

# AGE, GENDER AND DIVERSITY REPORT 2021



Promising Practices from Europe

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**COVER PHOTOGRAPH:**

*UNHCR helps victims of gender-based violence. Greece, 9 November 2021*

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# Introduction

**Throughout 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic entered its second year, UNHCR country operations continued to advance age, gender and diversity (AGD) inclusive programming and advocacy to address the adverse effects of the pandemic on persons of concern and to promote accountability to affected people (AAP), in line with the core actions of UNHCR’s Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD Policy).<sup>1</sup>**

UNHCR and its partners across the region applied the age, gender and diversity approach to address the needs of persons of concern, while building on their capacities, abilities and resilience. In 2021, UNHCR and partners also advanced targeted activities to prevent, respond to and mitigate the risk of gender-based violence (GBV), to advocate for the protection of children, and to work with LGBTIQ+ persons, older persons and persons with disabilities.

In line with its 2021-2025 Strategic Priorities, UNHCR’s Regional Bureau for Europe completed two in-depth surveys in 2021: (i) a survey on GBV against refugees and other persons of concern and (ii) a survey on community engagement and communication with communities. The two surveys informed UNHCR’s priority actions at regional level, including the issuance of GBV grants to country operations with Safe from the Start funding and the development of child-friendly information material.

In addition, UNHCR commissioned in-depth research on child-friendly and gender-sensitive asylum systems in Europe and organized a regional conference for refugee-led organizations, refugee leaders, volunteers and outreach workers, in collaboration with the European Coalition for Refugees and Migrants.<sup>2</sup> Throughout 2021, the Community-Based Protection (CBP) Working Group conducted regular meetings and thematic webinars, including on the use of social media for CBP, the protection of persons with disabilities, and working with refugee-led organizations. Promising practices were documented and regularly disseminated to further advance AGD mainstreaming and targeted action.

This report provides a sample of some of UNHCR’s activities in 2021 to implement the 10 Core Actions of UNHCR’s AGD Policy in the Europe region.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR’s Age, Gender and Diversity Policy is available at: [www.unhcr.org/5aa13c0c7.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/5aa13c0c7.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The webpage of the European Coalition for Refugees and Migrants is available at: [www.europeancoalition.org/](http://www.europeancoalition.org/)

# Age, Gender and Diversity Inclusive Programming



## Age, Gender and Diversity-inclusive Programming

At a minimum, all data collected by UNHCR will be disaggregated by age and sex and by other diversity considerations, as contextually appropriate and where possible, for the purposes of analysis and programming.

In Europe, data regarding persons of concern is largely collected by national authorities rather than by UNHCR or other humanitarian agencies. UNHCR advocates for data on persons of concern to be collected and disaggregated by age, sex and other diversity considerations, including through the promotion of the Washington Group Questions to identify persons of concern with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

In 2021 in **Ukraine**, for example, UNHCR rolled out a protection monitoring tool in over 150 settlements in the vicinity of the contact line in Eastern Ukraine. Partners conducted more than 800 interviews (of which 72 per cent were with women) and verified the results through focus group discussions, having covered a total population of over 360,000 persons of concern. The exercise allowed for enhanced data on persons of concern, disaggregated by age, sex and diversity, to inform and design programming, including for Humanitarian and Development Nexus (HDN) projects.

In **Greece**, UNHCR launched a series of exercises on the Aegean islands, followed by urban mainland areas, to collect data on asylum-seeker and refugee professional, education, skills and language profiles, used for advocacy with the Government and Greek public, highlighting the potential contributions of refugees to the Greek labour market.

In **Serbia**, UNHCR conducted a mapping of community stakeholders aimed at developing a focused stakeholder analysis of asylum-seekers, refugees and other categories of vulnerable persons among the mixed migration flows. This analysis aimed to help in the development of internal strategies and external partnerships and employed different data collection methods. As the result, 600 stakeholders from local communities were identified in 14 locations across the country. The final products of the exercise—maps of main and most relevant local community stakeholders in the surroundings of State-run centres—were disseminated for further use in all State-run centres.

<sup>3</sup> The Washington Group Questions are available at: [www.cdc.gov/nchs/washington\\_group/wg\\_questions.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/washington_group/wg_questions.htm)

A refugee from Yemen, spray painting a graffiti she was invited by the UNHCR to create during the Bayeux Calvados-Normandy Award for war correspondents in Bayeux, France, 6 October, 2021



© UNHCR/Kate Thompson-Gorry

At the regional level, UNHCR's Regional Protection Monitoring System (RPMS) was launched in 2021. The system includes disaggregation by age, gender and specific needs, including disabilities, using the Washington Group Questions.

The Regional Bureau for Europe regularly releases a range of external information products with disaggregated data on persons of concern. For example, arrival data for the Mediterranean situation is disaggregated (or estimated) by age group and sex and displayed on UNHCR's Operational Data Portal.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the joint UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM fact sheet on Refugee and Migrant Children

in Europe provides a detailed breakdown on the age and sex of accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children arriving in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

To the extent possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR offices in Europe continued to conduct participatory assessments with persons of concern and use these assessments to inform and adjust programming and advocacy interventions. Across the region, such assessments took place in 17 countries in 2021, consulting with refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons about key protection challenges and solutions.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR's Operational Data Portal for the Mediterranean Situation is available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

<sup>5</sup> The joint UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM fact sheet on Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe is available at: [www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2020/06/UNHCR-UNICEF-and-IOM\\_Refugee-and-Migrant-children-in-Europe-2019.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2020/06/UNHCR-UNICEF-and-IOM_Refugee-and-Migrant-children-in-Europe-2019.pdf)

# Accountability to Affected People



## Participation and Inclusion

At a minimum, country operations will employ participatory methodologies at each stage of the operations management cycle, to incorporate the capacities and priorities of women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds into protection, assistance, and solutions programmes.

In **Georgia**, UNHCR conducted semi-structured discussions with persons of concern in detention facilities, which allowed the office to further analyse issues of access to territory and asylum procedures. The participatory assessments also facilitated direct dialogue between persons of concern, the national asylum authorities and representatives of the Ombudsman's office.

In **Armenia**, with the active engagement of several stakeholders, phone calls, house and site visits, and key informant interviews were conducted with 75 asylum-seekers, refugees and persons in a refugee-like situation. The questionnaire was developed based on the UNHCR Needs Assessment Handbook and UNHCR Protection Monitoring Kobo Toolbox. As a follow-up to the assessment, a results validation workshop was organized to ensure that the main protection needs and concerns of persons of concern to UNHCR had been adequately identified and prioritized, and that its findings and recommendations were communicated back to persons of concern and other stakeholders that took part.

In **Greece**, UNHCR organized monthly information sessions with 13 refugee-led organizations in Athens, as well as capacity-building of 75 community mobilizers linked to six municipalities in northern Greece. Direct information sessions were also organized for asylum-seekers in Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and GBV. More than 120 women GBV community focal points were empowered to serve as resources for their communities, and a community workforce of 15 refugees continued to provide psychosocial support in three languages (Arabic, Farsi and French). A household survey with 787 men and women respondents was conducted on perceptions about intimate partner violence and awareness of available services.

In **Serbia**, a participatory assessment was organized on the theme of acceptance and inclusion. The results of the exercise showed the varying levels of acceptance of refugees in different parts of the country, with participants underscoring the importance of artistic and cultural events for the inclusion of refugees and in building positive relations with host communities.

Throughout the region, UNHCR has been advancing participation and inclusion through engagement and support to a wide range of **initiatives, organizations, advisory boards and committees led by persons of concern**. More than 1,370 volunteers, outreach workers and coordinators from affected communities engage with UNHCR and its partners on a regular basis across the region.

One of the promising practices in the region is the PartecipAzione programme in Italy, run by UNHCR and INTERSOS with the aim to build the capacity and empower refugee-led organizations and community-based organizations, and foster the protection and integration of persons of concern and their participation in the country's economic, social and cultural life.<sup>6</sup> Since 2018, 40 organizations have taken part in PartecipAzione and received dedicated support, including 1) intensive training; 2) tailored mentoring and technical support; 3) micro-grants for implementation of their selected projects; and 4) networking, by enhancing its networks with donors, government entities and other civil society actors. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a dedicated online platform, the PartecipAzione Lab, has also been established.<sup>7</sup>

In **Bulgaria**, the Refugee Advisory Board, with the support of UNHCR, brought together ten members from five countries to promote community-based myth-busting and rumour management. An online platform was made available in four languages (Arabic, Bulgarian, English and Farsi) and was used to share reliable and up-to-date information on refugee issues both for refugee communities and the broader Bulgarian public.<sup>8</sup> In 2021, the Refugee Advisory Board also acted as the national coordinator of Coursera for Refugees, an online

skills platform, disseminating information and assisting refugees to take part in the available courses,<sup>9</sup> and was registered as an independent NGO that can implement advocacy activities and provide direct services to refugees.

In **Belgium**, two national associations joined the seven Refugee Committees established and supported by UNHCR, while existing committees were further consolidated and strengthened. UNHCR organized several trainings on the code of conduct, confidentiality and PSEA for the newly formed Umbrella Refugee Committee.

UNHCR **Turkey** remained engaged with refugee communities through various community structures, with more than 2,800 refugees involved. There are 40 Refugee Committees supported by UNHCR, which collects information on protection risks and conducts referral of persons with special needs. The Refugee Committees also participate in provincial coordination meetings and the meetings of city councils.

Other mechanisms of community engagement in Turkey include outreach volunteers, community leaders and other community structures. In 2021, UNHCR Turkey engaged with 45 refugee-led organizations from 21 provinces. This included ad-hoc cooperation for activity implementation, financial support, outreach, networking and joint assistance distribution.

Smaller UNHCR offices are also advancing in community outreach and participation. A Refugee Outreach Coordinator was recruited in **Switzerland** and conducted a mapping of community networks, identifying more than 21 refugee communities in 2021 alone. As a result, UNHCR Switzerland has learned more about the key needs, challenges

<sup>6</sup> The webpage of the PartecipAzione programme is available at: [www.partecipazionerifugiati.org/](http://www.partecipazionerifugiati.org/)

<sup>7</sup> The PartecipAzioneLab is available at: [www.partecipazioneilab.org/](http://www.partecipazioneilab.org/)

<sup>8</sup> The online platform is available at: <https://rumorfree.org/en/>

<sup>9</sup> For more information about Coursera for Refugees, see: [www.coursera.org/](http://www.coursera.org/)

and strengths of the refugee communities in Switzerland. UNHCR facilitated a two-day workshop with refugee community representatives, where it was decided to focus on (i) opportunities for funding community-based activities, (ii) enhancing participation in decision-making on issues that affect persons of concern (including through the Refugee Parliament), and (iii) identifying community resources and establishing a strong network together with other stakeholders.

In **Austria**, UNHCR continued to support the UNHCR Refugee Team, a body with gender-diverse participation from different refugee communities in the country. The Refugee Team serves as a discussion forum and promotes collaboration among and within different refugee communities.

In **Lithuania**, through the Artscape integration project, UNHCR supported the Lithuanian Refugee Council, the first national refugee-led organization in the country. The project also sought to address integration challenges by creating synergies between “informal” integration platforms and the formal integration system and by engaging refugees as service providers and volunteers in community outreach. In 2020 and 2021, activities included transformative art education, creative workshops, cultural exchange and communication strategies for local communities.

At the regional level, UNHCR and the Migration Policy Group released the Municipalities Toolkit ‘**Effective inclusion of refugees: Participatory approaches for practitioners at the local level**’.<sup>10</sup> The Toolkit provides practical guidance for municipal authorities, civil societies and service

providers on participatory assessments and the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in programmes and services. The toolkit was developed and tested with stakeholders from seven pilot countries and aims to help local practitioners to assess, plan, design, implement and evaluate initiatives in cities and municipalities in Europe and beyond together with refugees. It consists of a handbook with a step-by-step guide, a scorecard to assess existing initiatives and identify good practices, an explanatory and a promotional video, as well as a flyer.<sup>11</sup>

### Supporting and promoting refugee-led organizations

Based on the strong tradition of volunteerism and civil society engagement found in many European countries, UNHCR proactively maps, supports and provides opportunities for refugee-led organizations to advance the protection of refugees at the local, national and regional levels.

In 2021, UNHCR published an ‘Issue Brief on Working with Refugee-Led Organizations in Europe’ to highlight the promising practices already in place in the Europe region and the lessons learned.<sup>12</sup> The three positive practices highlighted were:

- ① Promising practice #1: Capacity-building and training
- ② Promising practice #2: Advancing visibility and networking opportunities
- ③ Promising practice #3: Start-up support and grants

<sup>10</sup> The Toolkit is available at: [www.unhcr.org/effective-inclusion-of-refugees.html](http://www.unhcr.org/effective-inclusion-of-refugees.html)

<sup>11</sup> The Toolkit is available at: [www.unhcr.org/municipalities-toolkit](http://www.unhcr.org/municipalities-toolkit)

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, Issue brief - Promising practices from working with refugee-led organizations in Europe, available at: [www.unhcr.org/6155893a4](http://www.unhcr.org/6155893a4). The term refugee-led organizations (RLOs) is understood as organizations either entirely established and led by refugees, or those with refugees in more than 50 per cent of the organization’s positions of leadership and decision-making, and which are providing advocacy, protection and/or assistance to their communities. This includes women-led organizations, youth-led organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities that are inclusive of refugees.

UNHCR and the European Coalition for Refugees and Migrants (EU-COMAR)<sup>13</sup> organized the ‘Refugee Re-Connect’ conference in online format in September 2021, which brought together 175 refugee-led organizations, refugee leaders, activists and advocates, stateless representatives, outreach workers and community volunteers across the region to exchange and advance on the state of refugee leadership and participation in Europe. The participants attended from 27 countries in Europe and represented 30 different nationalities.

In order to ensure refugee leadership throughout the event, a core group of refugees from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Norway and Spain acted as a Reference Group and advised on the topics and format, facilitated the event itself, and organized breakout sessions in World Café-format to discuss topics more in-depth, with UNHCR present only in a supporting role.

The conference report, which was adopted by the Reference Group, set out concrete recommendations to local and national actors, civil society, donors, international organizations and refugee-led organizations in Europe in three thematic areas; (i) refugee leadership and participation; (ii) civic engagement; and (iii) access to the labour market.<sup>14</sup>

Among the recommendations was a call for further platforms for capacity-building and exchange between refugee-led organizations at regional level, which UNHCR will follow up on in partnership with New Women’s Connectors and EU-COMAR in 2022.

The new UNHCR CBO grant agreements were piloted in Europe in 2021. UNHCR in Switzerland, for example, initiated a partnership with the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) to conduct capacity-building of refugee parliamentarians in the ‘Refugee Parliaments’ in Switzerland.<sup>15</sup> Roll-out of the grant agreements will continue in 2022, with dedicated funding at regional level.

UNHCR operations across the region continued to maintain and expand two-way communication with persons of concern through a variety of channels, such as hotlines, dedicated email addresses, in-person counselling and reception hours, information sessions for new arrivals, and audio-visual and written material. Across the region, 21 UNHCR offices actively used social media and mobile applications to communicate with person of concern, including through Facebook, WhatsApp and Viber.

New UNHCR HELP pages were launched in Albania, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Italy, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom in 2021.<sup>16</sup> At the end of 2021, 24 countries in Europe had a dedicated UNHCR HELP page to share information with refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons. In response to events in Afghanistan, all these pages were updated with information for family members and members of Afghan communities living in Europe.

Refugee Outreach Coordinators in Hungary continued to contribute to two-way communication with persons of concern, supported by the Refugee Outreach Working Group. In Georgia, UNHCR and World Vision supported 16 persons of

<sup>13</sup> The webpage of the European Coalition for Refugees and Migrants is available at: [www.europeancoalition.org/](http://www.europeancoalition.org/)

<sup>14</sup> The Refugee Re-Connect Conference report is available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90132>

<sup>15</sup> For more information about the National Coalition Building Institute, please see: [www.ncbi.ch/fr/](http://www.ncbi.ch/fr/)

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR HELP is available at: <https://help.unhcr.org/>

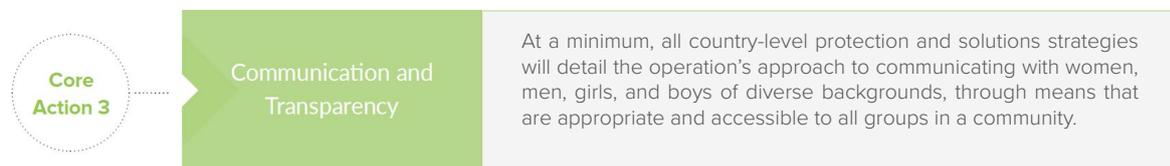
concern to act as Community Group Facilitators, who, after training by UNHCR, supported two-way communication with and provision of information to the wider community, established peer-to-peer groups, and contributed to meetings with the authorities.

With the support of the Community Group Facilitators, UNHCR managed to reach some 90 per cent of all persons of concern living in **Georgia**. The Community Group Facilitators also supported the identification of potential candidates for livelihood projects and job opportunities and supported their communities with information on how to cope with the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNHCR **Serbia** continued to strengthen communication and transparency through use

of digital and online tools and innovative means of communications, such as songs, theatre and school contests. Through regular interactions with persons of concern, UNHCR and partners identified their information and communication needs, and utilized multiple communication channels to reach persons accommodated in reception centres (including through WhatsApp, Instagram, Viber, Messenger, and Facebook Groups).

In **France**, refugee volunteers from UNHCR's networks took part in several Working Groups with the inter-ministerial delegation responsible for reception and integration of refugees (Diair) and other partners, including to support the dissemination of information to refugees through [réfugiés.info](http://refugiés.info).<sup>17</sup>



At regional level, UNHCR organized **thematic webinars to enhance the capacity of staff and partners** on the use of social media for community-based protection and on the management of rumours and misinformation among refugee communities, presenting concrete examples and lessons learned from the rumorfree platform run by the Refugee Advisory Board in Bulgaria,<sup>18</sup> the WhatsApp trees and helplines used to communicate with refugees in Greece during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Turkey Information Board on Facebook, which includes live sessions and podcasts on relevant topics.<sup>19</sup>

A number of channels are in use to receive feedback and complaints from persons of concern, including dedicated email addresses (in 31 countries), hotlines or call centres (in 27 countries), complaints boxes in reception centres or at service delivery points (in 18 countries), complaints boxes in UNHCR's offices (in 8 countries) and online feedback and complaint forms (in 11 countries). Above all, regular and in-person interaction with communities remains an important channel for feedback for all of UNHCR's offices across the region.

<sup>17</sup> The information page for refugees and asylum-seekers is available at: <http://refugiés.info>

<sup>18</sup> The rumorfree platform in Bulgaria is available at: <https://rumorfree.org/en/>

<sup>19</sup> The Turkey Information Board is available at: [www.facebook.com/unhcrturkeyinfo/](http://www.facebook.com/unhcrturkeyinfo/)

In **Armenia**, for example, management of the hotline was streamlined to ensure better feedback, complaint and response mechanisms, and maintenance of transparency and accountability. The hotline was enhanced with professional operators a new referral mechanisms, and timely and flexibly arranged translation services). The hotline serves as an important complement to the use of written information materials, dedicated emails and the complaints box.

In 2021, UNHCR **Greece** continued the operation of its helplines in Athens and the Aegean islands and maintained an open channel of communication with persons of concern, including to receive feedback and complaints. Data from the helpline was used for referrals to national authorities and service providers, as well as to map trends, inform advocacy efforts and plan interventions, such as specific information sessions based on the needs expressed by refugees and asylum-seekers.

At regional level, UNHCR supported country operations with sample Standard Operating Procedures for feedback and complaints from persons of concern in smaller offices.

The results of participatory assessments are regularly used to prioritize and design UNHCR programmes, activities, communications and advocacy toward national authorities and other stakeholders in the region.

In **Austria**, for example, UNHCR organized an online meeting with a provincial facility for unaccompanied and separated children in April 2021, which was attended by members of

parliament responsible for family affairs. This gave the parliamentarians the possibility to hear directly from refugee and asylum-seeking children themselves, as well as from staff members of the facility, on the importance of guardianship and appropriate supervision and care, and to better adapt their policy interventions to address the children's needs and priorities.

In **Greece**, knowledge of the Greek language was identified as the main barrier to integration and access to services by asylum-seekers and refugees themselves during participatory assessments. To address this need, UNHCR redirected and reinforced its teaching staff in the reception facilities on the islands to support Greek language classes for adults.

UNHCR in Europe strives for the **equal and meaningful participation of women and girls** in any management and leadership structures it supports, as well as in events, capacity-building and assessments.

Elderly Syrian among first refugees in Greece to receive COVID-19 vaccine. Greece, 4 February, 2021



© UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

Core Action 4

Feedback and Response

At a minimum, all UNHCR operations will establish and promote feedback and response systems, including for confidential complaints.

Across the region, 60 per cent of volunteers, outreach workers and community facilitators who regularly engage with UNHCR and partners are women, and 70 per cent of the members of the Committees and Advisory Boards led by persons of concern are women.

Participation of women and girls in refugee leadership structures is particularly strong in Turkey. Efforts continue to reach gender parity in refugee structures and committees in other countries. In Belgium, for example, UNHCR continued to support a separate Women’s Refugee Committee and appointed a woman as refugee liaison officer to enhance its outreach to refugee women and girls.

According to the 2021 participatory assessment in **Greece**, refugee women were less likely to be aware of community representation structures, and

less likely to access information, than refugee men. In reception facilities where women-dedicated spaces existed, women were found to have increased access to information, representation structures and Greek language training.

During the **‘Refugee Re-Connect’** conference organized by UNHCR and the European Coalition for Migrants and Refugees in September 2021, 67 per cent of participants and 60 per cent of the facilitators were refugee women. A partnership with a regional refugee- and woman-led organization will be pursued in 2022 to implement the recommendations from the conference.



© UNHCR/Alessio Mammi

Core Action 5

Organizational Learning and Adaptation

At a minimum, UNHCR operations will adapt programmes and strategies in response to input from persons of concern, and document this in Country Operations Plans and Annual Reporting.

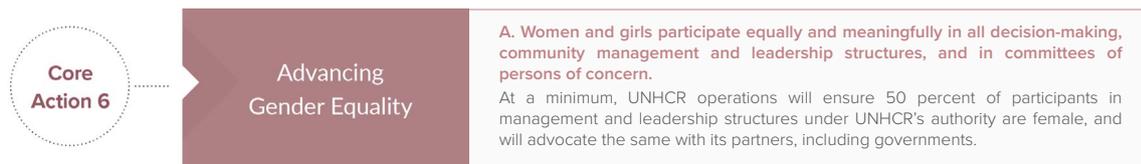
While UNHCR does not provide individual registration and documentation in Europe, it advocates as needed to ensure that women and girls receive individual registration and documentation.

UNHCR's approach is not to provide food, core-relief items or cash-based interventions in Europe, but rather to seek socioeconomic inclusion through effective access to the market system, social protection, programmes and services for refugees, including for refugee women. Implementation of livelihoods and cash-based interventions activities is considered a measure of last resort to be taken only in exceptional circumstances or if such inclusion is not possible.

UNHCR's approach to social protection, education and health for refugees in Europe is to advocate

for effective inclusion into existing structures and services. The importance of ensuring equal opportunities for women and girls is consistently considered in both operational and advocacy initiatives. Access to services, including sexual and reproductive services, is heavily reliant on the availability and accessibility of information, and the priority placed on communication with communities has been critical to progressing toward this objective.

# Advancing Gender Equality

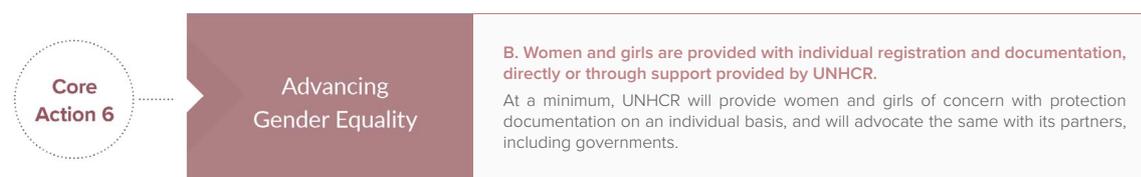


in the **United Kingdom**, for example, through a UNHCR project with an NGO partner, digital literacy courses were provided to refugee women and the equipment used for the course was donated to the NGO to be made available for the use of the project beneficiaries.

UNHCR in **Croatia** implemented a Refugee Internship programme with IKEA in 2021, having selected the participants in line with AGD principles. As a result, among the 15 identified candidates, seven were women. UNHCR also supported the Winter Bazaar organized by the Women to Women NGO from Zagreb. All proceeds from the Bazaar went to the women who produced the items for sale.

At regional level, UNHCR and the Liaison Office to the Council of Europe contributed to the drafting and negotiations of the Gender Equality Commission's **Committee of Ministers Recommendation** on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls.<sup>20</sup>

The Regional Bureau for Europe also contributed to the drafting of an **advocacy paper on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic** on refugee and migrant women and girls in Europe, under the umbrella of the Issue Based Coalition on Large Movement of People, Displacement and Resilience (LMPDR).<sup>21</sup>



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<sup>20</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, available online at: [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680a69407](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680a69407)

<sup>21</sup> The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees and Migrants and Building Back Better, available online at: <https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/gendered-impact-covid-19-refugees-and-migrants-and-building-back-better>

**Core Action 6**

**Advancing Gender Equality**

**C. Women and girls have equal access to and control over management and provision of food, core-relief items, and cash-based interventions.**

Depending on the context, UNHCR operations will increase the percentage of women who are the primary recipients of assistance within households and receive material and/or cash-based assistance.

UNHCR’s approach is not to provide food, core-relief items or cash-based interventions in Europe, but rather to seek socioeconomic inclusion through effective access to the market system, social protection, programmes and services for

refugees, including for refugee women. Implementation of livelihoods and cash-based interventions activities is considered a measure of last resort to be taken only in exceptional circumstances or if such inclusion is not possible.

**Core Action 6**

**Advancing Gender Equality**

**D. Women and girls have equal access to economic opportunities, including decent work and quality education and health services**

At a minimum, UNHCR will ensure that women and girls have equal access to livelihood, education and health programmes it delivers, and will advocate with partners, including governments, for their equal access to public services

UNHCR’s approach to social protection, education and health for refugees in Europe is to advocate for effective inclusion into existing structures and services. The importance of ensuring equal opportunities for women and girls is consistently considered in both operational and advocacy initiatives. Access to services, including sexual and reproductive services, is heavily reliant on the availability and accessibility of information, and the priority placed on communication with communities has been critical to progressing toward this objective.

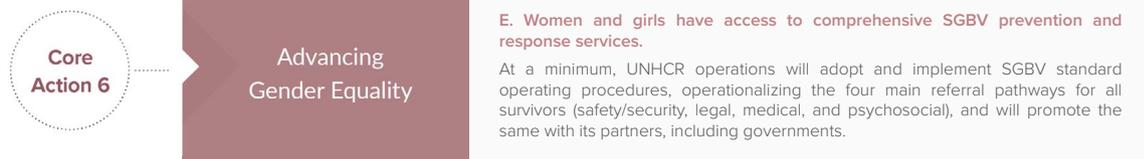
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The Regional Bureau for Europe also contributed to the drafting of an advocacy paper on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugee and migrant women and girls in Europe, under the umbrella of the Issue Based Coalition on Large Movement of People, Displacement and Resilience (LMPDR).



In April 2021, UNHCR finalized the **regional survey on GBV against refugees and other persons of concern**, which analysed common trends and challenges, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey highlighted significant challenges in prevention, risk mitigation and response to GBV, such as:

- the lack of comprehensive and reliable data on GBV against persons of concern;
- gaps in early identification and referral of persons with specific needs, including survivors of GBV;
- practical and administrative barriers to accessing national GBV services;
- unsafe or substandard reception and accommodation facilities;
- inadequate accommodation for unaccompanied children, families and LGBTIQ+ persons;
- varied implementation of safeguards for persons with specific needs within the asylum system, with particular challenges related to the assessment of credibility.

Underreporting of GBV was reported across the region, in particular due to lack of trust in service providers and government authorities, fear of retaliation, and misperceptions about the impact of reporting on the outcome of asylum procedures and on residency status.

The survey put forward a number of **concrete recommendations for GBV programming and advocacy in Europe, including:**

- advocating for enhanced data on GBV;
- early identification and referral of persons with specific needs;
- enhanced safety and mitigation measures in reception facilities;
- addressing the practical and administrative barriers to accessing national GBV services, including for male and LGBTIQ+ survivors;
- enhanced information provision on the rights and services available to GBV survivors;
- integrating procedural and evidentiary safeguards for GBV survivors in asylum systems;
- stronger collaboration with women-led organizations and LGBTIQ+ organizations; and
- capacity-building and awareness-raising for frontline staff.

While the survey report is internal, a summary paper on **'GBV Prevention, Risk Mitigation and Response: Promising Practices and Recommendations for The Way Forward'** was issued in October 2021 to highlight the key findings and recommendations.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, GBV Prevention, Risk Mitigation and Response in Europe: Promising Practices and Recommendations for the Way Forward, available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90962>

With Safe from the Start funding, the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe supported small projects to promote the roll-out of the GBV Policy in ten countries in the region (**Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland**, and the **United Kingdom**).

In **Armenia**, Standard Operating Procedures for GBV were updated and GBV Working Group meetings organized to strengthen coordination and collaboration among partners. Ten women support group meetings were conducted and a training was held for partner staff.

In **Bulgaria**, refugee women and girls developed leaflets in Arabic, Bulgarian, Farsi and Pashto, which highlighted the different types of GBV, the rights of survivors, and organizations that can provide help to them. One of the leaflets was aimed to sensitize men and boys. The leaflets use culturally appropriate language and visuals, and the key messages were drafted in consultation with the refugee community.

In **Greece**, through door-to-door outreach, UNHCR's partner DIOTIMA engaged refugee women in activities at the Women's Safe Space. Activities included information sessions and integration workshops and ensured that women became more aware of their rights in Greece, relevant GBV services, and areas where GBV incidents frequently occur. Activities in the centre also sought to change perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes, and to address these through concrete action.

In **Hungary**, UNHCR and the Women for Women against Violence Association (NANE) established a GBV identification and referral pathway, in collaboration with other NGOs and service

providers.<sup>23</sup> A counselling hotline on GBV was set up in English and trainings were conducted for partners and persons of concern. The PATENT Association, an NGO providing free legal aid to survivors of GBV, conducted a training for UNHCR and partner staff on the legal aspects of GBV case management, and shared an analysis of the national legal framework in Hungary.

In **Malta**, UNHCR partner Tama held sessions on sexual and reproductive health and female genital mutilation (FGM) for women residing in the reception facilities. Tama also engaged specifically with men and boys on gender roles, family planning and how to speak up against FGM. An awareness-raising campaign with multilingual videos on sexual and reproductive health and FGM is under development.<sup>24</sup>

In **Portugal**, UNHCR in collaboration with the artistic association Largo Residências held workshops for refugees and asylum-seekers with the support of a psychotherapist, a translator, a GBV specialist and a cultural mediator. Survivors among the participants later identified themselves and were referred to GBV services. The participants also produced an art installation to be placed in one of the reception centres, which aimed to promote conversation on GBV and convey key prevention messages.

Working with NGO Anais Association, UNHCR **Romania** organized four trainings on GBV for the General Inspectorate for Immigration and NGO staff in the reception centres, as well as a separate training for interpreters, reaching more than 50 persons overall. To complement these exercises, UNHCR Romania prepared a short guide on the legal framework and available services, which will serve as a reference for frontline staff

<sup>23</sup> Leaflets with information for GBV survivors is available on the NANE website at: <https://nane.hu/publications/?lang=en>. Information for survivors of violence is also available on the UNHCR HELP page at: <https://help.unhcr.org/hungary/help/violence/>

<sup>24</sup> A social media post on the filming of the videos is available at: [www.facebook.com/tama.malta.ngo/photos/a.153174456317079/452944003006788/](https://www.facebook.com/tama.malta.ngo/photos/a.153174456317079/452944003006788/)

when confronted with GBV survivors. UNHCR also finalized a leaflet entitled “Love ≠ violence” explaining the different types of GBV, survivors’ rights and where to seek assistance. The leaflet was produced in six languages and will be distributed in reception centres.

In **Serbia**, UNHCR and partners organized 23 workshops on practical psychosocial and life skills, parenting, GBV, PSEA, integration and cultural orientation. Overall, 223 persons of concern participated, including from asylum centres, reception and transit facilities, and private accommodation.

In **Croatia**, the Standard Operating Procedures on the prevention of and response to GBV were launched in the reception centres. UNHCR also developed information material on GBV for the reception centres to inform the survivors on how to report.

UNHCR **Spain** and a UNFPA partner organization designed a video on GBV in eight languages, which has been displayed in the main public reception centres and during activities with persons of concern.<sup>25</sup>

In **Switzerland** and **Liechtenstein**, UNHCR and a local NGO, Femmes Tische, implemented focus group discussions with refugee and migrant women and men on GBV, and trained 38 moderators (28 women and 10 men) in Geneva, Zug and Zurich. Further material is also under development.<sup>26</sup>

UNHCR in the **United Kingdom** and Refugee Women Connect have developed a short guide on how to create safe spaces for refugee women.

The guide seeks to help empower women who may have experienced physical, emotional or psychological trauma because of their gender or sexual orientation and help them create a safe space to access support and information. While the guidance is drafted for refugee women in the United Kingdom, the content and key messages can easily be adapted and translated for other contexts.<sup>27</sup> UNHCR also supported an NGO with a six-week digital literacy course for 50 refugee and asylum-seeking women and provided six laptops for the NGO’s drop-in services. A two-day training was held for 13 women community leaders on the definition of GBV, the legal framework regarding GBV and what to do if you suspect someone has experienced GBV.

At regional level, with Safe from the Start funding, UNHCR commissioned in-depth research on child-friendly and gender-sensitive asylum systems in Europe, to highlight the gaps and positive practices in asylum systems across the region, benchmarked against regional and international standards. The report from this research, entitled ‘**Safer Asylum**’, is expected published in 2022.

The Regional Bureau for Europe also organized a regional webinar with public health and GBV experts on the **protection and health needs of sex workers in Europe** in December 2021, where positive practices from NGOs in Greece were presented and discussed.

<sup>25</sup> The material is available on the website of UNHCR Spain at: [www.acnur.org/es-es/noticias/press/2021/3/60406fb24/acnur-presenta-un-video-para-ayudar-a-prevenir-la-violencia-de-genero-en.html](http://www.acnur.org/es-es/noticias/press/2021/3/60406fb24/acnur-presenta-un-video-para-ayudar-a-prevenir-la-violencia-de-genero-en.html)

<sup>26</sup> The material will be made available online at: [www.femmetische.ch/de/moderationssets-3.html](http://www.femmetische.ch/de/moderationssets-3.html)

<sup>27</sup> UNHCR United Kingdom, Guidance on how to create your own safe space, available at: [www.unhcr.org/uk/61cef80e4](http://www.unhcr.org/uk/61cef80e4). It has also been translated into Albanian ([here](#)), Arabic ([here](#)) and Farsi ([here](#)).



# Protection of children and youth

In **Lithuania**, the Artscape project created safe and welcoming spaces for migrant and refugee children and youth with an integration programme and summer camps, and where educators working with them were equipped with pedagogical, facilitation and artistic skills. Activities included art and creative workshops, and various life skills, such as how to be together, how to express their thoughts and feelings, how to trust themselves, and how to take pride in their authenticity and uniqueness.

In **Armenia**, Standard Operating Procedures on best interest procedures were developed by UNHCR and partners to ensure a collaborative and comprehensive response to children at heightened risk.

In **France**, UNHCR deployed the Inter'ACT Tour, an awareness-raising programme on forced displacement for middle school and high school students in Calvados-Normandy, Brive-La-Gaillarde and Monaco. More than 9,000 middle school and high school students participated in 2021. During the programme, schools opened their doors to refugee speakers, artists and chefs who shared their stories, passion and cooking with students. Activities included presentations and workshops, arts, crafts and tasting dishes from refugee chefs in the school canteens. A refugee volunteer

and social media influencer covered one of the Inter'ACT Tours as an editor-in-chief, taking over UNHCR France's Instagram account and producing video footage during the Inter'ACT event in Monaco.

UNHCR and an NGO partner in **Ukraine** organized a study tour for 12 IDP community leaders from five regions in Central and Western Ukraine, to equip young IDP leaders with practical skills. The participants were trained on how to engage youth in social and civil activities and how to work with local authorities. UNHCR also conducted a series of youth empowerment events for refugee, IDP and host communities jointly with the line Ministry.

In 2021, UNHCR and World Vision in **Georgia** implemented a Skills and Knowledge for Youth Economic Empowerment (SKYE) programme for 60 young people between the ages of 14 and 29 years old living in Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi, of whom 23 were asylum-seekers, refugees and humanitarian status holders. The SKYE model is a holistic and integrated approach to helping disadvantaged young people develop the skills, behaviours and attitudes necessary to obtain sustainable livelihoods and participate actively in their communities through group-based trainings and support services.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> For more information about the SKYE project, see: [www.wvi.org/georgia/article/project-skye-skills-and-knowledge-youth-economic-empowerment](http://www.wvi.org/georgia/article/project-skye-skills-and-knowledge-youth-economic-empowerment)



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In **Serbia**, 18 workshops on "Children's rights and obligations" were held at a country level, covering protection against abuse and neglect, prevention of discrimination, non-violent communication and peaceful resolution of conflicts and information on the possibilities for regularizing one's legal status in the Republic of Serbia. Overall, 161 unaccompanied and separated children attended the workshops.

At regional level, UNHCR organized **four thematic exchanges for government and NGO social workers** working with unaccompanied children in Europe in 2021: one session on the Irish and Italian models for appropriate care; one session on the Greek relocation scheme and emergency

Finland, Germany and Portugal conducted focus group discussions with relocated children upon arrival to inform advocacy interventions and further adjustments to the relocation programme.

By the end of 2021, 4,710 recognized refugees and vulnerable asylum-seekers had been **relocated from Greece to other European States**, including 1,179 unaccompanied children.<sup>29</sup> Nine children-led groups were initiated on the islands of Chios, Kos, Leros, Lesbos and Samos, engaging 164 children to reflect and participate in discussions and actions relevant to their rights and well-being.

to support country operations in provision of information to children and youth, in line with the recommendations of the regional survey, the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe **developed three child-friendly information leaflets** on asylum systems, where to go for help, and GBV, which can be adapted to the context in each country. The leaflets have been translated into eight different languages (Arabic, Dari, French, Pashto, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya and Russian), with more translations expected in 2022.

<sup>29</sup> See joint fact sheet available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90360>

# Working with LGBTIQ+ persons of concern

In **Italy**, UNHCR and the refugee-led organization 'Il Grande Colibri' developed an information campaign 'Io ho diritto alla salute' for men, boy and LGBTIQ+ survivors as a response to underreporting of GBV among these groups and with the aim to increase access to health services in a gender-inclusive manner. The campaign included three videos and three comic strips, WhatsApp cards, leaflets and posters including key messages on access to health services in seven languages.<sup>30</sup> UNHCR in Italy also supported LGBTIQ+ organizations to establish anti-discrimination centres for LGBTIQ+ persons of concern, which ensure free access to legal, health and psychological assistance and social mediation for victims of discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.

In the **Netherlands**, UNHCR completed a quality assurance project aimed at providing technical advice and guidance to the Dutch immigration authorities on how to improve the quality of adjudication of asylum claims related to sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention and UNHCR's Guidelines on International Protection. The main recommendations from the project included:

- examining and assessing all applicable Convention grounds;
- removing stereotyping and biases in credibility assessments; and
- improving the structure of asylum interviews.

UNHCR also undertook formal and informal interventions with the immigration authorities and lower courts in pending asylum cases and appeals, flagging concerns voiced by UNHCR's network of LGBTIQ+ persons of concern, the organization 'LGBT Asylum Support' and asylum lawyers. Specific advocacy points included the use of inappropriate language by translators in asylum interviews and safety concerns for LGBTIQ+ persons in specific reception facilities.

In **Switzerland**, the office conducted a two-day training jointly with the Council of Europe on LGBTIQ+ persons in asylum procedures, while in

**Montenegro**, UNHCR partners provided targeted psychosocial support and legal assistance for asylum-seekers and refugees, including LGBTIQ+ persons, and offered them support in adapting to a new environment.

In **Spain**, UNHCR and the Spanish Federation of LGBTIQ+ Associations developed an online course on LGBTIQ+ protection and asylum issues and best practices in reception and integration. They also supported an awareness-raising campaign on LGTBIQ+ refugees with local NGOs and promoted networking, information sharing and referral pathways through a dedicated LGTBIQ+ Working Group.

<sup>30</sup> See webpage: [www.unhcr.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2021/09/loHoDiritto\\_card\\_v7.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2021/09/loHoDiritto_card_v7.pdf)

Asylum seekers  
and LGBT couple  
met in the  
Netherlands.  
2 December, 2020



# Working with persons with disabilities

Priorities for UNHCR's work with persons with disabilities in Europe include adapted and accessible information provision; early identification, referral and inclusion in national service provision; inclusion of persons with disabilities in UNHCR's outreach, participatory assessments and consultation processes; and advocacy for accessible reception facilities.

UNHCR in **Spain** has a partnership with the national independent supervisory mechanism of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CERMI) on referrals, advocacy and adapted information provision for persons with disabilities.<sup>31</sup> UNHCR and CERMI elaborated a guide on the rights and protection of persons of concern with disabilities.<sup>32</sup> Thirty persons of concern with disabilities participated in a soccer match with 20 athletes from the Special Olympics in a social event which gathered more than 300 people from the local community, associations for persons with disabilities and civil society as a good example of coexistence and empowerment.<sup>33</sup>

In **Montenegro**, UNHCR's partners provide targeted psychosocial support and legal aid to access social

assistance, and facilitate access to healthcare for persons with disabilities, and in Croatia, the Croatian Red Cross and the Center for Culture of Dialogue regularly visit refugees with disabilities to provide psychosocial support, as well as assistance in accessing healthcare and social protection. The Croatian Law Center further assists in access to disability rights, such as applying for disability benefits or benefits for parents with disabled children.

UNHCR in **Turkey** continued to support and assist persons with disabilities through case management and community engagement, including through a Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Gaziantep. Overall, 42 persons with disabilities actively took part in activities of the various community structures, and committee members participated in the UNHCR Digital Skills Development Project carried out by ASAM and the KUDRA Association, during which they learned how to use applications such as Zoom, E-government, E-pulse and Gmail. Two members were also accepted to the ENHANCER project and will receive support to establish or expand small businesses.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The webpage of CERMI is available at: [www.cermi.es/en/node/43287](http://www.cermi.es/en/node/43287)

<sup>32</sup> The guide is available at: [www.cermi.es/es/colecciones/tengo-derechos-humanos-garant%C3%ADas-para-la-igualdad-de-trato-y-no-discriminaci%C3%B3n-de-las-0](http://www.cermi.es/es/colecciones/tengo-derechos-humanos-garant%C3%ADas-para-la-igualdad-de-trato-y-no-discriminaci%C3%B3n-de-las-0)

<sup>33</sup> For more about this event, please see: [www.acnur.org/noticias/press/2021/6/60d622d54/una-jornada-deportiva-emocionante-en-madrid-atletas-con-discapacidad-intelectual.html](http://www.acnur.org/noticias/press/2021/6/60d622d54/una-jornada-deportiva-emocionante-en-madrid-atletas-con-discapacidad-intelectual.html)

<sup>34</sup> For more information about ENHANCER, please see its webpage: <https://enhancerproject.com/en/>



On World Refugee Day, 20 June 2021, committee members visited the Gaziantep Provincial Directorate of Migration Management and the Gazişehir Gaziantep Sports Club basketball team, and on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 3 December 2021, committee members provided support to an event with children to raise awareness about persons with disabilities.

At regional level, UNHCR collaborated with the **European Disability Forum**, an umbrella organization for disability organizations in Europe, to organize a workshop for NGOs and government counterparts in Lithuania in October 2021.<sup>35</sup> A

joint regional webinar was organized by UNHCR and the International **Disability Alliance** in April 2021 to build the capacity of staff and share positive practices from the Europe region.<sup>36</sup> UNHCR's Division of International Protection also supported a session on persons with disabilities for the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Vulnerability Network in July 2021.

<sup>35</sup> The webpage of the European Disability Forum is available at: [www.edf-feph.org/](http://www.edf-feph.org/)

<sup>36</sup> The webpage of the International Disability Alliance is available at: [www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/](http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/)

# Recommendations

As demonstrated by the examples provided in this report, UNHCR offices and partners in Europe continue to make significant progress in the implementation of the 10 core actions of the AGD Policy. In 2021, advances have been notable in particular in the areas of child protection, prevention of and response to gender-based violence, and in working with refugee-led organizations.

To further strengthen AGD interventions across the region, and with due consideration of the findings of the first year of UNHCR's longitudinal evaluation of implementation of the AGD Policy, the Regional Bureau and country offices in Europe will continue efforts to:

1. **Maintain a strong focus on child protection and GBV prevention and response**, with dedicated efforts to roll-out GBV safety audits in reception facilities, address the issues of child detention and inadequate reception conditions, and promote appropriate care arrangements and effective guardianship options for unaccompanied children. .
2. **Further enhance the participation and inclusion of persons of concern**, and amplify their leadership and advocacy voices across the region, including through targeted support, visibility and partnerships with refugee-led and other community-based organizations.
3. **Enhance advocacy for, and support to, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ persons**, including in collaboration with specialized disability and LGBTIQ+ organizations.
4. **Actively address prevailing information and communication gaps with persons of concern**, through the roll-out of UNHCR HELP pages in all countries in the region, enhanced feedback and response mechanisms, and the continued expansion of social media channels.
5. **Continue to advocate for and showcase community-based**, AGD-sensitive and participatory approaches among national and local authorities and other stakeholders that are providing assistance and protection to persons of concern in Europe.



©UNHCR / Brian Sokol  
26 septembre 2014  
Kinshasa, République démocratique du Congo



**The Most Important Thing : sa machine à coudre**

Benjamin pose derrière sa machine à coudre. « C'est moi qui fais les vêtements pour mes amis. C'est mon moyen de gagner de l'argent pour acheter de la nourriture pour ma famille », explique-t-il.

À Batanga, en République démocratique du Congo, il gagne de l'argent en réparant les vêtements des réfugiés et des habitants.

Benjamin a fui après avoir vu un combattant Séléka tuer un marchand à la suite d'une dispute, dans la zone portuaire de Banga, le capitale de la République centrafricaine. Il a couru vers son village d'origine, Merga, pour chercher sa femme et ses enfants. Mais l'endroit était vide. Il a alors attrapé la machine à coudre puis est allé chercher ses proches. Il les a retrouvés sur le terrain de sa famille.

Le lendemain, ils ont traversé la rivière Oulangu pour se réfugier en RDC à Batanga.

**Le plus important : son document de composition familiale**

Benjamin était soldat en Angola. Il a fui son pays lorsqu'il a été forcé de partir. Bien qu'il ait toujours peur de y retourner, il ne veut pas laisser sa maison.

Après avoir fui à nouveau, le document de composition familiale et la photo seraient la chose la plus importante pour Benjamin.

« Sans ce document, je pourrais être expulsé », explique-t-il. « Sans cela, je pourrais être expulsé, ou leur mère les expulserait. Ce document prouve que mes parents sont des réfugiés congolais. Ce document prouve que mes parents seraient expulsés, ou leur mère les expulserait. Ce document prouve que mes parents seraient expulsés, ou leur mère les expulserait. »



# AGE, GENDER AND DIVERSITY REPORT 2021

Promising Practices from Europe

June 2022



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