

II. Guiding Principles

Several principles guide the use of this Tool: age, gender, and diversity¹⁰ mainstreaming, a rights-based and a community-based approach.

- **Age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming in UNHCR** is a strategy to promote gender equality and respect for human rights, particularly women's and children's rights, and to enhance the protection of all refugees, regardless of their ethnic, social or religious background. This strategy entails assessing the implications of protection risks and strategies and programme sector activities for women and men of different ages and backgrounds. Generally, women and minority groups have less social, economic and political power and are less well represented in formal leadership structures. Consequently, they may be overlooked in assessment and planning processes. It is important to understand existing power relations, e.g. how people, especially marginalized groups, can be excluded from access to and control over resources and decision-making within a community, which can lead to discrimination.

Because of their age, children, adolescents, and older people may also be marginalized. Corrective action is therefore required to ensure that the specific risks they face are taken into consideration. Proper participatory assessment involves women, children and older people, as well as people of diverse backgrounds, in order to focus on ways in which age and gender combine with other social, economic, physical, and political factors to marginalize and disadvantage certain sections of the population.

- **Community-based approach:** a community-based approach motivates women, girls, boys and men in the community to participate in a process which allows them to express their needs and to decide their own future with a view to their

empowerment. It requires recognition that they are active participants in decision-making. It also seeks to understand the community's concerns and priorities, mobilizing community members and engaging them in protection and programming. The focus is on helping refugees organize themselves to solve their own problems. The role of UNHCR is to support the building, rebuilding and strengthening of communities' capacities to respond to protection risks and to make decisions over access to and use of resources. Participatory assessment is carried out in the spirit of shared responsibility for enhancing protection of all members of the community and is an essential component of community-based work.

- **Rights-based approach:** human rights principles guide all phases of the programming process in all sectors, including assessment and analysis, programme planning, design (including setting goals, objectives, and strategies), implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Participation in decision-making is a right. All programmes must contribute to the realization of human rights. Applying a rights-based approach entails:
 - Understanding the structural causes of the non-realization of rights and analysing who bears the obligation to uphold the specific rights;
 - Assessing the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights, and of duty-bearers to uphold their obligations, and then develop strategies to build these capacities;
 - Monitoring and evaluating programmes according to human rights standards and principles;
 - Informing programming on the basis of recommendations of international human rights bodies and mechanisms.¹¹

A rights-based approach is also founded on the principle of participation and of working with communities to promote

change and respect for rights, both at the individual and at the community levels. Therefore, a rights-based approach and a community-based approach are complementary and view the community's concerns and priorities as the starting point for mobilizing its members and engaging them in protection and programming. Both approaches seek to mobilize women, girls, boys and men in the community to participate in a process in which they define the protection risks and incidents, analyse them, and decide on actions required to resolve the issues and realize their rights.

In the UNHCR context, a rights and community-based approach aims at mobilizing women, girls, boys and men as equal partners in protection and programming activities, with the ultimate aim of empowering the community as a whole, and the individuals within the community, to access and enjoy their rights.

Ethics of participation

The rights and well-being of refugees and other persons of concern who share their experiences must be safeguarded. Thus, when undertaking a participatory assessment, refugees and other persons of concern:¹²

- Do not have to participate in the assessment if they prefer not to;
- Should not be prompted to give information in public which embarrasses them, makes them feel uncomfortable or makes them relive traumatic experiences;
- Must be told the purpose and process of the assessment and be informed of its limitations, so that false expectations are not raised;

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- Should be aware of any potential risks or inconveniences associated with participation in the assessment (e.g. time away from family or job, reminders of traumatic experiences);
- Must be told of the potential benefits arising from the assessment. The information they give might help improve certain conditions for other refugees. However, they will not receive any direct financial or other personal gain from participating;
- Must be reassured that confidentiality of information sources will be respected. Refugees must not be exposed to protection risks because of their participation (e.g. victims/survivors of sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV) becoming known to the community, boys recruited by armed elements being subjected to reprisals for discussing their difficulties, internally displaced persons suffering repercussions);
- Must be permitted to express themselves freely without interruption and without having the information they provide “challenged” negatively (e.g. if parents say they cannot afford to send their children to school, they should not be asked why they never sought assistance). Empathy should guide all interactions with persons of concern;
- Should be given the names of contact staff or implementing partners (IP) with whom they can follow up in case they have personal questions;
- Must be kept informed of how the information they provide is being used and of any follow-up actions taken; they should remain involved in the process throughout.

Why is participatory assessment important?

An in-depth participatory assessment with refugee communities, as early as possible after their displacement, is important for the following reasons; **participatory assessment:**

- **Minimizes the risk of exclusion of certain groups** during the design and delivery of goods and services. For example, the inadequate placement of health posts and water points, the inappropriate location of and procedure for food distributions, and the unavailability of transportation may place undue hardship on some groups of refugees. Participatory assessment will contribute to a better understanding of which groups of refugees cannot fully access or benefit from available goods and services;
- **Recognizes the power relations** among groups (political, social, economic, gender, etc.) with control over resources and those without. Access to services and goods may be controlled and used by some groups of refugees or humanitarian workers as a means of wielding power over others. Participatory assessment provides an insight into the gender, age, race, caste, ethnic, or tribal dynamics that can lead to such abuses and exploitation within and between communities¹³ so that preventive measures can be adopted;
- **Promotes greater respect for the rights of refugee women and gender equality.** Women have the opportunity to express their views and concerns, thus increasing the potential for them to realize their rights;
- **Promotes participation by children, particularly adolescents,** and promotes their recognition as individuals with rights. Children have channels to express their concerns and to realize their rights;

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- **Leads to improved accuracy of baseline data.** Planning and programming will be based on more accurate information—as it will have been provided directly by the people of concern—and on a better understanding of the underlying issues, including inequalities and power relations between women and men or among diverse groups, which may affect resource allocation. Furthermore, communities that have been involved directly will feel greater ownership over the process and the resulting programmes;
- **Improves relations between UNHCR and partners in UNHCR's operations.** UNHCR staff, refugees and implementing partners, together with other NGOs, United Nations agencies, governmental counterparts and host communities participate in a process in which they build shared understanding, ownership and responsibility for achieving common operational goals for the benefit of the people of concern;
- **Allows for a more holistic, comprehensive understanding and response.** The information gathered using different methods of enquiry with different groups reflects a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints. Links can be made across sectors, for example, between the non-provision of textbooks and school drop-out rates or between the absence of livelihoods, exposure to sexual exploitation, and unwanted teenage pregnancy.

