....	85
Detention.....	86
Evacuation	88
8. Legal status	97
Determination of Refugee Status.....	97
Birth Registration, Nationality and Statelessness	103
9. Education.....	109
10. Unaccompanied children.....	121
Plan of action.....	124
Care arrangements	126
Family tracing	128
Long-term solutions	130
11. Durable solutions.....	137

Voluntary repatriation.....	138
Local settlement	144
Resettlement	145
Durable solutions for Unaccompanied Children	146
12. Operational framework.....	151
Annex A - UNHCR Policy on Refugee Children	163
Annex B - Abbreviations.....	177
Index.....	179

Chapter 1:

Introduction

I. Who this book is for and how to use it

This book was written with several groups in mind. It is primarily for UNHCR's staff, but it is also for the staff of its operational partners, whether they be voluntary organizations, UN agencies or Governments. Each chapter takes a subject, such as Legal Status or Psychosocial Well-being, and discusses it from the point of view of children's needs and rights. Generalists working in the field will be able to gain an overview of a subject as well as guidance for addressing specific problems.

A detailed Index is intended to help field workers find quick guidance on specific problems without having to read entire chapters. At the end of each main chapter, there is a check-list. It contains the essence of the guidelines in the chapter and can be used as a quick means of evaluating whether a field office has taken appropriate measures to ensure that the protection needs of children are met and that appropriate care is provided. There is a <<More Reading>> section at the end of each chapter for those who want additional information.

Planners and other specialists, both in the field and at headquarters, should also find the book useful because the Guidelines emphasize links - links between children, their family and their community, and links between different aspects of a child's life, such as education and psychosocial well-being. By keeping these connections in mind we can increase the benefits of our work and reduce unintended consequences. In addition, setting priorities involves focusing more on one aspect than on another, and this requires keeping a broader picture - all the links - in mind.

Since most of UNHCR's work is done through operational partners, the Guidelines will assist in unifying all our efforts towards a common goal: the protection and care of refugee children.

This book was also written with Governments in mind. These Guidelines will help countries of origin and countries of asylum to understand what UNHCR is trying to do for refugee children and why, and will therefore serve as a solid basis for cooperation. Furthermore, the Guidelines will be a starting point for dialogue with the UNHCR Executive Committee and donor States on refugee children: What are the problems in implementing the Guidelines? What else needs to be done? By whom? How?

II. What these guidelines are and what they are not

This book is not a practice manual. Unlike the manual you may get when you buy a car, this book will not tell you how to fix something when it is broken or how to keep it from getting broken; it will not tell you, <<In situation X, you must do Y.>>

By contrast, guidelines help you solve problems by pointing out things that are important for you to keep in mind. In using guidelines you must always rely on your knowledge of the local situation, your skills, and your common sense to get the job done. For example, in the chapter on Psychosocial Well-being we say, <<The single best way to promote the well-being of children is to support their family,>> and then as one of the guidelines on how to support families there is a paragraph on extra help to single-parent families. We explain why this is important. These Guidelines do not give instructions on how to set up and run a programme to support single parents, but we want every reader of this book to know why such support may be important.

Once you have this information, then we can ask you to use your knowledge of the local situation, your skills and your own best judgment to take whatever action you can to support it.

A qualification needs to be made. Guidelines are not mere suggestions that can be ignored when it is not convenient to follow them. Guidelines are tools for reaching policy objectives, so there must be good reasons for not following them in a specific situation. Sometimes you will find a statement that is more strongly worded than other guidelines. In such cases, that particular guideline is a set standard of practice that must be followed, except under the most extraordinary circumstances.

Most of the Guidelines are also <<universal>>; they apply in an emergency situation as well as in on-going refugee assistance programmes, both in countries of asylum and in countries of return. For example, the importance of family tracing and reunification for an unaccompanied child does not cease the moment that child crosses the border to repatriate.

III. How this book came to be written

This book of Guidelines has its ancestors. On one side of the family tree is the human rights branch, which includes the most recent forebear, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the other side is the UNHCR branch. In 1987, the Executive Committee requested a set of guidelines (Conclusion No. 47.), and the 1988 <<Guidelines on Refugee Children>> was published in the following year. In 1991, the Guidelines were evaluated in two reports, one by the International Save the Children Alliance in cooperation with UNHCR, and the other by the U.S. Bureau for Refugee Programmes. In 1993, the <<UNHCR Policy on Refugee Children>> (reprinted in Annex A) was presented to and welcomed by the Executive Committee.

In preparation for a revision of the Guidelines, UNHCR field offices were sent a questionnaire asking for their suggestions. These suggestions served as a basis for writing a first draft, and also for going back to some of the field offices to ask for more details. For example, staff members working in repatriation situations on both sides of the border generously shared their experience, thus providing a basis for guidelines on what to keep in mind concerning the special needs of children in preparing for repatriation and reintegration. That same year more than 2,500 copies of a draft revision of the Guidelines were sent to UNHCR staff and to <<extended family and friends>> (Governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and experts), along with a questionnaire.

Non-governmental organizations, UN agencies and individuals working with refugee children, in addition to UNHCR staff in the field and at Headquarters, have generously shared their experience and given their advice and comments to the draft. These suggestions were reconciled and incorporated to the extent possible into the final text.

The revised 1994 Guidelines you are now holding are the result of combining the concept of <<children's rights>> with UNHCR's ongoing efforts to protect and assist refugee children.

IV Advocates for refugee children

Refugee children should not become only <<the responsibility of the Senior Programme Officer or the Senior Protection Officer.>> Education and other services for children should not be seen as <<somebody else's>> programme. We want everyone to be advocates for all refugees, and we hope that these Guidelines will give each one of you enough information, and encouragement, to be good advocates for the rights of refugee children.

Chapter 2:

Refugee Children and the Rights of the Child

Standards set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child

"In all actions concerning children ... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (art. 3).

A State must ensure the rights "of each child within (its) jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind" (art. 2).

I. Treaties set standards

International treaties are important to refugee children because they set standards. When a State ratifies a treaty, the Government of the State promises to the international community that it will conduct itself according to the standards in the treaty

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol (Relating to the Status of Refugees) set standards that apply to children in the same way as to adults: (1) a child who has a "well-founded fear of being persecuted" for one of the stated reasons is a "refugee", (2) a child who holds refugee status cannot be forced to return to the country of origin (the principle of non-refoulement), and (3) no distinction is made between children and adults in social welfare and legal rights. One article in the Convention sets standards which are of special importance to children: refugees must receive the "same treatment" as nationals in primary education, and treatment at least as favorable as that given to non-refugee aliens in secondary education (art. 22).

The 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention (Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa) broadened the definition of "refugee" to include persons in Africa who flee from war and other events that seriously disrupt public order. The OAU Convention makes no distinction between children and adults. The 1984 Cartagena Declaration also expanded the concept of refugee, and although the standard is not legally binding, States in Latin America do apply it.

The treaty which sets the most standards concerning children is the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). While the CRC is not a refugee treaty, refugee children are covered because all CRC rights are to be granted to all persons under 18 years of age (art. 1) without discrimination of any kind (art. 2).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is important to refugee children because it sets comprehensive standards. Virtually every aspect of a child's life is covered, from health and education to social and political rights. Some of the standards are specific, for example the articles on juvenile justice (arts. 37 and 40), adoption (art. 21) and family rights (arts. 5, 9 and 14.2). Some social welfare rights are expressly qualified by the State's financial capability Rights to health (art. 24), education (art. 28), and to an adequate standard of living (art. 27) are called "progressive rights" because they increase along with the State's economic development. However, these social welfare rights are not just principles or abstract goals. Because they are "rights," the prohibition against discrimination (art. 2) means that whatever benefits a State gives to the children who are its citizens, it must give to all children, including those who are refugees on its territory

The Convention on the Rights of the Child has gained importance to refugee children because of the near- universal ratification of the treaty (155 State parties by March 1994). The CRC standards have been agreed to by countries in every region of the world, countries of every population and geographical size and stage of economic development, and representing every type of political system and religious tradition. Because the standards are universal, the CRC can be used as a powerful tool for advocacy: a country cannot claim its uniqueness as an excuse for not living up to universal standards.

The widespread ratification of the CRC is important for other reasons as well. When a State is a party to the CRC but not to any refugee treaty, then the CRC may be used as the primary basis for protecting refugee children. Even when a State has not ratified the CRC, UNHCR still advocates its observance because its standards are universal.

UNHCR also applies the CRC to its own work by using the rights as guiding principles. The UNHCR Policy on Refugee Children states, "as a United Nations convention, (the CRC) constitutes a normative frame of reference for UNHCR's action" (para. 17). One of the guiding principles in the Policy states, "In all actions taken concerning refugee children, the human rights of the child, in particular his or her best interests, are to be given primary consideration" (para. 26 (a)). (The Policy is reprinted in Annex A). At the beginning of each chapter of these Guidelines, the rights in the CRC are stated as UNHCR's standards.

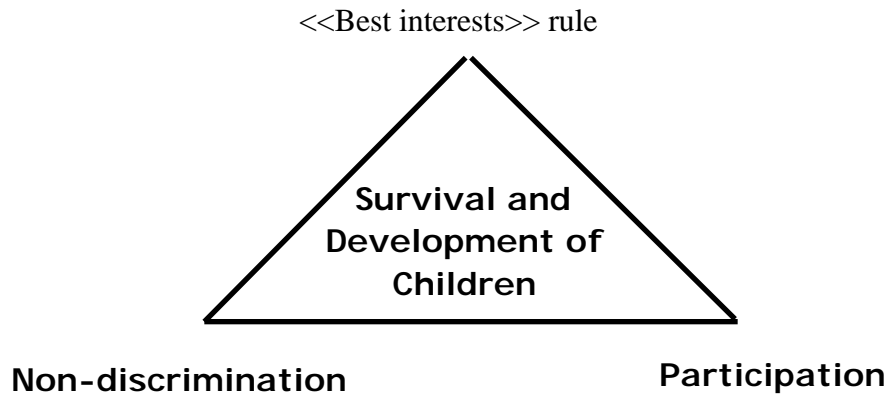
For the well-being of refugee children, UNHCR advocates the observance of CRC standards by all States, international agencies and non-governmental organizations.

In 1990, the World Summit for Children adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action. The goals of the World Summit set important standards to work towards in health and education. As follow up, States are encouraged to develop national plans of action, which should include refugee children under the category of "children in especially difficult circumstances." Although the Declaration and Plan are not treaty standards, their widespread acceptance has been a major step forward.

II. Overview of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The 'Triangle of Rights' The CRC's major innovation is that it gives rights to children. We are used to thinking of children as having needs that should be met, rather than as having legal rights. Because of the CRC, children now have internationally recognized human rights.

Although the rights in the CRC cover almost every aspect of a child's life, there are three rights that are so fundamental that they can be thought of as underlying the entire CRC: the "best interests" rule, non-discrimination, and the right to participate. These three rights are so important and so interrelated that it is helpful to think of them as a "triangle of rights". The three rights of the triangle reinforce each other to reach the objective: "the survival and development" of children (art. 6).



The Triangle of Rights

"Best interests" rule The "best interests" rule has two main applications: government policy-making and decisions made about children on an individual basis.

- **Policy decisions** Art. 3 requires that, "In all actions concerning children" the State shall make "the best interests of the child a primary consideration." This article requires States to analyze how each course of action may affect children. Because the interests of children are not always identical to adults' interests, and can at times even conflict, the State must carefully separate out the various interests at stake. The government does not have to take the course of action that is best for children, but if any conflicts are identified, the State must make the "best interests" of children "a primary consideration." This rule applies in budget allocations, in the making of laws, and in the administration of the government.
- **Individual children** When a decision is being made about an individual child, then the child's best interests must be, at a minimum, "a primary consideration." There are some situations where the child's welfare gets higher consideration. For example, in a case of abuse or neglect, a child can be separated from parents if it "is necessary for the best interests of the child" (art. 7). In an adoption case, the "best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration" (art. 21). In these cases, how a course of action might affect the child must be looked at closely, which is a requirement similar to that in policy decisions. What can be different in individual cases is that under some CRC articles a child's welfare must be given priority over an adult's.

For example, making a long term plan for an unaccompanied minor requires a decision about a child's best interests. A child might be an orphan living in a refugee camp, with grandparents in the country of origin, an uncle in a second country of asylum, and with an unrelated family in another country that would like to adopt the child. In deciding what is best for the child many factors would have to be considered, including "the desirability of continuity" of culture and language (art. 20), the preservation of family and nationality (art. 8), and the child's own desires, which must be considered according to the child's "age and maturity" (art. 12). The objective is to allow the child to "grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" (Preamble). The decision about a child's best interests can often be difficult; no single answer may be obviously and indisputably correct. (In the example, not enough "facts" were given to make a decision. More information would be needed: does the child have the legal status of "refugee"? How old is the child? What are the conditions in the home country? Are the grandparents able to raise the child? And so on).

The best interests rule underlies the CRC; each article is a variation on the theme of the best interests of children.

Non-discrimination The non-discrimination article, art. 2, requires States to "respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's ... national, ethnic or social origin ... or other status". In other words, every child within a State's jurisdiction holds all CRC rights without regard to citizenship, immigration status or any other status. Refugee children, asylum seekers, and rejected asylum seekers are entitled to all the rights of the CRC.

Participation Participation is a theme that runs throughout the CRC. Art. 12 provides that: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." In one way or another, nearly every article concerns some aspect of children's participation in society

There are many forms of participation. For example, there is social participation in family (arts. 7.1, 10) and community life (arts. 15, 17), and participation of those with special needs, such as disabled children (art. 23).

The participation of children in decision-making helps adults make better choices because they are better informed of the thoughts, feelings and needs of the children. But participation also meets a developmental need. It is through participation that children learn decision-making skills and gain the confidence to use those skills wisely.

As children age and mature they have greater participation in decision-making. Three forms of participation in decision making are:

- **Information input** When primary school children draw pictures, the activity can be just recreation and self-expression. But it can also be participation, provided that adults use the pictures as a source of information about the children's thoughts and feelings in their decision making.
- **Dialogue** Children have opinions and can discuss them with adults. When adults give the opinions "due weight", according to the child's age and maturity, then the children are participating in the decision-making process, according to the CRC.
- **Decision-making** At an older age, young people can make some of their own decisions. For example, under national law adolescents may have the right to get married or to join the army. Even though these choices are usually subject to the approval of parents, the right of adolescents to decide what is in their own best interests shows that participation is a continuum: with an increase in age and maturity comes an increase in control over one's life.

The CRC emphasizes relationships Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child gives individual rights to children, the CRC also emphasizes relationships. The well-being of children and the enjoyment of their rights are dependent upon their families and their community. The CRC recognizes that the family is "the fundamental group of society" and places children's rights in the context of parental rights and duties (arts. 5, 14, 18, etc.). The importance of the community is constantly recognized (arts. 5, 13, 14, 15, 20, 29, 30).

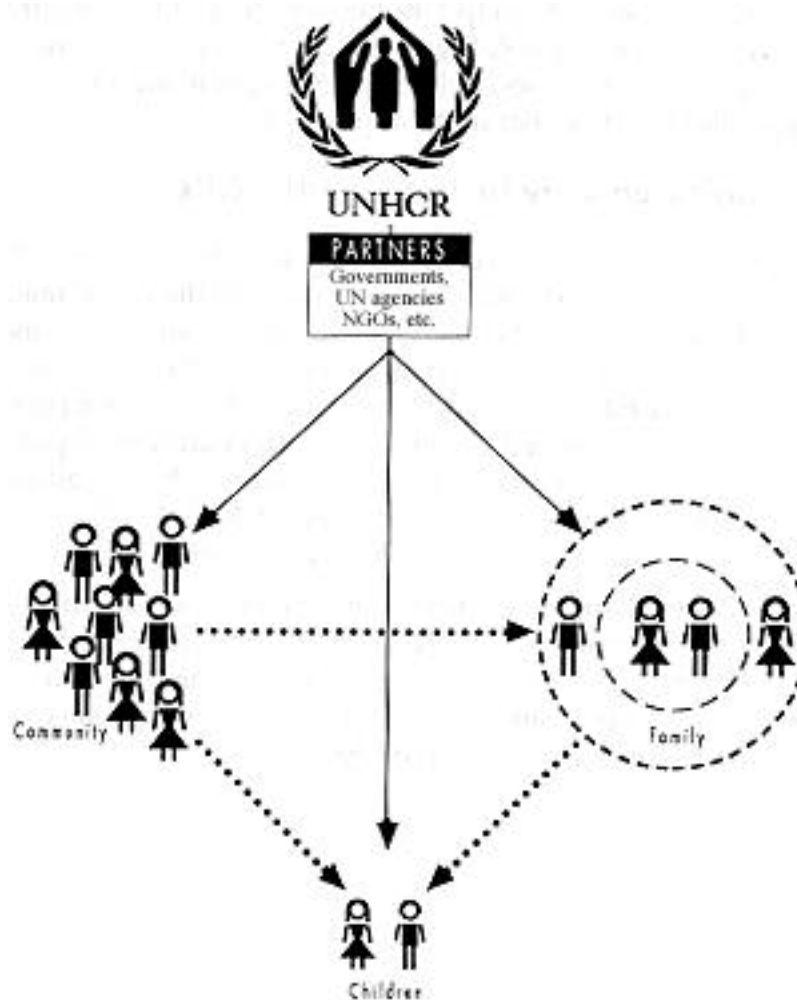
Throughout these Guidelines, we stress that one of the best ways to help refugee children is to help their families, and one of the best ways to help families is to help the community. UNHCR's Policy on Refugee Children conveys the same message. UNHCR's approach to the protection and care of refugee children is illustrated, on page 26.

III. Adolescents are included in the CRC

The CRC defines "child" as anyone "below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (art. 1). The CRC definition may cause some confusion because it equates child with "minor". The dictionary definition of "child", on the other hand, is a person who has not yet reached puberty, or sexual maturity. A person who is no longer a child but not yet an adult is an adolescent, or a young man or young woman. (UNHCR's Policy on Refugee Children uses the CRC definition (para. 3)).

In advocating "children's rights" in societies where adolescents are performing adult roles of marriage, child-rearing, work or combat, for example, you should be prepared to explain why all persons under 18 should receive the special treatment given them under the CRC.

UNHCR's approach to protect and assist refugee children



The best way to help refugee children is to help their families, and one of the best ways to help families is to help the community. The figure illustrates how UNHCR, often through operational partners in some cases protect and assist refugee children directly. More often programmes are designed to help the family assist and protect their children and to assist the community in supporting the family and thereby protecting the child.

One reason why 18 is the dividing line is because that is the widely accepted age of legal majority, that is, the age a person assumes the legal rights of adults. But there is a more practical reason why adolescents are included under the CRC. Although adolescents may have adult bodies and perform many adult roles, generally speaking they have not fully developed the emotional maturity and judgment, nor achieved the social status, of adults that come with life experience. In refugee situations, adolescents do need the "special care and assistance" given them by the CRC: they are still developing their identities and learning essential skills. When the refugee situation takes away the structure they need, it can be more difficult for them to adjust than for adults. Their physical maturity but lack of full adult capabilities and status also make them possible targets of exploitation, such as in sexual abuse and military recruitment.

In advocating for adolescents it may at times be more useful to focus on their needs in a given situation, rather than the CRC's legal language of "rights of the child," which might be misunderstood unless carefully explained.

IV Standards of practice

All UNHCR staff are encouraged to use the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all aspects of their work, to use the language of children's "rights," and to stress the "triangle of rights" - the "best interests" rule, non-discrimination, and participation.

It is good practice to be familiar with the CRC, to know whether the country you are working in has ratified the Convention and whether it has made any reservations, to know whether it has been translated into the languages of that country, and to have ready access to a copy of the Convention. Copies can be requested from Headquarters.

It is important that you not base your advocacy for CRC standards only on the fact that they are legal rights. Each right has been placed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child because it helps answer a developmental need of children. Successful advocacy reaches out to people's better nature - their natural desire to protect children and their sense of justice - and offers practical solutions to problems. The CRC is not just a legal treaty, it is a moral statement and a practical guide to the welfare of children.

Chapter 3:

Culture

Standards set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child

"The importance of the traditional and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child" must be taken into account (Preamble).

Every child who belongs to an "ethnic, religious or linguistic" minority or indigenous group has "the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or use his or her own language" (art. 30).

I. Why culture is important

The conservation of culture and the right to take part in a cultural life are recognized as human rights. Culture provides children with identity and continuity. By learning the values and traditions of their culture, children learn how to fit into their family, community and the larger society. Each society has a unique body of accumulated knowledge, which is reflected in its social and religious beliefs, and ways of interpreting and explaining the world around them.

Culture determines the values held by a social group as well as the rules and controls which ensure that such values are upheld. This includes a society's approach to the raising of its children. Each social group has its particular rules concerning who takes care of children, what they are taught at which age, what is expected of children, how they should be disciplined, and what should be done when things go wrong, such as when children are abused or neglected or their parents are unable to take care of them.

Culture is not static, but is constantly developing and adapting to change. To remain healthy, however, a society must incorporate change gradually to ensure that the various aspects of its culture evolve in a coherent and consistent manner.

A refugee movement can disrupt nearly every aspect of a culture. The social upheaval caused by the involuntary movement of individuals, families and communities, can dramatically affect the coherence of their culture. Normal social rules, values and controls begin to break down when the social group which provides the framework for their application disintegrates.

II. How the refugee experience affects children

The consequences of this disruption for children, in particular, can be extremely serious. When a society's guiding and regulating mechanisms are lost, individuals find themselves deprived of their normal social, economic and cultural environment. As a consequence, human relationships often suffer. Parental distress and anxiety can seriously disrupt the normal emotional development of their children.

Moreover, children often lose their role models in a refugee situation. Under normal circumstances, parents provide the primary role model for their children, contributing significantly to the development of their identities and to their acquisition of skills and values. Separation from one or other parent, very often the father in circumstances of flight, can deprive children of an important role model. Even when both refugee parents are present, their potential for continuing to provide role models for their children is likely to be hampered by the loss of their normal livelihood and pattern of living. (See also Chapter 4: Psychosocial Well-being).

Children's roles also change in refugee situations. If one parent is missing, a child may have to take on adult responsibilities. When a mother has to take over a missing father's productive tasks outside the home, for example, an older daughter may have to substitute for the mother in caring for younger children. As a result, the daughter's developmental needs might be neglected because of overwork, or lack of opportunities for play or to attend school.

The continuity of experience required for normal development may be further undermined for refugee children when they come into contact with different cultures. In many refugee situations, the language, religion and customs of the local population in the country of asylum, as well as that of officials and aid workers may be quite different from those of the refugee community. In such cross-cultural situations, in particular in the context of resettlement, children frequently "lose" their culture much more quickly than adults.

There is a natural tendency for children to try to adapt and conform to a new environment. The mother-tongue is often the first thing to be lost, and with it a vital part of the children's identity. The longer-term impact of such changes will, of course, depend on whether the child and family are temporarily in a country of asylum pending repatriation or are permanently resettled. In either situation, however, a serious consequence is likely to be a growing alienation between child and parent, particularly if the parent is finding difficulty in adjusting to the changed condition and is economically inactive.

III. Restoring cultural normalcy

The social and mental well-being of all refugees, but particularly of refugee children, can be most effectively assured by the quick re-establishment of normal community life. Voluntary return to the country of origin is likely to be the easiest way to achieve this. In many refugee situations, however, children and adults alike are obliged to stay for long periods of time in temporary asylum while for others the only solution is resettlement in a third country.

Resettlement is dealt with elsewhere in the guidelines, so this section focuses on the important issue of restoring the cultural normalcy of a refugee population remaining for extended periods of time in a country of asylum. The extent to which cultural normalcy can be restored will depend principally on the degree of fragmentation of the refugee population and on the willingness of the host government to permit refugees to determine their own activities. The following are ways in which the aid worker can assist refugees in re-building a healthy cultural life.

Identifying these factors in their particular context is essential for determining programme priorities and anticipating how these factors can affect the outcome of your plans.

Community Development Community development is an extremely important mechanism for regenerating normal social organization.

- ***Traditional leadership*** A refugee population may already include part, if not all, of its traditional leadership. The aid worker can help to strengthen and reinforce traditional leaders by consulting and working through them. Preservation of the refugees' traditional form of social organization enhances not only their well-being but also the effectiveness of assistance efforts.
- ***New leaders*** Where a fragmented refugee population lacks traditional leaders, it may be necessary to assist the community in identifying new ones. In this situation it is of critical importance to ensure that the non-traditional leaders given support and credibility by the aid worker have the best interests of their community at heart rather than their own self interest.

- ***Living together*** Community re-building or development can be achieved most easily if refugees are able to live in groupings which approximate those in the country of origin. This process can be helped considerably by promoting living arrangements whereby extended families and members of the same village of origin are able to settle close together. Serious problems have arisen in the past by filling up camps or settlement sites on a "first come, first served" basis. On the one hand this is likely to impede the reforming of coherent social groups, and on the other hand it can result in the inappropriate mixing of distinct tribal groups or clans, sometimes with devastating consequences.
- ***People-Oriented Planning*** To restore cultural normalcy, the aid worker will have to know the background of the refugees. "The Framework for People-Oriented Planning in Refugee Situations, Taking Account of Women, Men and Children" provides a framework for analyzing who the refugees are (demographic profile) and determining factors shaping the context within which refugees conduct their daily lives. These broad interrelated factors may include, inter alia: community norms, social hierarchy, family and community power structures including mechanisms for protection especially for women refugees and for child refugees; economic activity including division of labour according to gender; religious beliefs and practices; demographic considerations; national attitudes towards refugees in both the country of origin and the receiving country; and attitudes of refugees to development/ assistance workers.

Refugee Participation Refugee participation - or permitting refugees to take back control of their own lives - is fundamental to developing, or re-building, a healthy community. Through participation, refugees can regain influence and control over their lives which, in turn, will have a positive impact on the raising of self-esteem. Consulting refugees on matters such as house construction and layout, food preferences, or requirements to regenerate religious activities, can make a critical difference in the restoration of cultural normalcy.

There are many ways in which UNHCR and its implementing partners can seek and encourage refugee participation: through formal representation by traditional or elected leaders; through refugee committees; through informal contacts between refugees and staff, or through the employment of refugees, especially in decision-making positions. In many traditional communities where the leadership tends to be exclusively male, special efforts will be needed to encourage the participation of refugee women, to ensure that all aspects of community life are appropriately addressed.

- ***Language*** Maintenance of the mother tongue is a critical factor in retaining identity. Refugee children should be encouraged to use and preserve their own language. If refugee children attend national schools in the country of asylum, and if the language of instruction is different from the mother tongue, special provision may be necessary to enable them to retain, and become literate in, their mother tongue.
- ***Religion and Ritual*** A crucial element in regaining cultural normalcy is the renewed practice of religious and ritual activities. The disruption of such practices, so common during a refugee movement, can seriously interfere with the opportunities of refugee children to learn about the physical manifestations of their culture. Religious festivals and rites of passage such as birth, transition into adulthood, marriage and death are extremely important in unifying a community and in conferring identity on its individual members. The importance of such activities to community mental health should not be underestimated. For example, the provision of extra food for communal meals, or other material assistance for funerals (burial cloths, coffins, firewood, etc.) can give vital emotional support and sustain culture through a crisis.
- ***Arts and Recreation*** Traditional music, dance and other arts are important representations of culture and permit the communication of its values from one generation to the next. In a

refugee situation, it is important to encourage the continued practice and training in such traditional skills as well as the celebration of traditional events and festivals. Such activities play an important role in restoring and maintaining social cohesion. Sports, games and other recreational activities also have an important part to play in building up community spirit as well as providing entertainment and relieving stress.

- ***Avoiding Coercive Practices*** The instability and uncertainty which characterizes many refugee populations makes them extremely vulnerable to coercion by agencies and individuals wishing to impose alien religious beliefs. It is extremely important, in choosing operational partners, to make every effort to ascertain how an agency intends to support the culture and religion of the refugee community.

Check-list

- Are cultural, religious and social preferences of refugee families respected in assistance programmes?
- Are participatory strategies being implemented in the planning and implementation of refugee services?
- Are refugees able to practice their religion and do they have the facilities to do so?
- Do living arrangements enhance and protect cultural, social and religious values?
- Is the children's native language used and taught to the children?
- Is the economic self-sufficiency of refugee families being promoted as a means of enabling them to live the life they prefer?
- Are sports events and recreational activities promoted?
- Is adaptation to the cultural and social values of the host country and community being promoted?
- Are coercive religious and cultural practices by assistance agencies monitored and countered?

More Reading

Anderson, Mary B., Ann M. Howarth (Brazeau) and Catherine Overholt. 1992. A Framework for People-Oriented Planning in Refugee Situations Taking Account of Women, Men and Children. Geneva: UNHCR.