

4. Livelihoods & Jobs	19
Livelihoods & Jobs Girls 0 12 years:	19
Livelihoods & Jobs Girls 13 17 years:	19
Livelihoods & Jobs Women 18 24 years and 25 50 years:.....	19
Livelihoods & Jobs Older Women:	22
Livelihoods & Jobs LGBTI Women:	22
Livelihoods & Jobs Women with disability:	22
Livelihoods & Jobs Widows:.....	22
5. Protection Capacity	23
Protection Capacity Girl 0 12 years:	24
Protection Capacity - Girls 13 17, Women 18 -24, and Women 25 50 years:	24
6. Energy, Housing, Health, Food, Water And Infrastructure	26
Girls 0 12 years:	27
Girls 13 17 years:	27
Women 18 24 and 25 50 years:	28
Older Women:.....	29
LBTI Women	29
7. Durable Solutions	30
Durable Solutions Girls 0 12 and 13 17 years:	31
Durable Solutions - Women 18 - 24 and 25 50 years and Widows:	31
Durable Solutions Older Women, LGBTI Women and Women with Disability:.....	31
Key Resources	32

Overview

This reference document highlights evidence collected from over 600 refugee women from 10 ethnic communities based in Malaysia, Thailand and Bangladesh between 2019 and 2021. This evidence speaks to the common experiences of women and girls as reported at all three sites. Recent work done in African Nations, Latin America and the Middle East also support these findings.

Given the strong focus on the importance of an Age Gender and Diversity¹ (AGD) approach in the implementation of the GCR, the women and men in each of the three countries completed an exercise using the AGD matrix as a tool of analysis. They examined the different impacts of seven thematic areas through the lens of eight diverse groups.

Their analysis clearly demonstrated the intersectionality of issues for each age group. They were very frank in naming problems and were very clear about root causes, and the structural issues which both caused and exacerbated the problems. While the intersectionality of the issues was clear in all thematic groups, the crosscut of SGBV, and the various barriers to participation across the majority of thematic areas were very stark.

The following data has been disaggregated on the basis of the seven key thematic areas and eight categories of diversity, listed as follows:

Thematic Areas

1. Sexual And Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)
2. Barriers To Participation And Decision Making
3. Education
4. Livelihoods And Jobs
5. Protection Capacity
6. Energy, Housing, Health, Food, Water And Infrastructure
7. Durable Solutions

Categories of Diversity

1. Girls 0 -12 years
2. Girls 13 -17 years
3. Women 18 -25 years
4. Women 25 -50 years
5. Older Women
6. Women with a disability
7. LGBTI Women
8. Single Women and Single Mothers.

¹ For UNHCR's AGD policy, see <https://www.unhcr.org/5aa13c0c7.pdf>

kind of practice negatively affect them and their family (Refugee man)

SGBV - Girls 18 24 years:

*“Women are raped in refugee camps... then when they run, at borders...., then here in Malaysia...in schools...in jobs....in the market... by the police”
(Refugee Woman, 2019)*

Once again rape and sexual abuse are endemic for this group, and women reported an alarming increase in domestic and family violence. Both married and single women are forced to seek illegal work which puts them in danger of sexual abuse. Women in this age group often

One refugee women leader commented on how important it had been to include the LGBTI category on the Matrix even though this was a difficult group for many women to talk about. In particular she highlighted the fact that while issues for transgender women were more frequently spoken of, lesbian women in the community remained a very hidden group.

LBTI the name that is new for them. They knew it in different way. So far, they have seen male – transgender to female. But female are not willing to talk about it. (Refugee woman Facilitator)

SGBV - Women with Disability:

The women reported that women and girls with a disability are stigmatised and discriminated against. They have less access to education and employment than other women and girls, and are consequently very vulnerable to SGBV. They suffer from very high levels of sexual abuse because of these issues.

“If they need to go out they have to take Taxis, and taxi drivers have raped women with a disability.”

In cases where a person with a severe disability has had a child of rape, they are often unable to care for the child. This affects their mental health and ability to cope at any level. It also puts an additional burden on their family.

SGBV Widows/Single Mothers:

This appears to be a generic term used by the interpreters to cover widows and all single women with children. In spite of the many types of violence experienced by women, and the high levels of DV, and drug and alcohol addictions amongst the men, the women stated that

Barriers to Participation Women 18 24 years:

Our culture might stop us women and girls to be a leader, but that does not stop me to lead my community, my family and my own self!" (Refugee Woman, 2019)

Women reported that there is a cultural expectation that fathers make decisions on behalf of their daughters until they are married, then husbands take on that role. They said that this is very hard to challenge, and that women who do are often victims of domestic violence.

and at times confined to their homes. These situations effectively prevent women with disabilities from any form of participation.

Barriers to Participation Widows/single mothers:

These women experience all of the barriers to participation listed above, with the additional stigma and burden of being a single mother.

3. Education

Education Girls 0 12 years:



(Refugee Woman. 2019)

Access to education was a major problem for all children and in particular for girls. Where family resources are limited often girls will be withdrawn from schools to assist with household chores while women go out to seek work.

Participants also reported incident of sexual abuse of young girls in the schools and on the way to school.

Education Girls 13 17 years:

“education is more important for boys than girls. So if our family can afford only one child to send to school, then they will obviously send the boys [rather] than to send the girls” (Refugee Woman 2019)

“We want them to go to school, but salary is not enough to pay the fees” (Refugee Woman 2019)

This group faces similar problems to those of younger girls. Girls in this age group (and even younger, as noted above) are often required to care for younger siblings and/or family members with a disability while their parents work, so cannot attend school. Lack of educational opportunities denies girls the protection this affords and contributes to early marriage and a cycle of disadvantage and violence for young mothers and their children. It leads to low self-esteem, loss of hope for the future, working in dangerous illegal jobs, and vulnerability to SGBV. It also fosters a loss of trust in adults in their community and of NGO service providers, who they see as often powerless to assist them.

“Girls miss opportunities for secondary education and vocational training because they are afraid of being sexually abused” (Refugee Woman 2019).

Education Women 18 24 years:

gender inequality. This restricts opportunities to make decisions in their own lives, and to take leadership roles in their communities. Lack of education is a contributing factor to early marriage and its consequences; and in a vicious cycle, early marriage also prevents girls from completing their education.

“For these women, there is lack of any higher education opportunity”. (Refugee Woman 2019)

Education Women 25 50 years:

By the time women reach 25, there is no opportunity for further education, nor remedial education to make up for lost opportunities. This ties women who have not had an adequate education to either home duties or illegal and dangerous work. It increases their vulnerability to SGBV and severely limits the possibility for leadership opportunities, participation and decision making. Participation in training offered is usually not available to these women.

Women identified that English language is the most important thing for them to get jobs or to

Education Single women/mothers:

As noted above, single women (in particular single mothers) face extreme difficulties in procuring sufficient food and other basics for survival. They have neither resources nor time to access education, and most often are unable to raise the fees for their children to attend school.

Livelihoods & Jobs Older Women:

The major work opportunity for older women is to care for their grandchildren. It was mentioned that they are seldom if ever given opportunities for livelihood training, despite having many skills, both due to cultural reasons, and as long term survivors in the camps.

Some elderly women

Livelihoods & Jobs LGBTI Women:

Unless they elected to keep their sexuality hidden, stigma and marginalisation excludes LGBTI women from training and job opportunities.

Livelihoods & Jobs Women with disability:

Lack of access to education, marginalisation and structural barriers all combined to exclude women with a disability from job opportunities, even though some of them have high levels of skills and knowledge. *“They might be very good at weaving or know a lot but [because they have a disability] no-one listens to them”.*

Livelihoods & Jobs Widows:

This group was identified as one of the most impoverished and vulnerable groups, facing enormous challenges to keep themselves and their ch

5. Protection Capacity

“A woman was raped by her violent husband and became pregnant, they could not even feed the children they had, and had no money for healthcare. She went to the hospital and begged for an abortion, and was told “You should have thought about it before you had unprotected sex – so it is your fault and you cannot have an abortion” (Refugee woman 2019)

While people are greatly appreciative of the support they receive, it is very difficult to live well without work and income. The distribution of food and non-food items also has many challenges. Many concerns were shared about overall insufficiency of aid, the location or abusive and discriminatory collection conditions.

Girls 0 12 years:

Unsafe shelter was discussed as the major problem for all age groups including young girls. Refugees cannot afford to rent homes by themselves so are forced to share housing often with strangers. Children left alone while their parents work, and who cannot attend school are at high risk. There are no safe spaces where the children can go to play. It was noted that unclean or distant water points and inadequate or poorly managed drains and sanitation in the camps significantly increase disease and safety risks in the camps, particularly for children.

Women discussed how the reduction in health services, and the decrease in the number of hospitals had a major impact on babies and young children. Camps are so widely spread that they reported that children with fever sometimes went into shock during the long journey to a hospital, and that some people had died, because they could not access medical care. Vaccination programs receive supplies to match the number of registered refugee children, but because unregistered refugees and people from the host population also access the hospital, some children are not vaccinated. The low level of food rations is affecting the health of all children, with cases of malnutrition starting to appear.

Girls 13 17 years:

As above, and it was reported that many children of this age could not attend school because they had to work to assist provide their families with basic goods. Again this was seen as a contributing factor to early marriage.

The reductions in humanitarian aid are leading to a much higher rate of child and early marriage and its consequences, including girls too young to give birth, bearing children. The loss of hospitals and distances which need to be traversed to reach them mean that very young pregnant girls are not getting the pre-natal support (or nutrition) they need. Girls are also beginning to show signs of malnutrition. Young girls often are allocated the task of collecting water, and this puts them in danger of harassment as they move through the camp and wait in queues. Teenage girls are reacting to the pressures and showing signs of anxiety and depression or going out of the camp to work illegally in places which exposes them to high risk of sexual exploitation.

Women 18 24 and 25 50 years:

Participants discussed problems in being able to get enough rations and cash to survive. They were often requested to provide sex to landlords.

“The owner’s brother asked her ‘You are a refugee, how you are rented the house?’, so she said ‘Your sister already know about this’. So the police offer said ‘OK, you can stay our house rental period if I ask to sex with me you can continue stay in the house’” (Refugee Woman, 2019).

It was discussed that only having a UNHCR card as identity made women very vulnerable to this sort of abuse, as the landlords thought they could abuse them with impunity, and there is a high level of difficulty in securing rental accommodation.

The women reported that at times they could not get enough food for their families, or medicine or transport. While they did have access to local hospitals, they discussed being sexually abused by guards and medical personnel.

“.. sometimes the Doctors do the harassment – This is really happen!”. (Refugee Woman 2019)

Often women could not afford medication and this forced them to take and to remain in employment where they were being sexually abused but saw no alternative.

“These women are of childbearing age, and there is no affordable health care for them, so things go wrong” (Refugee Woman 2019)

Women reported that there was only short term shelter available for women fleeing violence. This was also not safe, with many cases of rape and harassment in the shelter.

They are advised to go and find a job, but if they do, there is no-one to look after the children. They just have to leave them in an unsafe space while they work. After one month the women have to leave and often return to their abusive husbands because they have nowhere else to go”.

Reductions in energy provision and Infrastructure have been exacerbated by the reductions of services. In the dry season, women and children often queue all day to find that there is no water when they get to the front of the queue. Some are having to scavenge for food. The standard of housing is deteriorating because of lack of building materials. Inadequate charcoal supply means that if a family cannot reach the few filtered water pumps, they are not able to boil the water they drink, unless they leave the camps to forage for firewood. These conditions are forcing many women to work illegally outside the camps. Others are resorting to survival sex as a means to feed their families. The inadequate supply of all basic provisions is causing stress, family conflict and mental health problems, and women reported a large increase in suicide and suicidal thoughts. The large increase of drug and alcohol use and its impacts was a major theme. Women reported that while it is mainly a male problem, some women were also using drugs and alcohol, and so the impacts cut across all age groups. It is having an extremely negative affect on family life, causing an increase in DV, and using scarce family resources. Younger children are taking the example of their older siblings, and starting to take drugs at an early age. This all increases the burden of responsibility already carried by the women. The lack of building materials is leading to constantly decreasing standards of shelter, made worse in the

Older Women:

As already marginalised and stigmatised groups, the participants saw the situation of these women as very similar. They experienced additional difficulties because of the reduction in humanitarian aid to those living in families, and suffered more SGBV when trying to fulfil their most basic needs. It was reported that even if they could acquire building materials often there was no-one to assist them to repair their houses. The elderly and those with disabilities were often isolated because of the poor state of roads and pathways.

There are no specialised physical or mental health care services available to this group, many of whom have been in exile for years. They have a lot of health issues but cannot afford to get help.

LBTI Women

As already marginalised and stigmatised groups, the participants saw the situation of these women as very similar.

7. Durable Solutions

The major cross-cut for this theme for the women was with protection capacity, as an uncertain future looms large in their minds.

Women raised statelessness, or the perception of statelessness, as a key problem which affected women across all categories. being a citizen of any country.

“We need a document which gives us a state, to be a citizenwe are not able to live in our country as we are living here. We are still blessed and thankful to Malaysia. That is another reason why we really want to contribute for that. We also thankful to NGO to UNHCR who help us to stay in this country. we are really thankful that we were able to live in this country, breathing—in our country, if we were in our country we would have been killed, chopped, burned alive. So we are thankful to be in this country.. . . . At least if we have that document we can be standing on our own feet.

Because of not having this document, we are not allowed to work if we request a job we are not accepted, we cannot study, cannot go to school. Because of not having documents, it's hard to survive. It is so many big issue to being undocumented, we are not even accepted in hospitals” (Refugee woman 2019)

“We are able to bring benefit to this country – we can be contributors” (Refugee Woman 2019)

Durable Solutions Girls 0 12 and 13 17 years:

Durable solutions for children were entirely in the hands of their parents. There were reports of family violence and despair when children asked parents why they had brought them to this terrible life, and requested to go back to their home country even though most had been born in the camps.

Durable Solutions - Women 18 - 24 and 25 50 years and Widows:

Mature women across these age groups reported that they had little choice in major decisions on Durable Solutions. Most married women are dependent on the decisions and status of their husbands. Lack of education and family violence which exacerbate the lack of opportunities for participation in decision making render them silent. Only a small number of extremely vulnerable single women have access to resettlement. All discussed the fear of forced return. They requested more information about what was happening from the governments, UNHCR and NGOs. Women stated that they are often not given information and that even their fathers and husbands could not access this at times. This leads to rumour, misinformation, myths and speculation, which causes disquiet, mistrust and a sense of hopelessness. Unfortunately, this in turn contributes to an increase in family disharmony and antisocial behaviour. The women stated the need for a guarantee of security and an end to conflict before they can consider

Key Resources

1. Refugee Women and Girls: Key to the Global Compact on Refugees: Bangladesh Final Report
2. Refugee Women and Girls: Key to the Global Compact on Refugees: Malaysia Final Report
3. Refugee Women and Girls: Key to the Global Compact on Refugees: Thailand Final Report