

Reading 6.1.1. Emergency Protection in Practice

Characteristics of a refugee emergency

1. There are many ways to characterise refugee emergencies. The background paper entitled “Introduction to Refugee Emergency Management” provides a good general description. In order to help you focus on the specific context and the kind of protection problems this paper deals with, it may be useful to recall the main characteristics of such situations.
2. Refugee emergencies usually present several, if not all, of the following characteristics:
 - a sudden and rapid population movement,
 - across international borders,
 - of large number of persons,
 - with high percentage of women and children,
 - caused by acute danger or other threats to their lives and liberty,
 - and into areas with scarce resources and limited infrastructure.
3. Even if the arrival of individuals or small groups of persons seeking asylum therefore does not qualify as a “refugee emergency”, it should not be forgotten that such situations also may present a number of protection problems. Some may require intervention on an emergency basis to prevent refugees from being returned to a country where their life or freedom would be in imminent danger. Although such protection problems unfortunately are common in all areas of the world and constitute an important part of the work of UNHCR staff and specialised non-governmental organizations, in this paper we will be concentrating on the specific protection issues in refugee emergencies.