



Working with urban refugees

A handbook



Jesuit Refugee Service



The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation established in 1980 by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Working in 60 countries worldwide, its mission is to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons.

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Cover photo: At the JRS community centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
Facing page: Refugees affected by floods in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2011.

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“The mission of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. As a Catholic organisation and a work of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), JRS is inspired by the compassion and love of Jesus for the poor and excluded.”

“In view of the increasing urbanisation of forced migration, JRS will strengthen and coordinate its expertise and resources to develop an appropriate response to urban refugees that reflects best practices.”

Jesuit Refugee Service
Strategic Framework 2012—2015

Soacha, a sprawling suburb of Bogotá, Colombia, is home to thousands of internally displaced people.



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At the JRS workshop held in Bangkok, Thailand, in March 2012.



Introduction

Scholars and practitioners alike have noted the rapid increase in the urbanisation of forced migration during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Today more than half the world's refugees live in urban areas, as opposed to camps and rural settings. This percentage is likely to grow in the coming years in line with the global urbanisation trend affecting developing countries in particular.

As one would expect, the activities of JRS reflect this trend: many of its programmes — especially in Asia Pacific, Europe, North America, the Middle East, Eastern and Southern Africa — are now located and implemented in major urban centres.

What may come as a surprise is that, from its inception in 1980, the Jesuit Refugee Service has always hosted projects in urban areas.

Aware of all this, in 2010, the JRS International programmes officers and a group of regional directors proposed a process of reflection on JRS' involvement with urban refugees that would allow for the sharing

of experience and the identification of common elements.

The first major plank of this process was a workshop held in Bangkok in March 2012. Each region sent up to three participants to the week-long meeting. Members of the International Office team, including the assistant international director, also participated in the meeting along with representatives from partner organisations and educational institutions who offered technical advice and observations. In all, 42 participants from 23 countries took part, representing every major JRS urban-based project.

This booklet gathers the shared fruits of this workshop so that all JRS staff working in urban settings will be able to benefit from the collective wisdom of the participants.

The booklet begins with a list of guiding principles that underpin JRS work in urban settings. It is then divided into six sections, corresponding to the major challenges faced by urban refugees that were identified in the workshop. Each challenge is addressed through two questions:



A converted aircraft hangar complex in Malta, where refugees are housed in shipping containers.

1. What are the underlying values and principles that JRS must safeguard as it addresses this challenge?
2. How can JRS best address this particular need and implement responses based on practical methodologies and strategies?

This publication is the first step in an ongoing communications process designed to help JRS, in keeping with its 2012-2015 Strategic Framework, to coordinate its expertise and resources in order to respond more effectively to the needs of urban refugees. We invite you, our fellow team members, to use it as a working document that is part of a growing body of resources and policies to help you in your work. We hope it will contribute to a continuing conversation on JRS' response to refugees in urban settings.

Guiding principles

- Guarantee human dignity.
- Abide by the primary core principle of humanitarian action: Do no harm.
- Adopt a holistic approach to address the multiple needs of urban refugees.
- Know the legal, economic and social context in which you are working.
- Be conscious of your limits (in terms of numbers, resources, time and the law).
- Work with existing services instead of duplicating them.
- Look to fill gaps in existing services, to meet needs not attended to by others.
- Build sustainable collaborative relationships with service providers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders.
- Seek to identify vulnerable refugees who need special attention.



Rufino Seva (left), from JRS in Bangkok, Thailand, interviews Hoa Seo Thao, a Hmong Christian leader from Vietnam (right); Huy Quang Le, also from Vietnam, is translating.

- Focus on a direct and ‘accompanying’ approach, befriending the people you serve.
- Be culturally sensitive.
- Do not create dependency.
- Seek to further integration and reduce isolation.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Work professionally, ensuring good practice and joint decision-making with refugees that is based on evidence and looks to overall impact.
- Ensure staff safety at all times.
- Make evaluation an integral element of your work.
- Involve refugees at all stages of the project cycle: planning, implementation and evaluation.
- Reflect upon and learn from successes and failures.

During food distribution at the JRS urban refugee project in Nairobi, Kenya.



Access to services

Urban refugees live in contexts where social, health and other basic services exist but are often not readily available to them. Obstacles facing urban refugees as they try to access services include lack of information and of legal documentation; lack of understanding of refugee rights and obligations; cultural and linguistic barriers; limited access to transport; and active discrimination against refugees and perceived impunity for crimes against them. JRS seeks to help urban refugees to access existing services without creating parallel systems.



JRS Malta nurse Lora Pullicino (left) with Yinka Akinola. Lora helps refugees to access health services.

Guiding principles

- Be aware of policy changes, always ensuring your information is up to date.
- Work to remove barriers that prevent refugees' access to services.
- Collaborate in a systematic way with mainstream service providers to create continuity of service for refugees.
- Encourage refugees to become aware of their responsibilities by assisting them to access services on their own, and by building their capacity to discover answers to their needs within the local community.

Elements of approach

With refugees

- Each case is individual: before doing anything, make sure you have a deep understanding of the background, needs and obstacles facing the person you are serving.
- Reflect when and how to provide information to refugees most effectively.
- Develop appropriate tools in different languages for sharing information, such as leaflets, videos and text messaging.
- Combine orientation with language classes.
- Promote the collective dimension, organising refugee support groups and creating opportunities for communities to meet to share information about how to navigate access to services.
- Use the expertise in host and refugee communities, engaging cultural mediators to inform refugees about their entitlements, how the system works and how it should be accessed.

With service providers

- Map existing services.
- Network and coordinate with other NGOs and mainstream service providers in order to avoid duplication.
- Help service providers be aware of and understand cultural practices that might influence the way refugees approach the service provided.
- Develop streamlined criteria and guidelines for referrals, setting up systems and terms of agreement with service providers, including feedback and the exchange of relevant information.
- Advocate at the government level for refugees' access to services, approaching key civil servants and mainstream service providers.

The office of the JRS urban refugee project in Pretoria, South Africa.



Sudanese refugee Betty Drassa makes peanut butter to sell at the JRS Mikono craft shop in Nairobi.



Livelihoods

Doubtless one of the most urgent priorities for urban refugees is to *find* work that is legal, safe and fairly paid. The lack of means to live in dignity underpins other challenges they face. For JRS, helping refugees to establish a secure livelihood incorporates many activities geared towards self-reliance, such as ensuring access to employment; offering technical training and assistance; and helping set up small businesses by providing grants and credit, tools and other resources. However, working on livelihoods is not just about economic self-sufficiency; it is also about restoring dignity, *confidence* and hope, as well as promoting integration.

Guiding principles

- Meet refugees' basic needs before starting and throughout a livelihoods programme.
- Wherever absent, advocate for the right to legal employment for refugees.
- Recognise the complexity and multi-disciplinary nature of this field of work.
- Intervene and implement a livelihoods programme when there is an empty niche you can fill, where there is clear potential for effectiveness and where engagement is likely to attract other resources from industry, from the NGO sector or the commercial world of the host community.
- Only engage in programmes where you can accompany people throughout the process, whether the focus is on skills training, job placement, income-generating activities or other initiatives.
- Identify the needs and capacities of the refugees you are targeting, both individuals and communities.
- Choose as participants those refugees who meet basic

Saide Yalim teaches Muma Abed at a JRS sewing class in Ankara, Turkey.

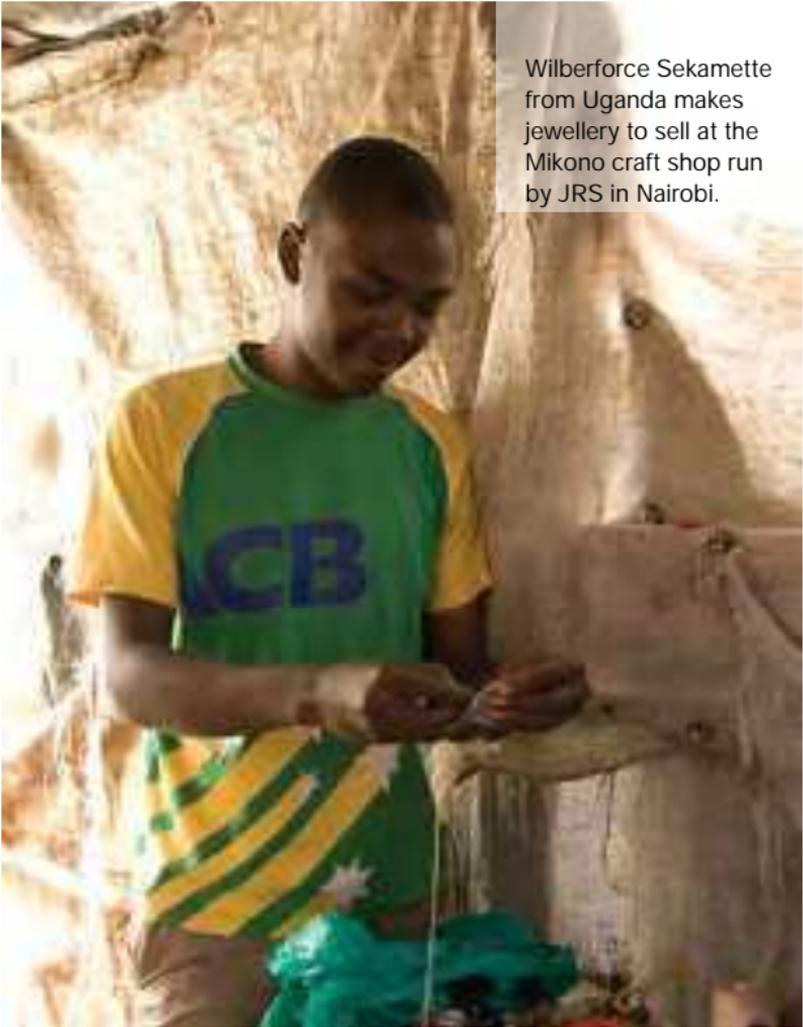


criteria to be successful in the livelihoods programme you are designing.

- Always ensure that refugees are not placed in employment situations that exploit them or endanger their health and safety. This is especially relevant for women who are more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence.
- In helping the most vulnerable refugees, assess their family and community connections so that significant members of their social networks may be included in a livelihoods programme.
- Be open to ongoing innovation based on reflection.

Elements of approach

- Before embarking on a livelihoods programme, assess your organisational capacity and readiness to deliver a quality service in this complex sphere.
- Listen to and learn from refugees by conducting participatory needs assessments that capture their needs, capacities and skills.
- Periodically conduct market assessments, as frequently as every six to 12 months.
- When designing programmes, try to match refugees' capacities with market opportunities.
- Involve refugees who will be part of the programme in its design, together with experts from within and outside JRS.
- Organise childcare arrangements and preschool activities for the children of working mothers.
- Develop measurement indicators and monitoring criteria.
- Accompany programme participants throughout the process, during both the implementation and follow-up



Wilberforce Sekamette from Uganda makes jewellery to sell at the Mikono craft shop run by JRS in Nairobi.

phases. How long you accompany someone should be linked to indicators that demonstrate when refugees have become self-reliant and are capable of accompanying others.

- Conduct and use evaluations.

Johannesburg, South Africa.



Psychosocial and mental health

Psychosocial support is rooted in our close accompaniment of refugees. The *definition* covers a range of involvement, from offering a listening ear, to professional and pastoral counselling, to therapy for mental health problems. This support is crucial for refugees living in cities, often in total isolation. Many who are already vulnerable become more so; others become vulnerable when they are bereft of all support, weighed down by the pressure of their traumatic past, stressful present and bleak future prospects.

Sr Hala Daoud leads Iraqi refugees in relaxation exercises at JRS' St Vartan centre in Aleppo, Syria. St Vartan was destroyed during Syria's civil war in 2012.



Guiding principles

- Seek to identify vulnerable refugees who need extra support.
- Protect and promote respect for the human dignity of each individual refugee.
- Encourage your client to participate in the healing/therapeutic process.
- Ensure your interventions are culturally sensitive.
- Ensure the safety of staff.
- Prevention is better than cure: create a space where refugees can come together in community, sharing information, challenges and hopes.

Elements of approach

- Create a welcoming environment, in terms of both actual space and team dynamics.
- Conduct professional assessments when necessary.
- Use expertise in host and refugee communities, engaging cultural mediators to empower other refugees to voice their needs and concerns.
- Consider the individual in the context of his/her family, community and overall situation.
- Adopt a multi-pronged approach including individual and group counselling, pastoral support, clinical care, social work and family therapy.
- Make community outreach part of your programmes, including regular home visits and shared community activities.
- Network extensively with other agencies and organisations, setting up referral systems.
- Organise training for other service providers, to equip them to offer a better, more informed service to refugees.
- Organise education and awareness activities for both refugee and host communities to boost mutual understanding and integration.
- Build regular supervision and support for staff into the programme design.

An English class run by JRS in Ashrafiyeh, a neighbourhood of the Jordanian capital, Amman.



Education

For refugees, one of the most dangerous threats to hope is the lack of future prospects for their children. Young refugees feel their lives slipping away as enforced idleness swallows up one endless day after another. As the mainstay of JRS activities in most regions, education offers refugees a “future and a hope”. Promoting access to the universal right to education leads to progress on other rights, such as gender equality.



JRS South Africa facilitates access of refugee children to schools, like Jules High School, pictured here.

Guiding principles

- Take a holistic approach to education, emphasising learning to *be* rather than merely learning to *do*.
- Consider education as a vehicle to enhance social integration, working with both host and refugee communities to this end.
- Facilitate access to local schools and other educational structures, unless such access is impossible for one reason or other (for example, language barriers).
- Make sure refugees have all the support they need to go to school, following them up and creating programmes to complement existing opportunities.
- Take into account local standards and curricula.
- Educate refugee parents about the importance of education for their children, with an emphasis on gender equality.
- Acknowledge the choices that refugees can make for themselves or for their children.

Elements of approach

- Facilitate access to schools by helping with administrative requirements, such as registration, and by meeting supplementary costs.
- Promote the involvement of parents in their children's education, through their assuming partial payment of school fees and other expenses, or through their contribution in other ways to the life of the school.
- Encourage the interest of refugee communities in local schools and vice-versa, encouraging parents to sit on school boards and to contribute to activities.
- Follow up on school placements, offer counselling services and liaise with the school authorities to resolve issues that arise.
- Organise provision of extracurricular activities that are needed to help refugees to succeed in school, including language classes, remedial classes and sports activities.
- Pay extra attention to children with special needs, as well as to girls and young women.
- Work with education providers to increase opportunities for refugees.
- Organise school activities that give local children the opportunity to better understand and appreciate the reasons why people become refugees.

Choosing something suitable during the JRS distribution day in Ankara, Turkey.



Material and basic needs

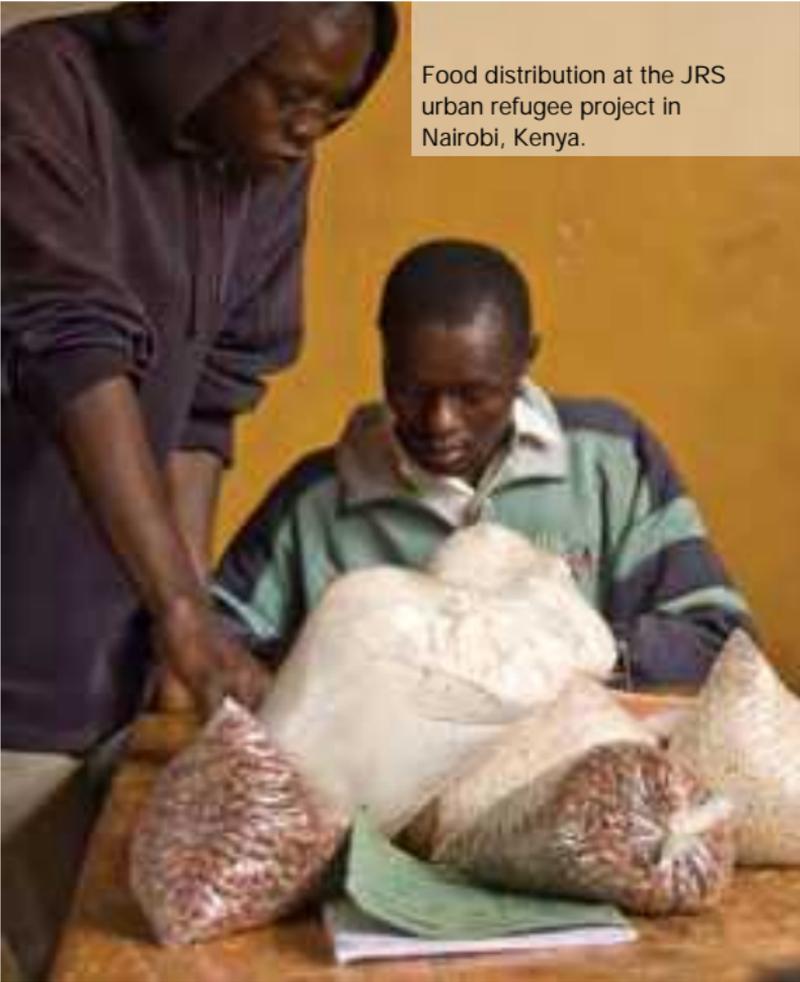
Emergency relief... food... accommodation

Many refugees, asylum seekers and other forcibly displaced people living in cities are totally destitute. New arrivals and vulnerable individuals and families are more likely to be in urgent need of even the most basic necessities. Emergency relief refers to the targeted distribution of food and non-food items, such as mattresses and blankets, clothes, hygiene items, basic medicines and money for transport. Finding accommodation is part of this category of services too. The challenge here is to meet the greatest needs unmet by other organisations.

Guiding principles

- Do not do for people what they can do for themselves.
- Step in to fill needs unmet by others, when no other agencies are providing services.
- Step in to protect refugees from the risk of sexual abuse and labour exploitation.
- Using objective criteria, seek to identify the vulnerable people who are most in need and totally lacking in resources. Remember that sometimes the most vulnerable are least adept at presenting their needs and may have to be sought out.
- Involve the refugee community to help you discover and deliver support to the refugees who are most in need.
- Deliver aid in such a way that respects the dignity of recipients.
- Be clear with refugees about how long the service is going to last, clarifying from the outset whether it is emergency relief to be given for a specific period or an ongoing service.

Food distribution at the JRS urban refugee project in Nairobi, Kenya.

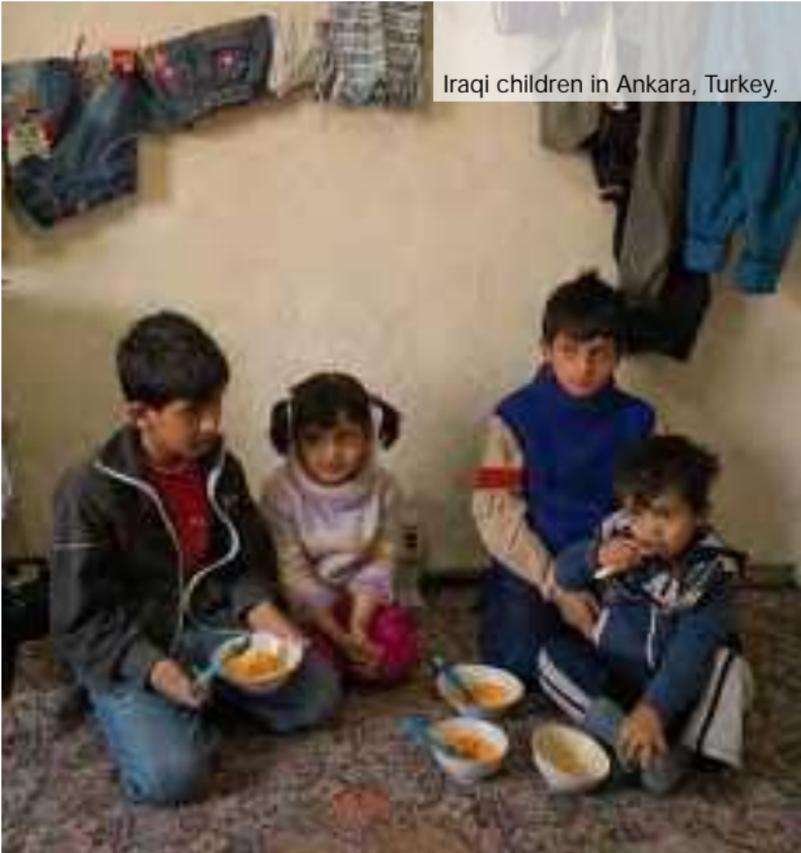


- Do not create conflict among refugees or between the refugee and local communities. In poorer countries, consider how to involve or serve the local community, especially if they are as poor and needy as the refugees are.
- Be aware of local, national and international standards of emergency relief.

Elements of approach

- Wherever possible, offer emergency support as part of an integrated approach that includes advocacy, accompaniment, psychosocial and livelihood components.
- Conduct comprehensive needs assessments and surveys of available resources.
- Involve refugees and, where appropriate, local communities in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the service.
- Look to the immediate community for resources, including local personnel and materials.
- Adjust services offered to local standards and customs so as not to create division between refugees and the host community.
- Implement services in a safe environment.
- Ensure staff members are well trained and prepared to deal with negative incidents such as robbery, drug and alcohol problems, threats and abuse.

Iraqi children in Ankara, Turkey.



- Strive to offer a dignified service by:
 - being discreet in service delivery
 - avoiding mass delivery, individualising services and using people's names
 - dealing with families and couples, and not simply individuals from families, whenever possible
 - offering choices whenever possible
 - taking care to keep the environment attractive
 - showing respect for the individual property of refugees when you visit or when they come to the office.



Breakdance on the outskirts of the Colombian capital, Bogotá, where JRS helps the young people of Soacha to express themselves creatively through art.

Legal issues, protection and rights

One of the pillars of our mission, advocacy is an integral part of JRS programmes for forcibly displaced people in urban settings, who constantly face protection risks, among them detention, deportation, abuse, exploitation and xenophobia. The frequent lack of refugees' documentation and registration makes this area of work all the more challenging. Components of advocacy work include legal casework on asylum applications, immigration matters and family reunification; training or awareness seminars for public officials, local NGOs and refugees; and documenting the challenges that urban refugees face in their search for safety.

Bianca Albu (left), legal counsellor on the JRS Romania team, with Doski Saud Farhat, an Iraqi asylum seeker.



Guiding principles

- Advocate for the right of all forcibly displaced people to receive at least the minimum services required to live in safety and dignity, regardless of legal status.
- Inform asylum seekers and refugees about their rights and how to access them.
- Accompany refugees throughout the process of obtaining legal status, documentation and the exercising of their rights.
- Foster collaboration among all members of the JRS team — programmes, advocacy and communications — in order to offer integrated and more effective services.

Elements of approach

- Go on outreach to inform refugees and asylum seekers about their rights and how to access them, using means such as translated leaflets to get the message across.
- Incorporate individual protection casework, as well as advocacy for changes in policy and practice, in the development and implementation of all JRS projects.
- Develop strategic partnerships with other NGOs and experts for information sharing, referrals and collaboration on advocacy and communications issues.
- When possible, engage constructively with government structures and key civil servants in order to achieve advocacy aims, both on the level of individual casework and wider policy change.
- Inform host communities about why people become refugees, about why they need protection and what their internationally recognised rights are.
- Ensure in-house capacity through the recruitment of qualified and skilled staff and training.
- Document and communicate protection concerns to facilitate JRS advocacy at national, regional and international levels.
- Collect baseline data and statistical information on protection and other legal issues to inform project assessment and advocacy.



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