



UNHCR'S COMMITMENT TO

GENDER EQUALITY

FROM WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT TO AN AGE, GENDER AND DIVERSITY APPROACH

UNHCR has been actively promoting gender equality for nearly forty years. The proclamation of 1976-1985 as the 'United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace' prompted UNHCR to begin systematically addressing the specific protection risks faced by refugee women. Since that time, UNHCR's approach to gender equality has evolved considerably, from perceiving refugee women and girls as vulnerable to promoting their empowerment, from an isolated focus on women to gender mainstreaming, and from gender equality to an integrated age, gender and diversity (AGD) approach.¹

Today, UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy (2011) guides the work of the entire organisation. The Policy clearly states that 'UNHCR acknowledges and reaffirms that the complete realisation of gender equality is an inalienable and indivisible feature of all human rights and fundamental freedoms...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.' Along with calling for mainstreaming of an AGD

approach, the Policy specifically mandates targeted actions to advance gender equality and support individual and community capacities to address protection risks.

The results can be seen on the ground, from leadership training of women refugees in Malaysia² to the engagement of men in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention, reproductive health, human rights and gender equality in Colombia³. UNHCR staff are accountable for promotion of the AGD Policy through interconnected accountability mechanisms, including mandatory annual participatory assessments with diverse displaced women, men, boys and girls.

With growing staff expertise on gender equality and on SGBV prevention and response, UNHCR takes its commitment to gender equality seriously. UNHCR has also prioritised making progress in gender equality in staffing. 2015 saw the ratio of male/female staff improve; the ratio for staff serving in the international professional or higher category is 56 per cent male and 44 per cent female and in local professional and general service is 64 per cent male to 36 per cent female.

¹ UNHCR, *From 1975 to 2013: UNHCR's Gender Equality Chronology* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2014), <http://www.unhcr.org/543b90796.html>

² UNHCR, *Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability Report 2014* (Geneva: UNHCR, June 2015), 14, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/50519c572.pdf>

³ UNHCR, *Age, Gender and Diversity Best Practice Compilation* (UNHCR Bureau for the Americas, 2012), 16, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/50519c572.pdf>

Over the years, dedicated tools and training have been developed for UNHCR staff to guide gender equality programming, including the UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls, a mandatory AGD e-learning course, a global strategy on SGBV prevention and response, and a newly launched training package on the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons in forced displacement. A gender equality review of UNHCR operations was conducted in 2015 in order to identify good practices and challenges and to improve the services we provide to diverse women, men, girls and boys.

In 2016, UNHCR is taking steps to recommit to creating a gender equitable organisation and promoting equality and participation throughout our work. The Policy on achieving Gender Equity in UNHCR Staffing (2007) is currently under review; UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women are being updated and re-launched; and an Advisory Group on Gender, Forced Displacement and Protection has been initiated to strategise with UNHCR on developing innovative ways to mitigate protection risks, bolster organisational capacity, improve protection and empower women and girls of concern to UNHCR.

CHRONOLOGY

1980s: UNHCR adopted a differentiated approach to women refugees, and stated that women's concerns need to be addressed through specific measures. A roundtable on refugee women was organised and a Steering Committee on Refugee Women set up.

1990s: UNHCR published the first 'Policy on Refugee Women' accompanied by guidelines for the protection of refugee women. UNHCR also adopted a strategy for mainstreaming gender equality into protection and programmes.

2001: UNHCR's launched the 'UNHCR Five Commitments to Refugee Women'. It was based on national and regional dialogues with over 500 refugee women, UNHCR staff, non-governmental organisations and host governments.

2002: A 'Gender Training Kit on Refugee Protection and Resource Handbook' is released.

2003: 'Guidelines for Prevention and Response to SGBV against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons' are published.

2004: UNHCR developed its Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy and launched an AGDM pilot project in sixteen countries.

2006: The 'UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations' is released. UNHCR developed an Accountability Framework for AGDM.

2007: UNHCR published its 'Policy on achieving Gender Equity in Staffing' and a 3-year AGDM Action Plan.

2008: The 'UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls' and the 'UNHCR Guidance Note on Refugee Claims Relating to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity' are launched.

2010: An evaluation of the AGDM Strategy (2004-2009) is completed.

2010-2011: 'Survivors, Protectors, Providers: Refugee Women Speak Out,' report is launched. It was based on dialogues held with over 1,000 refugee and displaced women and girls in Colombia, Finland, India, Jordan, Thailand, Uganda, and Zambia.

2011 - 2014: UNHCR issued its 'Age, Gender and Diversity Policy', an AGDM Forward Plan (2011-2016) and 'Action against SGBV: An Updated Strategy'. UNHCR also launched 5 Need to Know Guides on working with 1) Persons with Disabilities, 2) National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 3) LGBTI Persons, 4) Men and Boy Survivors of SGBV, and 5) Older Persons.

2014: UNHCR issued the eighth AGD Accountability Report. UNHCR's SGBV reporting and awareness raising led to a doubling of reported incidents in 44 countries. UNHCR Policy adopted on Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Authority.

2015: Report and training package on the protection of LGBTI persons of concern are released, and a Review of UNHCR Policy on achieving Gender Equity in Staffing is completed.

2015-2016: UNHCR conducted a gender equality review of operations and established an external Advisory Group on Gender, Forced Displacement and Protection.



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