

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS ON
THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATIONS ON REFUGEE WOMEN,
REFUGEE CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUMMARY REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In 2001 and 2002, two independent evaluations examined the extent to which UNHCR had implemented policies on refugee women and children in its operations, and in 2003, a third independent evaluation reviewed the role of community services in the organization.¹ The findings drew attention to the positive contributions that the offices of the Senior Coordinators for Refugee Women and Children and the unit for Community Services had made to date, but also highlighted serious shortcomings throughout the Office which required UNHCR's urgent attention. The five most salient and inter-related findings were: the widening gap between UNHCR staff and refugees;² the weak application of UNHCR policies on the protection of refugee women and children and community development; the low participation of refugee women, children and adolescents in decision-making processes and correspondingly low integration of their protection needs into programmes; the absence of coordination between protection, programme and community services staff and the undervaluing of the role of community services; and finally, the need for accountability mechanisms linked to the implementation of the relevant policies, and leadership to be shown in this regard by senior management.

2. This report summarizes key actions taken since the publication of the findings of the three evaluations, including the strategy adopted by UNHCR in early 2004. It will also address progress on the related areas of the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to refugee women and five global concerns for refugee children. The main body of the report is divided into five sections:

¹ *UNHCR policy on refugee women and guidelines on their protection: An assessment of ten years of implementation* (May 2002); *Meeting the rights and protection needs of refugee children: An independent evaluation of the impact of UNHCR's activities* (May 2002); *The community services function in UNHCR: An independent evaluation* (March 2003).

² The term "refugees" in this report also refers to returnees and internally displaced persons.

- UNHCR Policies: explains how UNHCR is strengthening and complementing current policies in relation to refugee women, children and community development;
- Policy operationalization, planning and monitoring tools and capacity building: outlines measures UNHCR is undertaking to ensure the practical application of these policies in operations;
- Staffing: considers actions taken to revitalize the role of community services and strengthen UNHCR's capacity to implement a community development approach and support gender equality and age mainstreaming;
- Partnerships: provides important examples of work with partners in the follow-up to the recommendations;
- Accountability: highlights the challenge of establishing effective and transparent accountability mechanisms for the pertinent issues within the overall institutional accountability framework.

II. UNHCR POLICIES

3. Some of the obstacles to ensuring the basic rights of refugee women and refugee children and implementing the corresponding policies lie within UNHCR's own institutional procedures, attitudes and culture, and require analysis and gradual dismantling, while others lie within hosting countries and/or refugee communities themselves. The follow-up actions to the three evaluations taken to date focus on how UNHCR creates the environment for mainstreaming gender equality, age and child rights' perspectives into operations. Within the institutional context, the Agenda for Protection has provided an important overall framework for reiterating the responsibility of UNHCR staff to implement the policies on the protection of refugee women, refugee children and community development.

Policy Development

4. Three key approaches have been developed to strengthen existing policies. The first relates to addressing sexual exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence. In 2002, UNHCR's Guidelines for Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in refugee and refugee-like settings were revised. The guidelines have been translated into some 20 languages and broadly disseminated.

5. The second area relates to policies on the protection of refugee children. UNHCR has actively participated in the finalization of *the Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*. The Guiding Principles have been disseminated to field offices and other United Nations and partner agencies. Moreover, field guidelines on education were completed and disseminated in 2003 and provide staff with guidance on education standards, in particular in relation to refugee girls and boys. In addition, policy guidance on an age-sensitive interpretation of the refugee definition as contained in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as a Best Interests Determination Guide, are currently being developed in coordination with DIP.

6. The Community Development Policy endorsed by the Standing Committee in March 2001 is the third area being strengthened and will now be supported by a manual and training package. In follow-up to the recommendations contained in the three evaluations and the demand from community service field staff for an overhaul of the approach to community services work, the outline and content of the Community Services Manual were discussed with community service, protection and programme field staff in October 2003 and elaboration of the package is now under way.

7. UNHCR's *Policy on Refugee Women* (1990) is also under review in order to bring it up to date with current thinking in relation to gender equality mainstreaming. Moreover, the *Guidelines on Protection and Care of Refugee Children* (1994) are to be revisited to ensure that they address present day refugee realities.

III. POLICY OPERATIONALIZATION, PLANNING AND MONITORING TOOLS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Support Structures

8. UNHCR has recently restructured the relevant units for refugee women, children, community services and education into one section in the Division of Operational Support (DOS). The restructuring took effect on 1 January 2004 and the section for gender equality, refugee women and children, community development and education is now fully functional with professional staff possessing specific expertise assigned to each area. The focus of the new section is on providing technical support to the field to reinforce UNHCR's capacity to implement policies in a practical manner in operations, as well as to strengthen the role of the regional bureaux and other headquarters sections in gender and age mainstreaming. As a result, DOS can now provide a more efficient, coordinated and coherent service in guiding and monitoring policy implementation at the operational level.

Pilot Project

9. In late 2003 and early 2004, DOS developed an approach which brings together the relevant policy priorities within one common initiative to address the main weaknesses highlighted by the evaluations. The initiative entitled "Gender equality and age mainstreaming pilot project" is based on earlier UNHCR experiences developed in Latin America and Turkey, which were considered positive examples by the evaluations. The initiative, which is being piloted in some ten countries across all five UNHCR regions, is based on a multifunctional approach which requires the Representative of each participating country office to form a team comprised of protection, programme and community service staff. These multifunctional teams are to play a catalytic role in supporting all UNHCR staff to mainstream a gender and age perspective in the operation under the leadership and accountability of the Representative.

10. The pilot project has four phases:

- (i) a country self-assessment exercise to conduct a stocktaking of gender and age mainstreaming in the operation, while testing a situation analysis tool and, in particular, engaging in structured dialogue with refugee women and men of all ages;
- (ii) a DOS/DIP regional capacity building and planning workshop where country/regional teams come together to analyse the information gathered from a gender and age perspective. During the workshop, the teams develop work plans to address weaknesses and build on the catalytic role of the team;
- (iii) the Representatives endorse the work plans and ensure implementation;
- (iv) a review, in the last quarter of 2004, of the progress made in the implementation of the country work plans and an evaluation of the pilot project methodology.

11. The results of the 2004 pilot will enable a systematic approach to strengthening gender and age mainstreaming in UNHCR country operations in 2005. To date, six countries (Egypt, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Zambia) have undertaken phases one and two and are implementing their work plans. The other pilot countries (Canada, Colombia, Greece, Guinea, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and Uganda) have also taken steps to set up or consolidate multifunctional teams and initiate the process. Currently, plans are underway to conduct the same pilot exercise in a number of countries in 2004.

12. UNHCR recognizes that a strategy for mainstreaming gender and age issues must be complemented by actions to support the empowerment of refugee women and girls to address their long-term needs. Therefore, activities related to rights awareness, legal literacy training and economic empowerment and initial work with men as “agents of change” in the promotion of women’s rights have been undertaken and will continue.

Situation Analysis

13. The three evaluations strongly recommended that UNHCR develop a situation analysis tool to enhance the community development approach and build effective partnerships with the main stakeholders, the refugees. This activity began in late 2003 and a draft version of the first part of the tool is now being tested in phase one and two of the gender and age mainstreaming pilot project. The tool builds on current methodologies available such as People Oriented Planning (POP) and Action for the Rights of the Child (ARC). Using the draft version of the situation analysis tool, the multifunctional teams involved in the above-mentioned Pilot Project, analyse background information and undertake structured dialogues with refugee women and men of all ages, including girls and boys, and meet with partners. The analysis and agreed proposals for enhancing protection strategies must then be reflected in UNHCR country programmes, as well as those of other partners. To facilitate these steps, the second part of the situation analysis tool is to be developed by DOS in the forthcoming months.

Combating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

14. Through a collaborative partnership between DOS, the Bureaux and DIP, five regional training workshops have taken place in Africa, four in Europe, one in Asia and two more are scheduled for Asia and CASWANAME, security conditions permitting. These regional events have led to country-level workshops and greater dissemination of the guidelines, while at the same time there has been a demand for support on how to elaborate protocols and facilitate SGBV programming. A framework model is being developed, based on experience in the United Republic of Tanzania, which will be shared with all offices. This will pave the way for introducing standard operating procedures, including a standard reporting form, in UNHCR offices and strengthening accountability. Support materials finalized in 2003 included SGBV prevention posters addressing three common areas of SGBV, namely domestic violence, rape and sexual exploitation, and these are being reproduced in some countries in local language. Currently under development are a training video for the field, a monitoring tool to support missions and a global reporting system to track the level of SGBV incidents and analyse trends and responses.

15. There are many challenges in addressing SGBV, in particular the use by refugees of traditional justice systems to address SGBV, which can even result in further basic human rights violations. Other challenges include: under-reporting, ineffective legal systems, community pressures and fears of retaliation. In some instances there is even hostility by refugee communities and host governments towards those who work to reduce and prevent SGBV. UNHCR is working with partners to ensure a smooth referral of SGBV cases between service providers, while maintaining respect for confidentiality. Given the extent of the problem, the long-term training requirements, the challenge of implementing well-developed monitoring systems and the number of requests received from the field for advice on handling SGBV cases, UNHCR has approved the creation of a full-time SGBV post in DOS as of January 2005.

The High Commissioner's Five Commitments

16. The High Commissioner's Five Commitments to refugee women serve as important milestones to assess developments in our field operations to ensure the protection of women and girls, as well as the progress made in terms of upholding their rights and promoting gender equality. To take stock of progress to date, the extent to which the commitments have been integrated into regular programmes and the main obstacles to implementation, the Regional Bureaux have gathered information from each country in question. A paper containing regional summaries of the main findings will be made available to the Standing Committee. To make more tangible these Five Commitments and to facilitate more quantitative reporting on them, the *Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations*, issued in 2003, has included a number of sectoral standards and indicators that will strengthen further systematic reporting and monitoring on them.

17. The reports from the field indicate an overall improvement with regard to all Five Commitments. This is more evident when dealing with camp settings, as urban settings have their own particular challenges due to the dispersed nature of the refugee population. The main hindrances relate to cultural barriers, sensitive political contexts and financial constraints. These reports have focused on UNHCR's efforts, while in many contexts, host governments are

responsible for registration and documentation and the provision of assistance in some cases. Progress on the Five Commitments is one of the reference points for the work of the country teams involved in the Pilot Project on gender equality and age mainstreaming. A range of related initiatives include: standards and indicators; Project Profile (registration); the Community-Based Assessments of the Commitments to Refugee Women by WFP and UNHCR (see below); and SGBV. The Five Commitments have thus become a point of reference for measuring UNHCR's work on behalf of refugee women.

Refugee Children

18. UNHCR continues to promote the rights of refugee children through strengthened inter-agency cooperation; increased field support, training and the Pilot Project on gender and age mainstreaming as well as ARC activities. Moreover, UNHCR continues to prioritize the five global concerns for refugee children: separation; sexual exploitation, abuse and violence; military recruitment; education; and the special needs of adolescents.

Recent Initiatives

19. Child protection networks were established through regional inter-agency ARC steering committees in Abidjan, Nairobi and Pretoria. In Afghanistan, UNHCR field staff were trained in the use of a child protection monitoring tool developed by Save the Children. ARC training was undertaken in South-East Asia and the CASWANAME region. Moreover, the Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP), in partnership with Save the Children, continues to function as an important network of NGO and UNHCR staff for advocacy and capacity building on the rights and protection needs of separated children seeking asylum in Europe. Furthermore, UNHCR is in the process of finalizing a compilation of Best Models in Dealing with Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Europe. UNHCR continues to work with governments to sensitize them to the particular needs of children, and in Asia, efforts are ongoing to ensure appropriate protection responses to separated children.

20. Child participation was promoted through different activities with a number of instances in Africa which included direct dialogue with separated children, an SGBV workshop for adolescents, refugee children presenting their stories to a wider public, and a radio programme on child rights (South Africa). UNHCR has worked in close collaboration with United Nations and NGO partners on a number of projects in the region. These include: training, in collaboration with UNICEF, of Community Watch Teams in Liberia on SGBV and the needs of children subject to forced recruitment; support to NGOs in Kenya for a gender and child rights audit of a Refugee Bill; the launching of a study on exploitation and trafficking with ILO in West Africa; and different Best Interests of the Child projects. The biennial *Summary Update of Machel Follow-up Activities in 2001-2002* was produced and UNHCR also coordinated and prepared the Secretary-General's report on *Assistance to Unaccompanied Refugee Minors*, with inputs from other agencies. The aforementioned SGBV Guidelines draw attention to the particular needs of girls and boys. The three ARC training modules on separated children, child soldiers and abuse and exploitation of children are currently being updated.

Refugee Education

21. To monitor and support primary education for children and to promote gender parity in line with the related Millennium Development Goal, quantitative and qualitative education indicators have been developed. One, in particular, deals with structured initiatives for retaining the enrolment of girls in school. These have been included in UNHCR's *Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations*. Furthermore, innovative projects have been launched with a specific gender focus. In Zambia, for example, an initiative has been launched to promote back-to-school projects for young girls who have abandoned school because of pregnancy; another includes a partnership with a private sector donor to support girls' education.

22. The importance of education as a tool for individual and grass-roots development, for building durable solutions and for reducing the potential for future conflicts is little understood in refugee contexts and, therefore, rarely prioritized and insufficiently funded. One UNHCR-led effort to address some of these challenges is an education forum entitled Innovative Strategic Partnerships in Refugee Education (INSPIRE). Two sub-regional meetings are currently being organized with the main actors to support education needs within the context of repatriation. Inter-agency reference groups are expected to drive the partnership process at the country level.

IV. STAFFING

23. In line with the recommendations of the three evaluations and the problems highlighted in relation to the role of community services, particular attention has been paid to community services staffing over the last twelve months. The number of regular UNHCR posts in this area has increased from 90 in 2003 to 114 in 2004 following the regularization of some posts and the creation of others. Among the new post creations are ten community service posts (seven at P2, and three at P3 level) made possible by an earmarked contribution. Planning for emergency and voluntary repatriation operations now systematically provides for the inclusion of community service posts in the staffing proposals.

24. To ensure that the professional capacity of the Office is enhanced in this functional area, a strict screening process has been applied in reviewing job applications for community service posts. Furthermore, the job descriptions of all community service posts have been revised to reflect responsibilities for promoting a community development approach, gender equality and age mainstreaming, and women's and children's rights. Likewise, the roles of the regional advisers are being modified to complement the strategy. These staff will play a pivotal role in sustaining the overall gender equality and age mainstreaming strategy as it "rolls out" in 2005. This streamlining will strengthen UNHCR's capacity to ensure a comprehensive and coherent approach to the implementation of the policies at field level.

V. PARTNERSHIPS

25. In follow-up to the three evaluations, a Steering Committee was established with refugee-hosting countries and donor, NGO and United Nations partners in January 2004. UNHCR presented a three-year action plan which has since been updated. The Steering Committee's terms of reference include monitoring, supporting and advising on the implementation of the action plan arising from UNHCR's response to the evaluations.

26. In collaboration with ILO, UNHCR is supporting an evaluation in Afghanistan of vocational training and income-generating activities, and their impact on the economic empowerment of women. Innovative projects for women's empowerment in Angola and Mozambique are also being developed. In 2003, UNHCR and WFP undertook a community-based assessment of the commitments to refugee women in Uganda. In 2004, the teams collaborating on these projects will continue to study and document good practices for increasing women's participation in food distribution and control of food and non-food items in two more refugee camps.

27. UNHCR has undertaken several important initiatives with national and international NGOs, such as the design and delivery of two country-specific workshops in Sri Lanka and Nepal, and one regional SGBV training workshop in Nepal with the Reproductive Health Consortium. In 2003, the Women in Law Development in Africa (WILDAF) conducted legal literacy training for the Mano River countries, and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) conducted a training-of-trainers in gender-based violence for men in West African countries. These partnerships are continuing in 2004, with a view to strengthening such activities in other countries and regions. UNHCR has also engaged in work with a partner to introduce activities for children relating to the environment, and is now exploring projects with agencies working with street children.

28. Particularly successful partnerships have been developed with a number of agencies to enable deployments in emergency and other settings in the areas of community services, child protection and, more recently, gender expertise for SGBV. These have enabled DOS to provide important technical field support in a timely manner, which is greatly appreciated by country operations. In 2004, DOS is seeking to widen the network to incorporate Francophone social work associations.

VI. ACCOUNTABILITY

29. The need to guarantee accountability for the implementation of the various policies, as well as the operational sustainability of the policies at a grass-roots level were highlighted by the evaluations. Any accountability mechanisms relating to these policies must necessarily fall within the overall institutional accountability framework which, in the case of UNHCR, is the Career Management System (CMS).

30. At the end of 2003, the Assistant High Commissioner requested all Bureaux Directors and the UNHCR Representatives in the field to establish an objective related to gender equality and age mainstreaming in their 2004 Performance Appraisal Report (PAR), which forms part of the CMS. Additionally, the gender equality and age mainstreaming work plans endorsed by the

Representatives participating in the pilot project will be monitored by the Bureaux and shared with the respective Regional Bureau Directors for consideration in the CMS process. Furthermore, DOS is currently exploring, in consultation with the pilot countries, the establishment of benchmarks regarding the basic requirements each office must fulfil in order to demonstrate progress in gender equality and age mainstreaming.

31. Establishing real accountability for gender equality and age mainstreaming involves a number of steps. These include a process of clarification on what accountability will mean in practice, so that each staff member can fully understand what she or he is accountable for vis-à-vis refugees, the institution, host governments and other stakeholders. Another key step is to ensure consensus and transparency among staff with regard to the benchmarks to be established and monitored in operations. Linked to this is the need for a clear picture of what Representatives and senior management are accountable for, especially when operating in sensitive political contexts and with limited financial resources. The outcomes of the gender equality and age mainstreaming pilot project are expected to include some important elements for establishing an effective platform for accountability.

VII. CONCLUSION

32. As highlighted in the introduction, UNHCR's policies to protect refugee women and children have been supported over the years through a range of initiatives. In building on these, the Office is now addressing some of the key problems identified in the evaluations. These efforts will focus in particular on creating greater internal ownership and accountability at all levels, including through:

- building a multifunctional team approach at headquarters and in the field;
- strengthening leadership by Representatives and Directors;
- expanding innovative partnerships with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental actors;
- developing and sustaining dialogue with different members of the refugee community;
- monitoring the pilot project to inform the 2005 roll-out.

33. It is important to underline that this is a long-term process which will require sustained institutional efforts as well as dedicated donor community support. Over time, these efforts to strengthen UNHCR's capacity to uphold the rights of refugee women and children, to promote gender equality and enhance the protection of the community, should yield real and lasting benefits for all persons of concern.