



Survivors, Protectors, Providers: Refugee Women Speak Out

Summary report

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Division of International Protection

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“On behalf of all of the women who participated in the Dialogues in every country, we would like to say “Thank you” to UNHCR for listening to us. That was the most important thing of all.”

One participant said that if just three good things happened because of the Dialogues, they would have been worthwhile. Let us ensure that the voices of the women and girls are heard and that not only three, but many more of their concerns are addressed.

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Introduction

“Just because we are not crying does not mean our hearts are not bleeding.”

This report summarizes a series of dialogues with over 1,000 refugee, asylum-seeking and internally displaced women and girls in seven locations around the world. Held in both urban and camp settings, the Dialogues were organized between November 2010 and May 2011 in India, Colombia, Jordan, Uganda, Zambia, Thailand and Finland as part of a programme of activities to commemorate the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

The Dialogues built on the Five Commitments to Women and Girls made by the High Commissioner following similar dialogues held in 2001 to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. They underscore UNHCR’s commitment to give women and girls a voice.

The Dialogues provided participants with a platform to share problems and develop solutions during several days of situational analysis workshops. A parallel workshop enabled men and adolescent boys to engage in the process and make suggestions to improve the protection of women and girls in their communities. Participants analyzed their protection problems, developed concrete solutions and, on the final day, came together to present the outcomes of their consultations to UNHCR staff, partners, government officials and other relevant stakeholders.

The Dialogue process was implemented in cooperation with the Centre for Refugee Research at the University of New South Wales in Australia. Discussions focused on ten core protection areas: individual documentation; women in leadership; education; economic self-reliance; shelter; sexual and gender-based violence; other forms of violence; health; sanitary materials; and legal issues. These were explored across the life cycle of women and girls as well as men and boys, and with a focus on vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors, persons



with disabilities and elderly persons. Concerns surrounding these ten protection areas are intricately linked. Women and girls face specific gender-based risks in every aspect of their lives.

In June 2011 ten refugee and internally displaced women who had participated in the Dialogues traveled to Geneva and made powerful and moving presentations during a meeting of UNHCR's governing body and as part of annual consultations with NGOs.

This report summarizes what women and girls reported and suggested during the Dialogues, encapsulating the problems, solutions, hopes and dreams of the participants. Their suggested solutions have the potential to address many of the protection concerns they raised.



UNHCR hopes that States participating in the intergovernmental event at ministerial level of Member States of the United Nations, to be held on 7 and 8 December 2011, will make forward-looking pledges to address the many pertinent issues facing women and girls of concern to UNHCR, especially those highlighted in this report.

The ten core protection areas: Key findings and recommendations

I. INDIVIDUAL DOCUMENTATION

“My sister is resettled – she says that there you have to register dogs or you get into trouble with the police. Here we cannot even register human beings.”

Access to registration and identity documents is a critical protection issue for displaced persons. Women discussed how difficult the registration process is in many places and the length of time it can take; sometimes up to three years. Obtaining identity documents may also be a challenge. Even when refugees get their refugee cards, these are sometimes not recognized by officials, preventing them from accessing basic services.

Without documentation women are unable to access many of the services and protection measures to which they are entitled, such as health care and education. This leaves them in a very vulnerable situation. Displaced persons in urban areas commented that lack of registration and valid documentation limits their freedom of movement, since they are more vulnerable to arrest and detention.

Difficulties in accessing birth registration certificates also cause major problems, including the lack of basic services such as health care and education. Some displaced persons are not even able to legally bury their dead babies. Children without birth certificates may be at risk of statelessness as they are not able to prove their place of birth and their parents' nationality when applying for identity documents.

Concerns were also expressed about how the credibility of asylum-seekers is often doubted, when no documents are produced in support of the application. Officials and judges determining refugee status need to better understand how documents can be missing because of war, sudden flight and travel, and how credibility can be established with other means.



“When one has to flee there is no time to take anything...the most important thing is to save your life. When we got to the city we didn't have any documents to obtain services or to have access to our rights.”

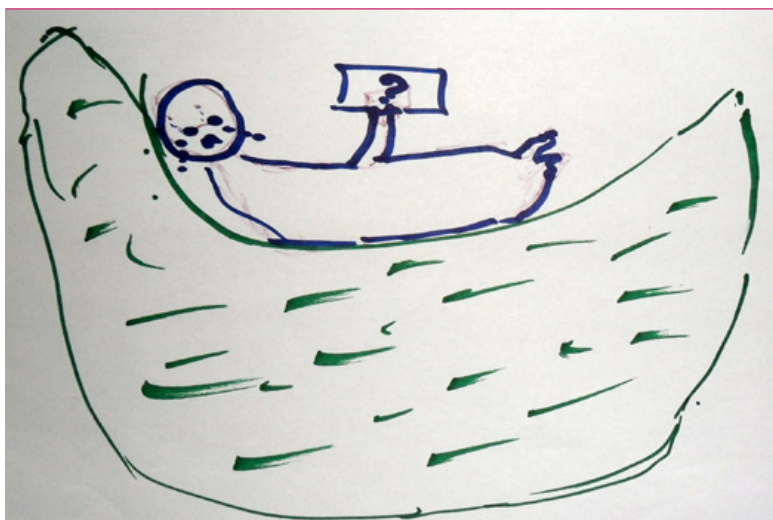
We, the participants, ask for:

Documents that give us legal status and access to our rights.

- Host governments and UNHCR have to continue to work together to streamline and speed up the registration processes and issuance of individual documentation for all refugees. Refugee identity cards should be standardized and recognized as valid identity documents for all purposes. UNHCR and host governments need to have formal agreements about the use of these cards.
- Decision-makers in the asylum procedure need to receive further training on credibility assessment in the absence of documentation. Refugees must not be requested to return to situations of danger to attempt to retrieve documents. Refugees and displaced persons will often not bring or have lost their documents. This should not be an impediment to obtaining refugee status or to family reunification.

Birth certificates for all.

- Governments have to ensure that birth certificates are issued and provided to all refugee and displaced families within a reasonable period of time after the birth of a child.



“My friend went back to her country but none of her kids had a valid birth certificate and now she has problems back home because of that.”

II. WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

“When girls want to be leaders they come up against obstacles from their teachers and from others. They are not given the opportunity to express themselves; they are silenced and their self esteem is destroyed. There is a lack of opportunities for women to express their ideas and opinions.”



“When we have leadership roles the community is more peaceful.”

Women taking up leadership positions in their homes, families, communities and in broader society face numerous challenges, which were discussed at length. Women were unanimous in every site that this had to change if their status in society was to improve. Women reported that they are often marginalized by men in their homes and routinely excluded from meaningful positions in their families and communities. Many are denied education, which can exclude them from learning the language used in meetings. In addition to cultural obstacles, negative stereotyping of refugee women by people in the community may also hinder their empowerment and capacity to take up leadership responsibilities.

Women reported that the lack of leadership opportunities is worsened by their often ‘tokenistic’ inclusion in decision-making processes. Refugee women and girls have not yet attained substantive leadership roles in community and camp management committees, as well as community justice systems. Moreover, displaced women are seldom included in consultations on potential durable solutions and conflict resolution.

The participants observed that just being appointed to committees was not enough. Women need training to ‘give them the right words to use’, help them to understand their rights, and develop more self confidence. *“We can defend ourselves and do things like men if we have leadership skills.”* But practical challenges also get in the way. In order to attend meetings, many women need childcare, assistance with transport or compensation for lost income. As one woman phrased it: *“To come to this training, it costs the same as one egg. I have*

two teenage sons who work as labourers. Every week I try and buy one egg to share between them on Sunday. So I have to choose between the egg for my sons or to come to the training.”

This overall lack of participation means that the special needs of women and girls, in particular the most vulnerable, are often not adequately acknowledged or addressed, with long-lasting consequences for themselves and their communities. Their knowledge, expertise and capacity are lost to these processes.



“Here we see a man with his foot on the woman pushing her not to be a leader; we have only men as leaders. The women are united, but they are in the background. They don’t have the opportunity to express themselves and they have to submit to the men’s decisions.”

We, the participants, ask for:

Knowing our rights.

- Context-specific and gender-sensitive training in human rights and women’s rights needs to be provided to both displaced men and women, to understand the changes flight and refuge might mean to their traditional culture and to assist women and girls to develop the skills needed to participate effectively in leadership positions.

Participating in decisions that affect our lives.

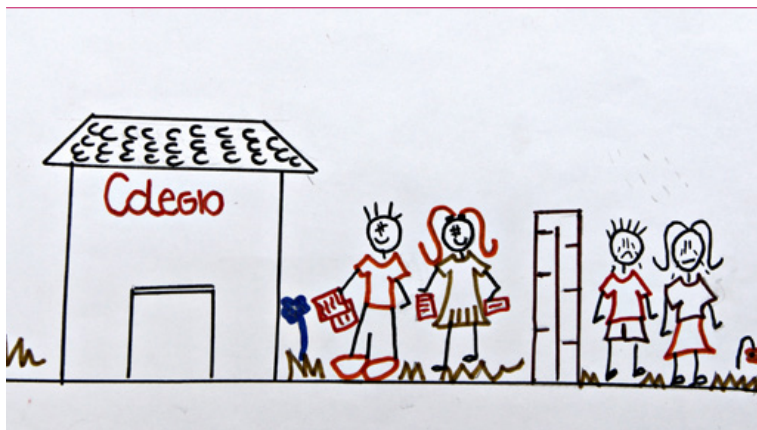
- UNHCR and NGOs need to engage women to take on an active role in camp committees and consultations, and recruit them when paid work is available.
- The participation of women has to be supported by providing childcare during meetings and training sessions, facilitating transport and, if necessary, ensuring some compensation for attending events. When required, the presence of interpreters has to be ensured.
- Governments and all agencies working with refugees and displaced persons have to support the meaningful participation of women in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes, and activities.

III. EDUCATION

“As a mother I feel very helpless because I cannot even send my children to school.”

Dialogue participants identified access to education for girl children and women as one of the most critical elements for ensuring protection, as well as for building a future and planning for successful durable solutions.

Barriers to achieving access to education include overcrowding in schools, with classes of up to 100 children. The participants complained of inadequate school buildings, sometimes lacking water and sanitation. They were upset about the unqualified and poorly trained teachers, and high levels of violence, including rape and sexual abuse of girls and boys by teaching staff and other pupils. Being forced to provide ‘sex for grades’ or for scholastic materials was reported. Safety was also reported to be a problem on the way to school, with girls being at risk of rape. There are few female teachers, and pregnant girls and girls with babies are not allowed to attend school in some instances.



“Some children can’t go to school because they don’t have documents. In order for the right to education to be respected we need documentation.”

Students and parents expressed their frustration at the lack of opportunities to pursue secondary or tertiary education, and girls dropping out of school early. *“Studying is expensive and scholarships are so rare. So girls are forced into early marriage because there is no other option.”*

Host countries often do not offer tailored language programmes adapted to different age groups, including elderly women and men. They do not make available to refugees courses to adapt or upgrade their skills in order to facilitate the search for employment, integration in the host country education programmes, or simply adaptation to a new life-style.

When vocational and adult education is available, it is often targeted to males or given at times when women cannot attend because of family duties. Little attention is given to the needs of pre-literate women. Former qualifications and levels of education are often not recognized by host countries and language is a problem for many students.

We, the participants, ask for:

Safe, inclusive and quality education.

- Education programs have to be accessible and inclusive of children with disabilities. The school infrastructure including the sanitary facilities must be accessible, the teachers trained to deal with a diverse range of learning capacities, and the environment open to welcome children with disabilities.
- Governments need to recognize teaching qualifications and other professional degrees of refugees, or offer opportunities for validation. Refugees should be allowed to work in schools attended by refugee children.
- Schools must actively recruit refugee women as teachers and teacher aides to fill chronic staff shortages, improve safety in schools, and respond to problems caused by lack of command of the local language. Women have to have access to training if necessary.
- Schools have to establish and disseminate codes of conduct for teachers, in cooperation with authorities, service providers and UNHCR. Adherence needs to be closely monitored and authorities must impose strict sanctions, including legal action, against teachers found to be abusing children. Confidential reporting mechanisms should be put in place for children to report incidents safely.
- Building materials have to be provided in camps and communities to enable displaced communities to build more schools for their children, working in partnership with UNHCR, host governments and NGOs.

Education for girls on an equal level as boys.

- Schools must make special efforts to include girls, teenage mothers, and pre-literate children. Classes need to be organized in a flexible manner to accommodate the other duties of women and girls.

Functional literacy for adult women.

- Adult education has to be structured to meet the special needs of refugee and displaced women, in particular those who are pre-literate in their own language.



"I am always at home alone; because I am deaf I can't continue my education. There is no communication for me. I am frustrated, I feel hopeless."

IV. ECONOMIC SELF-RELIANCE

“When a woman looks for a job she faces a lot of problems. Finally she resorts to [survival sex] as a means to sustain herself, and when she comes back to the camp, many people point her out, they know all about her and she feels depressed and ashamed.”

Lack of access to employment and legal means of income generation was one of the biggest hardships reported by refugee women and girls. *“Because we do not have work permits, we are paid half the salary of local workers. We are supposed to get a higher salary but we do not get enough without the permit.”*

Lack of permission to work in many host countries and lack of access to adequate subsistence allowances or rations leaves many women, especially single mothers, in desperate situations. They are unable to pay rent or purchase food or other essential items. This affects their health and their ability to send their children to school. Their only option is to seek employment in the informal labour market, where there are high levels of exploitation and endemic sexual abuse. When even this is not available, women are at times forced into survival sex to feed themselves and their families.

Child labour was reported to be common, with accompanying levels of child sexual exploitation, forced prostitution and trafficking. When vocational training is provided, it is often not targeted to the local labour markets and income-generation schemes do not allow refugees and displaced persons to generate adequate incomes.

Refugee women noted how they suffer from the lack of recognition of their qualifications. *“Often refugee women [with qualifications from their countries of origin] will get a job as an interpreter or working in projects [as unqualified workers]. Even if they have higher education, a degree from their own home country is not recognized.”*



“This drawing shows a girl, who has three choices: first, to get married to anyone, in order to have relief from her bad life. Second, she could ask for a job, but she can’t because she is a refugee. Third, she might beg for money or be forced to become a prostitute.”

We, the participants, ask for:

Market-oriented, sustainable vocational training.

- Local experts in vocational training and income generation need to be employed to establish effective and productive programmes for refugee women, taking into account the local labour market.
- Host governments are encouraged to give refugees access to national vocational training programmes.
- In cooperation with host governments, donor governments need to be encouraged to fund proven, successful income-generation programmes, which have both short-term and long-term benefits.
- Host governments are encouraged to develop a system to recognize qualifications secured in refugee countries of origin.

The right to decent work.

- Host governments are encouraged to grant work permits to refugees and asylum-seekers in order to ensure their self reliance, limit the burden they may represent to the host country and facilitate durable solutions.
- Host governments, UNHCR and partners are encouraged to assist refugees to find employment, become self-reliant and contribute to the economies of host countries.
- UNHCR and partners need to assist women who have been forced into survival sex to support their families in finding alternative employment. Staff and refugee communities have to be sensitized to the reasons why some women engage in survival sex.

V. SHELTER

“I would like to have a house that has a door so I can keep my daughters safe.”



“When we have more than three children, they don’t want to rent to us because they say the children will damage the property. The owners won’t rent to minorities. These people are subject to discrimination, exploitation and racism.”

In both urban and camp situations, refugees and displaced persons reported they had major problems with finding suitable accommodation. Housing is often overcrowded, unsafe, unhealthy and not weather-proof. In many cases large families are forced to live in small, unventilated spaces, such as mud huts with no window or hearth, which they are sometimes obliged to share with their domestic animals. The cost of housing materials is prohibitive and most are powerless to improve their housing conditions. Women with a disability, older women and LGBTI¹ displaced persons reported particular problems in finding safe shelter. Some had been obliged to move many times because of the negative attitudes of landlords and other displaced persons.

Lack of simple security measures, such as locks on doors or lights near latrines, creates serious protection problems for single women in camps. In urban areas, because of high rents, families are often obliged to share accommodation, with too many people living and sleeping in one cramped room, in which they also have to cook. Unaccompanied minor girls in urban areas often have to share rooms with single young men and, in camps, to work as domestic servants for families. This puts them at heightened risk of rape and sexual abuse. An additional problem in both urban and rural sites is access to adequate clean water and sanitation. Women have to walk kilometres to water points or sneak out in the night to get water from public taps in cities.

¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.



“For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people shelter is a very big problem. Some of us are kicked out by our family or have no family, and friends cannot let us stay a long time as it brings problems to them. I have lived in many different places in the camp and still have no fixed place.”

Overcrowding leads to health and domestic problems. The lack of privacy contributes to family breakdown, as married couples have no privacy for intimacy and women are ashamed to undress in rooms where their children also live. The lack of privacy also poses particular problems for women and girls during menstruation. Single women heading households may also find it particularly difficult to afford rents, and may have to live in inadequate dwellings.



“Because we live in such a small house, when my children eat they don't have enough space. But they get many germs if they eat outside.”

We, the participants, ask for:

In urban areas:

Non-discriminatory treatment.

- UNHCR and local NGOs need to work with governments to establish a network of landlords who are prepared to house refugees and displaced persons in a non-discriminatory and non-exploitative manner.

Affordable and safe housing.

- Mechanisms should be explored for providing safe and affordable shelter in cities. For example governmental institutions could make available to UNHCR or implementing partners blocks of accommodation to rent to displaced persons, which could be managed and maintained by committees of displaced families.

In camps:

Safe and accessible housing.

- Housing materials have to be provided commensurate with the size of families, so refugees and displaced persons can build housing that provides adequate shelter and privacy in which to conduct family life.
- Houses must be safe and secure for all, particularly for single women and female-headed households. Planning shelter in camps needs to consider the specific needs of refugees.
- Shelter must be accessible to persons with disabilities and older persons.
- Resources and training should be provided to groups who are willing to assist others in the construction and maintenance of shelter.

Water and sanitation close to our homes.

- Water and sanitation must be situated close to accommodation and sufficiently lit.

In all sites:

Safe houses for life-threatening situations.

- UNHCR and partners need to provide safe housing options in camps and urban areas for women and girls who have experienced or may be at risk of rape or any other form of sexual or gender-based violence and who find themselves in a life-threatening situation.

VI. SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

“For women and girls who have been raped the suffering never stops, there is so much shame but it’s not us who should be shamed, it’s the men who should.”

Sexual and gender-based violence is endemic, occurring too often and in every aspect of the lives of displaced women and girls and their families. *“We live in constant terror, unable to protect ourselves and our children.”* In every Dialogue, women discussed the many forms which this takes: rape and torture during conflict; sexual harassment; rape, exploitation and abuse in the workplace and at school; ‘corrective rape’ of lesbians; and domestic violence precipitated or aggravated by the trauma of displacement. Women and girls also suffer from discrimination, racism and ostracism, especially if it is known that they have been raped or sexually assaulted.

In the public sphere, women reported being raped while collecting firewood or water, or while travelling to the market. Market places are considered to be ‘dangerous’. Young girls and boys may be sexually assaulted or raped in schools or forced to exchange sex for grades or scholastic materials. The rapists include men in the local community, authority figures, and other refugees or internally displaced persons.

In all sites, women reported an increase in young teenage pregnancy due to rape and forced early marriage. *“Rape of girls causes many problems for young women: some become pregnant, this causes depression, isolation and fear, and in some cases suicide.”* Boys and young men are also targeted for rape, and families simply do not know how to respond to the needs of abused girls and boys. Many men also expressed their helplessness and grief about such situations. *“When they rape our mothers and daughters, it hurts us. Many of our daughters are forced into prostitution to survive.”*



“If a lonely girl has faced abuse from a stranger, and if she has been raped and has nowhere to go...who will help her get her rights back?”



“One man tied his wife up and tortured her. The woman escaped and went to stay in the safe house. It was decided that one child had to stay with the mother and one with the father. The mother thought of the best interest of the child so she reconciled with the father; she was forced back to this torture. If women had been involved in the decision, it might have turned out differently.”

Single women and children are attacked in their homes, which often do not have doors or locks. Survival sex is a major problem, because women shamed by rape, who are forced out of their family and community, may have no other option. Women may also be forced into survival sex to feed their families – their body is the only thing some women have to sell.

Forced marriage of young girls is common. *“Not all families can support all family members, so adolescent girls might be forced into prostitution to support the family. Also they are at risk of forced marriage to older men or to obtain residency. This is an early age to be responsible for a family.”*

The heightened vulnerability of unaccompanied minors and women with a disability was repeatedly raised in all Dialogues. Unaccompanied minor girls are particularly vulnerable to rape or sexual abuse by foster parents. This can lead to early and unwanted pregnancies, and to engaging in survival sex. In some of the Dialogues, the participants raised the issue of vulnerability and increased discrimination of lesbian women and girls.



“When you don’t have much education, some people want to abuse you, they take you and lure you with presents; you can be influenced by human brokers.”

Many among the younger participants raised the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM) and the majority of them expressed their rejection of this practice. While FGM is banned in many countries, it is still practiced in numerous communities.

Domestic violence was also reported to be common, with many commenting that it had increased since they had become displaced. The women reported that training about domestic violence needs to be adapted to the context and be provided to both men and women. Training sessions alone are not enough, and may even be detrimental if they are not followed up by support to the participants and their families in order to identify and address the violence affecting them.

Legal remedies are all too often inaccessible or ineffective. Justice systems, including traditional systems, fail women and children. Perpetrators can therefore act with the knowledge of impunity. Women in many of the Dialogues reported that if they did report a rape and the man was arrested, he was usually set free within a few days after paying the police a bribe and would then harass the family. Women were also afraid that if they went to report a crime, the police would rape them a second time. Humanitarian workers are overwhelmed by the sheer size of the problem and often do not know how to respond.

Credible complaints mechanisms and services which respond to sexual and gender-based violence in a meaningful way are scarce, and adequate physical and mental health services and support are not systematically available. Some women were afraid to access these services, especially when staff breached confidentiality, or made them feel ashamed, acting as if the rape had been their fault.

Services and safe houses for victims of domestic violence may be open to all, including displaced women and girls. But staff may not be prepared to face cultural differences and respond to the sexual and gender-based violence experienced by women coming from conflict situations and women who are on the move. Too often, trained cultural mediators are not available.



"This boy was raped at school. He is sad and crouching in the corner. The community is outside; they are pointing at him and shaming him."



“This is a girl looking for wood near her home. She is carrying the wood on her head, and then a man comes and defiles her and the wood falls off her head...Who will help her?”

We, the participants, ask for:

Fighting impunity and prosecuting perpetrators: sexual and gender-based violence is a crime.

- Host governments need to strengthen access to legal proceedings in cases of rape or sexual abuse (of women, children or other survivors of violence) and prosecute all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Impunity has to be fought by all institutions and actors involved in the protection of displaced persons.

Providing survivors with immediate, effective responses.

- Police, doctors, teachers, humanitarian and NGO workers, members of camp committees and staff in refugee reception centres need to receive training on appropriate responses to sexual and gender-based violence.
- All stakeholders must work together to provide an accessible and fast response to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. This has to include legal, medical and mental health support, as well as protection from further attacks.

Talking about sexual and gender-based violence to prevent it.

- Awareness-raising activities and training aimed at combating sexual and gender-based violence must constantly be promoted within the uprooted communities and the institutions working with them. The communities themselves have the responsibility to talk about it and to act against violence.
- Governments, communities and other stakeholders have to respect and promote gender equality and women’s rights: this is key to preventing sexual and gender-based violence.

VII. OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE



“This woman has come to a reception centre. She has very difficult things in her mind: rape and war related violence, and her family that she had to leave behind. Her mouth is taped; she cannot talk about those things, she is crying. The person working in the reception centre does not know how to communicate with her and just offers her some painkillers...”

While sexual violence was the key issue for refugee and displaced women, the participants also discussed other forms of violence faced in camps and in urban areas. These included inter-tribal violence, harassment from local populations, such as beatings, burning of huts in camps and refugee accommodation in cities. Violence in school was also reported. *“There is a big problem with violence in schools. There is drug addiction, arms, rape amongst the children. Sometimes the teachers know but they don’t do anything. Parents don’t know what is going on.”*

The violence of racism and xenophobia was raised in every site. This particularly affects women and girls when they are targeted for sexual abuse because of their difference from the local populations. This causes both physical and psychological distress to all members of the community. In some cases police and authorities have little understanding of the refugees’ experience or may themselves be the perpetrators of violence and discrimination.

Refugee women expressed particular concerns about young refugees who are at higher risk of being victims of racism and xenophobia because “they do not know how to be cautious.” They often face racism in public places and at school.

In some occasions it was reported that displaced persons may reproduce the violence they suffered, resulting, for example, in increased domestic violence or



“Older persons are more vulnerable. They can’t run, they can’t escape danger.”

discrimination against other groups of displaced persons. Women and girls are, once again, particularly vulnerable to violence coming from their family members. *“Violence that has been suffered is not forgotten and it’s repeated on the children of those who suffered it. It is like a circle that is constantly reproduced.”*

In some of the Dialogues, the issue of witchcraft was raised. Although on the whole communities were reluctant and fearful to discuss the issue, it was reported that women were at risk of violence when accused of being witches.

The need for active rehabilitation of child soldiers was discussed. Participants reported that young men found it difficult to settle back into communities after having been involved with armed groups. People in their communities were afraid of them because they often exhibited violent behaviour which they had learned while engaged with armed groups.

We, the participants, ask for:

Respect, non-discrimination and tolerance.

- To counter prejudice, joint activities need to be organized whenever possible for both refugee and displaced persons and host populations, and host communities should be made aware of the reasons why they are there.
- Police and other officials should receive special training about the circumstances of displaced persons to assist in building positive relationships with them.
- Public education campaigns and community outreach against xenophobia and racism should be organized, involving refugees and stressing the importance of a two-way process of integration.

Rehabilitation of child soldiers.

- UNHCR and NGOs need to advocate for more funds to construct and run rehabilitation centres for former child soldiers.



“Older boys don’t have access to education, so they may use drugs, or get involved in crime...”

VIII. HEALTH

“We know that overcrowding is a problem for everyone in the hospital, but the discrimination makes it very dangerous in emergency cases... because we are always at the end of the queue.”

Women in each Dialogue discussed their unhappiness at the lack of effective health care, including reproductive health care. Medical treatment for women and girls who have suffered rape is often inadequate or not available. Not only do health centres often lack medicines: it was reported that generic pain-killers were often issued inappropriately to treat serious diseases, the consequences of rape, and mental illness. The medicines are reportedly often out of date. Confidentiality for rape victims seeking medical treatment was also identified as a major problem. There was serious concern about the large number of young girls who have problems delivering babies because their hips are too narrow – as a result, many die. They requested that doctors able to perform caesareans be available for cases such as these.



“Because of displacement we don’t have the indispensable resources to buy the necessary food for good nutrition. As a consequence, our children suffer from malnutrition.”

Even when displaced persons have access to local health services, they are often required to pay for operations, the services of midwives, and the materials needed during birth. There is a general lack of access to health care for long-term or chronic diseases. Access to hospitals is difficult with insufficient ambulances available both in camps and urban areas. In all sites displaced persons reported deaths of patients during transport to hospitals and because of long queues upon reaching hospitals or health centres. Racist attitudes from some medical staff and lack of interpreters for medical cases seriously affected the level of care received.

The lack of fluency in the language of the host country can be a serious obstacle to health care. There are very few specialist medical interpreters. As a consequence, children, who often learn the language of the host country faster than their parents, are requested to interpret for their parents. It may be embarrassing for mothers and

fathers to talk of sexual and reproductive health issues in front of their children, and lack of interpreters may prevent families from receiving trauma counselling.

Lack of specialist care for people suffering from trauma and torture and the impact of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence were discussed in every Dialogue.

We, the participants, ask for:

In urban areas:

Non-discriminatory access to health care.

- Host governments and service providers are encouraged to ensure refugees' access to comprehensive health care, including sexual and reproductive health care, at least on an equal basis with nationals.
- Trained interpreters need to be identified and made available to accompany refugees to medical appointments. Members from the refugee community can assist each other with translations and may advise and support service providers on this.
- Refugees and displaced persons are often in need of specific counselling: service providers in reception centres have to build their capacity on torture and trauma related services specifically for refugees and asylum-seekers, but also for internally displaced persons.

In camps:

Decent quality health care, including reproductive and emergency health care.

- Host governments and service providers are encouraged to ensure access to comprehensive health care, including sexual and reproductive health care. If this does not exist, good clinics should be established for displaced communities.
- Additional ambulances should be provided in camps located far from clinics and hospitals, to assist in particular young pregnant women at risk of birth complications, seriously ill patients and older persons.
- Medical staff must receive specialized training in sexual and reproductive health, including performing caesareans, to better meet the needs of rape survivors and young pregnant women and girls.
- Medical clinics have to be staffed with female doctors and properly resourced with equipment for childbirth and current medications.
- Whenever necessary, female interpreters should assist female patients in hospitals and medical centres, if possible from the same refugee communities.

IX. SANITARY MATERIALS

“Not having access to sanitary materials is a problem: women and girls have to stay home like prisoners when they have their period. Some girls can’t go to school; some women can’t attend meetings so they cannot be leaders.”



“Female heads of household face problems; they have to choose between buying food or buying sanitary materials. The humanitarian assistance packages often don’t include these.”

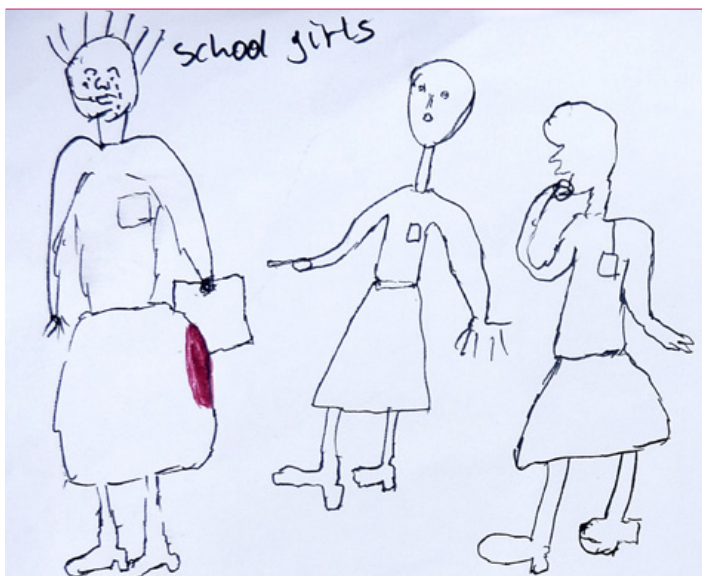
Despite some improvements since the UN High Commissioner for Refugees’ 2001 Five Commitments to Refugee Women, lack of sanitary materials is still a major problem for the majority of refugee women and girls. This is most often due to lack of funding to provide them. In some sites, no sanitary materials are available at all and in others the quantity and quality of sanitary materials are insufficient. Many women supplied with reusable sanitary materials do not have sufficient soap or a bucket in which to wash them.

In most sites, only women from 12 to 49 years of age receive sanitary materials and yet some girls begin to menstruate at the age of nine and numerous women continue to do so when they are over 50. The lack of sanitary materials prevents some women and girls from leaving their house during menstruation, causing girls to miss school and preventing women from working, attending meetings and doing other daily activities. It is also a problem which causes great shame. Women injured by rape and older women also requested incontinence pads.

We, the participants, ask for:

Sanitary pads: it's a matter of dignity and respect.

- Sufficient funding must be made available for the adequate provision of sanitary materials for all women who need them, which is protected from budget cuts.
- Implementing partners and UNHCR have to regularly consult with refugee women about their preferences regarding sanitary materials and the most effective mechanisms for their distribution.
- The age limit for sanitary materials should be reviewed to include all women and girls who need them. Incontinence pads should be provided when necessary.
- Soap and buckets need to be provided as a standard part of sanitary material distribution.
- UNHCR should monitor implementing partners to ensure that sanitary materials are distributed equitably, regularly and according to the standards.



“When a girl has her period when she is in class, when she stands up and goes outside, the sanitary towels leak onto her uniform and her friends laugh at her and ask what has happened, and she feels ashamed.”

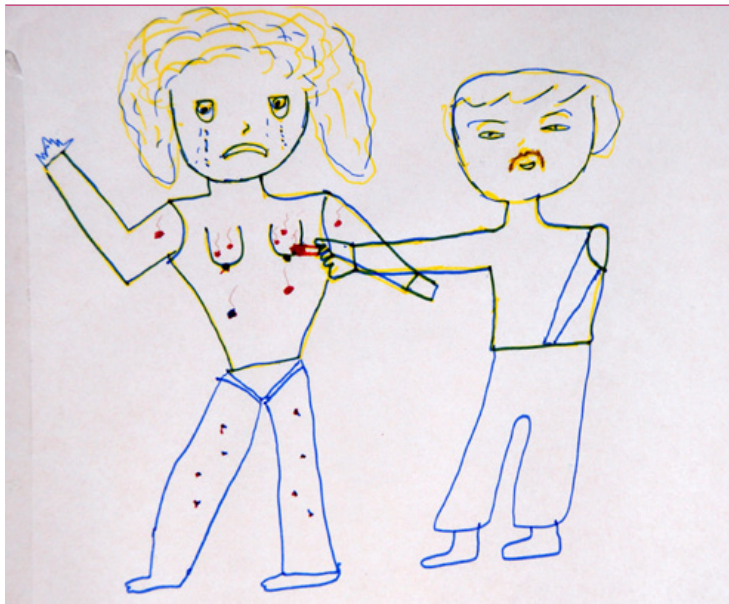
X. LEGAL ISSUES

Access to legal remedies.

“Even if a woman has the money to take the man to court...the person who is taken to prison will stay for a few days only, and then return to his settlement.”

Lack of access to all aspects of legal protection was a major concern in all Dialogues. The participants reported cases of racism and discrimination against displaced persons and corruption in the police forces. They reported beatings and rape at the hands of the police when trying to lodge complaints. Perpetrators act with impunity, bribe the police, and often return to threaten their victims for having reported them. The delay in response to criminal matters by officials meant that action was seldom taken. Many women could not access or afford lawyers, and access to mobile courts was limited.

In refugee contexts, there was a general distrust of camp justice systems, which are run by powerful men in the communities and where very few women are represented. The judgements of the camp justice systems are often detrimental to the women. Examples were mentioned of women being incarcerated because they had been raped and the perpetrators going free. Men are often fined an insignificant amount for serious abuses, if prosecuted at all.



“Women cannot report their husbands to the traditional justice system when beaten because it is considered to be insubordination.”

We, the participants, ask for:

Access to justice.

- Gender-sensitive, fair, accessible and affordable legal processes must be made available to all displaced persons, if necessary through the use of mobile courts. Information shared must be handled confidentially and in keeping with the wishes of the survivor.
- All displaced persons need to have access to a lawyer or other forms of legal assistance, when bringing a case to court.
- UNHCR needs to work with host governments to provide training on handling sexual and gender-based violence cases to police, judges, lawyers and other justice personnel. If such crimes are not sanctioned under national law, UNHCR should advocate with governments to amend relevant legislation.
- Cultural awareness training for front-line and border police officers needs to be developed, including awareness of the particular circumstances of refugees and their general lack of trust in the authorities, to assist building positive community policing relationships.
- Corruption has to be identified, isolated and prosecuted. Strong penalties should be enforced for police officers or humanitarian workers who act in a corrupt manner.
- UNHCR and implementing partners have to ensure that women are trained and appointed to senior roles in community justice mechanisms, and monitor the performance of men and women in such roles.
- Men and women involved in community justice systems need to be trained on human and women's rights and how to handle cases of sexual and gender-based violence.



"In the solutions we have placed an ear: women should be heard, understood and attended to when they report cases."

Access to land rights.

“The government gave the land back to us, but we don’t have the security to go back. We are afraid. We can still be killed there.”

Many displaced women indicated that they did not wish to return to the land from which they had been displaced, even if this were possible. They feared that they would return to violence and that they would not be able to resume their previous livelihoods. Other women, in particular indigenous women, wanted to reclaim their traditional lands and asked for support to return to their homes as soon as possible.

We, the participants, ask for:

Safe return to our land.

- Property rights of women must be acknowledged and respected. Communities need to protect the rights to property of women and to support their access to land.
- The traditional ownership of indigenous lands and the right of indigenous people to voluntary return have to be recognized.
- Effective return plans need to be established with those families who wish to return to their places of origin, and include the provision of land to ensure self-sustainability; help in reconstructing destroyed houses; land mine clearance where relevant; and the re-establishment of essential services such as schools, transport and health care. Security has to be guaranteed through the re-establishment of police and legal structures.

Protection against forced return.

“I came here as a young girl, caring for my five younger sisters. One of them was raped and has a child. I am only 23 years old myself. If we are forced to return, how can we build a house and live? The men will harass us and rape us because we are single women. We would rather die than be forced to go back to that.”

Refugees in several sites voiced their fear of forced repatriation. The fact that, despite the best efforts of UNHCR, in some places refugees and displaced persons have been forcibly returned to danger or death has only increased this fear. The major concern was the lack of information available to the communities about what was planned and lack of involvement in the decision-making process.

Participants deemed some groups to be in particular danger if forced to return to their home country, in particular people known to be politically active in resistance movements and people suffering from high degrees of trauma as well as single women who had been raped or forced into survival sex.

We, the participants, ask for:

Voluntary return in safety and dignity.

- UNHCR must consistently share information about planned repatriation with refugee communities and discuss the process with them. Women have to be actively and fully involved in these consultations.
- Governments, with the support of UNHCR, need to develop a transparent process for identifying those refugees and displaced persons whose return would put them at risk, and provide alternative solutions. Specific and careful consideration has to be given to any persons who suffered or are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence upon return.

Respect for our right not to return.

- The right not to return needs to be respected and supported by governments, UNHCR and NGOs.

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