**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

Standing Committee
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Update on age, gender and diversity

Summary

This paper reviews the key developments on age, gender and diversity since the updated age, gender and diversity policy was issued in March 2018. The updated policy sets out UNHCR's commitments to women and girls and accountability to persons of concern. The paper also includes examples of achievements in policy areas and discusses the ways in which UNHCR aims to build on good practices to advance the inclusion, participation and empowerment of all persons of concern.

Contents

I.   Introduction

1.   An updated policy on age, gender and diversity (AGD)[1] was issued on 8 March 2018 to further advance the notion of "putting people first", as outlined in UNHCR's strategic directions.[2] The policy consolidates and updates the Office's existing commitments to AGD and accountability to affected people (AAP), as well as the High Commissioner's five commitments to women and girls,[3] recognizing that these complement and build upon one another.

2.   The 2011 AGD policy[4] introduced key concepts and described the different characteristics, needs and capacities of persons of concern, including those of women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities; as well as people from national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous groups.

3.   The updated policy shifts the focus to the means by which AGD goals are achieved and sets out six areas of engagement with 10 minimum core actions. When implemented together throughout the operations management cycle, these actions will drive progressive change toward fuller inclusion of displaced and stateless persons' perspectives and more effective, accountable responses to their needs.

II.   Areas of engagement and core actions: policy and practice

A.   AGD-inclusive programming

4.   In order to respond to the unique needs of individuals and take into account their capacities, fully inclusive humanitarian programming requires AGD to be considered at all stages of the operations management cycle: during assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. AGD is therefore a central element of two global learning programmes on protection in UNHCR, and since 2016, some 250 staff members in 55 countries across five regions have benefitted from them. To advance AGD-inclusive programming, the updated policy requires all operations to collect and disaggregate data on the basis of age, sex and other diversity factors. This requirement will also be a key feature of the new results-based management system, as the current system only allows for disaggregation for a limited number of indicators.

B.   Framework for accountability to affected people

5.   Responsible and effective programming means that UNHCR is accountable, first and foremost, to the people it serves. This approach can be traced back to the 1992 framework for people-oriented planning and has progressively been refined through the tool for participatory assessments in 2006, the accountability framework for age, gender and diversity mainstreaming in 2007, the manual on a community-based approach in UNHCR operations from 2008 and the AGD policy. Since then, UNHCR has played a leadership role in this area, most recently as a

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[1] http://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/5aa13c0c7/policy-age-gender-diversity-accountability-2018.html

[2] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2017-2021, 16 June 2016, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/590707104.html

[3] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR's Commitments to Refugee Women, 12 December 2001, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/479f3b2a2.html

[4] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, 8 June 2011, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4def34f6887.html

co-chair of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee task team on AAP, and made notable progress, including by integrating the accountability framework into the updated AGD policy. The framework comprises four pillars: i. participation and inclusion; ii. communication and transparency; iii. feedback and response; and iv. organizational learning and adaptation.

1. Participation and inclusion

6. Participatory methodologies seek the input of persons of concern to identify priorities and help plan and implement programmes. To ensure the relevance and effectiveness of protection, assistance and solutions interventions, it is critical that all women, men, girls and boys, including groups such as people with disabilities and individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, are able to participate on an equal footing. Since the issuance of the 2011 AGD policy, UNHCR has made significant progress in this regard, with nearly all operations carrying out annual participatory assessments, the results of which are included in the country operations plans. Of particular note was a plan developed by UNHCR in Lebanon to raise awareness of the situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and intersex (LGBTI) individuals and carry out sensitization work with registration staff, in response to needs identified by LGBTI persons of concern. In India, children and youth are an integral part of UNHCR's operational response and are reached through children's groups, child protection committees, youth clubs and adolescent groups. Youth also lead community-based interventions such as mapping health services and supporting persons with specific needs to access them.

7. UNHCR recognizes that the participation of persons of concern has to be central to our work. The updated policy therefore calls upon operations to use participatory methodologies at all stages of the operations management cycle in order to cover implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation stages more systematically.

2. Communication and transparency

8. Accurate information, in accessible languages and formats, needs to be shared with persons of concern so that they can make decisions about their safety, protection, and well-being, and be able to hold humanitarian actors accountable. In Bangladesh, UNHCR set up information points at strategic locations, where refugees can ask questions and give feedback, as well as receive information about the available services and assistance and the roles of the humanitarian actors. In Malawi, UNHCR organized discussions with community leaders, women's groups and persons with disabilities about the findings of assessments. In Turkey, members of Syrian refugee women's committees served as community focal points and shared information on education, civil registration, rights and assistance, and raised awareness on women's rights and the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

9. It is vital that persons of concern have channels of communication with agencies, are kept informed of their rights, responsibilities and entitlements and made aware of protection and assistance programmes as they evolve. In 2017, UNHCR developed 'easy to read' versions of key documents, including the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants. This format is designed to improve access to information for people with limited literacy skills, as well as those with intellectual disabilities. Effective communication with persons of concern can also help manage expectations about what UNHCR can and cannot deliver. The updated AGD policy, currently being translated into several languages, requires country operations to document how they communicate with persons of concern.

3. Feedback and response

10.   To understand protection risks and the effectiveness of the humanitarian response, persons of concern need to be able to communicate safely and in confidence with UNHCR and partners, with the assurance that corrective action, if needed, will be taken. Country operations around the world employ a variety of methods to collect and respond to feedback. In Mexico, UNHCR consulted with 134 adolescents and adults, including LGBTI persons, to design a feedback and response system capable of handling even the most sensitive complaints, such as those relating to sexual exploitation and abuse. The system included multiple channels for feedback, including through confidential messages on an innovative online platform. In Jordan, a UNHCR helpline has been set up to make people aware of the available services, provide basic counselling and to gather feedback from refugees and asylum-seekers.

11.   The updated AGD policy envisions a more standardized approach where all operations are required to put in place feedback and response systems and are capable of confidentially receiving and responding to feedback on routine operational matters, as well as handling sensitive complaints related to serious violations, such as misconduct, sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel.

4. Organizational learning and adaptation

12.   As set out in the AGD policy, UNHCR should learn from persons of concern and track how it adapts its programmes and strategies in accordance with the received feedback from communities. The ultimate goal of the policy's core actions is to create the conditions in which these changes can take place. For example, in South Sudan, persons of concern highlighted the poor quality of education. In response, UNHCR developed training programmes, including sessions on computer literacy, to increase the number of skilled teachers and improve minimum standards.

C. Advancing gender equality

13.   The updated policy reaffirms the importance of UNHCR's commitments to refugee women, which have been the cornerstone for promoting gender equality in refugee situations since they were adopted in 2001. The commitments now extend to all displaced and stateless women and girls, and are contextualized in view of changes in today's operational environments. New tools, partnerships and approaches, such as the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF), will help to strengthen the commitments.

1. Participation of women and girls

14.   For decades, UNHCR has worked towards the active and meaningful participation of women in management and leadership committees that deal with issues affecting persons of concern. The participation of women has been promoted in a variety of ways, including through the development of negotiation and leadership skills, as well as human rights training. Women and girls have also been engaged as outreach volunteers including to raise awareness of gender equality among men and boys. In Malaysia, UNHCR supported refugee women in assuming active roles in their communities, which resulted in 131 refugee women taking on community leadership positions and six heading community-based organizations in 2017. Since UNHCR first formalized its commitment to promote women's participation, women's representation in decision-making structures and processes has been made a global strategic priority. Under the updated AGD policy, parity is mandatory and country operations are required to report on achievements and challenges in this regard.

2. Individual registration and documentation

15. Individual registration and documentation are critical protection tools, which contribute to ensuring safety, freedom of movement, family tracing, access to essential services, property claims and the exercise of political rights. In order for women and girls of concern to be able to exercise these basic rights and access protection independently, the updated AGD policy requires country operations to provide women and girls with individual registration. The roll out of registration software and improved biometric identity cards have allowed for individual registration of women and girls, as well as improved the identification of and the response to those at heightened risk. Since the end of 2016 for instance, 99 per cent of refugees in urban areas in Rwanda were individually registered and their biometric data was captured, making information available for specific protection interventions.

3. Equal access to and control over food, relief items and cash

16. The lack of access to services and resources can limit women's capacity to protect themselves, their families and communities. These situations frequently lead to women and girls being exposed to sexual exploitation and abuse, or having to resort to negative coping mechanisms. By participating directly in decision-making processes regarding the management and distribution of in-kind and cash-based assistance, women are able to exercise control over life-saving resources. Breaking new ground, the updated policy identifies women as the primary recipients of in-kind and cash assistance, where contextually appropriate. In Tanzania, UNHCR already implements this approach and in Brazil, socio-economic assessments of refugee families by UNHCR and a partner non-governmental organization (NGO) resulted in the inclusion of refugee families in the world's largest conditional national cash-transfer programme. The programme benefited households living in extreme poverty, of which 92 per cent of participants were women.

4. Equal access to economic opportunities

17. Control over economic resources is fundamental to women's ability to respond to the challenges of displacement in a manner that assists them to move out and stay out of poverty. Key efforts include not just increasing women's access to employment, but also addressing the socio-economic obstacles to women's economic empowerment, for example barriers to education and health services. To this end, the updated policy calls for ensuring equal access to livelihood, education and health.

18. Many operations are making progress in this regard, including in Burkina Faso, Somalia and Zambia, which provide material support to women for income-generating activities. In Pakistan, UNHCR increased the enrolment of women in teacher training courses, with the expectation that more female teachers will in turn increase girls' enrolment in schools and decrease drop-out rates. In addition, a formal market assessment was conducted to identify marketable vocational training skills for women, which resulted in the creation of certified skills-training, tool kits and self-employment opportunities.

5. Comprehensive sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response services

19. UNHCR works closely with communities and partners, including local authorities, to prevent, mitigate and respond to SGBV. From the onset of emergencies through to solutions, the organization has increased the deployment of technical expertise to operations. Prevention and risk-mitigation measures are being strengthened across all sectors of humanitarian response and response systems improved to address life-threatening consequences of SGBV. The updated AGD

policy therefore requires all operations to establish standard operating procedures to ensure safety/security, legal, medical, and psychosocial services for all survivors.

III. Implementation

20.   The policy is being applied across the organization, and operational guidance and tools are progressively being developed to support implementation in the field. Existing capacity-building programmes are being revised to include those new components of the policy. The policy is also being incorporated into the new results-based management framework, currently under development. UNHCR will promote the AGD approach with partners, including governments, NGOs and other civil society actors.

21.   Meanwhile, target country operations are being identified for thorough assessments on progress towards implementation of the policy this year. These operations will receive support to establish baselines for the 10 minimum actions and to test indicators for eventual inclusion in the results-based management framework.