

# Implementation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy (2018)

## Longitudinal evaluation, Year 1 Report

### UNHCR Evaluation Service



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

# Evaluation Brief

**Purpose:** To assess and support the implementation of the 2018 Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Policy. The evaluation explores how key staff understand the policy, and aims to generate evidence to guide and enhance UNHCR's approach to improving AGD practice.

**Evaluation type and methods:** developmental and longitudinal strategy evaluation.

**Methods:** Mixed methods including key informant interviews, focus group discussions focused on five countries and Bureau and HQ.

**Implemented:** 2019 - 2023 by Overseas Development Institute

**Scope:** Global, with focus on Chad, Greece, Mexico, Kenya and Thailand.

**Commissioned by:** Evaluation Service

## Evaluation Context

UNHCR has long utilised an AGD approach. In 2004, it introduced its first formal AGD mainstreaming strategy, which was followed in 2011 with an AGD Policy and again in 2018 with the updated policy that is the focus of this evaluation. UNHCR's Evaluation Service commissioned an evaluation to assess the implementation of UNHCR's [2018 Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\) Policy](#). This report presents findings from the first year of a three-year evaluation. The evaluation is a forward-looking transformative evaluation designed to promote learning from the strategies adopted by country offices to fulfil the AGD Policy, to identify lessons learnt and propose practical recommendations that can be tested over time.

## Key Findings

### Understanding and operationalization of the AGD Policy

Staff and partners largely understand AGD in the context of UNHCR's previous Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) policies (2004-2011), having a more limited awareness of the 2018 AGD Policy itself. Overall, there was

no sense that the focus on AGD had been intensified since the policy was updated in 2018, but rather a consensus that the existing level of focus was appropriate.

In terms of participation and inclusion of the people with and for whom we work, staff highlighted the participatory assessments, the representative structures of displaced and settlements in camps, settlements, or other settings, and partners with strong gender equality credentials in their organisation as key examples of this commitment. Among partners, there was no specific awareness of UNHCR's AGD Policy but a recognition that UNHCR champions gender equality and inclusion of displaced and stateless persons more generally in its work.

### Systematic collection and use of disaggregated data

Country offices collect disaggregated data, both during registration and in other interactions with people receiving support from UNHCR or partner programmes and services. Published data, however, is generally restricted to age group, gender, population (refugee, asylum-seeker, unaccompanied minor), nationality and locality. This limits the ability of actors external to UNHCR to fully assess and appreciate the different factors of protection risks that characterize forcibly displaced and stateless people. Staff awareness and utilization of the data available through the case management tool proGres4 was found to be somewhat limited, and requiring greater support.

### Systems and processes to support AGD implementation

Overall, while there is considerable activity regarding AGD principles by key advisors at the UNHCR headquarters (HQ) level, this filters down to the country office level in a limited and uneven way. This is due to human resource capacity constraints, limited championing by leaders at HQ and country level in a concrete and practical sense and – arguably the most important constraint – inadequate financial resourcing.

Participatory assessments and more regular protection monitoring provide a strong foundation for partnership-building around inclusive programming and AGD priorities, and this is widely valued by staff. However, feedback from these exercises is not sufficiently embedded in organisational processes to inform adaptations to

programme activities, including in communications with partners and displaced and stateless persons themselves.

Additionally, funding limitations do not allow priorities as articulated by the people with and for whom we work in these participatory exercises to be addressed by UNHCR - especially if they fall outside the priorities of senior managers. Siloed ways of working similarly, prevent the more full and systematic inclusion of feedback collected within UNHCR's work.

### Engagement and dialogue with partners

Country offices have been able to select and work with technically competent and highly committed partners, especially those with expertise on children, youth and gender equality issues. In some contexts, such as Mexico, UNHCR has established partnerships with non-governmental organization (NGO) networks who are led by and/or specialize in working with LGBTIQ+ persons, enabling more innovative practice in this area. Generally, though, there is a need to harness and strengthen expertise around working with persons with disabilities, older persons and LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement. In some contexts (such as Thailand), country offices are increasingly embedding AGD principles within funding proposals, and this could be a mechanism to strengthen the mainstreaming of AGD into programme implementation and monitoring, evaluation and learning.

### Likelihood of adhering to the AGD Policy

Most staff, NGO and UN agency partners agreed that UNHCR is playing a valuable role in championing AGD concerns in a range of fora, including through its proGres v4 database, participatory assessments and working group leadership, and particularly in the areas of child protection and gender-based violence (GBV). However, all noted that there is still much work to do in adhering to the breadth of the AGD Policy, in the face of major constraints, most notably:

1. The very constrained funding environment, with limited flexibility for innovation.
2. The complexity of dealing with diversity in all of its dimensions and especially given the wide range of countries of origin and circumstances faced by displaced and stateless persons.
3. Weaknesses in social service provision and bureaucratic governance structures.
4. Insufficient opportunities for dedicated learning via peer exchange of good practices that advance AGD Policy implementation;
5. Limited attention to embedding AGD policy and principles within project proposals, contracts and end-of-programme cycle reviews;
6. The limited incentives (systems and processes) in place throughout the organisation to encourage compliance with the AGD Policy – and the dearth of sanctions for non-compliance.

## Lessons Learned and Good Practices

**Diversified information channels are critical for supporting POCs to access information, services and support.** The evaluation findings underscore that context-specific conditions create different constraints and opportunities, and that tailoring of information needs to take into account language diversity. More specifically, communication mechanisms need to be further strengthened, taking into consideration persons with disabilities, especially those living with hearing or visual impairments, and communications alternatives for individuals with low literacy.

**Partnerships with NGOs and NGO networks with expertise in programming with specific groups of POCs have enabled UNHCR country offices in some contexts to forge stronger relationships and enabled more innovative practice.** The partnership with NGO networks specializing in LGBTIQ+ communities in Mexico and with NGOs specialized in supporting unaccompanied minors in Greece are two strong examples. In some contexts, country offices (e.g. Thailand) are increasingly embedding AGD principles within funding proposals.

**Cross-agency working groups** are important mechanisms for sharing information and experiences, agreeing and prioritising joint actions, and cascading training, and UNHCR should continue to play a key role in these, especially given its stature with government partners.

**Annual participatory exercises with POCs have** helped to embed the principles of AGD into country operations, annual workplans, and the overall ethos of work, but findings should be more systematically taken up and acted upon throughout the programme cycle.

**Strengthening the capacity of government** partners to implement programming for internally displaced people (IDPs), asylum-seekers and refugees, including through staff secondments, can help to build sustainable systems, but will need to be further strengthened to deliver on UNHCR commitments to AGD.

**Cash-based interventions (CBIs) are an important model of at-scale support to displaced and stateless persons** and can provide significant opportunities for realizing the objectives of the policy as well as increasing dignity for the people with and for whom we work. Providing robust and sustained technical assistance on AGD within CBIs will be essential to ensure that in the course of eventual handover to government partners, the promise offered by these programmes is realized.



## Suggested Actions

The suggested actions are more fully discussed in the report. Given that this represents the first year of the evaluation, these are actions that the evaluation team have put forward that UNHCR could consider.

### 1. To strengthen accountability for the AGD policy UNHCR could:

#### At the regional and HQ level:

- Hold country representatives accountable for progress towards AGD policy implementation, rewarding effective country operations with additional resourcing to implement innovative projects that advance the objectives of the AGD Policy.
- Ensure that good practices recognise not only the country operation but also the staff involved in those practices.
- Ensure the effective roll out of the protection monitoring tool so as to generate good information to be able to track performance, monitor and then link this to accountability mechanisms.

#### At the country level:

- As it is not practical for countries to address the full breadth of AGD, country operations should prioritise two or three groups with heightened protection needs (as relevant to context) to be especially highlighted and identify specific goals to track.

#### At the individual staff level:

- Develop and standardise the use of an AGD training database at HQ for staff that looks at how the AGD policy applies to different areas of work, and support and incentivize staff to select training in areas that are most relevant to their work (whether finance and budgeting, data management, protection, etc.). There could be a requirement to pass a minimum number of courses relevant to AGD to be eligible for promotion, or at minimum to take the AGD e-learning.

#### Institutional accountability:

- Consider providing resources and incentives through the creation of an AGD specific 'pot' that donors can support and that country offices can apply to for funding (similar to the resources made available for GBV-related programming).

### 2. To strengthen AGD capacity and promote knowledge exchange, UNHCR could consider:

Introducing mentoring as a mechanism to incentivize and support staff as well as to proactively involve leadership in mainstreaming and strengthening AGD throughout the organization. Mentoring should promote the sharing of

specific examples and solutions in terms of how to apply the AGD policy.

Embedding regular opportunities for staff from different cadres (including, for example, budget and financial officers, data managers, etc.) within country offices and across countries, to share experiences, lessons learnt and promising practices, especially in areas where there is still limited expertise. Regional bureaux could play a key role in identifying opportunities and coordinating thematic 'communities of practice' to promote more systematic learning.

Encouraging secondments of UNHCR staff to government agencies to strengthen capacity around AGD programming with displaced and stateless persons and to promote rights-based alignment of goals with government partners.

Supporting programme officers to engage fully with partners on AGD and ensure that partners are reporting on AGD in a systematic and coherent manner.

### 3. To improve systems and tools that facilitate and promote application of the AGD policy UNHCR could consider:

Developing integrated guidance on all AGD-related policies for staff that explains how to deliver on core commitments and goals through their everyday work and guidance on integrated AGD reporting. Guidance that includes specific recommended metrics for reporting should be emphasised

Developing mechanisms for country offices and staff to track progress on AGD within the Results-based Management framework (for example, using the Gender with Age (GAM) Marker or the Global Protection Policies Monitoring tool).

Continuing to invest and further promote an easy-to-navigate online repository with AGD tools and promising good practices, e.g. building on the [Community-based Protection \(CBP\) Community of Practice](#). Regional bureaux could play a key role in ensuring that this repository is relevant and easily accessible to staff.

Developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) to guide communication and information sharing practices with POCs and partners, the development of partner proposals, agreements and monitoring of partner deliverables, to ensure coherent and systematic reporting on AGD across regions (with context-related adaptations).

Identifying existing AGD human resources and create an internal roster so that AGD expertise can be easily identified as and when needed.

### 4. Invest in advocacy with donors

Ramp up advocacy with donors in order to promote enhanced financial resources for AGD to be distributed by UNHCR in accordance with results-based monitoring data.

## Next steps

In the next year of this project, the evaluation will focus on UNHCR's response to the specific needs and risks of individuals who identify as LGBTIQ+, as well as the needs of people living with disabilities - two topics highlighted in the first year as areas where further evidence and analysis could yield important institutional learning.

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**For further information about UNHCR's work on Community-Based Protection**, staff may explore the following resources:

- UNHCR [Safeguarding Individuals Page](#);
- [CBP Community of Practice](#);
- [CBP Intranet Page](#); and the
- AGD Microsite.

For the most recent updates on UNHCR's implementation of the AGD Policy, please explore the [AGD Accountability Report 2021](#) and [AGD Promising Practices and Case Studies](#).

## Full Longitudinal Evaluation, Year 1 Report available [here](#)

