



Age, Gender and Diversity Policy

Working with people and communities for equality and protection

I. Objective

- 1) Through the systematic application of an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach in its operations worldwide, UNHCR seeks to ensure that all persons of concern enjoy their rights on an equal footing and are able to participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their family members and communities.

II. Rationale

- 2) Each person is unique. The differences between people, whether actual or perceived, can be defining characteristics that play a central role in determining an individual's opportunities, capacities, needs and vulnerability.
- 3) **AGE** refers to the different stages in one's life cycle. It is important to be aware of where people are in their life cycle as their capacities and needs change over time. Age influences, and can enhance or diminish, a person's capacity to exercise his or her rights.
- 4) **GENDER** refers to the socially constructed roles for women and men,¹ which are often central to the way in which people define themselves and are defined by others. Gender roles are learned, changeable over time, and variable within and between cultures. Gender often defines the duties, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and privileges of women and men in any context. Gender equality refers to the equal enjoyment of rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of each gender are respected.

¹ "Sex" refers, in basic terms, to the biological differences between females and males.

- 5) **DIVERSITY** refers to different values, attitudes, cultural perspectives, beliefs, ethnic background, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, health, social status, skill and other specific personal characteristics. While the age and gender dimensions are present in everyone, other characteristics vary from person to person. These differences must be recognized, understood and valued by UNHCR in each specific context and operation in order to ensure protection for all people.
- 6) By analyzing the AGD dimensions as interlinked personal characteristics, we are able to better understand the multifaceted protection risks and capacities of individuals and communities, and to address and support these more effectively. By promoting respect for differences as an enriching element of any community, we promote progress toward a situation of full equality. Equality means respect for all. It includes the promotion of equal opportunities for people with different needs and abilities and direct, measurable actions to combat inequality and discrimination.

III. Core Commitments

- 7) UNHCR acknowledges and reaffirms that the complete realization of gender equality is an inalienable and indivisible feature of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The systematic promotion of this principle in measurable results is essential to ensuring protection and durable solutions for women and men of all ages and backgrounds served by the Organisation.²
- 8) UNHCR is deeply committed to ensuring that refugees, stateless and displaced people have equal access to their rights, protection, services and resources, and are able to participate as active partners in the decisions that affect them. To this end, UNHCR has committed to mainstreaming an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach. AGD is a human-rights and community-based approach. Mainstreaming AGD means to plan, programme, implement, monitor and evaluate operations, keeping in mind equality and full participation as guiding principles.
- 9) Working in partnership with people of concern and other stakeholders, UNHCR is committed to ensuring that safeguards are in place to prevent any action from inadvertently increasing marginalization, vulnerability, exclusion and stigmatization that may put some people/groups at further risk.
- 10) UNHCR is also committed to advocating for the implementation of an AGD approach by other intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental entities working with refugees, stateless and displaced persons.

² This is reaffirmed in Executive Committee Conclusion 105 (LVI) - 2006 on Women and Girls at Risk, Conclusion 107 (LVIII) - 2007 on Children at Risk and the General Conclusion 108 (LVIII) - 2008 on International Protection.

IV. Main elements for mainstreaming an Age, Gender and Diversity approach

- 11) *Working in partnership with persons of concern*: Working to ensure equality, putting people at the centre of decision making as well as supporting their capacities and efforts to have their rights recognized and accessible, together serve to promote the role of women and men of all ages and backgrounds as agents of positive social change in their own families and communities.
- 12) *Accountability*: All staff are expected to understand and integrate age, gender and diversity sensitive work practices. Senior managers ensure that this policy is translated into action in all phases of UNHCR's operation cycle. They are accountable to the High Commissioner for successful integration of age, gender and diversity considerations into their work and the work of their teams.
- 13) *Results based management*: Targeted actions to advance gender equality and support individual and community capacities to address protection risks and gaps need to be visible, appropriately resourced and measurable in all Country Operation Plans. UNHCR's results-based management tool, *Focus*, provides timely information to senior managers in respect of the AGD-sensitivity of operations enabling them to make strategic decisions. This ensures that the emphasis remains on results as opposed to processes alone.
- 14) *Capacity development*: Developing and strengthening staff capacity and competency in age, gender and diversity analysis is essential. UNHCR is committed to addressing gaps in this regard on a continuous basis through the provision of additional guidance and the development of new learning opportunities for staff at all levels.
- 15) *Human and financial resources*: Adequate human and financial resources are allocated to the implementation of age, gender and diversity mainstreaming to achieve desired outcomes. This entails better utilization of current resources, the assignment of additional resources where required and the alignment of resources with expected outcomes.
- 16) *Oversight through monitoring, evaluation, audit and reporting*: Enhancing oversight is critical to ensuring accountability of all UNHCR staff for their performance in age, gender and diversity mainstreaming. UNHCR's accountability framework has been developed for this purpose. The Annual Programme Review (APR) will also provide an opportunity to assess the AGD policy compliance of operations globally.

V. Defining Diversity: One Community, Many People

- 17) **Women and girls** frequently take on important roles in their families and communities. But they often have fewer opportunities and resources, lower socio-economic status, less power and influence and face multiple layers of discrimination. These factors are sharply amplified by displacement, leading to exposure to numerous protection risks, including exploitation, enslavement, rape and other forms of abuse and Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Women suffering from discrimination and violence face enormous challenges providing for their families and themselves. Their engagement in improving their own situation has a direct and positive impact on the well-being, livelihood and protection of their families and communities.
- 18) The roles of **men and boys** often change in displacement. This can create protection risks that need to be detected and addressed. Boys, in particular, can be at high risk of trafficking, forced recruitment and sexual and other forms of violence and abuse in situations of displacement. Promoting and supporting the positive engagement of men and boys in the many issues related to their community, including in the prevention and response to the scourge of SGBV, is a fundamental step towards ensuring access to protection and equality for all.
- 19) **Children, including adolescents**, enjoy comprehensive rights under international law, yet they are often deprived of the most basic ones. Forced displacement exacerbates children's exposure to neglect, exploitation, and sexual and other forms of violence and abuse. Children are at particular risk and require special attention due to their dependence on adults to survive, their vulnerability to physical and psychological trauma, and their needs that must be met to ensure normal growth and development. Participating in education in a safe environment provides children and young people with invaluable opportunities to attain normalcy in their lives. It is also a powerful vehicle for raising awareness of gender equality and teaching children and young people to respect one another and diversity within their communities. Children can often bring unique and valuable perspectives and solutions to the problems confronting them and their communities. Their participation in decisions affecting them, as well as their best interests and a strong focus on their protection and wellbeing, are essential.
- 20) **People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or intersex (LGBTI)** are often exposed to discrimination and abuse linked to their sexual orientation and gender identity. These risk factors are often severely compounded in situations of displacement, where the nature of the discrimination they encounter can be particularly virulent, their isolation from family and community profound, and the harm inflicted on them severe. Their participation in decisions affecting them is central to maximizing their protection, access to rights and the positive contribution they can make to community life.

- 21) **Older women and men** have the same basic needs as others, but may suffer increasing vulnerability due to the aging process. Aging factors alone, or in combination with other individual characteristics, can place older persons in situations of forced displacement at heightened risk of marginalization, exploitation and other forms of abuse. While they may be severely challenged during displacement, older persons should not be seen only as passive, dependent recipients of assistance. Older people often serve as community leaders and transmitters of knowledge, culture, skills and crafts. They can give guidance and advice, and contribute to peace and reconciliation measures, thus contributing greatly to the well-being of their families and communities.
- 22) **Disability** may affect every aspect of an individual's life and that of his or her family. People with disabilities may face heightened protection risks in displacement, such as exposure to violence and sexual abuse, exploitation, and exclusion from humanitarian assistance, education, livelihoods and health care. The participation of people with disabilities from a range of backgrounds is essential to identifying and developing appropriate solutions to disability challenges during and because of forced displacement. The inclusion of children with disabilities in education is a dynamic process that is central to a wider strategy to promote an inclusive society. People with disabilities, like all people, have skills and capacities to offer to their communities. These are to be valued and promoted.
- 23) **Women and men belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities or indigenous groups** often experience discrimination and marginalization, factors that are compounded in forced displacement situations. Age, gender and other specific factors may expose them to additional protection risks and discrimination. Working closely with minority and indigenous groups to identify the risks they face as well as strategies to mitigate them, is of fundamental importance. As individuals and groups, their active participation in community life is an enriching ingredient to be promoted.

