

Update on the recommendations of the surveys on the vulnerability of refugee women in Kenya

UNHCR Branch Office Kenya

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1. The survey conducted by Eileen Pittaway and Linda Bartolomei in 2004 in Thailand and Kenya on refugee women at risk, and the ensuing recommendations of that survey had a series of follow-up actions at various levels both at Headquarters and in the field.

It is necessary to underline that the survey and its conclusions drawn from the survey are not just resettlement related. The study is aimed at improving the protection environment of displaced vulnerable women and girls. Through its field research it found gaps in and suggested remedial action to the proactive identification of vulnerable girls and women. The study also spelled out obstacles in the effective identification of women refugees most at risk. The conclusions formulate protection solutions in the immediate, medium and long and propose tools to better identify and monitor the vulnerable refugee women and girls.

From the foregoing it is clear that resettlement is only one of the solutions offered to refugee women and girls. Within this context, Branch Office Kenya would like to present the following update.

2. With regard to refugees in Kenya, in line with the conclusions and recommendations of the above mentioned study and in implementing UNHCR's policy with regards to refugee women, several initiatives and actions both in the field and in Nairobi, have been undertaken, to better respond to the needs of vulnerable refugee women and girls. As described more in detail below the following actions and initiatives have been taken by the Branch Office Kenya.

Proactive approaches to identify needs and gaps involving all sectors of the operations have started to be implemented. Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) is being implemented through the establishment of Multi-Functional Teams, and participatory assessments. Those exercises, launched in Kenya in September 2005 uncovered the needs of specific groups of women. As a result of further analysis, the Multi-Functional Teams and the functional units formulated protection responses in the immediate, medium and longer term that further formed the basis for future programming. Monitoring mechanisms were set up to follow-up on the needs of these women. Resettlement Standard Operating Procedures have been established or further refined to reflect more direct involvement in the resettlement process of other functional units, including the pro-active identification of refugee women and girls, at risk in the camps and in Nairobi. Finally the ProGres database also offers a means of more systematic

identification and follow-up on vulnerable women and girls. As the database captures all information on a refugee's life cycle including elements relating to the refugees' social and protection situation, it can be used more systematically to identify women and girls at risk at all stages of their interaction with UNHCR from registration to Refugee Status Determination to assistance and durable solutions interventions. With regard to resettlement specifically, the database provides an important source of information to assist with case and group identification.

3. From October 2003 until August 2004, Branch Office Kenya undertook a profiling exercise of Sudanese vulnerable girls and women in Kakuma refugee camp. Based on detailed assessment questionnaires UNHCR conducted 415 profiling interviews. The refugee girls and women were categorized, in categories ranging from "highly vulnerable" to "vulnerable" or "no (obvious) vulnerabilities". The exercise was inspired by the need to assess the vulnerabilities of a group of "lost girls" in light of the large scale resettlement of the Sudanese "lost boys" to the USA. The exercise benefited over 71 cases, considered highly vulnerable, resettled mainly to the USA. Another 72 cases that were not considered highly vulnerable were re-assessed, and not more than 10 cases were found to be eligible. These refugees and in some cases, their caregivers were subsequently resettled.

Apart from addressing the protection needs of particularly vulnerable Sudanese girls and women, through resettlement, the exercise highlighted to UNHCR prominent protection issues in relation to refugee girls, and more broadly SGBV issues, in the camps. The "lost girls" exercise also led to the development of tools, similar to the ones developed and shared with UNHCR by Eileen Pitteway and her team, on risk assessment.

Although no general exercise assessing the risks of the entire female refugee population has been envisaged so far, UNHCR has developed better identification mechanisms, through closer cooperation with the functional Units, such as Protection and Community Services, to identify vulnerable girls and women in the camps as well as in the urban setting.

4. Throughout 2005 and in 2006, UNHCR has continued submitting refugee women to the resettlement programmes of various countries.

In Kenya it is the case that relatively low numbers of female refugees, single heads of households are identified and submitted for resettlement on the basis of the Women at Risk criterion. However, many, if not most, are submitted on one or more of the Legal and Physical Protection Needs, Survivors of Violence and Torture and Medical Needs criteria. In 2005, UNHCR Branch Office Kenya submitted 453 cases/2,298 female heads of household/single women to the various resettlement countries on all resettlement criteria. This figure represents almost 50 % of the total submission of 4,632 persons. A more detailed breakdown indicates that of the 2,298 persons, 1,233 were submitted from

Kakuma, 945 from Dadaab, and 120 persons from Nairobi. Interestingly, the majority were submitted on the basis of Legal and Physical Protection Needs (768 persons), followed by Women at Risk (490), Survivors of Violence and Torture (199), Lack of Local Integration Prospects (32), Medical Needs (25) and Family reunification (12).

In 2006, of a total number of 993 persons submitted to date, 586 persons, thus more than 50%, are female heads of household/single women. A detailed breakdown indicates that 355 were submitted from Dadaab, 180 from Kakuma and 51 from Nairobi. The majority were submitted on the basis of Legal and Physical Protection Needs (288), followed by Survivors of Violence and Torture (205), Women at Risk (64), Lack of Local Integration Prospects (22), Medical Needs (7) and Child or Adolescent (1).

The foregoing indicates a growing trend in the identification of vulnerable women and girls, however not necessarily under the Women at Risk category but other criteria including Legal and Physical Protection Needs and Survivors of Violence and Torture. A strengthened urban identification mechanism is responsible for more systematic identification of vulnerable women in Nairobi such as Ethiopian refugee women who experienced Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in the country of origin as a result of arrest and detention, and face similar risks of rape and sexual abuse in the country of asylum. In response to their immediate needs UNHCR offers medical assistance and psycho-social counseling by UNHCR's implementing partner GTZ. Vulnerable women identified from the camps in 2006 include disabled women from Dadaab and refugee women and girls, of various nationalities in Kakuma, at risk of forced marriages, child abduction, rape or other forms of violations of basic human rights for reasons relating to their gender.

5. In line with the recommendations from Eileen Pitteway, and to respond to the Age, Gender, Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) agenda, Branch Office Kenya established in September 2005 country wide Multi-Functional Teams (MFT). Participatory assessments were carried out in Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps and in Nairobi, in collaboration with implementing partners, operational agencies and refugee representatives. Staff from UNHCR included staff from all sectors, i.e. Protection, Resettlement, Community Services and Programme. The MFT held extensive consultative meetings with selected groups of refugees, analyzed the information gathered, formulated its findings and recommendations. Responses to groups of vulnerable women included immediate, medium and long term solutions, including resettlement for highly vulnerable women and girls. In Kakuma for example highly vulnerable women were recently resettled as a result of the findings of the assessments. These were women in forced prostitution, and mostly victims of past SGBV. Their vulnerability was often heightened by having contracted HIV as a result of rape or the forced prostitution.

Within the wider protection context, two positive elements of the participatory assessment and AGDM are worth highlighting with respect to improving protection for women-at-risk. The participatory assessment allowed UNHCR and operational partners to have direct dialogue with groups of women who are not represented among community leaders who are UNHCR's usual interlocutors. Their contribution has helped UNHCR to shape its programme and protection interventions to have greater impact. As an example, at Dadaab refugee camp, elderly women (a group seldom met previously) raised the problem of food rations being difficult to chew for persons without teeth. In response to this, WFP was able to respond quickly to make the necessary adjustments. Second, because the participatory assessment is carried out by a Multi-Functional Team in cooperation with refugees, this process encourages UNHCR and its partners to look holistically at the situation of refugee women at risk and frame an integrated response. As already mentioned, resettlement is one very useful solution among many to the myriad protection problems women face. For example, in Nairobi, the Multi-Functional Team identified SGBV and lack of education for the girl child as serious risks. The office responded to these needs in several ways: establishing a women's outreach clinic to assist victims of SGBV in cooperation with the city council and an implementing partner; creating a programme of micro-grants for refugee community development, which is currently supporting literacy programs for women and girls run by refugees themselves; and strengthening partnerships between refugee communities and public schools to ensure that girls can access public education.

Participatory Assessments in Kenya are ongoing and are a basis for further monitoring and programming into the next year.

6. UNHCR Branch Office Nairobi has appointed a SGBV Focal Point within the Protection Unit. Refugee women and girls have direct access to this focal point, and upon documentation of their cases, are referred expeditiously to Community Services or the Resettlement Unit. In 2006 the SGBV Focal Point received 34 claims related to SGBV from female refugee; 43% of them were found credible and referred for further follow-up to other functional units. 60% of the claims found credible were related to rape or attempted rape in Kenya. Given the large Ethiopian and Somali urban refugees in Nairobi, 90% of the victims were from these two nationalities. Victims were subsequently referred for psycho-social counseling and provided with assistance to minimize further risks. The Protection Unit recently launched a mapping project which aims at collecting geographical information with regard to places of assault, rape, or police harassment and correlates this information with the profile of refugees involved so that risk assessment for different refugee population can be drawn upon. With the participation of refugee representatives, UNHCR Implementing or operational partners, local NGOs and the Government of Kenya, UNHCR designs a plan of action with the ultimate aim to improve the legal and physical safety of refugees in Nairobi.

7. A last development which should contribute significantly to pro-active identification and effective monitoring of vulnerable refugee women in the future, is the establishment and implementation of the ProGres database. The database allows for entering data with relation to events in the refugee's life cycle. Vulnerabilities as well as other data with relation to Protection, Community Services or resettlement activities, are now systematically recorded. This database may prove a useful source to identify categories of female refugees who have specific needs or who face or may face protection problems during their refugee life.

8. In conclusion, many initiatives have been taken to improve the protection situation of refugee women and girls, by pro-active identification, participatory assessments, and formulation of more creative solutions in the longer term thereby involving and empowering the refugee women and girls themselves. Resettlement, under the various resettlement criteria, is increasingly a protection tool, for a large number of female heads of households or single women, many victims of gender-related persecution and at risk of SGBV in the country of asylum.

Branch Office Kenya will continue to find innovative ways to effectively and comprehensively protect the most vulnerable refugee women and girls refugees of various nationalities in Kenya.

Thank you for your attention.