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**Update on refugee women: promoting gender
equality and eliminating sexual and gender-based
violence**

Summary

This paper sets out recent progress towards the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, particularly in four key areas: participation and leadership; documentation and statelessness; education; and self-reliance. In addition, the paper highlights UNHCR's intensified efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

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I. Introduction

1. Ensuring gender equality for refugees, returnees, stateless and internally displaced persons of all ages and backgrounds is a goal to which UNHCR remains deeply committed. Indeed, this goes to the core of UNHCR's age, gender and diversity (AGD) approach, which guides operations worldwide. The purpose of this paper is to set out recent progress towards the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, particularly in four key areas: participation and leadership; documentation and statelessness; education; and self-reliance. In addition, the paper highlights UNHCR's intensified efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Steps taken to improve data collection and build UNHCR staff's capacity in the areas of gender equality and also SGBV are described.

II. Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

2. UNHCR promotes gender equality in all areas of its protection work. Through regular and meaningful participatory assessments, UNHCR works to ensure that the needs and concerns of women, men, girls and boys are understood and reflected in all planning and programming. In striving to achieve gender equality, UNHCR is particularly attentive to the specific protection concerns of women and girls. In 2011, UNHCR held its second series of dialogues with over 1,000 refugee, asylum-seeking and internally displaced women and girls in seven operations, which gave a detailed insight into the challenges they face and spurred new momentum to address them. Women who are educated and women who are economically self-reliant, for example, are better equipped to assume leadership responsibility, which in turn positions them to take control over other areas of their lives. This section focuses on four inter-connected protection areas that are particularly important for women's empowerment, and in which UNHCR has made measurable progress in recent years.

A. Participation and leadership

3. UNHCR operations around the world are making a concerted effort to increase refugee women's representation in leadership/management structures that represent their interests and influence decisions that affect them. UNHCR is also introducing innovative approaches to empower women leaders. In India, UNHCR has supported leadership capacity-building activities for women refugees, including training sessions and empowerment campaigns; by the end of 2012, refugee women comprised 64 per cent of leadership and management structures in their communities. UNHCR Sri Lanka supported orientation visits for community leaders and members of women's groups to strengthen their ability to address local issues without external support. Participants visited police stations, courts, legal aid commissions and SGBV desks at hospitals to learn how to better engage with these institutions. In 2011, 624 women's society members participated in visits in Jaffna District. In 2012, 549 women, 150 men and 27 government officials participated in visits in Vavuniya District. Participants have since held information sessions in their villages to share the knowledge they acquired. In Quito, Ecuador, UNHCR started a programme in 2012 to train refugee women as community mobilizers, modelled on a similar initiative in Damascus, Syria. Training sessions were designed to help refugee women who demonstrate community leadership potential to overcome the trauma associated with their displacement and educate them in areas such as human rights, community leadership and gender issues. In 2013, six of these women will be selected and supported to work as community mobilizers in six different neighbourhoods, to promote refugees' rights and serve as focal points for providing information to people of concern to UNHCR.

4. Despite these positive outcomes, and while some operations exceed UNHCR's goal of 50 per cent participation by women in leadership and management structures, overall refugee women remain under-represented. Progress towards this goal is slow. Given the crucial linkages between women's participation in decision-making and their enjoyment of

other rights, improving this situation is high on UNHCR's agenda. In 2012, UNHCR held an information-sharing discussion in Headquarters with participation from colleagues based in Malawi and Nepal to explore existing good practices and how these can be replicated elsewhere. In 2013, UNHCR will develop guidance for field operations on improving women's representation and influence in leadership structures. In order to increase institutional commitment to this goal in all operations and improve the availability of data, UNHCR has included promoting active participation by persons of concern in decision-making as a Global Strategic Priority for 2014-2015, with a specific impact indicator on female participation in leadership and management structures.

B. Documentation and statelessness

5. UNHCR's advocacy and capacity building initiatives continue to improve women's and girls' access to documentation, which is a valuable protection tool and important source of security against exploitation and abuse. UNHCR contributed to the drafting the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, which entered into force in December 2012. This Convention contains important provisions for the protection of women, including recognition of the equal right of men and women to obtain identity documents and have these issued in their own names. In Mindanao, Philippines, UNHCR supports the government-led Free Mobile Birth Registration Project. Since its inception in mid-2011, nearly 114,000 people have been registered and 82,595 have been issued new birth certificates, more than half of whom are women. Also as part of this project, an Accreditation of Tribal Marriage is provided to formally recognize indigenous people's marriages, which is required for the issuance of birth certificates and provides additional protection for women. In Zimbabwe, UNHCR has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve displaced persons' access to civil status documentation. Through its partner, Christian Care, UNHCR has strengthened the Government's capacity to provide civil status documents to persons of concern by renovating the Jotsholo Registry in Matabeleland North. Overall, women were the recipients of 52 per cent of the 11,500 civil status documents obtained by persons of concern in 2011-2012. Previously, many people, particularly women and girls, were at risk of *de facto* statelessness and were unable to exercise their rights as citizens. In the camps in Thailand, registration is currently recorded by family or household, with the issuance of one Household Registration Document. In order to respond to the particular needs of women who have suffered abuse by their husbands, become divorced or separated, or no longer belong to the household in which they were initially registered, UNHCR has successfully advocated with the Thai authorities to create separate registration records for women in these situations.

6. In pursuit of its mandate to prevent statelessness, UNHCR is working to promote gender equality in nationality matters. Twenty nine countries around the world retain legislative provisions limiting the right of women to confer nationality to their children. In October 2011, in partnership with the Collective for Research Training on Development-Action, UNHCR convened a Regional Dialogue on Gender Equality and Statelessness in Lebanon. The Background Note from this session, testimonies given by families from the Middle East and North Africa affected by gender-discriminatory laws, and a storytelling video produced after the Dialogue have been used extensively as advocacy and awareness-raising tools. Also in 2011, on the occasion of UNHCR's Ministerial Meeting, Senegal pledged to reform its nationality legislation to remove gender discrimination. UNHCR has since worked with the Senegalese authorities to implement their pledge, and legislative reforms are to be submitted before Parliament in 2013. UNHCR will continue promoting gender equality in nationality matters in the coming years, including by examining linkages between statelessness and SGBV with a view to developing strategies to eliminate risk factors.

C. Education for girls

7. While global enrolment rates for refugee children are low at - 76 per cent at primary and 36 per cent at secondary level – enrolment rates for girls are even lower, particularly during the last years of primary education and at secondary level. To improve this situation,

UNHCR's *Education Strategy 2012-2016* calls for targeted interventions to ensure that girls are enrolled, that their attendance is monitored, and ultimately, that they are able to complete their schooling. It also emphasizes the need to create safe learning environments. The strategy has been implemented in 20 priority countries since 2012 and has shown its first successes. In Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, the introduction of remedial classes for girls, community sensitization campaigns, monthly take-home sugar rations, and the distribution of sanitary materials have helped to increase the number of girls sitting the final primary school exam from 76 in 2010 to 286 in 2012. In Sheder camp in Ethiopia, completion rates at secondary level have significantly improved following the provision of school materials and remedial classes: all of the 28 girls who took the national final secondary school exam passed. In Eastern Chad, Accelerated Learning Programmes with a strong life-skills component, literacy classes, the provision of reading material at youth centres, teacher training on SGBV, and access to child care centres for young mothers in school have contributed to increasing girls' participation in primary school final exams from 32 per cent in 2010 to 55 per cent in 2012. However, the percentage of girls passing the exams was much lower, demonstrating the ongoing barriers to girls' education.

8. Other measures taken by UNHCR to increase the enrolment and retention of girls in school include developing strategies to recruit more female teachers; implementing and enforcing codes of conduct; providing separate latrines for girls and boys; promoting flexible schooling arrangements such as home-based schooling for young mothers; and including men and boys in efforts to improve education opportunities for girls. UNHCR also works to improve girls' access to higher education through its tertiary education scholarship programme, the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI). While in 2012 only 40 per cent of DAFI students were female, gender parity has improved slightly in recent years, and there are significant regional variations. For example, 52 per cent of Afghan DAFI scholars were female. UNHCR also works to build the capacity of staff, partners and national ministries of education to address barriers to gender equality in education. In 2011, training on safe learning environments was provided during a regional workshop in Uganda, involving six countries, in addition to a country-level workshop in Iraq. Between 2012 and 2013, UNHCR, in collaboration with UNICEF, held three regional workshops on girls' education for 12 countries in the Horn and East of Africa, the Great Lakes Region and West Africa.

D. Self-reliance

9. UNHCR has dramatically increased its engagement in livelihoods interventions in recent years. In 2012, the organization's global budget for this sector, covering 79 countries, was 66 per cent higher than in 2010. A number of UNHCR's livelihoods programmes, which are centred on achieving self-reliance, focus specifically on providing opportunities to women. In Mogadishu, Somalia, UNHCR through the Somali Women Development Centre provided two months of language training to 60 SGBV survivors, followed by three months of skills training. The women were then provided with kits to start small businesses. Since August 2011, UNHCR, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Tajikistan, has provided vocational skills training to 205 refugees (75 per cent female), 85 of whom were supported to start their own small and home-based businesses, such as hair dressing salons and tailor shops. Since the fourth quarter of 2012, they have also been given access to microcredit through a joint agreement signed between UNHCR and the First MicroFinance Bank of Tajikistan. In Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi, UNHCR and the Jesuit Refugee Service's Women's Centre established the Umoja Crafts Project in 2010, which has grown from 12 participants in 2010 to 50 in 2013 and is nearing self-sufficiency. The project has reached national and international markets through local vendors and online marketing. The women have access to banking services as well as training courses in business, literacy and languages, and they maintain a percentage of their profits in a cooperative fund.

10. Microfinance can enhance the capacity of persons of concern to generate income and improve their standard of living. Women typically represent 70 per cent of microfinance beneficiaries worldwide. In 2011, UNHCR produced a practical guide for the use of microfinance in UNHCR operations, which emphasizes the importance of adopting a gender-sensitive approach. Numerous UNHCR operations around the world facilitate women's access to microfinance. In Eastern Sudan, for example, in 2011 and 2012

microcredit was offered to women graduating from adult literacy classes and basic primary skills training at Women's Development Centres in the camps. Since 2011, loans have been provided to nearly 4,500 households for small-scale income-generating activities in areas such as crop production and livestock development, handicrafts and perfume-making. The sale of these products is the primary source of income for most of these women. In Costa Rica, UNHCR runs a microcredit scheme that combines vocational and technical training: in 2012, 73 per cent of the microcredit beneficiaries and 97 per cent of trainees were women. At the global level, UNHCR is also focusing on how to maximize the potential of cash-based assistance interventions, which were used by over one-third of operations in 2011. In 2012, UNHCR undertook a research project with the World Food Programme in a number of countries, including Bangladesh, Chad, Pakistan, Kenya, Ecuador, Jordan and Sudan, to better understand the positive and negative protection and gender implications of cash and voucher transfer programmes. The findings will feed into the development of operational guidance and standard operational procedures for the use of cash-based interventions in displacement settings in 2013.

III. Sexual and gender-based violence

11. In addition to providing quality support to survivors, UNHCR is committed to preventing the occurrence of SGBV. Improving gender equality, eliminating gender-based discrimination and empowering women and girls are vital for the creation of safe environments free of SGBV. Alongside efforts to reduce women's and girls' exposure to the risk of SGBV through measures such as the provision of domestic energy, UNHCR operations are tackling the more complex task of changing the attitudes and behavioural patterns that perpetuate cycles of violence. This entails engaging more closely with men and boys, both as survivors and potential perpetrators, and combatting impunity to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice. The implementation of UNHCR's updated global SGBV strategy also focuses on improving the quality, effectiveness and coherence of multi-sectoral SGBV programming in the field.

12. SGBV prevention and response programmes are life-saving interventions, particularly in the context of emergencies. Emergency operations receive support through strategic short-term deployments and the creation of protection posts dedicated to SGBV, as well as technical programmatic support. In Burkina Faso and Niger, for example, technical support resulted in the development and implementation of multi-sectoral emergency SGBV strategies. UNHCR devotes particular attention to ensuring that health services, including psychosocial support, are available and accessible at the onset of an emergency. UNHCR also identifies the major causation factors of SGBV as well as high-risk areas in displacement locations, to inform the design of prevention strategies. In relation to Syrian refugees, UNHCR has seen a steady increase in reporting of SGBV in 2013, partly owing to its support for community-based structures and SGBV outreach groups, as well as capacity development for UNHCR and partner organizations' staff. UNHCR's protection monitoring activities and focus group discussions have revealed widespread reports of early marriage as a perceived form of 'protection' against SGBV for refugee girls. As one example of a prevention measure, UNHCR partnered with the Royal Film Commission of Jordan to produce and broadcast public service announcements on local television concerning the illegality and harmfulness of child marriage.

A. Updated SGBV strategy

13. In 2011, UNHCR launched *Action against SGBV: An Updated Strategy*. UNHCR supported implementation of the strategy through special projects in 12 countries in 2012, focusing on innovative, multi-sectoral approaches to SGBV prevention and response. A number of achievements have already been made. For example, UNHCR Bosnia and Herzegovina supported internally displaced women who had survived conflict-related sexual violence with income-generation programmes, as an initial step in the psychosocial recovery process. In Haiti, UNHCR provided safe spaces for nearly 300 SGBV survivors and their direct dependents throughout 2012. In partnership with SEROvie, UNHCR Haiti also opened a transit centre for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex SGBV survivors, where they are hosted for up to three weeks, assisted in finding a suitable

accommodation, provided with a year's rental allowance and given access to income-generating and training opportunities. UNHCR Colombia worked closely with the Government to establish the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System, which has improved information sharing about SGBV incidents among humanitarian actors and enabled stakeholders to expand access to legal counselling for survivors. In 2013, UNHCR will implement the updated strategy in additional countries, providing prioritized support and monitoring for its implementation. To this end, four regional workshops were held in late 2012 and four Senior Regional Protection Officers for SGBV were appointed in Lebanon, Panama, Kenya and Senegal, dedicated to the development of SGBV prevention and response programmes across UNHCR's operations.

B. Working with men and boys

14. UNHCR engages with men and boys both as partners for change in SGBV prevention and as survivors. In 2012, UNHCR released a guidance note on *Working with Men and Boy Survivors of SGBV*, to reinforce the capacity of staff and partners in the field. UNHCR is exploring at the strategy level and through programmatic interventions in the field how best to end violence, including by involving men and boys in questioning entrenched views of masculinity and gender roles. For example, in late 2012, UNHCR organized a photography workshop with refugee men and boys from Bhutan in camps in eastern Nepal. Participants explored their gender perceptions and challenged traditional views of masculinity, visualizing their thoughts through photographic narratives. These were exhibited in the camps, spurring reflection and discussion within the community on gender roles, masculinity, and the role of men in eliminating SGBV. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, UNHCR supported a leadership programme in 2012 for male leaders and decision-makers as well as the husbands and fathers of SGBV survivors. Five training sessions were held with 566 men. Men have started to accompany women to the fields to protect them, and women have become involved in decision-making on matters previously left to men, such as dowries for their daughters, the distribution of household income, and sending girls to school. In Colombia, UNHCR and partners worked with a group of 25 men and 25 teenagers on a 'more men, less macho' project, providing training in areas such as SGBV prevention, reproductive health, HIV prevention, human rights and gender equality. This group is now undertaking awareness-raising and prevention initiatives, organizing training workshops for men and enhancing SGBV prevention community networks.

C. Access to justice for SGBV survivors

15. In 2012, UNHCR called on all operations to review their approach to working with SGBV survivors, communities, State authorities and partners in order to improve survivors' access to gender-sensitive, non-discriminatory justice institutions and outcomes. Operations have intensified their efforts to provide legal assistance and counselling, train law enforcement officers, improve awareness among the refugee population of the local legal systems and procedures, monitor cases, and support mobile courts. In Djibouti, for example, UNHCR worked with the Ministry of Justice and Prison Affairs and the Ministry of the Promotion of Women and Family Planning to organize 10 mobile court sessions in 2012, allowing judges to hear 67 per cent of the total number of reported SGBV cases. In mid-2012, UNHCR commenced a project with *Avocats Sans Frontières* in Bujumbura, Burundi, to offer legal counselling to SGBV survivors and their families, and provide a lawyer if they wished to pursue their case further. *Avocats Sans Frontières* supported 25 cases in Burundi, and in 2013 an important precedent was set when a perpetrator was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment and the survivor was granted compensation. In Uganda, UNHCR together with the Ugandan Government and partners launched a pilot mobile court system on 15 April 2013, to make justice more accessible to refugees living in Nakivale settlement. The court will hold three sessions a year, each lasting 15 to 30 days and hearing up to 30 cases. The project aims to benefit some 68,000 refugees and 35,000 Ugandan nationals.

16. An ongoing challenge for UNHCR in terms of gender equality is the role of traditional justice mechanisms; these may be the preferred or only available avenue for survivors, but are often male-dominated and may be discriminatory against women.

UNHCR is engaging with traditional justice actors such as community elders, religious leaders and elected leaders to encourage them to uphold the rights of women and girls. Cognizant of the many barriers precluding women's access to formal systems, UNHCR also works with community-based dispute resolution mechanisms such as mediation. By way of example, in Pankisi, Georgia, where traditional systems may be women's only available recourse, UNHCR helped to establish and train a Council of Women in 2011, comprising influential Chechen/Kist refugee women. The Council promotes and defends women's rights in the community, acts as a mediator between the local population and the elders who decide on cases as well as between the local community and Georgian authorities, and works with youth to challenge harmful traditions and promote compliance with Georgian family law. The Council has mediated 14 disputes relating to property, child custody and domestic violence, 11 of which were resolved in favour of women.

D. Domestic energy initiatives

17. Through domestic energy initiatives, UNHCR seeks to reduce the risk of SGBV associated with firewood collection and movement around camps at night. In the past year, over 150 solar street lights, 7,000 fuel efficient stoves, and 11,000 solar lanterns have been purchased for camps in Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, using funds from UNHCR's Light Years Ahead campaign. UNHCR has also explored the use of alternative energy for cooking, apart from fuel-efficient stoves, such as solar cookers and ethanol. An initiative with Gaia Association, an implementing partner, has found ethanol to be particularly successful in reducing the need for firewood in Jijiga, Ethiopia. UNHCR has also commissioned ProAct Network to undertake a series of domestic energy assessments in six countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Sudan) which will feed into the development of a global domestic energy strategy and guidelines. The objective is to increase UNHCR's efforts to address domestic energy issues across all operations, contributing to the prevention of SGBV.

E. Female genital mutilation

18. In 2012, UNHCR provided dedicated funding for a regional two-year multi-sectoral project to prevent female genital mutilation (FGM) among Somali refugee populations in Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen. Positive developments can already be seen. UNHCR Kenya screened 27 women refugees in Nairobi for fistula-related medical problems, and seven underwent corrective surgery. UNHCR Kenya organized six community dialogues in refugee-hosting areas of Nairobi to facilitate information-sharing on reproductive and sexual health among women, men, girls and boys. In Ethiopia, UNHCR organized and trained anti-FGM community groups, who in turn sensitized the community on the dangers of such practices. In Yemen, UNHCR held training sessions for health workers to improve their ability to provide adequate clinical care in response to FGM-related medical complications and familiarize them with the referral pathway for SGBV incidents, including FGM. Health workers were also linked with the community, to increase their awareness of the consequences of FGM and the medical services available.

IV. Data collection and capacity building

A. Data collection

19. In 2012-2013 UNHCR revised its Results Framework to improve the collection, measurement, reporting and analysis of data and build UNHCR's capacity to monitor and evaluate programmes. The enhanced Framework will allow for the collection of more relevant and accurate data resulting in improved evidence-based programming. Some 25 per cent of its 185 impact indicators are now directly relevant for an AGD analysis, including an increased number of indicators disaggregated by sex and age.

20. UNHCR has implemented the Gender-based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) in various operations since 2010. In 2012, UNHCR supported four target countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Colombia and Uganda) to implement the system, in order

to improve the gathering of reliable data to inform SGBV planning, programming and coordination. UNHCR will support the rollout of GBVIMS in an additional four countries in 2013.

B. Capacity building

21. UNHCR recently developed two new e-Learning courses for staff and partners. An SGBV course was launched in November 2012, and within two weeks 660 staff members from 144 field offices had completed the first two modules. A course on UNHCR's AGD approach was launched in February 2013 and is expected to become mandatory by September 2013.

22. In 2012, UNHCR collected 24 good practices from field operations on AGD and gender equality to connect and inspire staff around the world. This is an ongoing project, and UNHCR is exploring how to increase the visibility and use of such practices in the field.

V. Conclusion

23. The equal enjoyment of rights by women, men, girls and boys is at the core of effective protection. In striving to ensure the achievement of this goal, UNHCR will continue to improve the reliability of data and boost the capacity of staff to apply an AGD approach to all protection activities. In addition to responding to the effects of gender-based discrimination, UNHCR will strengthen its efforts to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and SGBV through empowering women and girls, working with men and boys, and promoting a shift in discriminatory attitudes and behaviours at all levels. Dedication to ensuring gender equality is crucial not only among UNHCR staff and partners, but also persons of concern: when equipped with the necessary support, skills and resources, they are the ultimate drivers of change.
