

AAP Minimum Standards for Complaints & Feedback Cash Based Technical Working Group, Turkey

Introduction

A complaints and feedback mechanism (CFM) is a formal mechanism for receiving and responding to complaints from people in communities where we implement programmes. The main objectives are to increase the influence of affected communities over programmes, ensure that incidences of dissatisfaction with the service provided are addressed, and to enhance programme quality.

Guiding principles of section

Complaints and feedback mechanisms should actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming, ensuring that mechanisms are appropriate and robust enough to deal with all possible types of complaints about your organisation or programmes.

1. The organisation defines, documents and implements expectations and the processes through which it will enable women, men, boys and girls that it aims to assist, and other stakeholders, to provide and receive feedback.
2. The organisation ensures that stakeholders, including the communities they seek to assist, partners and staff, have safe, accessible and confidential entry points through which they can raise complaints, and that the means by which they can lodge their complaints and receive a response are appropriate to the context and based upon their expressed preferences, as outlined during consultation.
3. The organisation defines, documents and implements procedures for receiving, processing and responding to complaints, and has systems in place to ensure that:
 - The complaints and response procedures specify processes for handling sensitive and nonsensitive complaints
 - All parties understand the complaints procedures
 - Complaints are handled in line with procedures
 - Procedures anticipate the handling of complaints ranging from every day programme issues, to allegations of sexual exploitation, abuse and corruption
 - The information the organisation gathers by handling complaints is used to improve practice and learn
 - Staff understand their responsibility to report abuse they become aware of Staff understand how to manage sensitive information¹

Receiving complaints

Info lines

Given the dispersed nature of refugees in the off-camp setting in Turkey, as well as the wide access to mobile phones among the refugee population, the most commonly used and widely accessible way for the affected population to register complaints is through establishing an info line. As this can also function as a way of resolving programmatic problems, as well as providing information on your own organisations programmes and the programmes of other organisations, it is the most cost effective and useful service to establish in terms of AAP in the Turkey context.

¹ Based on The IASC Principals' Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP) Tools to assist in meeting the commitments

Issues to be taken into consideration in the establishment of an info line:

- Ensure sufficient people staffing the hotline and number of lines in order to absorb the calls being made. Test your info line by having staff call it at different times of the day to see how easily they can get through, as well as including questions in PDMs on ease of access.
- Staff should speak the different languages of the affected population.
- Taking complaints and issues on a daily basis from the affected population is a difficult and stressful job. Staff should be provided with training on dealing with difficult calls, rotated into other roles regularly for short periods, as well as provided with sufficient staff care.

Complaints boxes

Complaints boxes should be placed in a prominent place during distributions of cards as well as in contracted shops or cash disbursement points, where this is applicable. Where organisations have services such as community/temporary education/information centres, complaints boxes can also be used in order to take complaints on all aspects of their programming.

Issues to be taken into consideration in the use of complaints boxes:

- Complaints forms should be short and simple, provided in all languages of the affected population (including Turkish), and always readily available by the boxes.
- Complaints boxes should be easily identifiable.
- This is not to be relied upon as the only way of receiving complaints, due to the low literacy rates among the refugee population as well as the need to be located near to the complaints box in order to use this method.

Email

Establishing a feedback email address is another way to ensure accessibility to the complaints mechanism for a dispersed population.

Facebook

If Facebook is already being used as a tool for information provision then it can also be used to take and respond to complaints about the programme, given its popularity amongst the refugee population as a source of information sharing.

In person/face-to-face

Complaints can be registered directly with field staff during outreach activities, or a request may be made through the info line or email to meet with a staff member in person. It is likely that people may want to make more sensitive complaints in person and so this option should be made available.

Processing complaints

Recording

- All details of a complaint must be recorded in a consistent and organised manner to make analysis easier. Suggested information to be collected is: date of complaint, gender of complainant, e-card number, language, main and sub category of complaint, description of problem, name of complainant, age of complainant, contact details, consent to process information, location/programme, priority grading, focal point for follow up, reference number.

- For staffed complaints mechanisms staff must be trained on active listening techniques, how to respond to issues, and how to log complaints and feedback, to ensure consistent categorization and logging between staff. Staff should also be prepared to respond to frequent complaints made.
- Given that hotlines are commonly used within cash programmes in Turkey as a main CFM, and these lines are also used to deal with commonplace programmatic issues and information, it is important that a complaint is categorized as such.
- Complaints should be tagged as open or closed, and the date of closure of a complaint should be recorded.

Referring

- After a complaint is received and recorded, complaints should be assigned to appropriate internal focal points for investigation and follow up. The nature of the complaint and the priority grading determines who the complaint should be referred to.
- If the complaint does not relate to your agency's programme, it should be passed on to the relevant actor for action.

Taking action

A CFM is only effective and reliable if it can ensure that complaints are appropriately prioritized and responded to within a set timeframe. Focal points receiving a complaint for follow up are responsible for ensuring that complaints are investigated and that appropriate action is taken to resolve the problem reported. This includes determining whether adjustments to the programme are required and possible given the severity or frequency of certain complaints.

Providing feedback

- The outcome of investigation and any action taken to resolve a complaint must be reported back to the complainant.
- If a complaint cannot be resolved or acted upon, the complainant should still be provided an explanation as to why it was not possible to resolve the complaint.
- The timeframe for responding to complaints should be fixed depending on the priority grading of the complaint.
- For commonplace complaints the response may be provided instantly through a hotline.

Management of sensitive complaints

Sensitive complaints are those which require the protection of the complainant, because they either feel embarrassment or shame, or fear of reprisal from another person. Complaints considered sensitive should be clearly defined in organizational "sensitive complaints management" policies.

- Sensitive complaints should be forwarded to and investigated by a designated person or to a higher-level organizational accountability committee appointed by the Country Manager.
- Investigations will be carried out confidentially and only a limited number of persons who need to know about the complaint will be involved in the process. Investigations will be conducted following organizational Investigation Guidelines. If these guidelines do not exist, or you do not have expert investigators within your organisation, NGOs can access the NGO Investigation Specialist Roster, managed by the Danish Refugee Council (<http://ngo-isr.org/>).

- Timeframes for dealing with a complaint will vary due to the nature of the complaint or for procedural reasons and complainant will be kept informed of progress.

Utilization of beneficiary feedback

For complaints to have an impact at the programming level, they need to be collated, analyzed, reported on to decision makers, as well as concrete actions decided upon and implemented. In order to achieve this the following is advised:

- A complaints management committee should be set up to review complaints data on a regular basis as well as respond the type of feedback to be provided to beneficiaries and should meet at least monthly or fortnightly.
- The complaints committee, or assigned focal point should regularly compile and report complaints data to senior management. It is advised that a regular slot is made available at management meetings to review and discuss complaints trends and how feedback will be used for making programmatic changes. Such decisions should be documented and
- Recommended to develop indicators as part of organisational annual planning demonstrating how complaints and feedback are used to inform programmatic decision making.

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