Age, gender and diversity (AGD)

24 March 2023

Key points

- Draw on information gathered during assessments and consultation throughout the programme cycle.
- Talk to individuals and groups across the community; 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 or collective self-protection. Strategies may or may not be effective, but it is important to identify and map them, and support what works.
- Acknowledge that the groups and individuals who are most difficult to reach may be the groups and individuals who are most at risk and have the most significant needs.
- Be aware that many protection problems may have existed before an emergency began. Some practices in a community may be harmful.
- Be aware that, to meaningfully involve children, you need to go beyond formal dialogue and discussion. Put in place the resources and expertise required to support methods and processes that will elicit children’s feedback and secure their participation in decision-making.

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 persons of concern (PoC) 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, even though, when they are given the opportunity to develop their talents and skills, they 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 effects of ageing alone, or ageing in combination with other personal characteristics. But they can play vital roles in their households and communities.

**Gender** denotes the socially constructed roles of women and men, which are often central to the way in which people define themselves and are defined by others. Unlike sex, gender is not a biological determinant. Gender roles are learned, may change over time, and vary within and between cultures. 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 women, men, girls and boys should enjoy rights, responsibilities and opportunities on equal terms. It implies respect for the interests, needs and priorities of each gender. Combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is inextricably linked to gender equality, since it challenges negative gender stereotypes and systemic discrimination arising from prejudice.

Women and girls fill important roles in their communities and families and contribute in various ways to strengthening protection and solutions. Men and boys can be agents of change in favour of rights, and can work to increase gender equality and prevent SGBV.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (**LGBTI**) 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, abilities, 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 persons of concern 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.

Persons with disabilities experience a range of barriers. As a result, they may be excluded from programmes, denied participation in decisions that affect their lives, and lack support networks.

Women, men, girls, and boys belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, or indigenous groups often experience discrimination and marginalization. They are likely to be affected both by immediate events leading to their displacement and by the long-term legacy of discrimination.

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 context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGD-INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING</th>
<th>For purposes of analysis and programming, all data collected by UNHCR will be disaggregated, by age and sex at minimum, and by other elements of diversity where contextually appropriate and possible.</th>
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<tr>
<td>PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION</td>
<td>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 women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds into protection, assistance, and solutions programmes.</td>
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<td>COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY</td>
<td>At a minimum, all country-level protection and solutions strategies will detail the operation's approach to communicating with women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds, using means that are appropriate and accessible to all groups in a community.</td>
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<td>FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE</td>
<td>At a minimum, all UNHCR operations will establish and operate feedback and response systems, including for confidential complaints.</td>
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<td>ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND ADAPTATION</td>
<td>At a minimum, UNHCR operations will adapt programmes and strategies in response to input from persons of concern, and document this in country operation plans and annual reporting.</td>
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<td>ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td>b. At a minimum, UNHCR will provide women and girls of concern with individual protection documentation and will encourage partners, including Governments, to do the same.</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td>e. At a minimum, UNHCR operations will adopt and apply SGBV 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.</td>
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2. Main guidance

When and for what purpose

As a foundational component of UNHCR’s commitment to accountability to affected persons (AAP), the AGD policy is relevant to all persons of concern to UNHCR, to all humanitarian actors, and in all interventions in every emergency. When working with affected populations, we must first understand their diverse and particular needs as well as their capacities and skills. Communities are not homogeneous groups but are composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds and identities. Close and regular engagement with persons of concern is critical to our ability to understand and assess their situation and specific protection risks, identify appropriate responses, determine what must be done to assist and protect them, and ensure we do not inadvertently increase marginalization and vulnerability. The success of our work in emergencies depends on obtaining timely access to and engaging effectively with persons of concern through community-based approaches. We cannot wait until emergency situations stabilize.

When engaging with a community, do not rely solely on contacts with individuals who are easy to reach, such as visible leaders. If information sharing and consultation are restricted to community leaders (who are often men), it can reinforce discrimination and exclusion and does not amount to consulting the community. Whenever possible, talk to people from all AGD backgrounds to gain a comprehensive understanding of their situation. Consciously reach out to groups that are marginalized and less visible, such as youth, persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons. Consult them. Consider the many different ways in which the intersection of age, gender and diversity can shape human experience. Find out, for example, in which locations
women can most safely collect food aid and other material assistance; ask whether those locations are accessible to women with disabilities. This is essential knowledge for programming and protection interventions. An inclusive, rights-based approach is critical to our accountability to those we serve and is at the heart of an AGD approach. The AGD policy is therefore a vital practical instrument that should be used continuously to inform the design and implementation of strategies and programmes at all levels. Although it may not be possible to consult every group during an emergency, it is vital to include a range of representatives from across the community and make sure they can participate in the assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes. By analysing interlinked personal characteristics in terms of AGD, we can better understand the many protection risks that individuals and communities face, and their capacities to address them, and so act more effectively. By promoting respect for difference and affirming that difference enriches communities, we promote progress towards equality and enjoyment of rights. Equality implies respect for everyone; the promotion of equal opportunities for people with different needs and abilities; and targeted measurable actions to combat inequality and discrimination.

**Summary of guidance and/or options**

**Assessment**
Gather and systematically analyse, with the active involvement of persons of concern, AGD-disaggregated information relating to the rights, needs, risks and priorities of all persons of concern. Balance the time and effort required to run an assessment against the length of time its findings will remain valid, particularly in situations that change rapidly. Use all opportunities and encounters with persons of concern to understand how the situation is changing for them.

**Design**
The design of programmes should be based on assessments of the protection needs of affected and host communities and their capacities. Involve persons of concern 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.

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

**Monitoring and evaluation**
Assessment and consultation provide an opportunity for populations of concern to comment on the effectiveness of interventions. Ensure feedback systems are in place early on, and that all persons of concern are aware of them and have opportunities to voice their concerns. Act on
feedback received from persons of concern and report back to them.

**Staffing**
Consider the AGD characteristics of UNHCR personnel, especially when these may affect their capacity, or the capacity of programmes, to protect persons of concern.

**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 people of concern in assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring processes and, thereby, decisions that affect their lives and their communities.

**Use a participatory approach to collect and analyse information. Listen to persons of concern, identify their priorities, draw on their knowledge, and give them feedback.**

- Use a range of participatory methodologies to understand the situation of people of concern; map community structures and available services.
- Conduct regular assessments to review protection risks and the incidence of human rights violations before and during the emergency. Use an AGD perspective to analyse root causes, with the aim of taking swift remedial action and avoiding further abuses or displacement.
- When you consult community members, carefully consider their security. Individuals or groups who communicate with aid agencies may face resentment or even violence from other individuals or groups. Sources of information should therefore be kept confidential. When working with local authorities, particularly in IDP contexts, ensure that no individuals or communities face repercussions because they have discussed human rights violations.
- Make arrangements to ensure that all groups in the population of concern 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, government officials and persons of concern. Adopt a multi-functional team (MFT) approach. Assessments are not working that only community-based protection and protection staff do.
- Disaggregate data collected on populations through needs assessment and during protection incidents. Analyse the data in terms of age, gender, and disability and, where appropriate, other diversity characteristics.
- 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 persons of concern to understand how their situation is changing.
- Avoid talking only to leaders or people who are more 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 that are convenient for different AGD groups. Take steps to assist certain AGD groups to participate (by providing childcare, food, or a travel allowance).
Include persons from marginalized groups in assessments of broader community issues, as well as discussions that specifically concern them.

Report back to communities on the results of assessments, validate your analysis, and highlight programme priorities that the community identified during the assessments.

**Include 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 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 persons of concern identified during the assessment phase. Use the information provided by feedback and response systems.
- AGD requires UNHCR staff 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 all responses to be inclusive and accessible to all groups in the community. Take specific action to target needs that are identified. It is important to involve persons of concern 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. Make sure that persons of concern 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 negative coping mechanisms and work with the community to replace harmful practices or mitigate 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.
- Identify and remove barriers that different groups face as they try to access 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.
- AGD requires UNHCR personnel to adopt specific and appropriate methodologies to involve all groups in a meaningful way.

**Information sharing and communication**

- In consultation with persons of concern, establish locations where UNHCR personnel are
available at regular times to meet persons of concern, gather information on specific 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 information is disseminated in the community, particularly to those who are at heightened risk.
- Working with the community; take steps to ensure that individuals across all AGD profiles 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.

**Carefully consider the composition of staff and effects on operational effectiveness.**

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

**Annexes**

UNHCR, *Policy on age, gender and diversity, 2018*

UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations (2006)

Understanding Community Based Protection, Policy Paper (2013)

UNHCR Manual on a Community Based Approach in UNHCR Operations (2008)

IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2017

IASC, Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action, 2017


IASC, Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action, 2018

UNHCR, Listen and Learn - Participatory assessment with children and adolescents, 2012
3. Links

- Working with persons with disabilities in forced displacement
- Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex persons in forced displacement
- Working with men and boy survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in forced displacement
- Working with older persons in forced displacement
- Working with national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous communities

4. 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.