

This document forms part of the 4th edition of the UNHCR Emergency Handbook and was generated from the digital Emergency Handbook system.

PPRE contingency planning (refugee situations)

Key points

- The contingency plan is not an end in itself. It captures planning decisions for an emergency response that all partners have agreed.
- UNHCR should always lead refugee contingency planning, in support of the host Government, and in collaboration with UN and NGO partners.
- A good contingency plan is easily converted into a response plan.

1. Overview

Contingency planning is an inter-agency process, in anticipation of potential crises, of developing strategies, practical arrangements and procedures, and identifying additional resources needed, to address the humanitarian needs of those adversely affected by crises. Inter-agency contingency planning for refugee situations is (co-)led by UNHCR with the host Government. Contingency planning for non-refugee emergencies is led by the RC and/or HC and is not covered by this entry.

The inter-agency refugee contingency planning approach described here forms part of the Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE). It has been designed in conjunction with standardised preparedness actions. A UNHR-led inter-agency contingency plan (CP) for a refugee situation is meant to be light and achievable within 2-4 weeks. The approach includes the attached CP templates for country and region, as well as a comprehensive toolkit.

2. When and for what purpose

Contingency planning for refugee situations forms part of Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs). APAs and a contingency plan should be considered when the risk of a refugee emergency is 'medium'; they are mandatory when the risk is 'high'.

When a refugee emergency is already imminent, ie highly likely, operations should prepare an inter-agency response plan, in accordance with the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM). It may also be appropriate to update a CP during an emergency, to address the effects of a further drastic

deterioration, for example, or the emergence of a new and destabilising factor.

An inter-agency refugee contingency planning process enables an operation to develop a scenario-based plan agreed by all partners. This plan agrees a scenario, a response strategy, coordination arrangements, resource needs, and possible gaps. A CP can swiftly be transformed into a Refugee Response Plan, launched in the first days of a refugee emergency, which may also serve as a funding appeal.



3. Summary of guidance and/or options

- Be practical. Contingency planning should be practical. It should be based on realistic parameters. Abstract plans are likely to fail and may create a false sense of security.
- Be flexible. Contingency planning starts with a scenario that should be sufficiently developed to allow for specific planning and preparedness. A scenario should not be over-detailed. Plans should be flexible, recognizing that events will probably not match precisely the assumptions of the scenario.
- Keep it simple. Contingency planning should be as simple as possible to do. It should not be a complex task for specialists only; all staff and partners should be able to participate. A realistic plan is one that can be implemented when needed.
- Give attention to process. Consult and include. Though written plans are important, a contingency plan based on a poor process is likely to be ineffective, left on the shelf or in the filing cabinet.

The following elements characterize a good CP. It:

- Reflects the agreed positions of key partners (Government, UN agencies, key NGOs), on the scenario, the response strategy, and preparedness actions.

- Includes an adequate, context-specific and realistic protection strategy which can readily be used as the basis of an operations' plan.
- Includes specific estimates of refugee numbers, characteristics, and likely crossing points, but does not contain details that are redundant, or might lengthen or disrupt the overall process.
- Results in specific actions that increase emergency response readiness.
- Is concise, and focuses on a context-specific response strategy, coordination arrangements, and key strategic decisions.
- Is understood by partners to reflect the key operational decisions and commitments they have made during the planning process.
- Includes a realistic and time specific logistics and procurement plan for relief items and cash-based interventions (vouchers, transfer mechanisms, etc., if appropriate). The plan covers procurement from local sources, and items that need to be supplied from abroad (global stockpiles, global suppliers, UNHCR or partners, etc.).
- Identifies first responders in all sectors. All participating partners should have made firm commitments. If no suitable first responder partner can be identified, UNHCR is the first responder and field offices must plan accordingly.
- Includes a budget that covers the resource needs for the first three months of operations, including the needs of all partners involved.

The response strategy of the contingency plan

- Refugee protection should be at the core of the response, starting with planning, advocating and facilitating an open asylum space. The following points should be considered and addressed in the overall response strategy:
 - Access to territory
 - Border monitoring
 - Status determination
 - Registration /documentation
 - Freedom of movement
 - Detention issues
 - Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) sensitive approach in all assistance sectors
 - Participatory assessment
 - Community mobilization strategies
 - Strategy for maintaining family unity
 - Child Protection
 - Civilian character of asylum
 - Monitoring, prevention and response to Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)

- Identifying and assisting persons with specific needs (PWSN)
- The CP should help to make the national authorities comfortable with allowing refugees to enter their territory, by offering the support of UN and NGOs to assist in managing the influx. As far as possible and appropriate, the response strategy should build on the existing capacity of national authorities, national systems and host communities to provide assistance services.
- If there is an ongoing refugee operation in the country, the strategy should consider adjusting these existing protection and assistance systems, allowing the operation to make the "switch" to faster-paced emergency systems. For example, switching from individual registration to household registration etc.
- The protection response strategy must include a clear vision for the rapid implementation of an achievable and appropriate emergency refugee registration system.
- The refugee shelter and settlement strategy is another important element of the protection response strategy. Decisions in this regard are particularly hard to reverse. Camps are to be considered as the last resort option. The default strategy should first look at alternatives to camps. Cultural and socio-economic factors, such as the livelihood patterns of the refugees (for example: cattle herders), should be considered.
- The assistance strategies for non-camp and camp settings differ fundamentally. In some contexts, the response strategy may need to be two-pronged.
- Depending on the existing capacities of the host country (such as available of shelter options within the host community) and the pace of the influx, camps may be the only feasible operational option. In such cases appropriate specific camp locations need to be identified with the host government as part of the response strategy. The response strategy should be based on field assessments of locations for camps. Before deciding on a camp location, it must be determined if the site is fit for purpose and sustainable.

4. How to implement this at field level?

UNHCR will support Governments to agree on a comprehensive refugee CP with key stakeholders. Partnership is central to a successful contingency planning process. From the outset, UNHCR planning should involve the host Government, and UN and NGO partners in the country.

The UNHCR Representative at country level and the UNHCR HQ Regional Bureau are jointly responsible for initiating and leading timely inter-agency contingency planning. The Representative maintains a strong and constructive relationship with the Resident Coordinator and/or Humanitarian Coordinator, who should be kept informed of actions taken to prepare for a possible refugee influx.

At country level

Country level contingency planning is initiated by the UNHCR Representative, the regional office, or the UNHCR HQ Regional Bureau, depending on the situation.

1. Initiate contingency planning (or update the existing plan).
2. Consult the Government on scenarios and assess national capacity to respond.

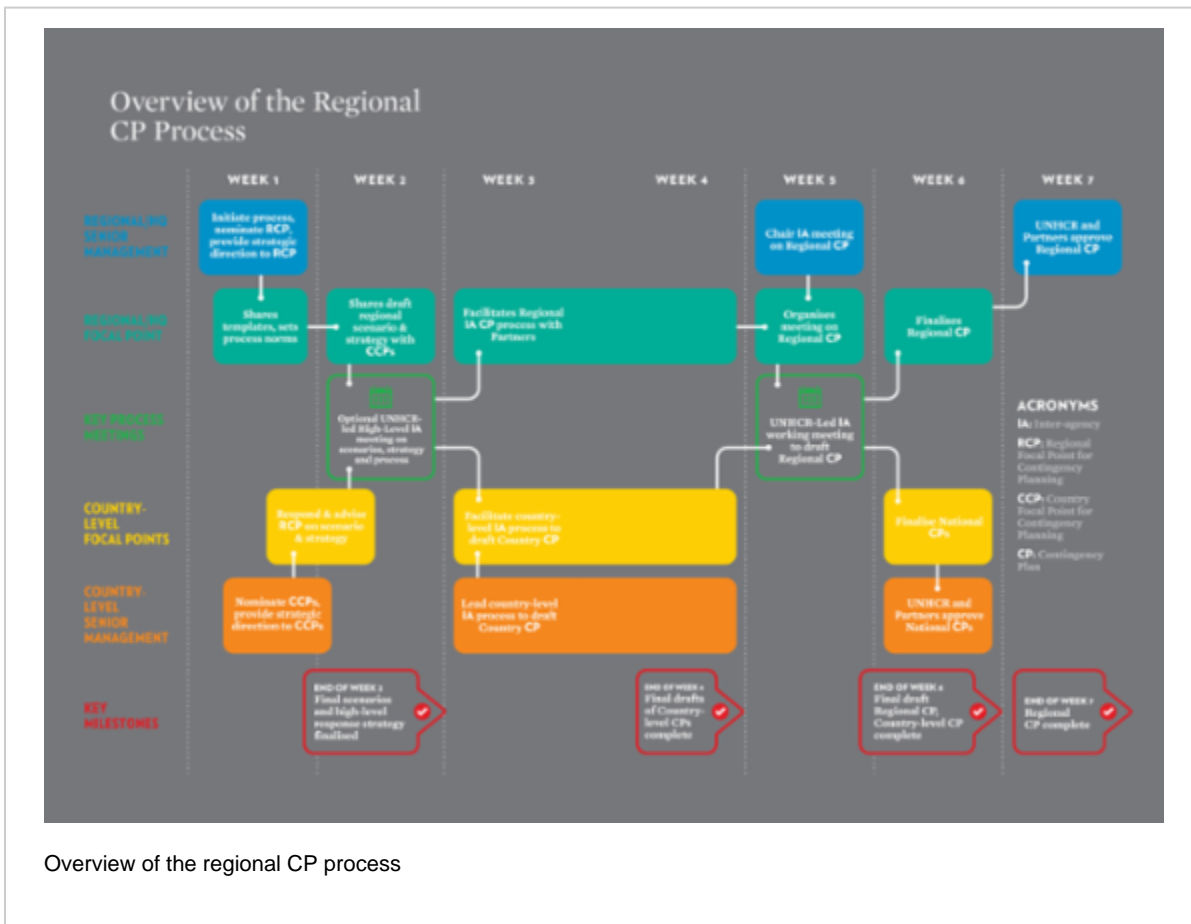
3. Nominate a country level focal point; launch a inter-agency task force with UN and NGO participation, co-led by UNHCR with the government. (Keep the RC/HC and UNCT/HCT informed throughout the process.)
4. Develop planning scenarios, in consultation with UNHCR and partners in the country of origin, and enter the chosen planning scenario in the national CP template.
5. Develop a coordination structure and draft a context specific response strategy. (See sections 3 and 4.1 of the CP template.)
6. Discuss and agree a coordination structure and response strategy in the inter-agency task force.
7. Develop sectoral response strategies. (Request input from sector-specific coordination groups if they are already in place.)
8. Circulate the complete draft CP, for comment, to key Government, UN and NGO partners.
9. Cost the CP (3 months of operations) in consultation with UN and NGO partners.
10. Finalize the CP, and obtain approval of it. If it is part of a regional CP, the final version must be shared with the regional focal point.
11. Next steps:
 - Identify specific trigger(s) for activating the CP.
 - Establish a timeframe for reviewing it.

At regional level

Regional contingency plans for an emergency usually involve several countries. Planning is initiated by the UNHCR HQ Regional Bureau, a regional refugee coordinator, or the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations), depending on the situation.

1. Initiate contingency planning (or update the existing plan).
2. Identify focal points: a regional focal point, and country level focal points for each country involved.
3. Draft a regional planning scenario in consultation with UNHCR and partners in the country of origin, and enter it in the regional CP template.
4. Draft regional strategic objectives and a regional response strategy and enter them in the regional CP template.
5. Circulate the Regional Planning Scenario and Strategy with all affected country focal points for comments, together with the Template for the Country Contingency plan; Objective: Coherent regional planning across countries in the same format.
6. Finalize the planning scenario and strategy and send it to all affected countries.
7. Complete country CPs . Ensure they are aligned with the agreed regional scenario.
8. Finalize the regional CP, on the basis of the completed country CPs and regional analysis.
9. Regional Contingency Planning Meeting with key UN and and NGO partners; objective: Review of final country CPs, and drafting / adoption of the regional CP.
10. Finalize the regional CP and share it with all partners concerned.

11. Establish a timeframe for reviewing the regional CP.



5. Links

Choularton, R., Contingency planning and humanitarian action: a review of practice, Humanitarian Practice Network Paper

Need help?

CONTACT UNHCR HQ, Division for Emergency Security and Supply (DESS), at: hqemhand@unhcr.org

Annexes

- UNHCR CP template, country level, with annotations (English), 2013
- UNHCR CP template, country level , with annotations (French), 2013
- UNHCR CP template, regional level, with annotations (English), 2013
- UNHCR CP template, regional level, with annotations (French), 2013

- Automatic Meetings Calendar
- Contact List
- Budget Template (UNHCR only)
- Budget Template (inter-agency, country level)
- Budget Template (inter-agency, regional level)
- Site planning and coordination matrix
- UNHCR Regional Contingency Planning Overview Matrix, 2013
- SOP Template
- UNHCR PPRE Training Session 2 (Emergency Risk and Planning Scenario)
- UNHCR PPRE training, Session 3, Contingency Planning Process, 2013
- UNHCR PPRE print publication 2014

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