UNHCR Annual NGO Consultations

June 2011
Gender Audit

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Date: September 2011
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Background

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee’s (UNHCR) Agenda for Protection, Conclusion on Women and Girls at Risk (No. 105 (LVII) – 2006), and the Guidelines on Gender-Related Persecution are among many examples of documents which highlight the importance of considering gender as a crosscutting issue in protection of displaced persons. Through UNHCR’s Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) initiative, the organisation has sought to consider and incorporate the gender and diversity related elements of refugee protection across the range of its programming and functions. There are a number of guidelines on the inclusion of gender in all aspects of programs that are available to states and UNHCR offices. While recognising that the organisation has some way to go before gender and diversity considerations will be institutionalised within its culture and programming, UNHCR claims that gender issues have been significantly mainstreamed. This Gender Audit provides both qualitative and quantitative assessments of the manner in which gender issues were addressed by UNHCR, and by NGOs, at UNHCR’s 2011 Annual Consultations with NGOs in Geneva.

In this report, the term ‘gender’ is defined as including all refugee groups who face discrimination based on their gender, or based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. A particular emphasis has been placed on the risks faced by women and girls. Groups who face discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation are collectively referred to as LGBTIs and are identified in the report as vulnerable people who require specific considerations and who have unique protection needs.

For more information, context or background on the meetings this report covers, please consult the full report of the 51st Standing Committee and Annual Consultations produced by the Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA).

Methodology

In order to maintain consistency in reporting, the 2011 Gender Audit has used the same methodology as the 2009 and 2010 reports.

UNHCR’s 2011 Annual Consultation with NGOs was held in Geneva from 28 – 30 June 2011.

Each agenda item at the 2011 Annual NGO Consultations (Annual Consultations) was documented and special note was taken of any mention of a gender-related issue. The context of the discussion was noted, including the level of detail given by both speakers and participants in each session. This report provided analysis on whether gender was mentioned cursorily, or if detailed observations or concrete suggestions were made. It was noted whether the discussion involved UNHCR staff, NGOs or both.

The documentation of each of the meetings’ agenda items was important in order to assess the progress of ‘gender mainstreaming’ by NGOs and UNHCR. Where a session was gender specific, that is noted next to the session name.

For reasons of accuracy, the quantitative tally of gender related mentions excludes the mentions that occurred within a gender specific session. The quantitative tally also includes mentions that occurred within the side meetings.
The documenters assessed the treatment of gender at the Annual Consultations using the following categories as indicators. The indicators are defined in Appendix B of this report.

1. Accountability (monitoring and accountability)
2. AGDM Framework (AGDM)
3. Education for girls (Education)
4. Gender disaggregated data and UNHCR’s data software, Focus and proGres (GDD)
5. Handbook on Women and Girls (Handbook)
6. Heightened Risk Identification Tool (HRIT)
7. LGBTI
8. Livelihoods for women (Livelihoods)
9. Sanitary Materials (Sanitary)
10. SGBV
11. Survival Sex
12. Women and Girls

Recommendations

Some recommendations were developed during the gender audit, based on findings from the Centre for Refugee Research (CRR) and UNHCR Regional Dialogues Report, in order to improve scope, accuracy and maintain consistency for future gender audits.

- It is recommended that the gender audit “gender mainstreaming” indicators be aligned with the findings of the ten core international protection areas for women and girls proposed by UNHCR as documented in the Regional Dialogues Report. These are:

  1. Individual Documentation
  2. Women’s Representation in Leadership
  3. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)
  4. Shelter
  5. Sanitary Materials
  6. Health Issues
  7. Legal Remedies
  8. Education
  9. Economic Self-Reliance
  10. General Violence

- It is also recommended that LGBTI as a very important women and girls international protection issue be included as an additional indicator.

- However, it remains important that the international protection for women and girls tools continue to be included within the quantitative gender audit tally, in order to gauge the use and engagement of these tools by UNHCR and States. This would mean the use of the above indicators as well as tool indicators, including:

  1. Accountability (monitoring and accountability)
  2. AGDM Framework (AGDM)
  3. Gender disaggregated data and UNHCR’s data software, Focus and proGres (GDD)
  5. Heightened Risk Identification Tool (HRIT)
**Key findings and themes**

The focus on gender related issues in the Annual Consultations was significant considering the involvement at the Annual Consultation sessions of the women refugee participants in the Regional Women’s Dialogues conducted by UNHCR as part of the 60th anniversary of the Refugee Convention. Please see the separate report of the Regional Women’s Dialogue (Women’s Dialogues) outcomes.

At a superficial level, the vulnerability of women and girls in the refugee context was at the forefront of discussions at the Annual Consultations by virtue of the acknowledged presence of the refugee women participants. However, the results of the gender audit indicate that the protection challenges specific to women and girls were sidelined at the 2011 Annual Consultations, with key themes of the Annual Consultations focussing on cessation concerns in Africa, the independence of South Sudan, natural disasters, statelessness and IDP issues across the globe.

Appendix A below provides a visual representation the gender mentions and omissions, documented in the non---gender specific sessions.

Despite the involvement at the Annual Consultations of the refugee women participants in the Regional Dialogues, in comparison with the 2010 gender audit, the extent to which gender was a focus of the Annual Consultations has again decreased from the 2009 levels. In 2010, the Annual Consultations contained two thematic sessions and three side meetings which were gender specific.

By contrast, in 2011, there was one gender specific thematic session based on the Women’s Regional Dialogues, and one roundtable meeting relating to LGBTI -The role of NGOs in protection of refugees fleeing persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity- which represents a reduced focus in gender in the refugee context. Outside the gender specific sessions, the focus on gender was minimal, with the Americas Bureau leading the gender focus, championed by the inclusion on the panel of two of the women refugee participants in the Women’s Dialogues.

While UNHCR has promoted the mainstreaming of gender, and confirmed their commitment to listening to refugee voices, the lack of discussion of the gender specific concerns at an in depth level at the Annual Consultations, despite the highlighting by NGOs and refugees of the heightened vulnerabilities of women and girls in refugee situations, indicates that there is a real risk that gender will increasingly become ignored as a key issue in protection. At the same time, women and girls continue to be at daily risk of human rights violations, with little visible improvement in the protection framework at the operational level by states, UNHCR, and NGOs, with many experiencing ongoing difficulties with funding and capacity to deal with the crosscutting issue of SGBV for women and girls.

As in 2010, it is heartening to note the increased focus on LGBTI refugee concerns which have been championed by a number of NGOs across the globe. Legislative changes recognising the rights of LGBTI individuals and the need for partnerships with LGBTI advocacy groups and refugee services was a theme of the consultations.

The outcome of the 2011 gender audit emphasises the need for increased, ongoing and persistent vigilance by the NGO community and other stakeholders to ensure that the
protection tools created for programming in relation to the protection of women and girls are implemented completely and utilised across the board in refugee operations.

The Gender Audit acknowledges the ongoing work of UNHCR, NGOs internationally and refugee voices, particularly the refugee women participants in the Women’s Dialogues in highlighting ongoing protection issues and making recommendations for the way forward.
Plenary and Thematic Sessions

Welcome and Opening Address – Plenary Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR
The opening address was presented by Ms Daisy Dell, Director, Division of External Relations UNHCR and Mr Antonio Guterres, High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR. Ms Dell welcomed the refugee women participating in the Women’s Dialogues and acknowledged NGOs assistance in organizing the dialogues. There was no further mention of gender related issues by UNHCR with Ms Dell focusing on the importance of partnerships between UNCHR and NGOs. Mr Guterres discussed the importance of communication between civil society and governments given the current state of political upheaval being experienced in a number of regions and the shrinking humanitarian space globally.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
A participant of the Women’s Dialogues raised the issue of SGBV and Mr Guterres responded directly acknowledging the Women’s Dialogue and stating that while UNCHR had actively advocated for the development and implementation of an AGDM and accountability framework, it was not implementing it effectively. He called for a zero tolerance policy across the board.

A member of a Colombian NGO identified issues of concern in Colombia including the murder of a female leader with impunity and requesting a stronger UNHCR presence in the country. Mr Guterres responded by affirming UNCHR and NGOs commitment to actively participate in the realization of rights.

The Heartland Alliance applauded UNCHR’s response to LGBTI refugees and outlined key issues of concern for the group. UNCHR was urged to look at this issue in terms of its mandate and protection of vulnerable populations and asked to outline how it was partnering with other UN bodies, such as the Human Rights Council, in relation to the issue.

In response UNHCR advised that it was committed to the issue however faced enormous challenges, including the insistence by some member states, including the African Union, that LGBTI is not a refugee issue. Resettlement was identified as being crucial in order to protect members of this vulnerable group as it is difficult to guarantee a protection space in a large number of countries for LGBTI.

Analysis
UNHCR immediately identified the presence of the participants from the Women’s Dialogues. However, as in 2010, gender was not outlined as a key protection issue and discussion was limited. On a positive note, LGBTI was discussed at length following a question from an NGO participant.

Strengthening Protection: The role of faith based organisations (FBO) – Thematic Session

Discussion of Gender by the Panel
This thematic session was broken up into two parts. Session One – National FBOs: their protection role, challenges and opportunities - did not include a speaker from UNHCR. Session Two – Strengthening protection partnerships with national FBOs- including a UNCHR speaker.

The panel discussion did not address issues of gender.
Discussion of gender issues by NGOs

There was limited discussion of gender in Session One by the FBO participants. During the session, participants broke away into smaller language groups for discussion of strengths, opportunities and challenges for FBOs. The Arabic, French and English speaking group, moderated by Mr James Thompson of Act for Peace, identified LGBTI, HIV and abortion as challenging issues for FBOs working in the refugee space.

In Session Two, women and children’s dependence upon assistance from Islamic Organisations in Pakistan was highlighted, and it was noted that organisations faced difficulties assisting people due to the political situation across the Middle East.

Analysis

Given the diversity of views represented and geographical areas of service provision, the scope for significant gender discussions in the session was large. The discussion of gender however was fairly limited, being contained to discussions of challenging issues for FBOs working in the refugee space in relation to HIV, abortion and LGBTI in the context of traditional value systems of some FBOs.

Discussions on the 2010 recommendations and their follow up – Thematic Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR

The Inter-Agency Unit represented UNHCR in the session. The only comment related to gender made by UNCHR was in response to an NGO highlighting of the presence of the participants in the Women’s Dialogue. UNHCR advised that the participants had spoken before Standing Committee and that there was a commitment to stronger and more comprehensive access to the refugee voice.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs

Refugee Council of Australia acknowledged the inclusion and involvement of people experiencing protracted refugee situations at the Annual Consultation, and referred to the attendance of the participants in the Women’s Dialogues, identifying the important role of bringing refugees’ voices to the Annual Consultations and the need to carry this forward. It was suggested by another NGO participant that a special report of the participants’ own recommendations from the Women’s Dialogue be produced.

Analysis

There was no proactive discussion of gender by UNHCR and limited intervening by NGOs, save for the acknowledgement of the presence of refugee voices – in the form of the participants in the Women’s Dialogues – at the current Annual Consultations.

Partnerships for futures: Addressing statelessness among children and youth – Thematic Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR

Gender issues were not addressed by UNHCR in the session. UNHCR’s focus in the session on statelessness was the need to ensure birth registration as a step towards obtaining nationality and further political pressure to be placed on states in regard to granting citizenship to people currently stateless residing in their country. Lack of access to health and education resulting from statelessness was discussed and UNHCR’s search for additional actors in the issue, given that human rights and the rights of children are heavily impacted. It was noted that the
Conclusion on Birth Registration had not been passed by ExCom last year although it had been previewed.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
The NGO Committee on Migration identified brides and the children of migrants as two groups of concern in relation to statelessness. Commercialised marriages common for women of developing Asian nations to developed Asian nationals resulted in major gaps in protection for women who may be classed as ‘excludable aliens’ required to renounce their own citizenship for that of the host country, resulting in increased vulnerability if the marriage dissolves. The phenomenon of children of migrants born in a host country is now resulting in 2nd and 3rd generation stateless peoples.

Analysis
The identification of the phenomenon of 2nd and 3rd generation statelessness highlights the need for partnerships with refugee women to increase rates of birth registration thereby contributing to reducing statelessness. Discriminatory legislation in relation to women and nationality, including mother’s passing on nationality to children, is also a factor to be considered.

Cityscape : Taking stock of new initiatives in response to urban refugee needs – Thematic Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR
UNHCR placed an emphasis on the importance of empowering refugees to advocate for themselves and engaging them in solutions in an urban landscape and the need for partnerships in that landscape beyond traditional partners, including urban planners, municipalities and the private sector.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
An NGO raised the issue of difficulties for vulnerable groups including women and girls in accessing services from UNHCR and other organisations. UNHCR indicated that upcoming guidelines would include a focus on community outreach.
A participant of the Women’s Dialogues noted that in Zambia work permits and ID cards confirming they are urban refugees were only provided to heads of households, meaning that other family members could be arrested if they tried to work. UNHCR advised that Zambia’s accession to the Convention in 1997 included reservations in relation to freedom of movement, requiring ongoing advocacy for the lifting of restrictions.

Analysis
There was no mention of the heightened risks to women and girls or LGBTIs in the urban context, particularly given that women make up the majority of urban refugees. The response regarding the position in Zambia was addressed in a limited manner.

The multi functional team and results based management: Make it work – Thematic session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR
The key focus of the session was ‘proximity through partnership’ as a means to ensure that UNHCR and NGOs address the needs of their target populations despite geographical barriers by utilising rights based management (RBM) tools. UNHCR acknowledged that it was in the process of implementing a RBM system, and was understandably encountering difficulties along the way, including; the fact that some of the indicators to be relied on were not present in operations, identifying problems in SGBV and youth activity indicators. Standardised
measured violence was reported to have a tremendous potential impact; with the overall direction to date being positive. The impact of gender-based violence was named as an area difficult to measure, requiring improvements in the measurement system.

Recommendations were made to proceed with caution regarding ‘measuring the immeasurable’. The example of non-UNHCR donors requiring a target number for the amount of women reporting SGBV was given. While the intention behind this type of reporting is good, measuring the success of SGBV awareness programs is difficult as it becomes unclear as to whether higher numbers indicate that sensitisation campaigns with men were effective and more women reported incidences of SGBV; or were the campaigns ineffective and incidences of violence increased? There is a real danger that artificial meanings can be attached to numbers.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs

The Centre for Refugee Research noted that the participants in the Women’s Dialogues had put forward suggestions which would result in many tangible outcomes and enquired as to whether it was proposed that these initiatives would become systems-focused approaches to be incorporated into RBM. UNHCR advised that RBM was merely one measurement tool for the organisation and that they perform a lot of other impact evaluations. The example of an evaluation on savings and loans in relation to women’s empowerment was provided.

Analysis

The UNHCR Programme Analysis & Support Section, Division of Programme Support & Management team did not address CRR’s question regarding incorporation of tangible outcomes from the Women’s Dialogues. Further, the opportunity to expand on discussions regarding the monitoring of SGBV in the context of more effective practice was not addressed.

Overcoming barriers: Strategies for the robust and effective use of resettlement as a protection tool – Thematic Session

Discussion by UNHCR

The session highlighted the difficulties in achieving a global resettlement program and noted that a large number of people who should qualify for resettlement fail to benefit from resettlement programs. There are concerns that the numbers unable to access resettlement will increase as states increase their security risk assessment processes.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs

The NGO Refuge Point (formerly Mapendo International) applauded UNHCR’s Policy on Urban Refugees and stated that they envisaged an expanded NGO role in identifying potential candidates for resettlement, particularly for groups with difficulty accessing the normal pathways of resettlement or at increased risk, such as LGBTI refugee individuals, the infirm or shut in, those with language barriers, disabled children, and single parents of many children.

Analysis

Children, single parents and LGBTI refugees were identified as groups who have difficulty in accessing the normal pathways or resettlement. Neither the Heightened Risk Identification Tool, nor SGBV were mentioned during the session, and there was no discussion of vulnerabilities specific to women and girls in the refugee context such as persecution, social exclusion, detention, extreme poverty and refoulement.
More alternatives than detention – Thematic Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR
UNCHR advised that the 2011 Note on International Protection presented at the 51st Standing Committee clearly indicated that detention alternatives continue to be a key priority for UNHCR, with particular concern regarding systematic, prolonged and indefinite detention situations. UNHCR is in the process of revising the 1999 guidelines to detention and in conjunction with NGOs is also looking at developing a manual for NGOS providing guidance on monitoring detention.

Following the issue of the vulnerability of LGBTI refugee and asylum seeker populations in detention being raised by Heartland Alliance, UNCHR advised that they would be happy to look at specific safeguards for these groups if any NGOs have specific recommendations.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
The Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service identified three critical elements for alternatives to detention, which were: individualised assessments; tailored case management; and, access to legal support.

International Detention Coalition (IDC) advised that traditional categories of vulnerability in detention relate to age, gender and diversity including LGBTI and that the reality is that everyone is vulnerable in detention. IDC is exploring some further work on LGBTI in immigration detention and is interested for groups to get involved in this.

Analysis
Gender mentions were limited to the identification of gender being a traditional category of vulnerability together with age and diversity. LGBTI is an emerging issue with UNCHR and NGOs discussing the need for specific safeguards for this vulnerable group.

Pinheiro into action: Challenges and way forward in housing, land and property rights – Enhancing partnerships – Thematic Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR
UNCHR did not address the gender dimension of the Pinheiro principles. The principles were acknowledged as an important achievement with a broad conception of restitution which is grounded in international human rights. Under the principles restitution is always the preferred option in order to counteract ‘ethnic cleansing’ attempts, however the Pinheiro principles also allows for compensation to those unwilling or unable to return to their land, but market value may not always be attainable. Compensation is also available when land or property is no longer available (e.g. destroyed or burned).

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
CODHES, Colombia noted that in Colombia 97% of displaced people are living in marginal urban areas and that of the 80% of people living below the poverty line, the majority are women.

Analysis
No significant gender aspects were addressed in the session, despite the identification of the women as the majority of those living below the poverty line in marginal urban areas and the specific vulnerabilities for women and girls in the urban refugee context.
Sudan: Partnerships for protection IDPs – Thematic Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR
A panel discussion was held regarding how partnerships between NGOs and UNHCR can enhance the protection of people of concern to UNHCR in Sudan. UNHCR reported that since April 2010 various sub-clusters have been established in South Sudan including one for children with a focus on enhancing funding for the protection centre. UNHCR has attempted to act as a bridge between the humanitarian actors and the cluster mission.

The strengths of the cluster in South Sudan include a strong RCHC presence with a strong UNHCR office and strong partners within the cluster. This was achieved by a focus on respecting the strengths of each partner by a rigorous prioritisation of protection issues including enhanced physical security, response to SGBV and in returning children involved in the military to their parents. UNHCR advocated a stronger human rights element to the mission.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
Intersos South Sudan based in Western Equatoria State provided details of their protection activities for refugees and IDPs which includes identifying people with specific needs and providing psychological support activities, often entailing support for SGBV victims who are traumatised. The organisation also conducts gender based violence prevention and response and refers SGBV cases to the relevant actors. Sudan Council of Churches reported their work included constructing shelters for 100 displaced families.

Analysis
The implications for women and girls in the IDP situation in Southern Sudan were highlighted in the session, with discussions drawing attention to action taken by UNHCR and NGOs to respond to SGBV. Further attention could have been drawn to the increased vulnerabilities to women and girls in the IDP context, where women are often the primary care giver and head of households, where men have already been separated from their families due to conflict or the search for work.

Commemorations: Overview and role of NGOs – Thematic Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR
UNHCR reported that as part of the 60th Anniversary of the Convention commemorations a number of meetings and roundtables on Statelessness had taken place, including looking at a definition of statelessness, and the concept of ‘defacto statelessness’, procedures to determine status, gender and child protection, acquisition of nationality at birth and conferral of nationality to children without gender discrimination.

The Women’s Dialogues were identified as an important process which informs the pledging process and the advocacy around it. After hearing the Women’s strong and powerful voices at the Standing Committee it is important to ensure that there is a medium for their message to be heard and acted upon. It was noted that the Conclusion on Birth Registration has not been accepted.

In response to AMES question regarding a pledge from governments to incorporate refugee voice so that there is a focus on state’s facilitating favourable conditions for refugee integration, UNHCR advised that the AGDM policy has been implemented in the organization, however, information provided by states was not split by AGDM.
Discussion of gender issues by NGOs

The Centre for Refugee Research emphasized the importance of visionary and inspirational declarations to battle the complex and intractable problems that exist such as SGBV, as well as concrete recommendations. UNHCR confirmed that the issue of SGBV is an area where the NGOS could offer some visionary thinking for consideration by the states in the pledging process.

Analysis

Continued challenges regarding birth registration and statelessness highlighted the vulnerability of women and girls in the refugee space, and the need for the conferral of nationality to children without gender discrimination. The opportunity to use the State Pledging process to gain state commitment for action to address the ongoing protection failures for women and girls was a promising development.

The struggle to meet durable solutions for IDPs – Thematic Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR

The session explored policies and practice which support local integration when return is not an option, including the Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons as an advocacy and monitoring tool in the search for durable solutions for IDPs. The link between statelessness and internal displacement was discussed.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs

Refugee Consortium of Kenya discussed the situation in Kenya since 2007 when a protection cluster with 2 sub-clusters for Children and SGBV were formed. In 2008 the clusters were disbanded, but the SGBV working group remained.

A refugee woman participant of the Women’s Dialogues advised that the guidelines in relation to protection of women were theoretically sound but did not work in practice, and asked what protection measures will be put in place. UNHCR acknowledged the challenge of SGBV and need for the Kampala Convention to be implemented, in order for domestic legislation to reflect IDP concerns.

Analysis

The relevance of gender based issues regarding durable solutions for IDPs was highlighted in the session by NGO participants, with a gender dimension to UNHCR’s discussion lacking. The relevance of gender in relation to livelihood establishment and related durable solution issues was ignored.

Africa Bureau – Regional Session

Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR

In relation to the issue of cessation, the Director of the Africa Bureau noted that participants in the Women’s Dialogues had talked very animatedly about personal consequences of cessation, questioning acquired rights, unsettling lives, refoulment, and unpredictability, asking for a response from UNHCR regarding the mechanism for protection if they are forced to go or to stay.

The Director advised that UNHCR was engaging a comprehensive strategy which includes acquired rights and that UNHCR were preparing to implement the entire strategy including cessation in order to secure rights for those who have continuing need for protection. It was stated that those who have established needs on grounds other than cessation will continue to
enjoy refugee status and enjoy protection; however, joint partnerships in relation to the issue raised by the refugee women were very poor.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
An NGO participant noted that LGBTI members that flee are often unable to access UNHCR offices due to national laws and/or unawareness that help is available and inquired as to what is being done by UNHCR to facilitate these members movement.

UNHCR responded by advising that safe spaces are trying to be established however it is very difficult as announcing the reasons for application expose the individual to potential harm. Further, the issue of providing safe spaces is ongoing so that real spaces of protection are created, which are organised to be culturally and attitudinally appropriate. The difficulty in creating such spaces was heightened by the continued criminalisation of this vulnerable group.

UNHCR also noted that across the organisation, following the LGBTI roundtable held in September 2010, case studies and regional training pilots had taken place in some countries, and training materials were disseminated to senior management staff, with the aim of ensuring that lessons learnt are taken back to the field and adapted for a legal context.

Analysis
The gender element to the session this year focussed on LGBTI protection issues, and the identification of issues of concern regarding cessation by the participants in the Women’s Dialogues. Gender related discussion was much less than last year, where the Director of the Africa Bureau identified ‘non-negotiable priorities’ including a commitment to meeting 100% of women’s needs in relation to sanitary materials, continual addressing of SGBV issues at all level of UNHCR operations, meeting AGDM principles and the supply of domestic fuel to women to reduce the number of rapes occurring in that situation.

These commitments were not alluded to in the 2011 session, and the evidence provided by the refugee women participants in the Women’s Dialogues and anecdotal observations from NGO partners indicate that these issues are far from being addressed. The extent to which education and training for men regarding SGBV as well as support for livelihoods and empowerment for women and girls would have been beneficial to the session.

Americas Bureau – Regional Session
Discussion of gender issues by UNHCR
There was significant discussion of gender issues in the session, attributed to a large extent to the presence of two of the participants in the Women’s Dialogues – both of whom are IDPs in Colombia.

UNHCR advised that they sought tangible recommendations from the session and confirmed that they had asked the Women’s Dialogue participants to voice their concerns of the framework of UNHCR planning. UNHCR acknowledged the participant’s protection concerns, and the important link between identity documents and the ability to be protected. UNCHR noted the participants’ request for better opportunities for livelihood and access to services and acknowledged that UNHCR was falling short of these needs.

UNCHR reported that the Regional Women’s Dialogues have tried to go into depth by diagnosing problems with the communities and identifying the core issues. The dialogues in Colombia took part in Medellin. Displacement was discussed with the women, and the fact that it breaks the
support network and references that they have built up over their lives. The minute people become displaced their overriding label is as displaced, undermining their personal and professional identities, and access to services may be denied because they cannot prove certain facts or cannot provide documentation.

UNHCR identified that these are the problems displaced persons have to navigate and must be overcome if we want to make integration possible.

UNHCR noted that the commitment to ensure sanitary materials for everyone had not been fulfilled, which was the purely the result of economic factors, and called upon UNHCR and NGO partners to ensure distribution is achieved.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs

NGOs contributed detailed discussion of gender issues, highlighting challenges faced by women, in excess of those also faced by men. The Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service discussed women and girls’ vulnerability to SGBV when seeking protection as well as the additional burdens of often being of more limited means and the primary caregiver for children, resulting in social isolation and exclusion from services and limitations to own development. As a result, services and programs have begun addressing social networking and community building to assist in women’s specific need for relationships as a coping mechanism. This has included women’s empowerment programs which have been designed and facilitated by the women themselves, and are therefore relevant for their particular circumstances. It was noted that NGOs must always remember to address the issues that the women themselves want addressed. These programs have included livelihood and skills training, access to affordable childcare, language classes and empowerment programs for young girls. Trafficking of children and young girls was noted as a serious concern in the region.

The participants in the Women’s Dialogues spoke to the outcomes of the dialogues which could benefit displaced persons. The participants thanked UNHCR, the government and NGOs for services already provided; however advised that they were still frustrated because some services aren’t always carried out fully or partially and they are seeking long term solutions for self sustainment. Problems accessing healthcare without appropriate identification documents was highlighted. Other issues identified included: trying to improve registration process for displaced women and men to ensure people do not have to pay again for documents; providing legal resources (or access); reducing abuse of public power and access to government services; creating spaces for open dialogues and legal redress; training programs alongside civil servants; safe housing for victims of domestic abuse or other violence; homes for children who have been trafficked or used as child soldiers; violence on the street for women and girls; trafficking; and safe transport to schools; There are invisible barriers such as quality of education; availability of scholarships to continue schooling; education strengthening values and self help; improving teachers training; limited access to health and sanitary equipment for women and the elderly; and stopping discrimination against native groups.

The participants discussed in detail concerns regarding SGBV, as this is a highly complex issue which occurs during all phases of displacement and to which displaced persons are highly vulnerable. Women are afraid to share stories of what occurs, however intra-familiar SGBV requires assistance by calling attention to these issues. SGBV requires more security in public places, hospitals and on public transport. Options for women who have had to use sex to survive need to be opened. Cycles of violence in cities continue where there has been intra urban forced displacement, which results in families that were victims of violence to become perpetrators themselves. The participants called for states to take greater measures against gangs that roam urban areas, with increased education programs, and all drug linked crimes and paramilitary and
gang crimes being prosecuted. Support, training, information data, economic recognition, and participation from external groups were called for in relation to women in leadership.

Lack of access to employment opportunities for women and limited education for children resulting in child labour were also mentioned. Micro-enterprises, financing and training were called for.

The Foundation Environment Society Ecuador identified challenges with refugees in Ecuador regarding inclusion and integration of the largest refugee population in Latin America. It was noted that cities provide a greater opportunity for integration however there is a higher level of discrimination against foreign persons including SGBV, trafficking and sex workers. It was reported that women refugees are often considered ‘friendlier’ and leads to sexual exploitation because they can be very open and friendly. Most women refugees are single mothers with an average of 3 children. Research also indicates that families have partners of different nationalities, and women refugees from Colombia often marry an Ecuadorian which can be a link with the host community and enables better integration.

Working conditions are also important as studies and education are often interrupted by the need to work and make money. Livelihoods training in diverse areas was an important focus to assist single mothers in economic integration. Without assistance for women in a caregiver role to capitalise on their skills, many turn to sex work, and the NGO called for microfinance opportunities. Partnerships with UNCHR were discussed to ensure programs are inclusive and avoid duplication.

The Centre for Refugee Research called upon the UNCHR to advise what action points will be put forward in leading the charge for enhanced participation of women in leadership, to which UNHCR responded that they intend to focus on education - noting that lack of resources prevented children from continuing schooling. UNCHR indicated that they wished to improve desegregated data to identify who is attending school, then form targeted actions and undertake resourcing.

An NGO participant stated that training with staff, and not just local authorities, is essential. Women who cross the border alone or with children face specific challenges and have a fear of authorities even in accessing humanitarian services. The state doesn’t have a clear policy or public campaign, and change won’t occur without this. People everywhere have the desire to live life with dignity, and we need to encourage groups of women to work with UNHCR and NGOs, and we need resources for this, because ‘who do you leave your children with if you have to go work’. ‘Regarding women victims of SGBV, we have to look at husbands participating in these crimes’.

There were a number of enthusiastic questions and interventions from the session’s NGO participants that could not all be answered by the Panel due to time restrictions.

An NGO representative from Haiti noted that none of the presentations really addressed the issue of housing; and that how you resettle people in a sustainable fashion is very important. They stated that the question of housing is fundamental to reduce the levels of violence and disease which women and children are most exposed to. The other issue not properly discussed was social services and support for women; in Haiti for example these programs are engaged to strengthen the links and relationships with people and work on different elements. Addressing psychological and emotional suffering is important in allowing people to move on and contribute.
Asylum Access Ecuador commented on how legal strategies are of great importance to women who have been victim to SGBV. Psycho-social activities are needed to help women rebuild lives, and it is important to stress access to justice in the case of SGBV should be considered part of a global picture that has to be handled through the correct channels. Participation in the legal process is of great importance, as is helping with housing programs. This theme needs to be identified on the global level as a major concern. This needs government support and although Asylum Access Ecuador were optimistic, the Ecuadorian government had not put forward key indicators (although it has shown good will).

Analysis
Due to the participation on the panel of the Colombian refugee women participants of the Women’s Dialogues there was significant gender discussion in the session. A number of issues were highlighted, with recommendations in relation to the need for livelihoods and education support for women and girls, and empowerment and support for women leaders. The need for a rights based participatory approach in consultation with refugee women was emphasised in the session.

Asia and the Pacific Bureau – Regional Session

Discussion of gender issues by Panel
In discussing the refugee situation in Bangladesh it was noted that high population growth with the average family size of eight in a conservative Islamic culture had implications for women’s mobility, education and early marriage which were reflected in the high birth rate. It was recommended that there be an increased focus on female education to reduce poverty in local communities.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
There were no gender dimensions to the Q and A.

Analysis
Many opportunities to discuss gender were missed by the panel, for example, when discussing the issuing of work permits, as well as specific protection concerns for women refugees during imprisonment in Bangladesh, and IDP situations.

Europe Bureau – Regional Session

The aim of this session was to build on 2010’s focus on capacity building and working with national NGOs.

Discussion of gender by UNCHR
In response to a statement by an NGO participant, UNHCR acknowledged that the Galkayo Medical Centre in Somalia has supported and protected many IDPs, particularly women affected by female genital mutilation.

In response to a question by a participant of the Women’s Dialogue in relation to lack of access to education for refugee children, particularly girls in Finland, UNHCR stated that the Finnish representative is aware of the concerns voiced.
Discussion of gender by NGOs
A comment was made by the Hungarian Helsinki committee stating that researchers have identified common needs, such as regional capacity building in the area of LGBTI, in Central and Eastern Europe.

Analysis
In the discussion regarding the potential lack of skills and knowledge of some national NGO's areas including SGBV and AGDM could have been specified. There was a discussion of lack of refugee voices in partnerships, where particular consideration of those most vulnerable such as women and girls should have been discussed. When discussing partnerships and same standards, ethics, AGDM could have been raised.

MENA Bureau
Discussion of gender issues by Panel
This session focused on ‘identifying current challenges facing refugees, IDPs and persons of concern, and in particular within the context of urban setting at a time of crisis disrupting the provision of protection and services.’

Commenting on the continuing humanitarian crisis in Libya, UNCHR reported that Libyans families from the West of Libya had sought refuge in Tunisia. This includes women and large number of children with the men remaining to fight. This also includes women who have suffered from physical or sexual violence who refuse to stay in camps due to promiscuity and violence. Many Tunisians are operating as hosts as the camps are full but the host families are poor themselves and UNHCR reported looking for new assistance strategies for host families so they can deal with the additional burden effectively.

Main challenges were identified as needing to strengthen the capacity of host families, improve the living and security conditions, improve hygiene, health care, social and educational provisions and improve coordination between humanitarian agencies and partners. Coordination difficulties between agencies were reported as effecting attempts to work together. The need to support new programs for women and children who are victims of violence was identified as well as social activities for women, children, special needs, the mentally handicapped and elderly to minimise stress and avoid outlaw behaviour.

Increased refugees from Somalia and Afghanistan, specifically women and children were reported in the region.

Discussion of gender issues by NGOs
The Egyptian Foundation for Refugee Rights raised concerns regarding problems between refugees and UNHCR in Cairo and gave an example of one refugee filed a complaint to the Tribunals because of aggression of a person in the UNHCR office and the person was imprisoned for six years. There has been no statement by UNHCR and after the revolution many were subjected to violations by certain Egyptians. Another instance of concern mentioned was that of a Sudanese woman who was subjected to collective rape and when asked for protection and UNHCR staff allegedly refused to give her assistance.

The need for improved livelihoods strategies and targeted efforts to support girls’ access to and completion of school were also identified as crucial aspects of responding to some of the endemic protection risks.
Analysis

The gender aspect to the session was limited to identifying women and girls as a vulnerable group together with children, the aged and disabled, in need of specific programming. There was no mention of survival sex or sexual exploitation despite the high incidence of the phenomenon within the region, nor an identification of the need for increased information gathering and analysis concerning risks to women and girls in the region. LGBTI was not referred to.
Gender specific Sessions

Commemorations a dialogue with refugee women, NGOs and UNHCR – Thematic Session (Gender specific)

Discussion of gender issues by UNCHR

Following the attendance of the refugee women participants of the Women’s Dialogues at Standing Committee, this session was a dialogue with refugee women, UNHCR and NGOs. UNHCR highlighted the importance of participation of women and ‘beneficiaries’ in identifying their own solutions and noted that it was alarming that issues raised were similar to those raised 10 years earlier at 50th anniversary. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) commented on the community based methodology ‘pioneered’/used for the dialogues and stated that these methods have already influenced UNHCR participatory assessments models.

The Dialogues were expressed as a new ‘bridge building’ mechanism with the refugees communities with which UNHCR works; building confidence, dialogue; and serving as a caution against complacency about the seriousness of the issues effecting refugees around the world.

UNHCR stated that the Dialogues had highlighted good practices, serving as a ‘good practices multiplier’ for UNHCR to send ‘lessons learnt’ to their offices around the world, the Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) expressing the hope that this ‘good practice guide’ would continue to develop and that the Dialogues will influence government pledging process at ministerial level this year to eventually materially contribute to the enhanced protection of refugee women and girls. When introducing the women refugee participants in the Dialogues, the Assistant High Commissioner noted the range of refugee experiences, highlighting the *protracted* nature of many.

In response to the refugee women participants’ discussion of SGBV, UNHCR highlighted the heightened vulnerability of women and girls to SGBV as a result of displacement, and the double impunity for women who experienced SGBV, and who suffer from inadequate justice systems.

The importance of collective engagement and commitment on issues identified by the participants was stressed.

Discussion of gender issues by participants in Women’s Dialogues

The refugee women in the Dialogues answered questions and presented on the issues of concern for refugee women and girls: education, women and leaderships, livelihoods (self sufficiency), SGBV and sanitary materials. Recommendations were made in relation to each issue.

Glaring inadequacies in services and protection were identified. The difficulties in obtaining resources and materials in camps to access education, with some women being forced into survival sex to access schooling was discussed, as well as the limited access to higher education. Recommendations included increased support through scholarships and sponsorship, monitoring of teachers to prevent sexual harassment and establishing educational facilities women can access.
Physical and emotional threats to women leaders and the role of informal leadership was discussed. Recommendations included increased security for women leaders, punishment for SGBV offenders and increased support for women in leadership roles.

Difficulties in obtaining work permits and women being forced into survival sex for income were noted as livelihoods issues, with educated women finding it difficult to obtain work permits in host countries. It was recommended that awareness raising take place through intensive training courses and workshops, in order to improve the economic situation and capacity of women and that educated women’s access to employment opportunities be improved by providing work permits. It was also noted that the recognition of the voluntary nature of many women’s work, especially in refugee camps was important. Reducing the cost to purchase work, travel and other relevant permits both in camps and urban situations was also recommended.

A number of the refugee women participants discussed the issue of SGBV. The vulnerability of single women and the issue of shelter as a major issue was identified. As a result of limited (or no) education, and the consequent inability to obtain employment and earn income resulted in many women having to perform survival sex.

The everyday risk of SGBV as reality was discussed, with the example of vulnerabilities when performing everyday tasks such as collecting water and firewood, when women are required to walk long distances unprotected. Reporting and punishment of SGBV crimes continued to be a problem, with threats to women contemplating reporting crimes. The problem was identified as worldwide, also effecting men who have suffered themselves and take this out on their families. The stigma associated with rape was discussed and the lack of psychological support for women who have been raped.

The participants noted with concern that UNCHR officers were aware of specific cases of the kind outlined above and had done nothing.

Recommendations included recognising the particular vulnerability of single women in refugee communities, improving access to adequate and secure shelter to provide adequate protection, and improving psychological and physical support and treatment for rape and SGBV survivors and increasing education of both men and women.

Difficulties in accessing adequate quantities, appropriate size and quality of sanitary materials and soap was discussed. The problem of having to use the same bucket for washing and drinking highlighted the inherent health risks and challenges that posed to refugee women and girls. It was recommended that the quality and size of sanitary materials provided be improved and that the quantity of materials provided, including soap and buckets be increased.

Discussion of gender by NGOs

NGO interventions included the identification of the lack of adequate and secure shelter as an important and cross-cutting issue; the imposition of survival sex as a last resort for women lacking education/training opportunities and the basic failure of the NGO community to engage men in education and attitudinal change about SGBV.

Increased funding to NGOs who engage with women (ie. attach funding ties so that NGOs have to engage refugee women as providers and deliverers in their programs) and the importance of increased engagement with men was recommended.

The Church World Service sought a commitment from UNHCR to increase resources and budget allocation to provide sanitary materials.
Caritas Internationalis expressed support for the issues identified by the refugee women participants and congratulated UNHCR on the initiative. The importance of working with men as part of the solution was noted. A plead was made for everyone to involve refugees in consultations about these issues so that more and more people have the opportunity to speak for themselves. A call for a follow-up session next year was made.

**Analysis**

The session allowed an opportunity for refugee women to express in their own words the issues of concern for them in the context of an environment where SGBV is a crosscutting issue, and vulnerabilities specific to women and girls continue to receive inadequate attention. UNHCR acknowledged that they were listening to women and girls however; it is of concern that these issues have been highlighted repeatedly in the past and continues to impact on every part of refugee women’s lives. UNHCR did not make any specific commitments to future action.

**The role of NGOs in protection of refugees fleeing persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity – Round Table (gender specific)**

**Discussion of gender issues by the Panel**

The panel discussed issues surrounding access to NGO services by LGBTI refugees and ORAM provided the results of a survey of NGO refugee service providers regarding attitudes towards LGBTI refugees.

UNHCR welcomed the increased focus on LGBTI issues in the global context and noted the June 2011 of the UN Resolution on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity which expresses grave concerns regarding the persecution of LGBTI persons. UNHCR identified LGBTI concerns as a priority issue for the organisation and indicated that it has adopted a 3 pronged approach to protection for LGBTI refugees/asylum seekers made up of legal, operational and mainstreaming (integrating LGBTI sensitivity and awareness into all HCR operations) tracts.

UNHCR also acknowledged the benefit of NGO assistance in providing legal services to people during RSD, and identified some ongoing concerns in relation to forced gender reassignment in some states to confirm with gender policies, often resulting in those reassigned being forced into sex work and experiencing SGBV.

Key barriers facing NGOs providing legal, social and medical protection to LGBTI refugees were identified as homophobia and transphobia, fear of self-identifying as LGBTI and the criminalization of homosexuality in some nations. Services for LGBTI refugees in these areas included security measures and life skills training.

Legislative and other legal developments in protecting LGBTI rights were discussed by Asylum Access Thailand.

Lawyers for Human Rights noted the need for ongoing advocacy and lobbying for changes in domestic legislation and at the Human Rights Council.

When providing the findings of the survey regarding NGO service providers, ORAM noted that after only two years of LGBTI being raised as an issue of concern for refugees at the Annual Consultations, it was now at the forefront of discussions in virtually every quarter. The purpose of the survey was to explore why NGOs do not encounter significant numbers of LGBTI refugees despite the issues of criminalisation, death penalty for homosexuality, and whether attitudes
within the NGO community are having an impact on vulnerable people coming forward. It is hoped the results will assist NGOs to change polices and implement recommendations.

The analysis of results was still ongoing, with some response still to be received; however ORAM could report that NGOs rated both their protection concerns for LGBTI refugees and willingness to provide services highly. It was noted that the response was provided by senior management, accordingly, the focus should be on staff training with an emphasis on the provision of equal protection to all seeking assistance. It was noted that a willingness to provide services strongly correlated to the degree people know or have contact with LGBTI individuals and therefore, the need to ensure interaction with the LGBTI community.

UNHCR confirmed the issue of educating ‘gatekeepers’ to ensure that the LGBTI community was provided with the opportunity to state their case appropriately following initial approaches to UNHCR (and NGO) offices.

NGO representatives were encouraged to identify barriers within their own organizations to effective LGBTI refugee protection and highlight ways forward.

**Discussion of gender issues by NGOs**

The difficulties in locating LGBTI refugees to assist was discussed, as well as the greater likelihood of success if refugee organizations partner with LGBTI organizations to promote this issues, noting the success of partnerships in lobbying for gay marriage legislation in the US. Xenophobia as a further challenge was also highlighted. The Council of Europe advised that they had recently released a report regarding attitudes towards LBTI in their member states and reported that 33/47 states in one way or another recognised sexual orientation as grounds in asylum applications while gender identity is recognised as a grounds in only 6. The report contains recommendations regarding lobbying and advocacy for organisations.

The International Detention Coalition supported disclosure of rights to all applicants seeking RSD so that LGBTI status is identified as acceptable early on, noting concerns with late disclosure (which could be sometimes viewed as fabrication) in jurisdictions such as Australia. The issue of creating a safe space for LGBTI applicants was noted as crucial.

Best practice and measures used by NGOs to target LGBTI people and welcome them to services were discussed, noting the importance of partnerships, visible accessibility for LGBTI refugees and the priority of resettlement as the best option for LGBTI refugees.

**Analysis**

As a meeting specifically focused on LGBTI refugees, the gender considerations were strongly grounded in issues of persecution and marginalization of LGBTI people in refugee situations.

The session marked by recognition of the inclusion of LBGTI at the forefront of most discussions at the Annual Consultations, which is a promising development, particularly considering that LGBTI concerns have really only been raised at the Annual Consultation in the last two years and is reflected by the recent resolution on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Judicial challenges and cooperation and collaboration between LGBTI advocacy and refugee groups were highlighted as important ways forward in recognition and support for LGBTI refugees, with a key focus on resettlement as the best option. Both UNHCR and NGOs emphasized the need for education and sensitization of staff, which is a promising development.
Report back and closing address

Report back on the NGO Consultations- Plenary Session

At the beginning of the session the Rapporteur to Executive Committee (ExCom) reported that protracted refugee situations, SGBV, and education sessions are just some of the discussions that have formed the Consultations this year which are concerns for ExCom.

Rapporteur to the 2011 Annual NGO Consultations

In her summary of the Consultations the Rapporteur advised that the refugee women participants in the Women’s Dialogue had spoken out courageously about widespread rape and sexual violence that pervades their lives and the lives of their communities and they urged action and an effective response. UNHCR was commended for the progress it had made in recognising the particular protection problems of LGBTI refugee and urged to do more.

It was noted that in the Asia Bureau meeting the need for improved livelihoods strategies and targeted efforts to support girls’ access to and completion of school were identified as crucial aspects of responding to some of the endemic protection risks.

In the MENA Bureau session the need to strengthen protection in the hosting community among host families and in camps, with conditions of extreme heat, limited water, appalling health conditions and women afraid to stay in the camps due to insecurity and ongoing risks of SGBV and to improve coordination between multiple actors, including those without humanitarian experience were discussed.

The Africa Bureau discussed the particular problems and risks facing LGBTI refugees and the need to build the awareness and capacity of UNHCR staff to respond.

The Rapporteur confirmed the detailed discussion of gender issues in the Americas Bureau session reporting that the Bureau explored past achievements and current challenges in the local integration of displaced women and exploring challenges faced by refugee women. Also discussed good practices across three different displacement contexts, among asylum seeking and resettled women in the USA, for refugee women in Ecuador and IDP women in Colombia. In each case the pervasive risks of rape and sexual violence characterised women’s experiences in their quests for protection and safety. The lack of access to safe livelihoods was identified as one of the major factors that compounded risks. This was enriched by the lived experience of the two IDP women who had participated in the Women Dialogue held in Colombia. Speakers urged that the high prevalence of SGBV not be treated as the new normal and that safeguards needed to be urgently enacted and psychosocial and legal support provided.

In the session focused on FBOs it was identified that some FBOs may face obstacles in addressing issues such as HIV/AIDS, SGBV, and LGBTI rights.

It was reported that in the session – Cityscape: Taking Stock of New Initiatives in response to urban refugees - participants noted that several protection challenges face women and girls especially if they are not able to work legally. This includes sexual abuse and exploitation in the workplace or being forced into survival sex.

The Rapporteur discussed the confronting nature of the thematic session on the Women’s Dialogues, reporting that the women described the impacts of lack of documentation, overcrowded and unhealthy shelter, poor quality health services and lack of educational opportunities, unsafe and poor quality schools, barriers to women in leadership positions, lack
of access to legal remedies for crimes committed against them, and the horrendous impacts of lack of sanitary materials. The overwhelming and cross cutting theme was that of rape and sexual violence, which was both an outcome of these protection failures and also causes additional protection risks such as the necessity to engage in survival sex. The women all requested that they be consulted and included in decision making about their lives and be active partners in solutions to their problems. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) commented that the Dialogues had been a salutary lesson about our collective failure to address these issues over the past decade.

The major recommendations identified by the Rapporteur from the session were that:

- UNHCR and Non Government agencies introduce strong policies and guidelines for the meaningful participation of refugee women and girls in all levels of consultation and decision making in all areas of their lives. These measure should be monitored and strict accountability measures be taken to ensure their full and effective implementation. Women themselves should have an active role in this monitoring.

- That actions be identified by UNHCR and the NGO community to respond to problems identified by the women in each of the protection areas discussed in the Dialogues. This must include properly resourced, comprehensive and holistic services to be available for victims of rape and sexual violence in all refugee sites and that a follow up meeting be held at the NGO Consultations in 2012 to report on the implementation and outcomes of these actions.

The Rapporteur affirmed that strategies for working with men should be developed and implemented in all refugee sites as a matter of urgency to reduce the incidence of violence and to include them as active partners in the protection of women, girls and boys from all forms of violence, including SGBV.

The session - Commissions: Overview & Role of NGOs – discussed the opportunity to use the State Pledging process to gain state commitment for action to address the ongoing protection failures for women and girls were discussed.

Responses to the Rapporteur’s Report

There were limited gender mentions in the response to the Rapporteur’s report. The only recommendation made was that of the International Federation of Social Workers, who stated that ExCom should create a Special Rapporteur on SGBV because currently upholding the human rights of victims appeared in some ways to be a ‘fata morgana’ (mirage). It was stated that SGBV constitutes a crime against humanity and that a Special Rapporteur would make clear there should be zero tolerance for SGBV.
Closing Address by Erika Feller, Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees (Protection) – Plenary Session

The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) closed the session by advising the participants that the Annual Consultations are UNHCR’s most valued partnership discussions which they want to continue to foster in years to come. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) reported that she was impressed by widespread, eclectic participation from various segments of society and interest groups. She wished to highlight the importance of the refugee women participants in the Women’s Dialogues having the opportunity to share the experiences that have marked their lives, some in very protracted situations having grown up in refugee situations. It was acknowledged that it was very important for them to see how NGOs function, how their concerns are represented in collective discussions and how they’ll be followed up. It was noted that what the refugee women participants in the Dialogues seek from UNHCR and NGOs is to be listened to, to be heard, and for their recommendations to be acted upon. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) stated the she sincerely hoped the participants would take back a sense of quiet, that somehow they are better understood, and that they will be better responded to in the future.

It was noted that SGBV was raised as a very important issue with some interesting recommendations put forward. A lot of commitment to more resolutely address the problems at the root of SGBV and the problems confronting victims is needed, and UNHCR and NGOs collective activity to date has been insufficient, the Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) stating that her office and that of the High Commissioner were very committed to revisiting this issue.

The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) asserted that the Women’s Dialogues brought out the concerns and the best practices in operations and that UNHCR intended to bring out a compilation of best practices, including a focus on SGBV, acknowledging that it wouldn’t resolve the issues but that UNHCR must strive to do something about it, not accept its repetition and not become complacent about the inevitability of SGBV. In relation to the suggestion that there be a Special Rapporteur on SGBV, the Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) stated she was unclear as what this role would entail, with possibilities including a reporting mechanism to UNHCR and Standing Committee, or as an advocate through a reporting mechanism at the Human Rights Commission.

In the response to the closing, a participant in the Women’s Dialogue thanked UNCHR and the NGOs for providing a platform for the participants to present refugee concerns including problems of SGBV, education, health, shelter, documentation, livelihoods, sanitation, leadership and proposed recommendations in relation to these issues. She advised that the participants in the Women’s Dialogues wished to know what UNHCR and NGOs are going to do to ensure that the lives of refugees are made better? What are they committing to refugees? how will they ensure continued support and increased participation of refugee women? She noted that many NGOs talked about specific countries and did not talk about other countries and that no-one came out in the open and promised one thing that they were committed to doing for refugees; that a number of workable proposals were given but no one has said “this is what I am going to do for refugees”, which she found disappointing, advising that she didn’t know what she was going to be able to report back to the community waiting for her to return and report what had taken place.
In response to the participant in the Women’s Dialogue, the Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) stated that the participants in the Women’s Dialogues could report that they had been given several very important forums to express concerns, that they had been listened to with a lot of interest and concern and that they had been heard. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) advised that UNHCR has consistently said that they would like a clear link between the dialogue process and the pledging process. If the participants do not take away specific commitments, she stated that she hoped that they could say with authority and belief that the sorts of recommendations that they have made, practical and many simple, will be reflected in the pledges that will be made by the principal providers of protection to refugees ie. governments. UNHCR is strongly encouraging that what has been heard will be translated into commitments at the government pledging process in December. A preliminary report on the Annual Consultations was being finalised, with a focus on avenues for activity and improvement, together with a document of generic pledges including on Women and Girls and SGBV. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) acknowledged that this sounded like a heavy bureaucratic process, and for people who have waited a long time, and for whom hardship is a prevalent part of daily life, it is hard to be patient. But she suggested UNCHR counterparts be given some time to digest what they’ve heard. UNHCR has developed a general strategy for ADGM with an accountability framework which requires, on a cascading basis from the High Commissioner to the officers in the field, that are number of things are done, seen to be done, reported to be done and responsibility is assumed.

There has been recent dialogue with coordinators for SGBV in a number of key operations around the world where it is a prevalent issue, covering discussions to improve interventions through to the advocacy level. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) reported that the next AGDM participatory process will hopefully have an SGBV theme. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) acknowledged that when the participants asked for commitments from NGOs there was limited response, and noted that this was something to reflect upon and she hoped the NGO community feels as strongly about the issue as the participants in the Women’s Dialogues. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) finalised her comments by affirming “We’re not only advocates but we’re doers.”

The Refugee Council of Australia intervened in response to the participant for the Women’s Dialogues comments and advised that they would discuss with the Centre for Refugee Research what Australian NGOs will do to respond.

Care International intervened advising that they had recently approached the UNHCR office in Liberia about setting up joint accountability systems for SGBV, noting that it was well-received but there was generally a lack of knowledge. Care inquired how this issue could be moved forward, advising that UNHCR is not necessarily a preferred partner, with respect to program and funding timelines, stating that UNHCR programs are characterised by erratic timelines, for example, in situations such as Dahab, donors and hosts may cringe at the idea of long, protracted situations but our approach is more practical. Care stated that protection cluster partners are struggling, OCHA lacks operational background and UNICEF is very specialised focussing on children’s issues. In their experience, engaging UNHCR led to better outcomes.

Care was directed to discuss the issue with the Africa Bureau, and Janet Lim, the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) confirmed her support for partnerships, noting that there is a lot of capacity in the international community and that the collective accountability system is a very good idea. The Assistant High Commissioner stated that she accepted that in some situations funding can be quite erratic, and that partnerships are important for a multi-year perspective. In terms of clusters it was noted that coordinating a cluster is very different to representing a party’s own interests within a cluster.
Side Meetings

Advocacy within UNHCR’s governance structure – Side Meeting

Analysis
The session focus was the way in which NGOs can be more effective in influencing Ex Com decisions, including with recommendations from the Annual Consultations. The need for increased involvement of Global South NGOs in regional and global dialogues was highlighted. There was no mention of gender issues in the session, despite the opportunity increased advocacy would provide for vulnerable groups, and UNCHR’s own implementation of an AGDM framework across its operations.

Turning policy into practice: Implementing the SAFE guidance on cooking fuel – side meeting

This session was not documented.

Distance learning: A window of opportunity – side meeting

Analysis
The panel consisted of representatives from the Refugee Education Trust, Jesuit Refugee Service, World Education and York University all of whom discussed the details of distance learning programs they are currently implementing with refugee populations with a focus on improving camp life, and utilising modern advances in technology.

There was no gender dimension to the discussion, which is extremely disappointing and somewhat surprising given the known difficulties for women and girls accessing education.

Strengthening National RSD Systems – side meeting

Analysis
The stated objective of the session was to find ways for NGOs to work together and with UNHCR and States in strengthening national systems of RSD. Given the anniversary of the Convention, UNCHR stated they were advocating for governments to make pledges to improve or to take up initiatives in RSD and are seeking NGOs to help advocate and lobby governments to do this.

There was no discussion of gender issues during the side meeting. The failure to consider vulnerabilities specific to women and LGBTI groups in RSD could have been highlighted and discussed with recommendations made regarding appropriate advocacy to states on the issue.
Appendix A – Chart

Gender Mention by Indicator

- Women and Girls: 75
- HRIT: 2
- Handbook on Women and Girls: 4
- Sanitary Materials: 3
- LGBTI: 4
- SGBV: 2
- AGDM Framework: 2
- GDD: 9
- Accountability: 5
- Survival Sex: 4
- Livelihoods: 0

NB: The indicators HRIT, Handbook and Gender Aggregated Data and Gender Indicators: Focus and ProGram (GDD) were not mentioned.
Appendix B – Definition of indicators

AGDM Framework – Specific reference to UNHCR’s efforts to ‘mainstream’ gender and diversity considerations across their programming

Education of girls – Any specific reference to the education of girls and young women, including challenges that may prevent them from accessing education

Gender disaggregated data and UNHCR software programs Focus and progress – Specific mention of the collection of specific data related to gender and the capacity for disaggregation of this data. Includes any specific reference to the inclusion of gender indicators within UNHCR’s Focus or proGres software

Handbook on Women and Girls - Any specific reference to the Handbook on Women and Girls

HRIT – Any specific reference to the Heightened Risk Identification Tool

LGBTI – Any mention to the need of refugees who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender or intersex.

Livelihoods – Any specific mentions of livelihood programs for women

Monitoring and accountability – Any mention of efforts, by UNHCR or NGOs, to monitor and hold themselves accountable for the consideration of gender and diversity considerations, and particularly any mention by UNHCR of their AGDM Monitoring and Accountability Framework

Sanitary materials – Any reference to women’s sanitary materials, including challenges faced by women who do not have sufficient access to sanitary materials, and the challenges faced by UNHCR or NGOs in providing sanitary materials to refugee women

SGBV - Any reference to sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and domestic abuse

Survival sex – Any mention of women or girls being forced, by necessity, to engage in sex as a means of providing for their own basic needs, or the basic needs of their families

Women and Girls – Any mention of women or girls
Appendix C – Acronyms

AGDM – Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming
DRC – Democratic Republic of Congo
GBV - Gender-based violence
HRIT – Heightened Risk Identification Tool
IASC – Inter-agency standing committee
IDC – International Detention Coalition
IDP – Internally displaced person/peoples
IFRC – International Federation of the Red Cross
IOM – International Organisation for Migration
FBO – Faith Based Organisation
LGBTI – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
MENA – Middle East/North Africa
NGOs – Non government organisations
ORAM – The Organisation for Refuge, Asylum and Migration
PRS – Protracted refugee situations
PSEA – Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse
RBM – Rights Based Management
RSD - Refugee status determination
SEA – Sexual exploitation and abuse
SGBV – Sexual and gender-based violence
UN – United Nations
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees