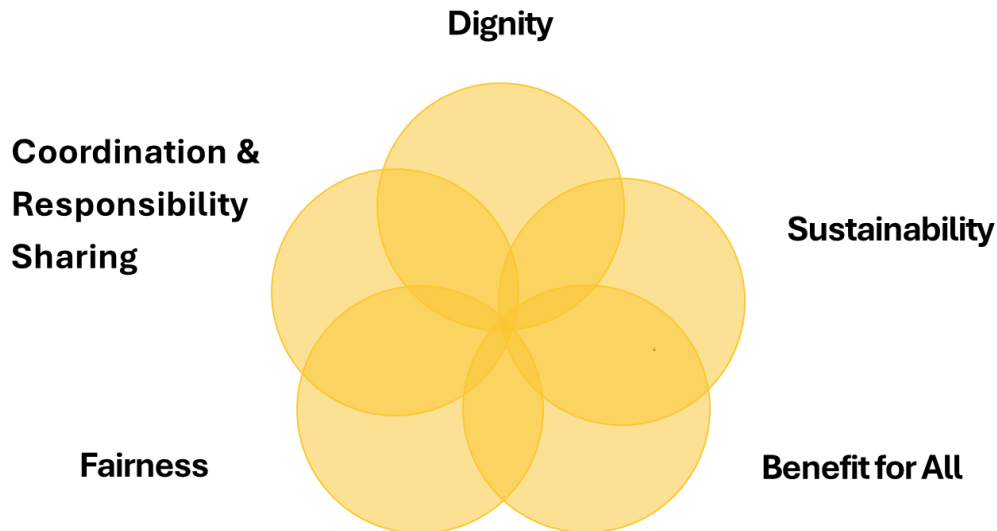# Core Reception Principles
Welcoming People Seeking Safety, Supporting Host Communities, and Advancing Fair, Effective Asylum Systems

As forced displacement reaches historic levels, people fleeing their homes to escape conflict, persecution, climate disasters, and other causes continue to arrive in communities of refuge around the world to seek safety and opportunity. But the lack of appropriate reception responses can leave people in dire circumstances, interfere with the fairness and efficiency of asylum and other migration processes, needlessly limit the contributions of newcomers to host communities, and exacerbate costs due to ineffective programs. At the same time, harmful political discourses are promoting misinformation, discrimination, and violence against displaced people and migrants, as some countries take steps to push people back at borders and limit the fundamental human right to seek asylum.

> **Reception Systems** include the policies, programs, services and other assistance (set out by law or available in practice) that establish how asylum seekers and migrants are treated from their arrival thru the adjudication of their cases, including in the satisfaction of basic needs, access to migration legal processes, and protection of rights.

Evidence from communities around the world shows that reception solutions can welcome people seeking refuge with dignity, support host communities receiving them, and help uphold and advance fair, effective asylum and migration systems. Drawing on the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) experience implementing programs to support asylum seekers and refugees in transit and in communities of refuge, we find that reception approaches best achieve these aims by embracing five key principles:

Dignity · Sustainability · Benefit for All · Fairness · Coordination & Responsibility Sharing

This document explains how these principles advance reception systems that work for people seeking protection, host communities, and asylum systems. It also provides some examples of good reception practices and how to rethink harmful ones.
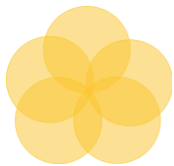
DIGNITY: When dignity is a central principle of reception, rights are respected, including the principle of non-discrimination, humane treatment is provided, and the agency of individuals to make or participate in reception decisions that affect them is upheld. Government reception systems that promote dignity acknowledge the circumstances that caused people to flee, recognize the humanitarian circumstances displaced people face, ensure they enjoy an adequate standard of living, and operate with a presumption of liberty, avoiding detention and other restrictions on liberty.

Ensuring dignity is crucial to the fundamental humanity of people seeking safety who interact with reception services and systems. Promoting the dignity of people who flee their homes, including through official communications, can foster public understanding, address misinformation, and counter dangerous rhetoric.

Failing to treat people with dignity, such as by leaving them unable to satisfy their basic needs or resorting to the use of detention and detention-like facilities, can gravely harm individuals' immediate and long-term physical and mental health, wastes government resources on more costly approaches, delays and reduces the contributions of newcomers to host communities, and interferes with the fair and effective adjudication of requests for asylum and other protections.

Promising Practices

Since 2015, Uruguay has provided applicants for refugee protection the same national identity document used by Uruguayan citizens. It is valid throughout the adjudication of the person's case and can be used to access the labor market, education and other social services. This approach avoids stigmatization and provides a pathway to inclusion.

The Case Management Pilot Program (CMPP), a U.S. government-funded alternative to detention, upholds the dignity of people seeking protection instead of subjecting them to costly and inhumane detention. Through local government entities and non-profit organizations, CMPP provides trauma-informed services, trafficking and other screenings, as well as legal orientation and assistance. It is a fraction of the cost of detention, and a prior case management program resulted in 99 percent attendance at immigration check-ins and court hearings.
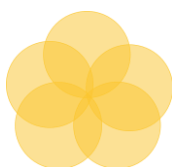
SUSTAINABILITY: A sustainable approach to reception should be part of a formalized, adequately funded, and planned humanitarian system that can scale up and down to meet current needs. It should comprehensively address the circumstances of individuals and host communities - from information provision and legal orientation to temporary accommodation and inclusion in local services and labor market opportunities. Reception systems should set forth the responsibilities of government institutions and the rights of individuals.
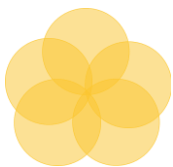
Making sustainability a core principle is crucial to ensure that reception systems are agile and can adapt to shifting needs and displacement / migration trends, are as efficient and cost-effective as possible, and minimize service disruptions that can leave individuals and host communities without support. Treating reception as a temporary or emergency response often results in lower quality, higher cost measures that are difficult to sustain. For instance, the UK's use of hostels to provide what was intended to be short-term emergency accommodation has left asylum seekers in inadequate facilities for many months, at high cost to the taxpayer.
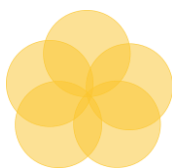
COORDINATION AND RESPONSIBILITY SHARING: How countries achieve coordinated reception approaches with responsibility shared equitably will vary widely depending on the context but should involve national and local actors, including government, civil society, and international organizations. Initial services as people arrive (meeting humanitarian needs, providing information and orientation) are a key component of a coordinated reception approach, but reception should also encompass medium-term programming, including support to move newcomers toward inclusion and self-sufficiency. Assistance to individuals to relocate within a country or region to rejoin family / community members or receive reception support through formal relocation programs may also form an important part of coordinated responsibility sharing.

Reception systems that effectively promote coordination and responsibility sharing can reduce strains on areas of initial arrival, unlock contributions of newcomers across host communities, make more efficient use of resources, and connect protection seekers with family members and other local entities that can welcome and support them. The lack of coordination and effective responsibility sharing can lead to mounting pressure on countries and communities of first arrival, resulting in worsening conditions and uncoordinated secondary movements instead of relying on existing relocation schemes. This spiraling situation can add fodder to dangerous anti-refugee and other xenophobic rhetoric and threats.

FAIRNESS: Reception should enable a fair process for individuals who are applying for asylum or other migratory status. Information and legal assistance provision are paramount to support protection seekers in their ability to make informed decisions, avoid misinformation, understand legal obligations and options, and fairly participate in asylum and other protection or regularization procedures.

Centering fairness in reception systems – including through robust information provision and legal assistance – helps to ensure that individuals receive appropriate refugee and other relevant protections, that decisions are rendered in a timely manner, and that host communities can channel individuals to available supports and better leverage limited resources. The lack of accurate information leaves individuals unaware of existing support that can better meet their needs and results in the spread of damaging misinformation that creates confusion and additional costs for host communities. Without adequate legal assistance, asylum and other protection or regularization procedures can see delays and appeals of inaccurate decisions multiply – needlessly burdening judicial systems and increasing costs of the appeals process. Facilitating fair, effective, and timely protection and regularization processes is also crucial to sustain public confidence and support in the system.

Promising Practices

Free legal counseling and representation are an integral due process and fairness safeguard in the accelerated asylum screenings adopted by Switzerland in 2019 to reduce the duration of the adjudication process. An external evaluation found that a significant percentage of accelerated cases (50-60 percent) resulted in positive decisions (asylum grants or provisional admissions) and that decisional quality improved over time, with declining rates of decisions invalidated on review.

Virtual platforms can reach displaced populations on the move with referrals to available services and accurate information on local legal protections and procedures. Examples include UNHCR's Facebook page for refugees and migrants in the Americas as well as IRC's SignPost programs in Europe and North, Central and South America that provide information to people on the move via social media, websites, chat apps and direct questions to individual moderators.
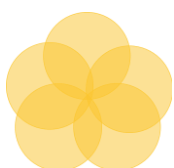
BENEFIT FOR ALL: Reception systems should facilitate, not limit, the contributions of newcomers and lay the foundations for self-reliance and inclusion – to the benefit of newcomers and host communities alike. Making available existing community services, with attention to newcomers' particular circumstances, avoids service duplication and can be an opportunity to strengthen service delivery generally. Contributions are multiplied where newcomers have access to labor markets , language courses, qualification accreditation and skill (re)training.

Refugees and migrants make significant social, cultural and economic contributions to host communities, often paying more in taxes than they receive in social welfare assistance. Quickening and maximizing these contributions depend largely on the policies newcomers face on arrival. Failing to adopt beneficial reception policies can result in diminished and delayed economic contributions and inclusion outcomes, as well as missed opportunities for universal service improvements that can help to counter potential host community resentment and xenophobic attitudes. In particular, bans on, and delays in, allowing asylum applicants to seek employment are both an immediate and long-term barrier to the self-sufficiency and economic inclusion of newcomers and cause significant financial losses to host country economies.

Promising Practices

Colombia's "integration centers" provide attention to newcomers and host communities alike. Located in cities with large Venezuelan populations, they provide a "one-stop-shop" for government-supported services that can bridge barriers in the health and education systems, offer employment support, and provide access to other government institutions. These services are available not only to Venezuelan refugees and migrants but also displaced Colombians returning from abroad and local host community members.

Recognizing the economic and social positives of migration, Portugal's reception and integration approaches aim to maximize benefits for all. Asylum seekers have the right to work from the moment they apply for protection and can access employment support programs, language and vocational training. The government's focus on qualification recognition and entrepreneurship has resulted in college-educated migrants being "less likely to find themselves overqualified, underemployed or unemployed" compared to elsewhere in Europe. Host communities recognize these benefits. A 2021 survey found that 73 percent of Portuguese people said that the integration of migrants in their area was successful.