

GUIDANCE NOTE ON PROTECTION IN EVACUATION CENTRES PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

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1. BACKGROUND

Experiences from different countries in the Pacific Region has shown that communal centres (eg places of worship, schools, community halls, public centres, police posts etc), are often used as temporary shelters or evacuation sites for people displaced during natural disasters. However, there is limited information and guidance available to promote safety, wellbeing and dignity for those hosted in evacuation centres in times of disasters and to support protection of the most vulnerable. In this context, the Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster (PHPC)¹ has developed this *Guidance Note on Protection in Evacuation Centres* to build awareness of protection and to support its integration into disaster preparedness and response in the Pacific region.²

The Guidance Note draws on widely recognised good practices in response to emergencies and existing international humanitarian standards in emergencies. In particular, the guidance note reflects the content of the *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters*.

The Pacific Protection Cluster is available to provide technical assistance and support for drafting country-specific guidelines on protection in evacuations centres, as needed.

2. PURPOSE

This Guidance Note aims to build understanding of protection issues/concerns in evacuation centres, and to outline possible preventive and responsive measures. It is intended for those involved in disaster management, as a guide for including human rights protection in disaster preparedness and response efforts, with a focus on activities related to the operation of evacuation centres.

3. WHAT DOES 'PROTECTION' MEAN

The international definition of protection refers to “all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with relevant bodies of law” – this includes relevant international human rights obligations applicable to the Government, along with relevant national legislation.

¹ The Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster is established under the Pacific Humanitarian Team to monitor and advocate for the effective integration of protection principles and protection-based activities into national and regional responses to disaster-affected populations in the Pacific region.

Basically, humanitarian protection is about improving safety, well-being and dignity for crisis-affected populations. Protection refers not only to what we do, but also to the way we do it. It involves actively applying key protection principles and responsibilities to our humanitarian work across all sectors. Core principles include:

- Do no harm
- Non-discrimination in access to assistance and services
- Identifying the most vulnerable and their specific needs with attention to age, gender, disability and other relevant aspects of diversity according to the context
- Safe and dignified access to basic services
- Community participation & empowerment
- Identifying and strengthening existing positive community protection strategies/building local capacity

Humanitarian protection also includes being aware of specific protection issues that arise in emergencies and may come to our attention in the course of our relief work, but do not fall within your sectoral or organisational mandate or capacity. These issues require information-sharing, advocacy and/or referral to specialised actors for appropriate response. Such issues include:

- Child protection concerns (eg identifying and assisting separated and unaccompanied children)
- Gender-based violence
- Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Protection of people with disabilities
- Protection of people displaced by disaster

Therefore, when considering protection in evacuation centres, key concerns include:

- physical safety & security for evacuees
- identifying the most vulnerable among the evacuees (eg people with disabilities, elderly people, separated children, survivors of violence etc) and ensuring that they receive appropriate care and support
- ensuring safety and non-discrimination in access to relief assistance and basic services
- incorporating gender analysis into disaster response to ensure that the specific needs of affected men, women, boys and girls are understood
- keeping displaced, disaster-affected people safe from further harm

4. PROTECTION RISKS IN EVACUATION CENTRES

Typical protection risks that may arise in evacuation centres include, among others:

- Gender-based violence (see section 6 below for more detail)
- Abuse, neglect and exploitation of children
- Obstacles in accessing personal documents including identification documents
- Common crime and/or inadequate law enforcement
- Limited access to livelihood activities
- Conflicts among people staying in the evacuation centre and with host communities
- Restrictions to freedom of movement and choice of residence for displaced persons
- Limited participation in the management of the evacuation centre by certain groups
- Discriminatory access to basic provisions and services – water, food, shelter, basic health services – particularly for persons with specific needs
- Risk deriving from family separation, particularly for children, older persons, persons with disabilities and other individuals who rely on family support for their survival

In situations of displacement and evacuation, there are various conditions and factors which can potentially increase protection risks, including:

- High number of persons staying in one evacuation centre: increases social tensions and protection risks to vulnerable persons staying in the evacuation centre
- Large evacuation centres: weakens the role of self regulation. Social networks break down and solidarity between individuals decreases when too many people live in one place. Various forms of exclusion or violence become increasingly likely
- Lack of privacy: could increase tensions but depends on local customs/culture. More intimate situations (i.e. bathing, breastfeeding, toilet) require that social norms are respected by all persons staying in the evacuation centre
- Structural issues: such as isolated basements, dark areas, and hallways and streets without lighting at night can pose a serious security threat to people hosted in evacuation centres, above all women, children, the elderly and disabled
- Composition of population hosted in evacuation centres: uneasy social realities may have been created that need to be taken into consideration. Minorities or groups which are discriminated against within an evacuation centre – but which differ from the general pattern in the area/region – may have been created. Also, the ethnic, religious, and social composition of the displaced population hosted in the evacuation centre versus the host community must be considered
- Absent or unequal assistance: if assistance is not provided, or not provided equally between the various evacuation centres, or equally among people / groups staying in evacuation centres, the potential for tension, conflict and abuse increases dramatically.
- Distress and stress: especially in the early stages of disaster and displacement, many individuals show signs of distress, which may be worsened by crowded and inappropriate living conditions in evacuation centres
- Lack of security: absence of national authorities: especially in the early stages of displacement and in large evacuation centres with high numbers of individuals, authorities should be present to maintain law and order.
- Uncertainty and lack of information: displaced people in evacuation centres who little or no access to information about their situation, about relief assistance, and about their rights are more likely to feel that they are under pressure and may therefore act unreasonably, posing a threat to themselves or others.

5. PROTECTIVE MEASURES

In order to decrease protection risks for displaced people in evacuation centres, the following measures should be taken:

- Identify and use smaller evacuation centres where possible - as self-regulation within smaller groups is more likely and solidarity may be fostered.
- Meet and discuss with host communities prior to identifying an evacuation centre in order to assess generally their attitude towards displaced populations, as well as the support they may need for hosting them.
- Conduct a technical / material assessment of identified evacuation centres to ensure that minimum physical safety requirements are fulfilled.

- Allocate sufficient space to each person / household hosted in the evacuation centre, especially if their displacement is likely to occur over an extended period of time.
- Establish suitable forms of self-governance and structures of participation among the displaced people hosted in the evacuation centre, including vulnerable persons.
- Set up mechanisms to inform in a timely manner all people in the evacuation centre about the disaster situation, relief activities and safe return to their homes.
- Ensure that a formal link exists between the representatives of people hosted in the evacuation centre and relevant local and national authorities.
- Conduct awareness raising and training activities on protection for displaced people in the evacuation centre, and use these opportunities to collect information on potential protection issues in the evacuation centre.
- Ensure that assistance is distributed equitably and impartially to all persons hosted in the evacuation centre, and at the same level between the different evacuation centres.
- Provide timely psycho-social support for persons suffering from distress in order to prevent negative coping mechanisms, including increases in domestic violence, drug abuse, etc.

6. PREVENTION OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence (GBV) entails any act against a person on the basis of their gender or sex, which results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering - including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The nature and extent of GBV varies across cultures, countries and regions. Examples include: sexual violence, including sexual exploitation/abuse and forced prostitution; domestic violence; trafficking; forced/early marriage; rape.

While gender-based violence is usually targeted at women and girls, boys and men may also be at risk. GBV can occur within the family or community, and is perpetrated by persons in positions of power, including at times by police, guards, and armed forces. It can take place in families, communities and institutions – including schools, detention centres and religious facilities. GBV can also be perpetrated by aid and development workers.

Certain categories of women and girls are particularly at risk of GBV, such as single women heads of households, women without family support, unaccompanied girls or girls in foster families, mentally and/or physically disabled girls, child mothers and children born out of rape.

The consequences of GBV include physical injury, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health problems, emotional and psychological trauma, stigmatization, rejection, isolation, depression, increased gender discrimination and sometimes death.

Situations of disaster and displacement can lead to the breakdown of family structures and community safety mechanisms, thereby increasing the risk of GBV. Inadequate and unsafe evacuation centres can increase risks of GBV. Disasters place great stress and strain on individuals, families and communities, creating environments in which domestic violence may occur or increase.

To prevent and respond to GBV from the earliest stages of an emergency, a minimum set of coordinated activities must be undertaken quickly and in collaboration with all partners:

- Safe and appropriate structures and mechanisms for reporting, responding and preventing GBV need to be instituted in each evacuation centre;
- Survivors of GBV hosted in evacuation centres should receive assistance in the form of safe shelter, health care, psychological, social and legal support;
- Prevention activities must be put in place, in coordination with the community, to address causes and contributing factors to GBV in evacuation centres;
- Effective action to prevent and respond to GBV must be incorporated into all stages of the identification and management of evacuation centres;
- All staff members and persons working with displaced people in evacuation centres should sign codes of conduct and be sensitised on the professional and ethical obligations contained in the code of conduct.

7. PROTECTING PEOPLE WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS

Some groups of people among the displaced population in evacuation centres may have specific protection needs. These groups can vary but often include:

Population categories	Persons with specific needs
Boys and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unaccompanied and separated children • Children heads of households
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of school and unemployed youth
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women heads of households, including widows • Women without male support • Women who are survivors of gender-based violence
Older persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older persons without family or community support • Grandparent-headed households
People affected by sickness, disability or trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sick persons without family or community support • People with physical disabilities • People with mental disabilities • People living with or at risk of HIV/AIDS • Survivors of violence

Usually the family or the community provides the support that these vulnerable individuals require, but this is not always the case. Even where family or community care is provided, it is important to remember that caring capacities are often stretched and resources are very limited in times of disaster. During their stay in an evacuation centre, people with specific needs may not benefit from the same level of care and support as they normally receive at home. Moreover, during evacuation and displacement, fear, deprivation and tensions among displaced people in evacuation centres can lead to breakdowns of cultural and ethical/social values. In this context, or in the absence of family/community support, people with specific needs may be more vulnerable to neglect, harm, exploitation and abuse than others in the evacuation centre.

In addition, people with specific needs hosted in evacuation centres may not have access to appropriate communication channels to make their needs known. Likewise they may not be able to speak out due to age, disability, stigma or fear. They may be unable to voice a complaint when they do not have the assistance and protection that they require.

It is critical to identify these risks and take steps - in preparedness and response phases - to ensure that evacuation centre staff and management actively implement prevention and protection measures to ensure safety from further harm and respect for basic human rights for the most vulnerable. A two-fold approach is

required:

- Generally, the identification and management of evacuation centres should take into consideration the presence of groups with specific needs and ensure their safe and dignified access to the evacuation centre, its facilities and services
- A targeted response to ensure that appropriate assistance and protection is provided to meet the specific needs of identified vulnerable individuals/groups. This may be through community-based activities or individual referrals.

Finally, it is important to note that the specific needs of vulnerable or at-risk individuals may change over time throughout the stages of a disaster. It is therefore essential that vulnerable individuals in evacuation centres are identified at the outset, and that their needs and concerns are assessed and monitored throughout the stages of the disaster. This involves also recognising the capacity of vulnerable individuals/groups and including them in decision-making that affects them.

8. COMPLAINT AND REFERRAL MECHANISMS

Complaint mechanisms

A complaint mechanism should be established in each evacuation centre to ensure that all agencies and service-providers are accountable to the beneficiaries. Complaints procedures should:

- include a standard complaints form (but review all complaints received, regardless of format)
- include ways of lodging a complaint anonymously
- include ways of lodging a complaint verbally (for people who are illiterate)
- give people submitting a complaint the opportunity to identify themselves whilst respecting their anonymity, should they fear retaliation
- include ways to submit complaints through a staff member other than the one about whom the complaint is made
- incorporate an appropriate and effective follow-up process

Referral mechanisms

A referral mechanism is a co-operative framework - involving national authorities, UN agencies, the Red Cross, national and international non-governmental organizations, and other civil society actors - for identifying and responding to the specialised concerns and needs of vulnerable individuals/groups affected by disaster. An effective referral mechanism requires good co-operation between this range of actors. For example, victims of violence are often first identified by law-enforcement personnel, and then referred to civil society organizations to access necessary medical, legal and/or psycho-social support.

As a disaster preparedness measure, a country-wide referral mechanism should be established to provide an effective way to link vulnerable disaster-affected individuals/families in a timely manner to the specialist services they may require. The first step in establishing a referral mechanism is to identify key protection stakeholders at local and national levels, along with their capacity to take on referrals in the context of natural disaster.

A referral mechanism is not a rigid structure but a dynamic and inclusive process, which should incorporate:

- Guidance on how to identify and appropriately treat vulnerable individuals while respecting their rights and giving them power over decisions that affect their lives;

- A system to refer vulnerable individuals to specialized agencies offering protection from physical and psychological harm, as well as support services such as medical assistance, rehabilitation support, access to assistive devices for people with disabilities, social and psychological support, legal services etc

9. REGISTRATION AND PROFILING

Registration and profiling is the systematic collection of data to determine the size and characteristics of the population which is / will be hosted in evacuation centres. The primary purpose is to identify disaster-affected individuals/families so that their needs can be met and their rights protected. Registration and profiling data provides the basis for planning programmes and ensuring the provision of appropriate assistance and services to people in evacuation centres.

Registration

Registration is a systematic method of collecting and recording data to identify a person and his/her specific needs. This information is collected for a specific purpose, whether to inform preparedness activities, ensure adequate relief assistance, or provide the basis for other protection or assistance interventions.

In disaster *preparedness*, registration of all people/communities who may be hosted in evacuation centres is a useful process. This registration data can then be used to guide the identification/selection and preparation of evacuation centres according to the specific needs of the anticipated evacuating population. Registration data can also be used to identify capacities and skills among people who will be hosted in evacuation centres, notably to ensure their participation in managing evacuation centres, along with information-sharing and capacity building activities. Where such population registration is conducted as part of *preparedness* activities, it is critical to establish a process for regularly maintaining and updating the data, recognising that essential information (eg births, deaths, marriages etc) changes over time.

In disaster *response*, it is essential that a nominated authority or agency takes responsibility for organising the registration of all people staying in evacuation centres. The registration form/process should be consistent across all evacuation centres and at minimum should support age and sex-disaggregated data collection. Various humanitarian actors including national authorities, UN agencies, the Red Cross, NGOs and other civil society actors can provide operational support for the planning, gathering and utilisation of data, depending on their mandates.

Profiling

Profiling is a method of collecting and analysing the characteristics of a group of people in an aggregated manner. The objective of profiling is to obtain baseline information and an overview of the population that is / will be hosted in evacuation centres to enable appropriately targeted programming. Good registration data can form the basis for profiling.

The profile of the displaced, disaster-affected people who are / will be hosted in evacuation centres should provide at least the following “core data”:

- number of displaced persons, disaggregated by age and gender; and
- location(s) – place of origin and place of displacement / evacuation centre.

Wherever possible, additional information might include: protection concerns, humanitarian needs, and potential solutions. Methods for profiling include desk review, estimation, surveys, registration, focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

10. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The overarching role of disaster preparedness and management in any country rests with the national government. This includes providing assistance and protection to all people affected by disasters, in particular to displaced people hosted in evacuation centres. In addition, the Red Cross, faith-based organisations, NGOs and other civil society actors play a key role in providing support to national governments and assistance to those affected by disaster.

In situations where the national capacity to respond to the disaster is overwhelmed, the wider international community, including UN agencies and international non-government organisations, stand ready to assist national authorities to assist and protect the affected population.

Administration (Supervision) - Role of Governments and National Authorities

In line with the responsibility of national governments to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons hosted in evacuation centres, *administration* refers to the oversight of all disaster management activities in one country. This includes the provision of security, maintaining law and order, as well as the issuance of documentation (eg. birth certificates, identity cards, travel permits etc.) to all the displaced people hosted in evacuation centres throughout the country.

National authorities (often a National Disaster Management Council) are responsible for the designation and use of evacuation centres, including property and occupancy rights. They decide on the opening and closure of evacuation centres. In other words, they determine the period during which identified sites are utilised as evacuation centres – usually from the official declaration of disaster until the displaced people hosted in the evacuation centre are able to safely return home or to another location where they are able to access safe and adequate shelter and basic services.

The government's responsibility to protect internally displaced people means that evictions or any further displacement of people staying in evacuation centres should be prevented, until they are able to return to their original place of residence or to relocate to a new place in situations where return home is not possible.

Finally, *administrative authorities* are responsible for facilitating access to evacuation centres for humanitarian agencies, as well as for providing relevant information (eg registration data) to them in a timely and appropriate manner.

Coordination - Role of the National Disaster Management Office / Divisional & District Disaster Management Councils

During an emergency, the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) has an overall *coordination* role in development and implementation of the national disaster management plan, which should stipulate measures for the identification and management of evacuation centres.

Throughout the emergency, NDMO with divisional/district management authorities should:

- ensure that basic human rights standards are applied within and across all evacuation centres;
- identify and designate managing agencies (see below) and service providers;
- monitor and evaluate service provision and address issues of poor performance;
- provide training and guidance to managing agencies and relevant stakeholders.

The NDMO's coordination role also includes the responsibility to establish and maintain assessment, monitoring and information management systems that allow all agencies and service providers to access and

share information within and across evacuation centres. This is essential to identify and address gaps, and to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.

Management of Evacuation Centres

Management refers to on-site coordination of all activities within an evacuation centre, and includes:

- co-ordination of relief services delivered by government, non-government and faith-based organisations);
- establishing governance and community participation/mobilization mechanisms;
- fostering the promotion of self-management among persons in the evacuation centre;
- coordination of registration of evacuees (data collection and sharing of information with relevant actors);
- ongoing monitoring of safety and wellbeing in the evacuation centre;
- monitoring the services delivered by other providers in accordance with agreed standards.

One *Manager/Managing Agency* should be identified for each evacuation centre and made responsible for the coordination of relief assistance to ensure that it is provided without discrimination, except on the basis of need.

The *Manager/Managing Agency* also collects and maintains information on gaps in protection and assistance and, avoids duplication of activities. All problems that cannot be resolved by the *Manager/Managing Agency* should be referred to the *Coordinating Agency* (eg. NDMO/divisional/district authorities through close liaison with the designated headman or government representatives in area).

It is essential that the *Manager/Managing Agency* and all its staff/volunteers are appropriately trained in the protection and promotion of human rights in disasters. All staff/volunteers should sign a code of conduct, which provides specific guidelines on ethical conduct in emergency interventions.
