



Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to **CHILDREN**

Rohingya children participate in Essence of Learning activities in one of Caritas' child-friendly spaces in Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh.

This tip sheet is one of a series of six aimed at applying the specificities of the age, gender and diversity (AGD) approach. It highlights the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as age, gender, disability, religion, ethnicity, physical appearance, etc.) combine, overlap, or intersect. It draws our attention to the impact of various overlapping social identities or intersectionality¹ on our work with groups of concern to UNHCR; more specifically, persons with disabilities, youth, children and adolescents, minorities and indigenous peoples, older persons, and LGBTIQ+ persons.

Who are we talking about?

As per the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC), the term “child” refers to “every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. As far as the assistance and protection that UNHCR provides is concerned, this definition applies to asylum-seeking, refugee, stateless, internally displaced and returnee children.

¹ **Intersectionality** is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (e.g., gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, height, etc.) might combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies advantages and disadvantages that are felt by people due to a combination of factors (Oxford English Dictionary).

Why does it matter?

Protecting and promoting the rights of all children is a key priority for UNHCR, as outlined in the [Age, Gender and Diversity Policy](#) and [UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion on children at risk](#). It recognizes that children should be among the first to receive protection and assistance.

As often witnessed in UNHCR operations, children, because of their age, social status and physical and mental development, are often more vulnerable than adults in situations of forced displacement, return to post-conflict situations, integration in new societies, protracted situations of forced displacement, and statelessness. The wider environmental factors and individual risk factors, particularly when combined, put children in situations of heightened risk. Particular vulnerability of refugee children included, but not limited to, being forcibly exposed to the risks of physical and psychological injury, gender-based violence (GBV), exploitation and death in connection with armed conflict, unaccompanied and separated children, particularly those in child-headed households as well as those accompanied by abusive or exploitative adult. In addition, children may face very different situations from one another depending on their gender identity; the social and cultural roles assigned to their gender in their community may accentuate inequalities and exacerbate discrimination, including being at a heightened risk of GBV, such as i.e. early marriage and other forms of traditional harmful practices, sexual violence as well as barriers to access education.

To uphold the rights of children as outlined in the CRC, UNHCR shall incorporate the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in regard to its protection procedures and programmatic actions concerning children. Non-discriminatory enjoyment of rights and each child's right to life should be ensured, while also assuring to the maximum extent possible each child's survival and development. In programming for children, UNHCR is obliged to assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child, and that mechanisms exist to inform children and adults alike of children's rights and options.

What can UNHCR do?

UNHCR and its partners' interventions should be guided by the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and particularly by its four guiding principles: Best Interests of the Child, Non-Discrimination, Survival and Development, and Child Participation.

Below is a list of actions required if children are to be meaningfully included in UNHCR interventions. Actions are organized around the three key areas of engagement of the 2018 AGD Policy.

AGD inclusive programming

- The age cohorts recommended by UNHCR to capture the diversity of experiences faced by boys and girls, are as follows: 0-4, 5-11, 12-14, and 15-17.
- Collect data disaggregated by sex, age, and disability², as well as data related to specific needs, risks and barriers that children may face, including underlying factors such as social norms, attitudes and practices related to younger age and gender.

² This could be achieved through the application of the IASC Gender with Age Marker during project design and implementation. <https://www.iascgenderwithagemarker.com/>

- Apply the twin-track approach to inclusive programming for children: 1) ensure that all UNHCR programmes are child-sensitive and promote children rights (mainstreaming), and 2) provide child-focused programmes, including education and child-protection programming (targeted programming).
- Verify that country operation plans, partnership agreements and standard operating procedures adequately reflect the situation of children and adolescents, giving particular attention to intersecting identities such as: married children; children who are heads of households; unaccompanied children; children at risk of and survivors of gender-based violence; working children and school-going children; disabled children, etc.
- Assess and build the capacities of staff and partners in ethically and technically sound child-friendly data collection methods, data protection protocols and the management of sensitive information.

Accountability to affected people

- Assess children's needs, capacities, limitations and barriers in their access to information and services.
- Together with children, ensure that they can access the full range of protection, assistance and solutions services without fear, barriers or discrimination and review the quality of information made available to children about these services. Review to what extent the information and the services themselves are gender- and age-appropriate, child-friendly and culturally sensitive.
- Map community attitudes and social roles that are usually assigned to children and adolescents, taking into account gender, age, and other diversity criteria, and identify ways of ensuring that the views and concerns of children and adolescents are adequately listened to.
- Design and employ inclusive and accessible tools and strategies to ensure the meaningful participation of all children, considering their gender, age, disability, preferred communication method, level of maturity and safety.
- Engage children, including in the design and roll-out of awareness-raising and information sessions, advocacy and communication on protection risks, including the risk of GBV, needs and responses; ensure child-friendly, contextualized messages on relevant protection risks in multiple formats that are accessible to them.
- Ensure that the feedback loop is complete and design a process whereby children will receive an adequate and meaningful response from UNHCR and partners about the concerns they raise, including risks of GBV, as well as protection arrangements for such children who might be targeted by potential rights violators or perpetrators of abuse, violence and GBV.
- Build the capacity of UNHCR staff, partners and community leaders to understand the issues and rights of boys and girls of different age groups and backgrounds and to advocate for child rights.

Gender equality³

- Map community attitudes and social roles that are usually assigned to children according to their gender, particularly of adolescent age. Identify how girls can participate in the decisions affecting them, and how communities could be persuaded to listen equally to the opinions of

³ In line with what is stated in the Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, although the Commitments focus on women and girls; attention is also paid to gender inequalities that affect men and boys as well as other genders.

all children and adolescents regardless of their gender. Engage caregivers to avoid mistrust and rumours on why UNHCR is engaging girls.

- Invest in conducting gender analysis on access to birth registration and documentation; use the analysis to ensure equal access to registration, birth certificates and documentation for male and female children.
- Ensure that health and education services address the gender-specific needs of boys and girls of different ages and those who have diverse sexual identity and/or orientation.
- Ensure all school-aged children, regardless of their gender, are provided with the necessary documentation and with material and non-material support to enrol in school, including access to menstrual hygiene (sanitary) kits and reproductive health services for adolescent girls.
- Ensure that schools have the capacity to provide education to all school-aged children. This is contingent on the availability and training of female teachers and the adoption of methodologies and curricula that would facilitate the enrolment and retention of girls.
- Actively promote education for girls; improve retention and mitigate dropouts from schools.
- Strengthen the capacity of formal and informal service providers to provide child-friendly services to all children, including health services. Pay special attention to diverse needs and barriers relating to sex, gender, age and disability. Children with diverse gender identities and those who are married, pregnant or with children, trafficked, unaccompanied or associated with armed forces or groups may have special needs.
- Raise awareness among staff and within communities of the warning signs of gender-based violence (GBV) and other forms of violence.⁴
- Establish child-friendly, gender-sensitive and confidential referral mechanisms for children and their families at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, including GBV, such as cases of child marriage and female genital mutilation.
- Strengthen communities' ability to monitor and address gender-based violence (GBV) risks particularly through addressing negative attitudes, norms and harmful practices within households and to provide children and their caregivers with information on where and how they can seek support in an ethical, safe and confidential manner.

Key resources

International legal and policy framework

- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), 1989

International guidance

- [Child Protection Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Action \(CPMS\)](#), 2019
- [Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No 6 on Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin](#), 2005
- [Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#), 2004
- [IASC Guidelines for Child Friendly Spaces](#), 2011

⁴ In line with what is stated in the UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence (2020).

UNHCR policy and guidance

- [UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion on Child at Risk \(2007\)](#)
- [UNHCR Gender Equality Toolkit, 2020](#)
- [Guidance on working with refugee children struggling with stress and trauma, 2019](#)
- [Enhancing the protection of children and promoting child-focus pledges and good practices to advance the objectives of the Global Compact on refugees, 2019](#)
- [Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interest Procedure \(BIP\) of the Child, 2018](#)
- [Listen and Learn: Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents, 2012](#)
- [UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence \(2020\)](#)

*This resource is a living document that will be updated to reflect ongoing UNHCR work on the inclusion of children and application of the resource in the field. UNHCR colleagues and partners can send questions and feedback to **UNHCR HQ Child Protection Unit** at hqchipro@unhcr.org.*