

Standard Operating Procedures for UNHCR and Partners to Assist Persons with Specific Needs in Sri Lanka

A. Background

Assistance to persons with specific needs (PWSN) aims to ensure that all individuals (and/or their families) with heightened protection risks among IDP and returnee populations are not overlooked or discriminated against in their community, but protected. The support provided by UNHCR or its partners should enable PWSN to develop coping mechanisms and improve their chances of sustainable durable solutions. It should aim at helping PWSN to help themselves to become self-reliant.

To identify and respond to the needs of PWSN in general, UNHCR and its partners conduct several activities including awareness raising and training on how to protect and assist PWSN for Government, local authorities, NGOs, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees. In addition, assistance with individual documentation, vocational training and livelihood assistance is provided for PWSN, in particular for women at risk.

In principle, it is first and foremost the responsibility of the community in which they live to respond to the needs of PWSN. Therefore, as a matter of priority, UNHCR and its partners mobilize and build the capacity of IDP and returnee communities to meet the needs of PWSN, if possible, within the care of their families or communities. When community support is not available it is the State's responsibility to address these needs (see annex 1). If government assistance is not available, assistance must be sought by and coordinated with relevant agencies with community involvement. Only when support by communities, the government and other agencies is not available or suitable, should UNHCR or its partners intervene.

UNHCR and its partners are among few agencies, which have the ability to quickly and flexibly provide assistance to PWSN. The PWSN budget line should be used to provide immediate support to meet the most basic and critical needs of PWSN on an exceptional basis. Such assistance is not intended to provide long-term support, but rather to help at the relief phase. UNHCR and its partners must responsibly refer and follow-up PWSN cases to guarantee that assisted persons will be able to sustain their well-being.

These Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)¹ detail the minimum procedures for assessment and response to provision of assistance to PWSN.

B. Beneficiaries

PWSN are individuals facing heightened protection risks because they have specific needs that require the implementation of measures to ensure their protection, including health and well-being, and because they are unable, or face major obstacles, in accessing existing forms of assistance and services, which could

¹ UNHCR Sri Lanka introduced individual assistance to extremely vulnerable IDPs and returnees in 2000/2001. The first SOPs for UNHCR assistance to EVIs were drafted by the UNHCR FO Jaffna in 2002. The current SOPs derive from extensive drafting and consultations between UNHCR offices in Sri Lanka during the second half of 2007, which culminated on 28-29 January 2008 during the UNHCR Sri Lanka Protection Retreat in Habarana.

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respond to their needs.² In Sri Lanka, PWSN can be identified in various settings, including welfare centres, transitional accommodation centres, host families, return areas and relocation sites.

Beneficiaries include IDPs, returnees and refugee returnees from India. In exceptional cases, assistance to a host family member may be considered (for example to a host family of a mine victim or destitute war affected child).

C. Eligible Cases

The general standard categories of persons that require special protection and assistance consist of the following:

- **Child or adolescent at risk (CR):** Children below the age of 18 who are especially at risk for instance unaccompanied or separated children,³ children who are married and children who are or were part of regular or irregular armed forces or groups in any capacity, including cooks, porters and messengers.
- **Persons with disabilities (DS):** Adult or child who is physically or mentally impaired by illness, injury or wounds which hinders the normal day to day activity and needs to be addressed to allow the person to function normally
- **Older persons at risk (ER):** Male or female, 60 years of age or older who is at risk for instance because s/he have been separated from his/her usual caregivers or because s/he suffers from health problems and/or has difficulty adjusting to his/her new environment and knowing where to seek assistance
- **Important medical condition (SM):** For individuals under the care and treatment of a medical doctor with conditions that may affect the identification of a durable solution (both positively and negatively) and the requirement of additional assistance (both for treatment and nutritional and non-food items)
- **Single parent (SP):** Single-parent household (male or female 18 or older) with one or more dependants, all of whom are under the age of 18, in which the head of household (or principal applicant) is both the primary income earner and care provider
- **Women at risk (WR):** Women who face protection risks particular to their gender, whether they are single heads of families, widowed, unaccompanied girls or unaccompanied by a male family member, as well as women that are survivors of violence. Protection problems include security threats, sexual violence, physical abuse, intimidation, torture, economic hardship or marginalization, lack of integration prospects, community hostility and different forms of exploitation
- **Pregnant or lactating (PG):** A temporary status to highlight medical assistance, nutritional enhancement or material requirements for women or girls during pregnancy or lactation

² UNHCR, The community services function in UNHCR, An independent evaluation, (2003), EPAU, p. 33; UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies, (2007), p. 190, 191.

³ *Separated children* are boys and girls under the age of 18 who are separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. *Unaccompanied children* are children who have been separated from both parents and or other relatives and who are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

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- **Specific legal and physical protection needs (LP):** Persons, male or female, not falling into the other categories, but who have specific needs within the particular context (e.g. survivors of torture or violence, members of a particular ethnic or religious group, or other protection concerns)

D. Identification of PWSN

Identification of PWSN should take into account the vulnerability and family situation of the individual within the local community context. Assistance should only target individuals, who are assessed to be PWSN according to the following criteria:

- The individual should have at least one type of the above listed vulnerabilities (see under eligible cases). Individuals who have more than one type of vulnerability should be prioritized over individuals who have only one type
- The intervention should aim at reducing levels of vulnerability
- The intervention should only take place as a last resort where/when community based support and emergency or special assistance from other entities (humanitarian or charity agencies/authorities/institutions) have not been made available within the required timeframe; and if the required assistance is not provided, the identified protection risk of the individual will deteriorate significantly
- The intervention should be one off and not repeated: assistance to PWSN that require long-term assistance, for instance a person with a serious medical condition should be limited to the emergency phase. For long-term support, cases should be referred to government authorities or other agencies and community support should be mobilized

E. Types of Assistance and Scope of Response Action

The assistance should be short-term while prioritizing the identification of longer-term community-based support mechanisms. Depending on the circumstances of the case, UNHCR or its partners can provide the following assistance:

- **Non Food Relief Items (NFRIs)**
- **Shelter** material
- **Income generation assistance** to make the PWSN self- sufficient
- **Mobility equipment** and prosthetics
- **Security material** such as padlocks for persons with specific legal and/or physical protection needs
- **Cash grant** to up to 20,000 Rupees (see procedure for cash grants)

Cash assistance should only be provided when all other forms of assistance are not appropriate. If the PWSN assistance is funded by UNHCR and if possible or necessary, it should be given to the recipient directly by UNHCR and not by an implementing partner (IP). Cash assistance may cover:

- Exceptional medical care to prevent health hazard or fatal health condition of the individuals
- Transportation to reach the nearest appropriate levels of health care where needed, for instance for survivors of violence
- Transportation for survivors of violence to attend courts where needed
- Implementation of physical security measures for the safety of survivors of violence

F. General Procedure and Responsible Staff

Establish a clear referral system for PWSN cases in each setting, which guide general procedures and responsible staff from identification and assessment to monitoring and evaluation (see annex 4 as example of referral pathway).

Please note that the following procedure has to be applied, if the PWSN assistance is funded by UNHCR. If not, part C, D and E of the SOPs on eligibility criteria, ways of identification and types of assistance and scope of response action should still be considered when providing assistance to PWSN.

Identification

UNHCR field staff and IP staff can identify PWSN cases in following ways:

- PWSN are identified **in the field**, for example during protection monitoring or NFRI distributions
- They are **referred to UNHCR by the IDP community or other agencies**
- PWSN **approach the office of UNHCR** or an **IP** directly, requesting assistance

Assessment

Assessment procedure includes the following:

- IP or UNHCR staff identify a potential case and complete assessment of particular needs
- If IP identifies case, IP has to refer the case to UNHCR for verification of facts (recommendation) and approval. If UNHCR identifies a potential case, only separate UNHCR approval is required
- A field visit, including interview of the PWSN must be undertaken as part of assessment for all applications
- The assessment should include a verification of the details reported by the PWSN. This may be done by conducting a home visit and talking with family/community members. Access to case history reports from referral agencies may be necessary
- The availability of government services and assistance by the local community should form part of the assessment
- The capacity of the individual to receive the proposed assistance should be assessed
- UNHCR or IP staff, however, should not aim at finding the solution for the individual. Instead the PWSN should be encouraged to think about, find and express what s/he sees as a solution for him/herself: The PWSN should be asked to explain what he/she sees as a solution(s) to his/her problems and what his/her own contribution to the solution(s) will be.
- Specific output indicators should be identified and agreed at time of assessment
- The expected date for delivery of the assistance should be stated

The assessing IP or UNHCR staff member enters all this information into a standardized assessment form (see Annex 2 for a sample), dates and signs it.

Recommendation

This standardized assessment form is given to the UNHCR officer responsible for PWSN cases. This person should preferably be an international UNHCR Protection or Community Services officer. The designated UNHCR officer should verify the

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application based on the above criteria, check the assessment form and complete it if needed, including with the following information:

- Basic family details
- Justification for the assistance, including a description of the critical and unmet emergency needs
- Types of assistance suggested, including contribution of the PWSN and/or community
- Desired output indicators to measure the success of the assistance

If verified positively, the designated UNHCR officer recommends the specified PWSN assistance by dating and signing the assessment form.

Approval

The recommendation is reviewed by the authorizing staff, preferably the most senior UNHCR Protection officer. The assistance may only be provided when both the designated UNHCR staff and the authorizing UNHCR staff (and in cases where assistance exceeds 20,000 Rupees the HOO and Protection staff of RO Colombo) approve the eligibility of the individual for PWSN assistance and the recommended form of assistance, by dating and signing the assessment form.

Provision of assistance

Assistance may be provided by UNHCR staff or by IPs. After a grant has been approved the recipient should be informed about the purpose of the assistance and expected output indicators that will be used to assess the impact of the grant. In addition, recipients should be advised that misuse of the assistance may lead to ineligibility for further assistance.

Approval and receipt of the assistance is to be completed in a timely manner.

This can be achieved by:

- Delivery date for provision of assistance stipulated in standardized assessment form
- Approval by the UNHCR designated officer completed at earliest possible time
- Fast tracking emergency cases

Procedure for cash grants

In exceptional cases where cash is being provided, a direct disbursement by the authorizing UNHCR officer to the beneficiary is required. The beneficiary must sign a petty cash voucher acknowledging receipt of the money and agreeing to use it for the identified purpose. The beneficiary is informed that he/she will have to provide disbursement records and receipts proving that the money has been used for the agreed purpose and these must be obtained and kept by the authorizing UNHCR staff. If it is not possible to obtain a receipt, a note for the file signed by the authorizing UNHCR staff is necessary to ensure financial accountability. Financial and assistance monitoring is required as per UNHCR financial regulations and UNHCR guidelines. Assistance above 20,000 rupees must be cleared by the HOO and referred to UNHCR RO Colombo (Protection) for consultation and approval.

Monitoring and evaluation

UNHCR and/or IP with supervision and guidance of the UNHCR designated officer will monitor output indicators for impact of PWSN assistance on a case by case

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basis within a month of the grant. Monitoring and evaluation of the assistance should preferably be undertaken by the person who undertook initial assessment.

Follow-up assessment should have regard to the following:

- If the provision of the assistance has responded effectively to the identified need
- Assess impact on PSWN and her/his community based on the identified output indicators, and
- If further assistance is needed

Identified cases of fraud should be carefully recorded to guarantee the integrity of the program. UNHCR staff should familiarize themselves with market prices for items such as fuel and transportation on a regular basis to identify misuse of funds.

Case management and confidentiality

The confidentiality of the recipient and his/her family must be maintained at all times. The case management system should ensure that:

- Case information and follow-up is recorded in a dedicated database
- Database is periodically reviewed to monitor trends and uncover irregularities
- Trends and analysis of data are shared on a monthly basis with other agencies distributing similar types of assistance
- Case details are kept strictly confidential and are not disclosed to a third party except when referred to another protection agency for follow-up. This agency should also be requested to maintain records confidential
- Access to the PWSN database is restricted to the designated and authorizing UNHCR staff, and the HOO and provided to RO as required

H. Annexes

Annex 1: Assistance available from Social Service Officers (SSO) at DS level

Annex 2: Model of Assessment Form on PWSN

Annex 3: Database on Regional Remedial Institutions

Annex 4: Example of Assessment Pathway for PWSN – Puttalam

UNHCR Sri Lanka

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