UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | EMERGENCY HANDBOOK

Age, gender and diversity (AGD)

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Key points

- Draw on information gathered during assessments and consultations with forcibly displaced and stateless persons throughout programming phases
- Talk to individuals and groups across different AGD groups, among forcibly displaced and stateless persons and host community members; it is not enough to engage only with leaders
- Do not make promises to the community that you cannot keep
- Recognize that each community and person has capacities and engages in forms of individual and/or collective self-protection. It is important to identify and map community-based protection mechanisms and support what works
- Be aware that many protection problems may have existed before an emergency began. Some practices in a community may be harmful to the protection of certain AGD groups
- Be aware that, to meaningfully involve specific AGD groups, such as children, older persons, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ persons, minorities and indigenous peoples, you may need to adapt the way you reach them and ensure their participation
- Organise needs assessments, protection monitoring and other similar activities in a way that includes the collection of age, gender, disability and other relevant diversity characteristics, as needed. Use the AGD data when conducting the analysis in order to generate AGD-sensitive findings and inform AGD-inclusive programmes

1. Overview

Every individual is unique. The actual or perceived differences between us shape our opportunities, capacities, needs and vulnerability; and perceptions of difference can influence how we are treated by others.

Conflict and displacement affect individuals differently, depending on their age, gender, disability, and other diversity characteristics. UNHCR's age, gender and diversity (AGD) policy seeks to ensure that all forcibly displaced and stateless persons fully participate in decisions that affect them and enjoy their rights on an equal footing with others.

Age denotes the different stages in a person's life cycle. It is important to know where people are in their life cycle, because their capacities and needs change over time. Age influences and can enhance or diminish people's capacity to exercise their rights, and must be considered in all protection, assistance and solutions programmes.

Children and adolescents can bring unique and valuable perspectives and solutions to problems that confront them and their communities.

Youth are frequently overlooked as a social group, When given the opportunity to develop their talents and skills, youth have the potential to make important contributions to protection and to solutions, for themselves and for their communities.

Older persons may face heightened protection risks, due to the negative interaction of ageing with barriers in the environment, including ageist attitudes, and other personal characteristics. When supported, they can play vital roles in their households and communities.

Gender denotes the roles of women and men in societies, which are often central to the way in which people define themselves and are defined by others. Gender roles may change across cultures and over time. Gender often defines the duties, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and privileges of women, men, girls and boys in any context. The principle of gender equality affirms that all individuals regardless of their gender should enjoy rights, responsibilities and opportunities on equal terms. It implies respect for the interests, needs and priorities of all genders. Combating discrimination based on gender is inextricably linked to gender equality, since it challenges negative stereotypes and discrimination arising from prejudice.

Women and girls fill important roles in their communities and families and wider society and contribute in various ways to strengthening protection and solutions. Supporting the empowerment of women and girls is vital for dismantling gender barriers and reducing inequalities.
Men and boys can be agents of change in favour of rights, and can work to increase gender equality and prevent gender-based violence (GBV).

Persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC), including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) persons face complex challenges, threats, and barriers and often experience discrimination, abuse, and violence.

Diversity denotes the different values, attitudes, cultural perspectives, beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, sexual orientations, gender identities , disabilities, health, social and economic status, skills and other specific personal characteristics that people possess. Diversity

characteristics vary from person to person and intersect with age and gender, making each person unique. UNHCR undertakes to recognize, understand, respect and value these differences in each specific context and operation, to ensure that all forcibly displaced and stateless persons are protected appropriately. Respecting diversity means recognizing and valuing those differences and creating a protective, inclusive, and non-discriminatory environment in which every person's rights are upheld. The general concept of diversity is also a call to not restrict ourselves to pre-defined groups which may be marginalized or need specific responses, as this may also be highly context-specific.

Persons with disabilities experience physical, attitudinal, information and communication barriers to access services and assistance. As a result, they may be excluded from programmes, denied participation in decisions that affect their lives, and lack support networks.

Minorities and indigenous peoples are often marginalized or excluded from participation in socio-economic life, rarely have access to political power and frequently encounter structural obstacles to manifesting their identity. These obstacles are multiplied for minorities and indigenous peoples during forced displacement and statelessness, and increase protection risks.

UNHCR Policy on AGD (2018)
In 2018, UNHCR revised its AGD Policy. The updated policy consolidates and updates UNHCR's commitments to inclusive AGD programming, to accountability to affected people (AAP) , and to women and girls. These commitments complement and build on one another. The AGD Policy sets out ten minimum core actions that are mandatory for all UNHCR operations in all contexts, including emergencies

AGD-INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING	For purposes of analysis and programming, all data collected by UNHCR will be disaggregated, by age, sex, and disability at minimum, and by other elements of diversity where contextually appropriate and possible.
PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION	At a minimum, country operations will employ participatory methodologies at each stage of an operation's management cycle, and will incorporate the capacities and priorities of persons of all ages, genders and diverse backgrounds into protection, assistance, and solutions programmes. In an emergency, this may include organizing focus group discussions with diverse groups as soon as possible to ensure the response provided is adequate and identify potential adaptations.

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY	At a minimum, all country-level protection and solutions strategies will detail the operation's approach to communicating with persons of diverse age, gender and diversity backgrounds, using means that are appropriate and accessible to all groups in a community. In an emergency, access to information and communication can be promoted by using multiple channels, including radio messaging, audio and printed information, and community volunteers, among other.
FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE	At a minimum, all UNHCR operations will establish and operate feedback and response systems, including for confidential complaints. Channels can be adapted for emergency response, including the use of digital and in-person mechanisms.
ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND ADAPTATION	At a minimum, UNHCR operations will adapt programmes and strategies in response to input from forcibly displaced and stateless persons, and document this in country operation plans and annual reporting. In emergencies, use feedback collected through focus group discussions and feedback channels to adapt programming and document lessons learned as soon as possible.
ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY	a. At a minimum, UNHCR operations will ensure that 50% of those who participate in management and leadership structures under UNHCR's authority are women. UNHCR will encourage partners, including Governments, to do the same. b. At a minimum, UNHCR will provide forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls with individual protection documentation and will encourage partners, including Governments, to do the same. c. Depending on the context, UNHCR operations will increase the percentage of women who are the primary recipients of assistance in households that receive material or cash-based assistance. d. At a minimum, UNHCR will ensure that women and girls have equal access to livelihood, education, and health programmes it delivers, and will work to persuade partners, including Governments, to give them equal access to public services. e. At a minimum, UNHCR operations will adopt and apply GBV standard operating procedures; operationalize the four main referral pathways for all survivors (safety/security, legal, medical, and psychosocial); and encourage partners, including Governments, to do the same.

2. Relevance for emergency operations

Proper attention to the age, gender and diversity of forcibly displaced and stateless populations is of the essence, from day one of an emergency, to identify and address the most acute protection problems and needs. For instance: persons with disabilities and older persons may have been left behind during forced displacement. The extent of GBV may not be apparent among recently arrived refugee women. Inadequate responses to dietary needs of internally displaced nomad populations may aggravate malnutrition.

It is essential to quickly identify the most acute protection problems and needs affecting specific groups and to develop specific responses in the first stages of an emergency. AGD analysis and developing new responses, or adapting existing ones, must however continue during the emergency as more information becomes progressively available.

3. Main guidance

As a foundational component of UNHCR's commitment to accountability to affected persons (AAP), the AGD Policy is applicable to all persons under the UNHCR mandate: refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, returnees, internally displaced persons. It applies to all humanitarian actors and interventions in emergency and non-emergency situations. The following actions can support the implementation of the commitments to AGD in an emergency.

Summary of actions

Assessment and other types of consultations
Gather and systematically analyse, with the active involvement of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, AGD-disaggregated information relating to the rights, needs, risks and priorities of all forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Identify the AGD characteristics that are relevant and need to be available as an evidence base to inform AGD-inclusive programming. Design the assessment accordingly, as to enable the disaggregation of data information by AGD characteristics. Balance the resources, time and effort required to run an assessment against the length of time its findings will remain valid, particularly in situations that change rapidly. As appropriate, use all opportunities and encounters with forcibly displaced and stateless persons to understand how the situation is changing for them, and ensure this information is documented and analyzed in a systematic manner.

Design
The design of programmes should be based on assessments of the protection needs of affected and host communities and their capacities. Involve forcibly displaced and stateless persons and their representatives in the design of programmes that affect them.

Resource allocation
To fully implement an AGD approach, budget allocations and programme interventions must reflect the findings of assessments and community consultation, and should consider the priorities set by the community. Consider the resources needed for continuous engagement with the community when doing your resource allocation.

Implementation

Decide what targeted actions are required to address the specific needs of different AGD groups of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, and remove barriers that make it difficult for them to access services they need or be part of the solution. Implement these actions with care, making sure that inequalities are not exacerbated and that no individuals or groups are improperly excluded. Involve forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the implementation of your programmes, including distribution of cash, food and core relief items (CRIs).

Monitoring and evaluation
Assessment and consultation provide an opportunity for forcibly displaced and stateless persons to provide feedback on the effectiveness of interventions. Ensure feedback, complaints and response systems are in place early on, and that all forcibly displaced and stateless persons are aware of them and have opportunities to voice their concerns. Act on feedback received from forcibly displaced and stateless persons, for example by taking corrective action, and report back to them.

Staffing
Consider the AGD characteristics of UNHCR and partner personnel, especially when these may affect their capacity, or the capacity of programmes, to protect forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Note that forcibly displaced and stateless persons may be more comfortable interacting with personnel based on their age, gender, or other diverse characteristics, such as a preference for women interpreters, or personnel who speak local or sign languages.

How to implement this at field level?

The AGD policy is fundamentally linked to UNHCR's rights-based and community-based approaches, which seek to facilitate the meaningful and systematic participation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons across programming phases and, thereby, in decisions that affect their lives and their communities.

Use a participatory approach to collect, analyse and disseminate information, and to identify relevant AGD characteristics, categories, and data sources. Listen to forcibly displaced and stateless persons, understand their identified priorities, draw on their knowledge, and respond to feedback.

- Use a range of participatory methodologies to understand the situation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons; map community structures, communication channels, and available services.
- Conduct regular assessments to identify and monitor protection risks and incidents, and the incidence of human rights violations before and during the emergency. Use an AGD perspective to analyse root causes and their impact, with the aim of taking swift preventive and/or remedial actions and avoiding further abuses or displacement.
- When you consult community members, carefully consider their safety and security. Individuals or groups who communicate with aid agencies may face resentment or even violence from other individuals or groups. Identifying information and their sources should therefore be kept confidential. When working with local authorities, particularly in internal displacement situations, take measures to ensure that no individuals or communities face repercussions because they have discussed human rights violations or shared any other

information with us.
- Make arrangements to ensure that all groups in the community are aware of opportunities to participate in assessments and that any barriers to participation in these are removed.
- Assessments should draw on the expertise of all personnel (national and international), as well as partners, local NGOs and civil society groups, government officials and forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Adopt a multi-functional team (MFT) approach. Participatory assessments are the responsibility of all personnel, not only community-based protection and protection staff.
- Organise needs assessments, protection monitoring and other similar activities in a way that includes the collection of age, gender, disability and other relevant diversity characteristics, as needed. Use the AGD data when conducting the analysis in order to generate AGD-sensitive findings and inform AGD-inclusive programmes.
- During an emergency, the situation changes very quickly. Spend as much time as you can in the community and use every opportunity to engage with forcibly displaced and stateless persons to understand how their situation is changing.
- Avoid talking only to leaders or people who are more visible and vocal. Proactively seek to engage different groups in the community and take steps to consult the opinions of people who are at heightened risk or marginalized.
- Conduct assessments during times of day and in locations that are safe and convenient for different AGD groups. Take steps to ensure accessibility for individuals from all AGD groups to participate, for example by providing childcare, food, or a travel allowance.
- Report back to communities and engage with them to validate the findings and the proposed programme priorities.

Include forcibly displaced and stateless persons persons of concern meaningfully in operational planning.

- Run participatory planning exercises and work with communities to implement protection solutions. Failure to consult communities adequately, or to take account of their views when responses are designed, can have serious consequences. If women are not consulted, for example, sanitation facilities may be constructed near areas where men socialize; this may put women and girls at risk, cause them to avoid using the facilities, and so harm public health as well as their safety and dignity.
- When you plan, draw on the needs, priorities, and proposed solutions that forcibly displaced and stateless persons identified during the assessment phase. Use the information provided through the feedback, complaints and response systems.
- Engage with organizations led by persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ persons, youth, and women, particularly those led by displaced and stateless persons, and collaborate with them on the design and implementation of inclusive responses and safe referral pathways to services. Invest in partnership with such organizations (including thorough the Grant Agreement).
- AGD requires UNHCR personnel to adopt specific and appropriate methodologies to engage meaningfully with different groups. (Develop child-friendly information materials and consultation exercises for boys and girls of different ages, for example.)

Identify where targeted action is needed to address specific protection gaps.

- Design responses to be inclusive and accessible to diverse groups in the community. Take specific action to target the most pressing needs that are identified. It is important to involve forcibly displaced and stateless persons in this work and build their capacities.
- When taking action during an emergency, avoid establishing patterns of behaviour or relationships that might be difficult to change later on. Prefer temporary arrangements and review them regularly, as the situation evolves. Make sure that forcibly displaced and stateless persons are made aware that arrangements introduced during emergencies may change later.
- Identify and support communities' self-protection measures and avoid introducing new measures that may weaken the community's capacities. Identify both positive and negative coping mechanisms, and work with the community to address harmful social norms and their effects.
- Quickly identify a diverse group in the community who are able and willing to organize community support for those at heightened risk, including temporary care arrangements for unaccompanied children. Make sure that such a mechanism is then incorporated in a wider community mobilization strategy Identify and remove barriers that different groups face as they try to access registration, assistance and other services in an emergency. Many persons with disabilities, for instance, experience social, cultural, physical, economic, and political discrimination that impedes their efforts to participate in society on equal terms and may obstruct their access to rights and services.

Information sharing and communication

- In consultation with communities, establish locations where UNHCR personnel are available at regular times to meet forcibly displaced and stateless persons, gather information on protection needs, answer questions, and provide counselling in a safe and confidential environment. Inform the community about these arrangements. Be mindful that not all persons in the community may be able to access those points. Go to them instead!
- Work with community outreach volunteers to ensure timely information is disseminated in the community, particularly to those who are at heightened risk, in a way they are likely to be able to understand and use to make informed decisions about their lives.
- Working with the community; take steps to ensure that individuals across all AGD groups have access to information on assistance and other issues. Post notices in places where people are likely to meet, such as water-collection points, community centres, registration points, and wherever assistance is distributed, ensuring that messaging is available in local languages and for people with low levels of literacy and digital connectivity.

Carefully consider the composition of UNHCR personnel and its partners and effects on operational effectiveness, to reflect the diversity of the communities where we work.

- For example, it may be difficult to encourage women's active participation and leadership, or consult women and girls adequately, if the UNHCR and partner personnel engaging with them are male.

Post emergency phase

A post-emergency phase normally provides opportunities to deepen and make more sustainable responses to diverse population groups. As an instance, GBV programming may be enriched with longer-term women empowerment. Self-help mechanisms, together with advocacy with authorities, can be deployed to promote obtention of personal documents.

Mapping of State responsibilities, such as regular social protection programmes for vulnerable persons, is important during the emergency phase. A post emergency might then provide the opportunity to switch from direct interventions, such as humanitarian cash assistance, to support to authorities for e.g. inclusion of displaced persons in existing social protection schemes.

Checklist

- Obtain a quick understanding of the specific population groups, according to AGD, which may be most affected by acute protection problems and needs.
- Ensure that all assessments are adapted to measure the above, through e.g. the inclusion of specific indicators.
- Adapt programmatic and advocacy responses to identified needs.
- Progressively refine knowledge with specific or more in-depth assessments and adapt the response accordingly.

4. Standards

Managing UNHCR's results indicators

UNHCR Results Monitoring Framework encourages disaggregation by age, gender, disability and other diversity considerations as relevant. Dedicated Good Practice indicators to monitor access to groups at heightened risk are also available under Outcome Areas 4, 5 and 7.

Managing UNHCR's results indicators - accessible to UNHCR staff only

5. Policies, Guidelines and Useful Links

UNHCR/HCP/2018/1 Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity

Annexes

Understanding Community Based Protection, Policy Paper, 2013

UNHCR Manual on a Community Based Approach in UNHCR Operations, 2008

UNHCR, Gender Equality Toolkit, 2020

UNHCR Specific Needs Codes – Disability Interview Guide, 2022

UNHCR, Need to Know Guidance: Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement, 2019

UNHCR, Need to Know Guidance: Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex persons in forced displacement, 2021

UNHCR, Need to Know Guidance: Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement, 2021

UNHCR, Need to Know Guidance: Working with national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples in forced displacement, 2011

6. Learning and field practices

AGD e-learning [English], [French] (also available to externals)

Community-based Protection

7. Links

IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexua... IASC, Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Human... IASC, Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action, 2023 UNHCR & UNICEF, Guidance Note: Responsible Disaggregation of Data on Refugee an... UNHCR, Listen and Learn - Participatory assessment with children and adolescent... CBP Intranet Page (UNHCR staff only) Safeguarding Individuals Page Persons at Risk Accountability to Affected People (AAP) Accessible to UNHCR staff only - Participatory Assessment Toolkit, provisional ...

8. Main contacts

As first port of call, contact the UNHCR Deputy Representative (Protection), the UNHCR Assistant Representative (Protection), or the Senior Protection Officer or Senior Community-based Protection Officer in the country.

Alternatively, contact the UNHCR Head of Protection, or the Deputy Director (Protection), or the senior Protection Coordinator, or the senior Protection Officer, or the senior Community-based Protection Officer in the Regional Bureau.

The person you contact will liaise as required with the relevant technical unit at UNHCR DIP.