

## Analytical Note on UNHCR Multi-Purpose Hubs (MPHs), IOM Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), and IFRC Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) Clarifying Mandates, Design Logic, and Complementarity under Route-Based Approach

### Purpose of this Note

This note responds to growing queries from civil society, Member States, partners, and donors regarding the distinctions and complementarities between UNHCR's Multi-Purpose Hubs (MPHs), IOM's Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) and IFRC Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs).

These models are increasingly referenced as practical expressions of the route-based approach. While they stem from different institutional origins, in many operational contexts they serve refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants alike, depending on needs and established referral pathways. Clarifying how each model functions, and how they complement one another, is essential to strengthen inter-agency coordination, avoid duplication, and maximize complementarities and operational coherence along routes.

This note draws on UNHCR, *Route-Based Approach: Establishing Multi-Purpose Hubs – A Guide* (2025) [here](#) and the *Minimum Operational Guidance for Multi-Purpose Hubs* (2025) [here](#), IOM's Migrant Resource Centers Toolkit [here](#), as well as IFRC HSP guideline [here](#) and HSP Digital Toolkit [here](#).

### 1. Shared Logic, Complementary roles

UNHCR, IOM and IFRC have each developed service and coordination models situated across routes or corridors where refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants move in mixed and onward movement flows.

- UNHCR embeds Multi-Purpose Hubs (MPHs) within the *route-based approach*, which seeks to connect protection, solutions, and engagement across countries of origin, transit, and destination. MPHs are tangible expressions of this approach, offering multi-actor, community-informed protection and referral services for refugees, asylum-seekers, and other at-risk people earlier along the route. Their aim is to reduce exposure to risks of trafficking, violence, and unsafe onward movement and to enable access to asylum, protection, and durable-solution pathways at the earliest possible stage.
- IOM situates its Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) within the *Migrant Response and Resource Mechanism (MRRM)* framework, also grounded in route and corridor analysis. MRCs provide migrant-centred assistance, protection case management, and counselling on safe and regular migration, economic empowerment services while strengthening national and municipal migration-management systems. Like MPHs, MRCs are designed to support earlier protection and assistance along movement routes, contributing to safer and more orderly mobility.
- IFRC Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) provide assistance and protection for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced people irrespective of their legal status in relation

to the *Global Route-Based Migration Programme* and in line with the IFRC's *principled humanitarian approach*. Operated by National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, HSPs may be established both in emergency response and longer-term programmes to meet essential needs of people on the move.

The three organizations therefore share a route logic, addressing the continuum of movement rather than isolated country responses, but differ in mandate, primary objectives, and protection lens.

- **Mandate:** UNHCR's work is anchored in the *international protection* mandate of the 1951 Refugee Convention, ensuring access to asylum and durable solutions for those in need of protection. IOM's mandate is *migration management and assistance*, promoting safe, orderly, and humane mobility for all migrants, including those in vulnerable situations. IFRC approaches migration and displacement in a purely humanitarian lens, providing information, safe referrals, and other services that meet the essential needs of any migrant and displaced person.
- **Primary Objective:** MPHs aim to identify and channel individuals in need of international protection toward asylum and protection systems while reducing the risks of mixed and onward movements. MRCs aim to assist migrants in vulnerable situations through information, immediate support, and counselling on regular migration and voluntary return. HSPs aim to address the essential needs of people on the move along mixed migration routes, in countries of origin, transit, destination, and return.
- **Protection Lens:** MPHs operate with a protection-first lens ensuring access to asylum and specialized services. MRCs apply a protection and assistance lens, integrating protection safeguards and services such as vulnerability assessments, case management and referrals. HSPs provides needs-based humanitarian services and support to people on the move.

In essence, UNHCR, IOM and IFRC approach mixed movements from distinct but complementary institutional perspectives: UNHCR through international protection and solutions along routes, IOM through protection of migrants and humane and orderly migration governance/management, and IFRC through principled humanitarian action focused on essential needs.

In many contexts, MPHs, MRCs and HSPs already function as complementary entry points for *all* people on the move, irrespective of mandate. While MPHs prioritize access to asylum procedures, protection and solutions pathways, they also deliver or refer to services relevant to migrants. Likewise, MRCs primarily serve migrants, but also routinely encounter persons with international protection needs and refer them to UNHCR for asylum procedures, documentation, or specialized protection services. HSPs provide a neutral humanitarian point of contact, offering essential assistance and information to migrants, refugees and displaced people, and facilitating referrals to specialized services delivered by UNHCR, IOM, public authorities or other actors, depending on needs and context. This practical complementarity ensures that people are not channeled solely based on the facility they approach first, but are supported based on *their needs*, with models linked through referral, coordination and shared safeguarding standards.

## 2. Institutional definitions

### **UNHCR Definition of Multi-Purpose Hub (MPH)**

A Multi-Purpose Hub (MPH) is a physical, digital, or hybrid space, or an entire specific location, identified as a strategic location for coordinated, multi-purpose interventions. Anchored in the route-based approach, a hub can offer information and counselling on available services and options, including regular pathways, support for voluntary return, and referrals to asylum procedures or specialized services in the country where individuals are located. MPHs also aim to respond to diverse needs and protection risks faced by people along their journeys. Services may include support for immediate safety and emergency needs, legal counselling, assistance for children, and health services, including mental health care. These interventions are informed by community feedback, adapted to evolving protection needs, and implemented through collaboration among various actors operating across different locations, depending on existing structures and the needs identified along the route.

*(Source: UNHCR, Route-Based Approach: Establishing Multi-Purpose Hubs – A Guide, 2025)*

### **IOM Definition of Migrant Resource Centre (MRC)**

Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) are core facilities within IOM's broader Migrant Response and Resource Mechanisms (MRRMs). They combine walk-in centres, mobile/outreach, and remote services whose form and function are tailored to context. Their design is driven by route analysis and national/local response plans, and aligned with an integrated MRRM service package (information and orientation; protection screening and case management; safe recruitment/labour rights advice; economic empowerment, documentation and legal aid referrals; health and MHPSS first-line care; family tracing and consular liaison and, where appropriate, counselling on voluntary return and referral). MRCs use a modular approach—standardized service modules that are scalable across routes—while ensuring adherence to safeguarding and data-protection SOPs. The MRCs rely on partnerships with governments and municipalities, local organizations and MLOs/RLOs, UN agencies, the private sector, and civil society to extend reach and ensure continuity across borders.

*(Source: IOM Migrant Resource Centres Toolkit)*

### **IFRC Humanitarian Service Point (HSP)**

Humanitarian Service Points (HSP) are neutral, safe, and welcoming physical spaces operated by National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies along mixed movement routes that are accessible to migrants, displaced people and host communities, irrespective of their status, category, nationality, sexual orientation, race, age, gender, disability or any other characteristic and without fear of or interference by authorities. HSPs are run by Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers, trained and working in line with IFRC approach to migration and displacement, as well as protection, gender and inclusion. These service points provide information and other humanitarian services that meet the essential needs of migrants and displaced people and provide safe referrals to other services.

*(Source: HSP Digital Toolkit)*

## **3. Operational and functional differences**

Although MPHs, MRCs, and HSPs are both route-based service mechanisms, they differ across several dimensions: design logic, service offer, operational partnerships, data management, and expected outcomes. These differences reflect each organization's mandate and operational comparative advantage, while remaining complementary in practice.

#### a. Design and approach

- Multi-Purpose Hubs are community-informed, multi-actor spaces. They are adaptable in format (physical, digital, or hybrid), and their scope is defined through consultation with authorities, communities, and partners. UNHCR’s design logic prioritizes flexibility and contextualization, with the service menu evolving in response to feedback loops, movement dynamics, and protection risks. MPHs combine route-based analysis with continuous community engagement and feedback mechanisms (engagement with communities), allowing services to adapt to changing needs and contexts.
- MRCs use a modular, typology-based design under IOM’s MRRM, allowing centers to adapt to context while applying standardized service modules such as case management, protection assistance, MHPSS, AVRR counselling, legal documentation, and integration support. This approach ensures scalability, quality, and compliance with safeguarding and data-protection standards. MRCs are typically managed or supported by IOM in partnership with governments and NGOs; about 45% globally involve IOM, with strong engagement in West and Central Africa (86%) and East, Horn, and South Africa (82%). Beyond immediate aid, they provide information on regular pathways, economic empowerment, and protection services, with 65% of IOM-supported centers offering protection compared to 28% where IOM is not involved.
- The modality and location of HSPs and the services provided will always depend on the context, the capacity of the National Society and the needs of the migrants and displaced people. HSPs may be a fixed or mobile structure, and can include gazebos, tents, kiosks, information desks or equipped buses, vans or boats that can provide humanitarian services to migrants and displaced people along mixed movement routes, in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, along land or at sea. In some cases, strategically located National Society branches may operate as HSPs. There are many ways National Societies meet the longer-term needs of migrants and displaced people in local branches, integration or community centres, or otherwise. HSPs, on the other hand, are implemented as a modality to provide essential and often short-term humanitarian services and information to migrants and displaced people.

In short, MPHs emphasize contextual flexibility and multi-actor configuration, combining physical, digital or hybrid modalities and evolving service menus informed by route analysis and continuous community participation, whereas MRCs emphasize standardization and scalability through modular typologies. Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) emphasize principled humanitarian presence, designed to provide trusted and needs-based assistance through flexible fixed or mobile formats, with strong referral capacity. Together, these different design logics ensure that assistance and protection can be delivered closer to points of movement and protection risk, responding to diverse operational environments while remaining complementary rather than duplicative.

#### b. Scope and service offer

All three models deliver multi-sectoral services along mixed-movement routes. Their scope, however, is reflected through different service logics that reflect complementary mandates.

MPHs organize activities around five core pillars, focusing on early access to protection, asylum, and solutions, using a protection-first lens and strong referral networks bringing together partners to deliver

a combination of information, counselling, referral, and direct services. MPHs are structured around five interconnected pillars:

1. Self-service and information access – including requests, data updates, and information on rights, asylum, and pathways;
2. Community engagement – feedback mechanisms, digital engagement, and participatory community spaces;
3. Counselling and referral – legal aid, protection counselling, and referral to asylum and specialized services;
4. Material support or services – assistance provided by partners and authorities, including health, psychosocial, or material support for those with urgent needs
5. Return, inclusion, and solutions – education, livelihoods, voluntary return counselling, and third country solutions.

IOM Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs):

MRCs follow a modular, typology-based design that allows each centre to adapt to its context and scale services across routes, ensuring consistency in quality and strict adherence to safeguarding and data-protection standards. MRCs serve as migrant assistance and case management centres, ensuring immediate help and safe migration options, in partnership with central government or municipal structures and other local partners and UN agencies Typical modules include:

- case management and referral mechanisms
- provision of food, NFIs, shelter, and emergency health care;
- protection assistance and safeguarding
- health and mental health/psychosocial support (MHPSS)
- counselling on safe migration
- Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)
- legal identity and documentation support
- integration and inclusion services (education, recreational activities, etc)
- economic empowerment services (training, employment, etc)

HSPs operate depending on the context, the capacity of the National Society, and the needs of the migrants and displaced people. However, at a minimum, HSPs always provide relevant and useful information to migrants and displaced people including about the services available to them. Because HSPs may not be directly able to meet all the needs of migrants and displaced people, incorporating safe referral mechanisms is also a valuable service. Formal referral procedures are established with relevant agencies and public services to provide a range of assistance, including in child protection, shelter/accommodation, health including mental health and psycho-social support, Sexual and Gender-Based violence (SGBV) referral pathways, safe houses, education and other specialist care and support. Below is an indicative list of humanitarian services that may be provided at a Humanitarian Service Point:

- Information provision
- Communication and connectivity, including mobile phone charging, WIFI, and access to a telephone or other forms of communication, if needed.
- Restoring family links.
- Food and non-food item distribution.

- A clean and safe place to rest, sometimes including hot meals or snacks, showers, and even spaces to nap or sleep.
- First aid, basic health services.
- Psychological first aid and possibly other mental health support.
- Safe referrals for a range of assistance, e.g. shelter/accommodation, health and mental healthcare, safe houses and other specialist care and support.

In essence, MPHs provide direct and referral-based protection assistance anchored in asylum and durable-solution pathways; MRCs provide direct humanitarian and migration assistance anchored in case management and AVRR; and HSPs emphasise humanitarian assistance and safe referral. Together, they form complementary entry points for early assistance and protection along mixed movement routes.

### c. Operational partnerships

Multi-Purpose Hubs are anchored in UNHCR's protection and solutions mandate and established through collaboration among a range of partners, including governmental, humanitarian, and community actors operating along mixed-movement routes. Their primary purpose is to strengthen coordination, referral, and complementarity among existing service providers at strategic locations.

MPHs bring together NGOs, local authorities, and community-based organizations through coordinated service delivery, which may take place within one facility, across a network of sites, or through hybrid and digital modalities. The operational model adapts to each context and existing service landscape, aiming to connect rather than duplicate structures already in place.

Coordination around the hub may occur through existing national or inter-agency mechanisms, or through route-based and area-based collaboration facilitated by partners involved in the hub. Where formal structures are not in place, the hub itself may serve as a practical platform for partners to align referral systems, data-protection protocols, and standard operating procedures.

Migrant Resource Centres are generally managed by IOM in partnership with national or local authorities (such as, Ministries of Interior or Labour) and are often embedded within governmental or municipal facilities. IOM provides operational management and technical oversight, while collaborating with civil-society, consular entities, and private sector actors. This integrated model links humanitarian assistance with national migration-governance systems ensuring coherent and coordinated service delivery.

Humanitarian Service Points are set up and operated by National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies along mixed migration routes. They operate independently from authorities, but in partnership with local organizations and service providers who are able to provide services that the National Society is unable to provide.

## 4. Complementarity in practice

While MPHs, MRCs, and HSPs differ in design and services orientation, *in practice they operate as interlinked entry points within the same mixed-movement ecosystem*. Along most routes, refugees and migrants move together using the same routes, rely on the same smuggling networks and are exposed to the same protection risks. As a result, access points along routes are often shared, and service models

intersect operationally. In this context, MPHs frequently serve migrants, providing information on risks, referrals to IOM for voluntary return or other migration-related support, and access to immediate services available in the hub. On the other hand, MRCs frequently serve refugees and asylum-seekers, offering basic assistance, information, and onward referral to UNHCR for registration, RSD, and specialized protection services. HSPs often operate as humanitarian access points, providing immediate humanitarian assistance, information and safe referrals to both refugees and migrants. This role is essential in locations where MRCs, MHPs, or HSPs are the first or only point of contact for people on the move.

This bi-directional complementarity is essential: *no person is channeled solely based on where they first arrive, but based on their needs and rights*. The three models ensure that individuals move toward the appropriate lawful pathway, be it asylum, other protection services, or safe and regular migration options.

#### Illustrative examples:

##### Obock (Djibouti):

IOM's *Migrant Resource Centre* provides emergency aid, medical support, psychosocial assistance, and counselling on voluntary return (AVRR). Individuals expressing international protection needs are referred to UNHCR for access to asylum procedures. This setup ensures that both assistance and protection needs are met without overlap.

##### Tine (Chad):

UNHCR's *Multi-Purpose Hub* brings together multiple partners providing protection, health, and community services at a key border location. Current activities include:

- Protection monitoring and data collection at entry points (CTR with border police);
- Case management, awareness raising, and referral coordination jointly by UNHCR, IOM, and CTR;
- Registration and relocation of asylum-seekers (CNARR and UNHCR);
- MHPSS and GBV services (IRC);
- Anti-trafficking interventions (IOM and national authorities);
- Information and counselling on complementary pathways, resettlement, and inclusion opportunities.

##### Rosso (Mauritania and Senegal)

In Rosso, Mauritania and Rosso, Senegal, two cities separated only by the Senegal River, the Mauritanian Red Crescent and Senegalese Red Cross work across borders to exchange information and coordinate effort to ensure people on the move receive continuous humanitarian assistance on both sides of the border. National Society teams work side by side to support migrants and refugees with dignity and compassion. Through the Humanitarian Service Points, the National Societies provide food, hygiene and dignity kits, psychosocial support and first aid, and restoring family links services, while connecting those with additional needs, such as healthcare or protection, to specialized providers. To strengthen the quality and accountability of these services, the Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers have received dedicated training on HSP management and protection standards, ensuring principled, people-centered support across the route.

Together, these examples illustrate how the three models operate at different points along mixed-movement routes, ensuring that persons on the move are channeled toward the most appropriate pathway: asylum and protection where relevant, or safe migration and return options where appropriate. This demonstrates how route-based coordination can align protection and migration-management objectives in practice, without duplication of roles or structures.

Additionally, Mauritania provides one of the clearest illustrations of complementarity between MPHs and MRC-type assistance. In Nouadhibou and Nouakchott, UNHCR and IOM, operate formal Multi-Purpose Hubs that serve as central access points for protection, assistance, and referral services for people on the move along the Atlantic route. These MPHs host multi-actor service packages that include: access to protection and asylum procedures (including RSD interviews); temporary shelter and basic assistance (food, NFIs, hygiene items, safe spaces); medical care, first aid, and MHPSS support; coordinated referral mechanisms for victims of trafficking, GBV survivors, and persons with specific needs; and information and counselling on available pathways, including asylum, regular migration options, and voluntary return of those not in need of international protection.

In these locations, the MPH model demonstrates its full flexibility: refugees and asylum-seekers access protection and solutions, while migrants benefit from immediate humanitarian support and onward referrals, including to IOM. The daily collaboration between UNHCR, IOM, local authorities, and civil society ensures that assistance is not duplicated and that individuals are directed toward the appropriate pathway. This makes Mauritania one of the strongest operational examples of how MPHs function as integrated, multi-actor platforms that serve mixed caseloads.

## Conclusion

While UNHCR, IOM, and IFRC developed route-based operational mechanisms, these models are complementary rather than overlapping. UNHCR's Multi-Purpose Hubs are *protection-anchored and community-informed spaces* that extend access to asylum, specialized services, and durable solutions closer to points of movement. At the same time, IOM's Migrant Resource Centres are *protection and assistance anchored facilities* that provide migrants in vulnerable situations with immediate support, counselling, voluntary return, and guidance on safe and regular pathways. IFRC's Humanitarian Service Points add an essential dimension to this ecosystem. Operated by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, HSPs provide neutral, accessible and needs-based humanitarian services and safe referrals to people on the move irrespective of legal status, particularly in locations where trust, immediacy and humanitarian access are critical.

Together, MPHs, MRCs, and HSPs form part of a coherent and complementary service architecture along mixed-movement routes. By combining access to asylum and protection, migration assistance and principled humanitarian support, they help ensure that people on the move can access timely information, assistance, and protection through the appropriate, lawful, and safe channel.

In essence, MPHs, MRCs, and HSPs are distinct in mandate but complementary in purpose: working in concert, they help ensure that no person on the move is left without assistance, protection, or a pathway to safety.