

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

Advocacy in emergencies

Key points

- Be clear what your key messages are. Be clear about the purpose of your advocacy. What do you want to achieve?
- Incorporate advocacy in your overall protection strategy.
- Adjust your strategy to what you want to achieve. If a small (closed door) intervention suffices to reach your goal, no need to go public with an advocacy campaign ["Ladder of options" approach].
- Consult extensively and cooperate with others. Wherever possible, avoid competitive advocacy. Seek to work with others to achieve advocacy that is complementary.
- Manage risks pro-actively to avoid surprises. Consider possible unintended consequences of your advocacy, at field and global level, on the humanitarian response on the ground and on UNHCR's oversight responsibilities.
- Make sure that all advocacy products are evidence-based, fact-checked, and proofread. Make sure you are honest.
- Make sure that all your advocacy messages are consistent, internally and over time.
- Be concise. Avoid jargon wherever you can. If you have to use jargon, explain what it means.

1. Overview

'Advocacy' is a set of coordinated activities (ideally contributing to a broader strategy) that seeks to ensure the protection of persons who are of concern to UNHCR by promoting changes that bring policy, practice or law into line with international standards. UNHCR and its partners undertake advocacy of various kinds, including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research, and lobbying. In emergencies, (evidence-based) advocacy plays a vital role in efforts to influence decision makers and stakeholders to adopt practices and policies that will protect refugees, internally displaced people, stateless persons and other affected populations. It is and should remain a central element of comprehensive protection and solution strategies.

Combined strategically with other protection activities (information dissemination, monitoring, negotiation), advocacy can help to transform attitudes, systems and structures that put populations of concern at risk. Advocacy messages must have clear objectives and target audiences.

2. Protection objectives

- To end human rights violations and encourage respect and positive observance of human rights by encouraging stakeholders to fulfil their protection responsibilities (including among others States, and peacekeeping missions).
- To ensure that stakeholders deliver humanitarian assistance to persons of concern in a safe and dignified manner, on the basis of humanitarian needs and without discrimination of any kind.
- To ensure that stakeholders make funds and resources available to meet the needs of persons of concern.
- To bring policies, practice and laws into compliance with international standards (notably refugee law, humanitarian law, human rights law, guiding principles on IDPs, international standards on prevention of statelessness and protection of stateless persons).
- To promote greater acceptance of persons of concern by host communities and to combat discrimination and xenophobia.

3. Underlying principles and standards

- **'Do no harm'**. Ensure that advocacy does not negatively affect access to or protection of persons of concern, the credibility of UNHCR, access to UNHCR or partners for relevant populations, or partnerships.
- **Impartiality and neutrality**. Preserve these values of humanitarian actions, at field level and globally, in order to foster dialogue, access, and open channels of cooperation.
- **Public or restricted dissemination of advocacy messages**

Decisions on the status of advocacy messages should be determined case-by-case, weighing the risks. Will publicizing a statement disrupt an important dialogue with key stakeholders in the field? Or persuade key stakeholders to open vital areas to humanitarian access? Or heighten the risks faced by persons of concern or humanitarian staff? Decisions should always be made in the best interest of affected populations. This interest is best understood by affected populations themselves and (wherever possible and relevant) they ought to be asked whether or not advocacy messages should be made public.

4. Protection Risks

Safety of persons of concern

- Host authorities may restrict access to persons of concern if they object to advocacy messages.
- Individuals may be endangered if advocacy messages divulge confidential personal information.

- Inappropriately framed messages can stir up prejudice against vulnerable individuals or groups.
- Ill-advised advocacy can have unexpected indirect consequences. Calls to stop sexual and gender based violence which are not carefully formulated and contextualized, may, for example, simply cause families to keep girls at home.

Data Protection

In principle, personal information should remain confidential and should not be used for advocacy purposes. Personal data may be shared with third parties only for specific purposes; often, the person(s) concerned must grant prior consent (see UNHCR's Data Protection Policy and Associated Guidance).

5. Other risks

- **Security of staff and assets.** If authorities or non-state actors take issue with advocacy messages issued by UNHCR or partner organizations, they may react negatively to or harm staff, offices, or assets in retribution or to stop further similar messages. Decisions on adjusting or mitigating agreed advocacy approaches for reason of security-related concerns will need to be taken in close coordination with HQ (Bureau, Division of International Protection, Security). A proper balance between efforts to mitigate such risks and advocacy for protection priorities must be achieved.
- **Reputational risk.** The reputation of UNHCR or partners may be harmed if they issue information that is incorrect, conflicts with operational priorities or UNHCR's global mandate, or is of poor quality.
- **External contributions and partnerships.** Relationships, cooperation and financial support may be undermined if advocacy statements antagonize partners or donors.
- **Access.** If access is denied to UNHCR or its partners as a result of advocacy, this may directly affect their capacity to work in the country and protect people of concern.

6. Key decision points

Key decisions on advocacy should be based on a contextual analysis of risks and opportunities. This analysis, and the advocacy strategy as a whole, should be developed in collaboration with partners, and should consider the following questions:

- **Define your objectives. What do we want to say?** What issues require advocacy? What is the purpose of the intervention? What do we want to achieve? What are the key messages? Answers to these questions should emerge from a well-informed, evidence-based analysis. Do not build advocacy messages on rumours or unconfirmed information. In an emergency setting, nevertheless, it may sometimes be appropriate or necessary to initiate advocacy before detailed evidence has been gathered and confirmed. (For example, it might be appropriate to issue an advocacy message on SGBV, certain that incidents have taken place but before comprehensive evidence is available.) Objectives should take into account the short- and long-term impacts that are desired.

- **Select the target audience.** Your target audience may be organizations, decision-makers, individuals or allies, or actors whose actions raise protection concerns. Adopt an approach appropriate for the actor you seek to influence.
- **How will you communicate the message? Who will say what? Where and when?** All options can be considered at this point. Messages may be public or restricted; and disseminated via meetings, reports, photos, videos, statistics, maps, infographics, case studies, or press release. Decisions should be based on the context, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and the advocacy strategy. Always consider the impact a chosen channel will have, the need for confidentiality, and the potential to harm your sources of information, persons of concern, partners or UNHCR. Think practically. Who will do what? When? What channels will be used (email, websites, social media, newspapers, posters, interviews, news media, etc.)? Establish clear responsibilities and an action plan.
- **Build links.** Advocacy activities should be joined up with other forms of influencing (information dissemination, reporting, monitoring, negotiation, conferences, etc.).
- **Monitor implementation.** Monitoring should be part of the action plan and advocacy initiatives should be reviewed, and adjusted when required, in the light of their impact and effectiveness.

7. Key steps

1. Work with existing coordination structures to identify key problems that require advocacy. Develop an advocacy strategy and set priorities; decide how best to disseminate key messages; identify the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors. In doing so, use a "ladder of options", escalating the advocacy efforts as required from "quiet diplomacy" to a full-fledged public advocacy campaign.
2. Collect and validate evidence continuously. Use the means available to monitor the situation and collect information; link the information you gather to programming as well as advocacy. Take steps to fill gaps in evidence.
3. Involve partners, persons of concern and other sources of information in drafting advocacy messages and delivering them. Advocacy is often more effective when a variety of partners reinforce the message. Remember that persons of concern, including children and young people, are often the best advocates for their protection and concerns. In some settings, for example, it can be effective to convene meetings at which minority groups can talk directly to local authorities.
4. Advocacy messages normally include three elements: a brief description of context, key protection or other concerns, and recommendations or 'asks'. Consider products that will reinforce and support your message (maps, infographics, case studies and testimonials, open or private letters, statements by key actors and influential persons, etc.).
5. Ensure your message is formatted correctly. In addition, ensure it cleared (as appropriate) by the Country Office, Regional Bureau, Division of International Protection (DIP), Division of External Relations (DER), or inter-agency structures such as UNCT/HCT/cluster as applicable. Proofread and fact-check.

6. Disseminate in accordance with agreed methods (hard and soft copies, list of recipients, public domain release or restricted circulation). Ensure that dissemination strategies consider a range of formats and media.
7. Monitor the impact and adjust strategy as required.

8. Key management considerations

- Consult and clear with experts (in advocacy, PI methods and strategy, other content) at country, regional or global level (as appropriate).
- Clear draft advocacy statements and proposed initiatives with UNHCR management at field, country, regional or global level (as appropriate).
- Revise your advocacy strategy as required, taking account of feedback, impact, and changes on the ground.
- Comply with internal policies and procedure with respect to updates, research materials, and branding.

9. Resources and partnerships

Advocacy budgets depend on the scale of the strategy (local press release or global campaign), the profile and size of the target audience (local partner organization, Government minister, global TV audience), and the dissemination method (social media, e-mail text, video documentary, global TV campaign).

The following resources are likely to be relevant:

- Staff time, in cooperation with partners, to collect and validate evidence-based information, prepare advocacy materials, implement initiatives, and follow up.
- Information management staff and technical resources, to produce properly designed and formatted information products.
- A budget to travel, and to organize meetings with interviewees and workshops with partners.
- Resources for printing, recording, marketing, etc.

10. Links

Guidelines on Donor Visibility

UNHCR Protection Manual, Chapter on Protection in Mass Influx / Emergency Response (internal)
Global Protection Cluster (GPC)
OCHA advocacy guidance

Need help?

CONTACT As first port of call, the UNHCR Dep. Representative (Protection), UNHCR Asst. Rep. (Protection), and/or Snr Protection Officer in the country; or The UNHCR Regional Asst./Dep Rep (Protection) and/or Snr. Regional Protection Officer at the regional office (if applicable); or The Snr. Regional Legal Advisor in the respective UNHCR regional bureau, covering the respective country region, who in turn will liaise as required with the parent unit at UNHCR DIP.

UNHCR Division for External Relations (DER), PI service.

Global protection Cluster (GPC)Support Cell: gpc@unhcr.org

Annexes

- Global Protection Cluster (GPC), Standard Operating Procedures on Public Advocacy Messaging
- IASC, The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2013
- UNICEF, Advocacy Toolkit. A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives
- United Nations, Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to non-United Nations Security Forces
- Information note - UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy and its relevance and application in UNHCR operations

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