Joint WFP/UNHCR action plan to address rumours in [camp/settlement]

**1. Introduction**

The **objective** of this joint action plan is to address rumours in the [camp/settlement] regarding [programme/s]. The settlement hosts approximately X refugees and asylum seekers and is surrounded by over X members of the host community. The refugees and asylum seekers residing in [camp/settlement] are from [country] (X%), [country] (X%), [country] (X%), and other countries (X%).

The main **rumours** to be addressed in [camp/settlement] suggest, first, that [agency] [rations are being reduced by humanitarian organisations to push refugees and asylum seekers into livelihoods activities and local integration, second, that engagement in livelihoods activities will prevent refugees and asylum seekers from being resettled to other countries, and third, that refugees and asylum seekers need to pay to be able to participate in the livelihoods activities.]

Rumours generally emerge under conditions marked by a combination of **uncertainty**, **anxiety**, and a **lack of trustworthy information**. To successfully manage rumours, the key is to identify the **most trusted communication channels** to better understand the rumours that are spreading and **share accurate information** through these same channels. By sharing accurate and actionable information through trusted communication channels, any questions and/or fears that are behind the rumours can be addressed.

In case there is a lack of clarity around the **information sources that refugees and asylum seekers trust the most** and the ones that they trust the least, and also if there are any differences between **men**, **women**, **young people**, **older people**, **people with disabilities** etc. in this respect, it is strongly recommended to carry out an **information needs assessment** to better understand crisis-affected people’s information needs and communication preferences.

**2. How to deal with rumours**

Rumours should be viewed as **valuable community feedback** since they give insight into what community members think of the humanitarian response, what they do not understand, and what information gaps exist.

Addressing rumours needs to happen through a conversation that takes into account where the information comes from and why people believe it, considering their fears and desires. UNHCR and WFP field staff should regularly ask the following questions as part of **unstructured and informal conversations** with a diverse sample of refugees and asylum seekers to stay on top of any rumours that might be going around in the refugee camp:

* Is there anything that you think humanitarians need to know?
* Have you heard something that you are not sure is true?
* Is there any positive or negative feedback about the humanitarian response you’d like to share?

When deciding how to deal with a specific rumour, it’s important to understand and recognise the **potential impact of a rumour**, its **likelihood to be believed**, and understand **what piece of information is needed to proactively correct the misunderstanding** without spreading the rumour further.

If possible, it might also be helpful to find out who is starting the rumours, and to ask the above questions to these same people. There might be an opportunity to better understand why they are spreading the rumours and how to address some of their potential information gaps, concerns or fears. It will be important, however, to assess any potential security risks before doing so.

**Accurate and actionable information** on the issues causing the rumour should be shared with refugees and asylum seekers through a **variety of trusted communication channels**. When dealing with rumours, **face-to-face information sharing and conversations** are usually most effective for **building trust** andcommunicating important information. Face-to-face communication in **local languages** will therefore most likely need be prioritised in most contexts, e.g. through a **diverse team of UNHCR and WFP field staff** who actively seek out the most vulnerable members of the community with the least access to information. As mentioned above, an information needs assessment can help operations better understand which particular face-to-face and other communication channels are the most trusted ones.

Having **regular face-to-face interactions** helps build trust. If the community regularly sees staff being respectful, providing useful information and interacting well with all members of the community, it will contribute greatly to the trust refugees and asylum seekers place in both WFP and UNHCR.

Moreover, individuals such as **health workers, religious workers, community volunteers** and other service providers interact with a wide variety of community members on a regular basis and are often seen as **trusted sources of information**. Involving them in efforts to share accurate information can greatly expand our ability to tackle rumours.

Finally, it’s important to be **consistent** with the information that is shared across different communication channels. If conflicting information is shared through different channels, it will have a damaging effect on refugees’ and asylum seekers’ trust in humanitarian organisations.

**3. Communication channels**

The below **table** lists the different **communication channels** that can be used to counter rumours, with priority given to face-to-face channels. The table also details which **vulnerable groups** can be reached through which channels, **how frequent** information should be shared through each channel, and **which focal points are responsible** for making sure that communication is taking place.

**Refugee representatives** should be involved in the information sharing campaign as much as possible as long as they feel comfortable doing so and don’t feel that this puts them at risk. It will be important to ask them about how they feel about being involved and to go along with their suggestions. Refugee representatives will need to be trained on the key messages to make sure they spread the right information.

Note that **every time information is shared**, right afterwards **a small number of refugees and asylum seekers should be selected**, including illiterate people, people with disabilities and older people, to check in a private conversation **if they have understood the key messages**. Doing this will help **improve the key messages** and better understand **which communication channels work best**.

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| **Communication channel** | **Vulnerable groups reached** | **Frequency** | **Responsible** |
| **UNHCR and WFP field staff** | * Illiterate people * Older people * People with disabilities | * Regular extended visits that reach every corner of the [camp/settlement] | * UNHCR (lead) * WFP |
| **Community meetings**  (organised together with community and religious leaders) | * Illiterate people * Older people | * Monthly community meetings | * UNHCR * WFP * Cooperating/ implementing partners (CPs/IPs) |
| **Community-based organisations**  (incl. women’s groups, organisations for people with disabilities, youth groups) | * Illiterate people * Older people * People with disabilities | * CBOs are trained on the key messages to share accurate information and be able to correct rumours at any time | * UNHCR * WFP |
| **Refugee committee** | * Illiterate people * Older people | * Committee members are trained on the key messages to share accurate information and be able to correct rumours at any time | * UNHCR * WFP * CPs/IPs |
| **Zone chiefs and block representatives** | * Illiterate people * Older people * People with disabilities | * Refugee reps are trained on the key messages to share accurate information and be able to correct rumours at any time | * UNHCR * WFP |
| **Theatre / role plays**  (with the involvement of refugees if they feel comfortable participating) | * Illiterate people * Older people | * Monthly | * UNHCR * WFP |
| **Visual messages on posters, leaflets and noticeboards** | * Illiterate people * Older people * People with mobility impairment (leaflets) * People with hearing impairment | * Continuously | * UNHCR * WFP |
| **Radio** | * Illiterate people * Older people * People with mobility and visual impairments | * Weekly | * WFP * UNHCR |
| **Loudspeakers and megaphones** | * Illiterate people * Older people * People with mobility and visual impairments | * Weekly | * UNHCR * WFP |
| **SMS and WhatsApp campaigns** | * People with mobility and hearing impairments | * Monthly | * WFP * UNHCR |

**4. Joint key messages**

As stated at the beginning of this document, the main **rumours** to be addressed in [camp/settlement] suggest, first, that [agency] [rations are being reduced by humanitarian organisations to push refugees and asylum seekers into livelihoods activities and local integration, second, that engagement in livelihoods activities will prevent refugees and asylum seekers from being resettled to other countries, and third, that refugees and asylum seekers need to pay to be able to participate in the livelihoods activities]. The below key messages have been developed to better inform refugees about the ongoing **livelihoods programme** and how **resettlement** works, so that any potential information gaps can be closed [adapt key messages as needed]:

1. The livelihoods programme has been created to give refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity to learn new skills and become more independent economically.
2. The newly learnt skills will be useful for the rest of your lives, be that here in [country], back in your home country or another country.
3. Those that participate in the livelihoods programme will be better able to provide for themselves and their families once they start earning a more stable income.
4. Refugees and asylum seekers can join the livelihoods programme if they are at working age (18-59 years), with full physical and mental ability to work, and effectively resident in [camp/settlement] or in the surrounding host community – regardless of their country of origin, religion or status (asylum seekers, refugees). There is no need to pay to participate in the livelihoods activities – all activities are free of charge.
5. WFP and UNHCR strongly encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities that the livelihoods programme offers. The livelihoods programme offers the following opportunities:
   * Agricultural support in cash crop production;
   * Improved access to markets through asset transfers (e.g. through egg production, poultry farming, carpentry, etc.);
   * Professional trainings;
   * Language courses;
   * Wage and self-employment opportunities;
   * UNHCR Graduation Approach activities [to be specified];
   * Business planning;
   * Creation of savings and loans groups.
6. The reason that the livelihoods programme has not been affected so far by the same funding issues as the [rations] is that the livelihoods programme was approved by our donors in [year] for several years. Moreover, the livelihoods activities are funded by donors who are different from the donors who are funding the [type of] assistance. The donors for the livelihoods activities don’t allow us to use their funding for anything but livelihoods activities.
7. For those that are hoping to be resettled, please understand that only a very small number of refugees are resettled from [country] to other countries and this is not going to change in the near future. Also, please understand that:
   * Resettlement is for refugees who have no option to integrate locally or return to their home country and have protection needs in [country].
   * Resettlement is available for refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or fundamental human rights are at risk.
   * Resettlement is not a right and is not available to everyone who has refugee status. Places are very limited and Resettlement States – the countries that receive resettled refugees – decide how many refugees they want to receive.
   * While UNHCR identifies refugees for potential resettlement and interviews them to assess their eligibility for resettlement, the final decision to accept a refugee for resettlement rests with Resettlement States and not UNHCR.
   * All of UNHCR’s services are free of charge, including resettlement. If anyone asks for payment in return for services, this should be reported to UNHCR immediately.
8. If you have any further questions, please don’t hesitate to approach and speak to us. There are different ways you can get in touch with us, including:
   * UNHCR, WFP and partner field staff that regularly visit the [camp/settlement] can be approached at any time for questions, feedback or complaints.
   * [Agency]’s hotline, the free hotline for the humanitarian response in [country]. Listen out for the introductory message to select a language that applies to you – for Swahili, select number 7. The call operators will do their best to provide clarifications – make sure that they know where you are calling from and that you are a refugee resident in [camp/settlement]. If they do not have the answer available, they will gather as much information as possible from you and, if you agree, share the issue with the relevant refugee assistance focal point for action or clarification.
   * The refugee committee is in regular contact with us and can share your questions, feedback or complaints with us.
   * The zone chiefs and block representatives can also be approached to share your questions, feedback or complaints with us.
   * Complaint boxes are located in the office of the refugee committee, in the [agency] office in [camp/settlement], as well as in the camp’s administration office.

**5. Joint action plan**

The below **table** details the **different steps** that will have to be taken to launch the information sharing campaign that is needed to tackle the rumours:

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| **Action** | **Output** | **Responsible** | **Deadline** |
| **Draft key messages to address rumours** | Draft version of key messages | Joint Hub |  |
| **Review draft key messages**  (internally and together with refugee representatives) | Feedback on draft key messages | Country Offices |  |
| **Finalise key messages** | Final key messages | Joint Hub |  |
| **Develop a guide for the hotline operators** | Final guide for hotline operators | Country Offices |  |
| **Train hotline operators on the [camp/settlement] context and key messages** | Hotline operators trained | Country Offices |  |
| **Train field staff on key messages** | Field staff trained | Country Offices |  |
| **Train refugee representatives on key messages** | Refugee representatives trained | Country Offices |  |
| **Develop posters and leaflets**  (in collaboration with refugee representatives) | Posters and leaflets developed | Country Offices  (with Joint Hub inputs) |  |
| **Initiate distribution of posters and leaflets** | Distribution of posters and leaflets | Country Offices |  |
| **Develop theatre script**  (in collaboration with refugee representatives) | Theatre script developed | Country Offices  (with Joint Hub inputs) |  |
| **Train staff and refugees on theatre script**  (including young people, older people and people with disabilities) | Staff and refugees trained on theatre script | Country Offices |  |
| **Conduct theatre activities** | Theatre activities conducted | Country Offices |  |
| **Develop and record radio, loudspeaker and megaphone messages** | Audio messages developed | Country Offices (with Joint Hub support) |  |
| **Initiate dissemination of audio messages through radio, loudspeakers and megaphones** | Dissemination of audio messages | Country Offices |  |
| **Develop SMS and WhatsApp messages** | SMS and WhatsApp messages developed | Country Offices  (with Joint Hub inputs) |  |
| **Initiate dissemination of SMS and WhatsApp messages** | Dissemination of SMS and WhatsApp messages | Country Offices |  |
| **Establish an anti-rumours field task force** (engaging youths) | Anti-rumours field task force established | Country Offices |  |
| **Monitor rumours** by having regular conversations with a diverse sample of refugees as well as the anti-rumours field task force, and **adapt the key messages** accordingly | Updated key messages | Country Offices | Continuously |