

Gender considerations

Age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM) in emergencies

UNHCR's AGDM strategy aims to ensure that the meaningful participation of all persons of concern to the office is integral to the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of UNHCR's emergency protection strategies and programmes. Through dialogue with women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds and ages, facilitated by multifunctional teams, a proper analysis of the protection problems they face as well as their proposed solutions can be undertaken.

The findings from participatory assessments and all other information should be analysed from an age, gender and diversity perspective. This analysis provides the basis for emergency planning and responses designed to ensure the effective protection of all members of the community. There needs to be a continuous exchange of information with the different members of the community to ensure that responses are regularly evaluated and adapted according to feedback from the people of concern.

Identify protection risks and needs from an age, gender and diversity perspective

An appropriate response in the provision of protection and material assistance requires participatory assessment of the protection risks facing refugees and their needs. This should take into account not only their specific protection needs, material state, the resources available as well as their capacities, but also their culture, age, gender and background including those of the nationals in whose country they are granted asylum. The provision of protection and of essential goods and services must be provided to refugees in ways which actually meet their needs.

In collaboration with other agencies, promote and ensure collection of sex and age disaggregated data and information on groups with specific needs, such as persons with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children.

Among the risk factors in the wider protection environment that can arise as a result of, and after, women and girls flee their homes are:

- **security problems threatening or exposing them to SGBV or other forms of violence**, particularly when such dangers arise from inadequate housing, the need to collect fuel and water and to tend to crops/animals, or, in urban settings as a result of isolation, problems with housing/landlords, or because displaced children are living on the streets;
- **problems accessing and enjoying assistance and services**, resulting from inadequate food and/or material assistance; inadequate access to health care, especially given their sexual and reproductive roles and disproportionate vulnerability to HIV/AIDS; lack of access to, or unsafe or poor educational opportunities; child labour; abuse by those in positions of authority controlling access to assistance and services; lack of livelihood or income-generating opportunities;
- **the position of women and girls in society**, which results in discrimination against them; marginalization; camp management, community, and leadership structures that do not sufficiently include them; unequal gender and power relations; changes in gender roles; continuing harmful practices; the breakdown of family, community structures, and values;
- **legal systems that do not adequately uphold their rights**, including justice systems that do not fully address harmful traditional practices or domestic violence or that restrict their rights to marriage and divorce and to property and inheritance; traditional justice systems that do not respect international norms; national registration systems that do not provide refugee or asylum-seeking women with individual documentation; asylum systems that are not sensitive to the needs and claims of female asylum seekers;
- **protection systems that do not uphold their rights**, because refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls are not individually registered; disaggregated data on displaced women and girls are not available; systems to identify, monitor, and support women and girls at risk are inadequate and slow to respond; there are insufficient numbers of female and international staff or female law enforcement officers present; a lack of awareness about

women's and girls' rights; reporting systems are not clear; relations between staff and displaced communities need strengthening; monitoring of unaccompanied and separated girls and other women with specific needs is weak.

These more general factors may be combined with individual risk factors. They can be grouped as relating to:

- their **status or situation in society**, including as women who are alone, are single heads-of-household including grandmothers, in mixed and/or polygamous marriages, or are without documentation; as widows without family support; as girls, including adolescents, who are unaccompanied or separated, heads-of-household or out of school; as women and girls who challenge social norms, are stateless, are without access to assistance or in detention;
- their **exposure, or risk of exposure, to SGBV or other forms of violence**, including rape, torture, other serious physical harm, domestic violence, abduction, trafficking, female genital mutilation, early or forced marriage, forced contraception, abortion or sterilization, maltreatment by foster families or relatives, forced recruitment by armed factions, whether as (child) combatants or sex and labour slaves;

additional health care or other support, because they are physically or mentally disabled, traumatized, pregnant or teenage mothers, affected by HIV/AIDS or suffering from medical conditions particular to their sex or gender.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) refers to a range of actions by which an individual is exploited because of her/his sex or gender. This includes physical, emotional, psychological and socio-economic abuse such as rape, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, forced marriage, exploitation, threats, confiscation of money or identity cards, and restrictions on freedom of movement and liberty.

SGBV often occurs in situations where people can abuse the power they exercise over others, such as:

When people are caught in armed conflict: rape and other forms of sexual abuse are widely used as weapons of war to humiliate the enemy.

When people flee persecution and armed conflict: refugees and the internally displaced are at risk of sexual abuse or rape during flight when they are smuggled or trafficked. Because uprooted people often do not have identity documents, money, or access to justice, those with authority may take advantage of the situation and exploit them.

In the family and the community: rape, including within marriage (marital rape), forced early marriage, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual harassment, trafficking of women, and forced prostitution are some types of SGBV that can occur in a family or in the community.

In the daily lives of asylum-seekers, refugees, the internally displaced and returnees: SGBV can occur in the workplace, at border check-points, in detention centres and prisons, in educational institutions, classrooms, health centres, places where assistance and/or documentation is provided, areas for firewood or water collection outside a camp, and at latrines located in poorly designed camp settings.

Survivors of SGBV usually need one or more of the following responses:

i. Medical attention: A survivor of rape needs to see a doctor within 72 hours to receive treatment, which may include prevention of unwanted pregnancy and HIV infection.

ii. Psycho-social support: A survivor may be traumatized and will require emotional and social support, which includes a non-blaming and supportive attitude from the immediate family.

iii. Legal counselling: Most forms of SGBV are punishable crimes under relevant national law. If a survivor wishes, s/he should be supported in reporting the case to the police and prosecuting the perpetrator(s).

iv. Physical security: Survivors may be threatened with retaliation for reporting cases and therefore need a safe place to stay. In some situations, resettling them to another country is one way of protecting them.

Whenever assisting survivors of SGBV, always respect the confidentiality of the survivor. Furthermore, provide all the relevant information to the individual so that s/he can decide what s/he wishes to do.

Impact of an emergency on women

In emergencies, there may be a loss of normal community structure and the changes in demographic proportions may have altered refugees' daily routines. This could also have a negative effect on traditional mechanisms for the protection and assistance of persons with specific needs. As a result of a conflict, the change of social composition in refugee communities may also include:

- i. increased numbers of female-headed households;
- ii. large numbers of unaccompanied children;
- iii. reduced number of able-bodied men; and
- iv. disruption of the extended family, with its role as social caretaker.

All the above requires our attention when planning to accommodate such refugees.

It is important that the specific needs of persons are taken into account in site planning. It may be difficult to reach these people if they do not traditionally form part of the leadership structure of the community. In such cases, the needs and resource assessment should obtain views of all concerned through age, gender and diversity mainstreaming.

Specific actions should be taken to ensure that refugee communities are organized to assist groups with specific needs with their shelter construction. Specific attention should be given to refugees unable to complete their own shelter construction.

Women at risk

Different groups of women exposed to risk: Although not all women are at risk or exposed to protection problems, it is important to identify those women who are specifically at risk due to gender-related reasons. Protection problems include expulsion, refoulement and other security threats. Women may be survivors/victims of sexual and gender violence. Women torture survivors and those associated with fighting forces can also be at risk. Women could also experience different forms of exploitation like forced labour and face acute economic hardships or marginalization forcing them into engaging in risky behaviour, including survival sex. Groups or individual women could face discrimination and community hostility. Protection problems can become exacerbated based on family composition. Individual or groups of women at risk can be categorized either as single woman household, unaccompanied girls, survivors of SGBV etc.

Key actions:

- Undertake focus group discussions with various groups of women to identify those single women who are at risk and require immediate responses and follow up with individual interviews to set up a case management system.
- Design and plan emergency responses that take into consideration the specific needs of those groups of women who are identified as "at risk", so as to ensure emergency assistance is provided and followed up with discussions for agreeing on other short term action plans.
- Combine a variety of methods like follow-up visits, observations and individual discussions to monitor the targeted assistance and support and check if the protection impacts are positive and as intended on the individual or group of women who require these targeted actions.
- Organize community meetings to ensure that established community structures are taking responsibility for providing community protection and support to individual and groups of women at risk.
- Identify and partner with women's groups and NGOs to support activities that undertake case work and draw up plans of action with individual women at risk.
- Ensure that women exposed to risk have opportunities to participate in any women's group activities that are organized for information sharing and raising awareness on entitlements etc.
- Undertake brief awareness raising workshops with local NGO partner staff members and community leaders so that the concept of individual and groups of women at risk are understood and response actions are supported.

Quotes from: Handbook for Emergencies, Third Edition, UNHCR, Geneva, February 2007