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

**Standing Committee
54th meeting**

Age, gender and diversity approach

Contents

I. Introduction

1. In the years since its introduction, there has been significant advancement in the strengthening of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach. This report describes progress made, in terms of policy-making and Headquarters support as well as operationalization in the Field, and sets out the Office's strategic vision in its five-year "Forward Plan".

II. Background

2. The AGD approach, introduced by UNHCR in 2004, provides staff and partners with a central orientation to their work which is inclusive of all groups within a given population of concern. It was developed based on a longstanding appreciation by UNHCR of the fact that displaced populations, like any other population, have extensive knowledge of their own community, including the risks they may face, as well as a broad range of skills and expertise that can be leveraged to improve their situation. Understanding and capitalizing on these attributes can significantly improve the protection environment for persons of concern.

3. A wide array of initiatives has supported the achievement of UNHCR's objectives in the area of AGD. This includes, for example, activities that enhance participation, community development, gender equality, prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), child protection, and access to education and livelihood opportunities.

4. The central operational elements of the AGD approach are: i) ensuring the active participation in UNHCR's work of diverse and representative groups[1] of persons of concern, using the participatory assessment (PA) methodology[2] and other tools; and ii) identifying, in conjunction with affected individuals and communities, areas where targeted actions are necessary to address inequalities and support the capacities and protection of groups at risk.

5. The role of Headquarters in supporting the mainstreaming of the AGD approach has consisted of: i) progressively incorporating an AGD perspective into all relevant policy, guidance, tools and learning initiatives; and ii) holding senior managers accountable through the *Accountability Framework for Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming and Targeted Actions (AGDM Accountability Framework)*.[3]

III. Recent initiatives to strengthen the age, gender and diversity approach

6. UNHCR's provided its last update on progress made under the AGD approach to the Standing Committee in 2010.[4] The report highlighted a number of areas where

---

[1] Identified in UNHCR's 2011 Age, Gender and Diversity Policy as: women and girls; men and boys; children and adolescent girls and boys; people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or intersex (LGBTI); older men and women; persons with disabilities; and women and men belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities or indigenous groups. UNHCR, *Age, Gender and Diversity Policy*, 8 June 2011, is available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4def34f6887.html.

[2] The participatory assessment is UNHCR's primary tool for ensuring a structured dialogue with persons of concern and is now a standard feature of the yearly planning process.

[3] *UNHCR Accountability Framework for Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming and Targeted Actions*, available at *http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&query=Accountability+Framework*

[4] UNHCR, *Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming*, 31 May 2010, EC/61/SC/CRP.14, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4cc96e1d2.html.

greater attention was required, based largely on the findings of a 2010 evaluation.[5] These areas can be summarized as follows: a) establishing the AGD approach as policy; b) strengthening leadership for AGD approaches; c) enhancing the participation of persons of concern; d) enhancing capacity to deliver on AGD commitments; e) improving data quality; and f) developing a clear vision for AGD. Since this time, a number of measures have been taken aimed at strengthening work in these areas.

A.   Establishing AGD as policy

7.   To consolidate UNHCR's AGD work, the Office issued the *Age, Gender and Diversity Policy*: *working with people and communities for equality and protection*[6] (AGD Policy) in 2011. The AGD Policy sets out the rationale for pursuing an AGD approach, clarifies its objectives, defines the age, gender and diversity elements, and, in doing so, establishes their relevance to UNHCR's work. The AGD Policy also lists the main actions needed to mainstream an AGD approach within UNHCR's work, and enumerates the distinct groups that can be recognized in a given population, highlighting the potential risks they may face, as well as the contributions they can make to their families and communities.

B.   Strengthening leadership for AGD approaches

8.   The *AGDM Accountability Framework,* now in its sixth year, continues to be the main tool guiding UNHCR's leadership in the implementation of the AGD approach. This annual snapshot enables UNHCR to measure progress over time, across regions and at Headquarters, on the basis of 2007 baseline data. The results of the yearly analysis are regularly presented at a side event during the June Standing Committee meeting.

9.   At the field level, there are a number of recent good examples of Representatives demonstrating strong leadership in applying the AGD approach. For example, Representatives have:

- actively led multifunctional teams and participatory assessments in a number of countries;

- ensured that informal and formal performance appraisal systems in their operations refer to the quality of staff participation in and follow up on participatory assessments;

- met personally with persons of concern and their leaders to monitor progress in addressing issues raised during the participatory assessment process;

- personally followed up to ensure that planning and implementation processes incorporate prioritized plans developed with persons of concern; and

- engaged in important awareness-raising and other advocacy initiatives to promote the development of targeted actions to assist persons of concern with specific needs.

10.   In the inter-agency context, and particularly through its leadership of the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), UNHCR has ensured that AGD is also recognized as a key

---

[5] Virginia Thomas and Tony Beck, *Changing the way UNHCR does business? An evaluation of the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Strategy 2004-2009*, PDES/2010/08, June 2010, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/4c206b449.pdf.

[6] UNHCR, *Age, Gender and Diversity Policy*, 8 June 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4def34f6887.html.

feature of effective protection delivery. This is reflected in the GPC's newly adopted strategic framework for 2012-2014.[7]

C. Enhancing the participation of persons of concern

11.   The use of the participatory assessment (PA) methodology in UNHCR operations has been central to introducing the AGD approach globally. As of 2011, the vast majority of UNHCR operations were making use of the PA tool, which systemizes consultation with and the participation of persons of concern in decision-making and implementation. In the small number of operations where the PA methodology is not being applied, a lack of access to populations of concern, often linked to security concerns, is cited as the main impediment.

12.   Over the past few years, a number of good-practice examples have emerged in the use of the PA methodology in the Field by UNHCR and its partners. In Burundi, for example, PA results were shared with the donor community, partners and governmental counterparts, and formed the basis of all planning activities and the design of programmes in 2011. In Colombia, the findings from PAs helped the Ministry of Social Protection develop national guidelines on forced displacement that take into account the different needs, concerns and risks of men, women, girls, and boys, without distinction as to age, gender or background. In Georgia, PAs conducted with the Government formed the basis of the extended National Action Plan for Internally Displaced Persons.

13.   Work to enhance the quality of two-way communication with persons of concern is ongoing. Between November 2010 and May 2011, UNHCR held a series of seven regional dialogues with over 1,000 refugee and internally displaced women and girls, as well as some 200 men and boys. These Regional Dialogues with Women and Girls were conceived as part of a programme of activities to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the 50th Anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The Regional Dialogues provided a platform for women's perspectives to be heard, as participants from different displacement settings shared problems and potential solutions during three to four days of structured workshops. Discussions focused on ten core protection areas: individual documentation; participation in leadership; education; economic self-reliance; shelter; SGBV; other forms of violence; health; sanitary materials; and legal issues. The findings from the Regional Dialogues were presented during the June 2011 Standing Committee, and are now available online.[8] The experience of the Regional Dialogues reaffirmed the value of in-depth consultations with persons of concern and the capacity of people and communities to identify practical solutions to the multiple challenges they face. Of equal importance, the methodology used during the dialogues, developed in partnership with the University of New South Wales, proved to be an effective tool for fostering in-depth, structured, dialogues among persons of concern, UNHCR and partners. While participatory assessments will remain a key feature of UNHCR's work, efforts are underway to document and refine the "extended dialogue" methodology, with a view to implementing it in other UNHCR operations in order to deepen the understanding of the challenges and capacities of any given community.

D. Enhancing capacity to deliver on AGD commitments

14.   The following paragraphs describe recent developments in key areas aimed at enhancing the Office's capacity to deliver on AGD commitments.

---

[7] Global Protection Cluster *Strategic Framework 2012-2014*. Copies can be obtained by writing to the following email address: zulu@unhcr.org.

[8] UNHCR, *Survivors, Protectors, Providers: Refugee Women Speak Out,* 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4f310baa2.html.

1.   **Mandatory AGD e-learning for UNHCR Staff**

15.   In order to capitalize on UNHCR's successful experiences in implementing an AGD approach over the course of the past eight years, an AGD e-learning course for staff will be introduced in 2012. The course, which will be mandatory for all staff, will provide practical examples and exercises to: a) support staff in ensuring that UNHCR and partner programmes are accessible to and inclusive of all persons of concern; and b) to identify where targeted actions to address specific gaps in the protection of individuals and groups based on an AGD analysis are needed, as well as to design and implement such interventions.

2.   **Sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response**

16.   In June 2011, UNHCR issued the publication, *Action against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: An Updated Strategy.*[9] This document provides a framework to assist UNHCR and partners in dealing with SGBV on the basis of a five-year, multi-sectoral approach. The strategy fully integrates an AGD approach, targeting six areas that are ubiquitous and yet often overlooked: (i) the particular risks of children, (ii) persons with disabilities, (iii) lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or intersex (LGBTI) persons; (iv) the risks related to unsafe environments and (v) survival sex; and the transformative role not only of survivors, but also of (vi) men and boys as agents of change for gender equality and bringing an end to violence. As of January 2012, eight operations have elaborated five-year strategies: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Ecuador, Georgia, India and Pakistan. The implementation of the updated strategy will be further enhanced by the High Commissioner's commitment to enhancing protection capacity to prevent and respond to SGBV, including through additional support for several countries that have developed country-specific strategies. Fifteen countries will implement 22 projects, strengthening the six action areas of the strategy. The implementation of the updated SGBV strategy will also be facilitated by the creation of four regional protection positions.

3.   **Working with diversity**

17.   In 2011, emphasis was placed on giving further definition to the "diversity" element of AGD approaches. In mid-2011, UNHCR launched a *Need to Know* guidance series, which aims to provide field practitioners with an essential introduction to, and action-oriented advice on, a range of protection issues relevant for AGD approaches. The first three volumes in the series are dedicated to raising awareness of groups that often face social exclusion such as: persons with disabilities;[10] LGBTI persons;[11] and national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous people.[12] A fourth volume, focusing on older persons, will soon be released. Building on this guidance series, a training package on the inclusion and protection of socially-excluded groups is under development and will be made available to all UNHCR operations in 2013.

18.   To advance the implementation of the 2010 Executive Committee conclusion on disabilities,[13] and building on the *Need to Know* guidance mentioned above, UNHCR has

[9] UNHCR, *Action against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: An Updated Strategy,* 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e01ffeb2.html

[10] UNHCR, Need to Know Guidance 1, *Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement*, 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e6072b22.html.

[11] UNHCR, Need to Know Guidance 2, *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Intersex Persons in Forced Displacement*, 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e6073972.html.

[12]   UNHCR, Need to Know Guidance 3, *Working with National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Forced Displacement,* 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ee72a2a2.html.

[13]   Executive Committee Conclusion No. 110 (LXI) – 2010, *Conclusion on refugees with disabilities and other persons with disabilities protected and assisted by UNHCR*, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/4cbeb1a99.html.

concluded a strategic partnership with the Women's Refugee Commission.[14] The purpose of this partnership is to engender a better understanding of the country-specific risks for and capacities of persons of concern with disabilities, and to identify concrete ways for UNHCR staff and partners to better respond. The initiative also aims to expand the network of relevant partnerships at the county level to enhance the protection space available to persons of concern with disabilities. This is being done through a series of in-depth dialogues with persons of concern with disabilities, followed by a three-day training event which brings together UNHCR staff, partners, persons of concern and key national actors, working at the national level to enhance the rights of these individuals. Two such events were held in 2011, in India and Uganda, and a further three are planned for 2012.

4. Protection of children

19.   A core component of UNHCR's work is the protection of refugee children. "Best interests" procedures, which integrate an AGD perspective, are a key protection tool for girls and boys at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children. UNHCR has strengthened its capacity in this area by providing training, developing learning tools and providing detailed guidance to its operations through the 2011 *Field Handbook on the Implementation of UNHCR Best Interests Determination Guidelines*.[15] Last year, 11 UNHCR operations received expert deployments for child protection. In 2012, UNHCR will release its new Framework for the Protection of Children, which articulates a long-term strategic direction for the protection of all children of concern. The Framework will be implemented through partnerships and according to a "systems approach." Later this year, the Office will issue a document on this approach entitled, "*A Systems Approach to the Protection of Children – A UNHCR Framework for Protection Programming for Children*." A more in-depth overview of recent development in the area of the protection of children can be found in document EC/63/SC/CRP.13, *International protection of children of concern, including education.*

5. Education

20.   UNHCR's new Education Strategy for 2012-2016 is an integral part of the Office's AGD commitments, focusing on the protection of boys and girls of all ages and backgrounds. Many refugee children do not have access to education at all, let alone to a quality education that provides physical protection in a safe environment and facilitates the development of personal capacities. Drawing on a 2011 global review of refugee education,[16] two key priorities of the new Education Strategy are: improving access to quality education and enhancing the protective function of education. The Strategy is structured around six objectives, each of which includes key activities, expected results and indicators. The Education Strategy includes a focus on increasing access to education for marginalized groups, including children and young people with physical and cognitive disabilities, and over-aged learners who have missed out on schooling. In rolling out the Education Strategy UNHCR is currently focusing on 13 focus countries, supporting the operations in developing their own multi-year, multi-sectoral education strategies. A more in-depth overview of recent developments in the area of education can also be found in document EC/63/SC/CRP.13, *International protection of children of concern, including education.*

---

[14]   The Women's Refugee Commission has been conducting research in this area for a number of years. The publication, *Disabilities Among Refugees and Conflict-Affected Populations, a Resource Kit for Field Workers*, June 2008, is a useful resource which is available at: http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/docs/disab_res_kit.pdf.

[15]   UNHCR, *Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines*, November 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e4a57d02.html.

[16]   Sarah Dryden-Petersen, *Refugee Education: A Global Review*, November 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/4ebd3dd39.pdf.

6.   **Strengthening UNHCR's community development work**

21.   The 2011 Standing Committee paper on *Community Services: towards a community development approach*[17] presented measures to maximize the positive role that displaced communities can play in improving their protection environment. There are a number of complementary actions taking place in this respect in 2012. Central among these is a revised positioning of UNHCR's community services function, which will be finalized in 2012. This includes a refinement of the job descriptions at different levels to emphasize work that promotes the positive role the community can play in areas such as SGBV prevention and response, child protection, education, gender equality and the protection of persons with specific needs. This is one element of a comprehensive revision of all protection-related job descriptions, *inter alia*, to clarify some ambiguities between the community services role and other protection and field-based functions. In addition, UNHCR is developing guidance on "community development approaches", based on successful experiences of UNHCR and partners around the world. This guidance, along with the *Need to Know* guidance series and its related training materials, as well as the "extended dialogue methodology", all referred to above, will be essential new tools to equip UNHCR community services staff to fulfil the revised role foreseen for them.

E.   Improving data quality

22.   Access to reliable data, disaggregated by sex, age and background, is a key component for conducting in-depth analysis of protection problems, as well as for identifying targeted actions to address them and measuring results. Work to refine UNHCR's Results Framework to allow for more detailed data collection is taking place in several phases. As part of the first phase, various indicators have been prioritized for sex disaggregation in 2012. In parallel, UNHCR is actively advocating with States to improve the quality of their own data on populations of concern.

F.   Developing a clear vision for AGD

23.   In its 2010 report to the Standing Committee,[18] UNHCR stated that it would develop a time-bound, corporate plan of action to integrate the AGD approach within all of its activities. This resulted, in 2011, in the issuance of UNHCR's five-year Forward Plan for the AGD approach,[19] which is now in its second year of implementation. The Forward Plan sets out seven strategic results to be achieved over a five-year period, ending in 2016. These results, once achieved, will collectively represent UNHCR's vision of an organization that is fully AGD inclusive. The seven strategic results are: i) strengthened internal leadership and accountability for AGD; ii) integration of AGD in programming; iii) expanded capacity and knowledge for enhanced AGD impact; iv) AGD shortcomings addressed in resource allocation and expenditure; v) enhanced leadership externally (advocacy) for AGD; vi) enhanced and expanded partnerships to strengthen AGD; and vii) strengthened monitoring and evaluation of AGD and its impact.

---

[17]   UNHCR, *Community Services: towards a community development approach*, 31 May 2011, EC/62/SC/CRP.16, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e967d852.html.

[18]   UNHCR, *Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming*, 31 May 2010, EC/61/SC/CRP.14, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4cc96e1d2.html

[19]   UNHCR, *Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Forward Plan 2011-2016*, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/4e7762f19.html.

IV. Conclusion

24.   In 2006, the High Commissioner said that age, gender and diversity mainstreaming should really change the way we do business.[20] In 2012, as this report has highlighted, this change is increasingly evident in a number of areas of UNHCR's work. As a result of this progress, UNHCR is better placed to ensure equitable results for all persons of concern. While it continues to strive to ensure that the AGD approach is part of the essential fabric of the Office, UNHCR also remains deeply committed to a continuous process of improvement. The refinement of existing policies, guidance, tools and learning initiatives, and the development of new ones in response to emerging challenges, have been and will continue to be a central feature of UNHCR's work on AGD. The Office looks forward to engaging with States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners on how to include an AGD approach not just in UNHCR's operations, but more broadly in the work of all central actors.

---

[20] Virginia Thomas and Tony Beck, *Changing the way UNHCR does business? An evaluation of the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Strategy 2004-2009*, PDES/2010/08, June 2010, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/4c206b449.pdf.