



# Age, Gender and Diversity Good Practices

UNHCR in Europe  
2017 - 2018

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## INTRODUCTION

UNHCR has long upheld age, gender and diversity (AGD) mainstreaming as an essential approach to understand and respond to the needs of all persons of concern. UNHCR makes considerable efforts in Europe to integrate AGD considerations both in operational planning, programme implementation and while engaging with governments in protection, advocacy and legal interventions. This report highlights a range of initiatives across the region in 2017 and 2018 to illustrate this.



### Minimum Core Actions that Apply under the 2018 AGD Policy

**Participation and Inclusion:** Women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds are able to engage meaningfully and are consulted on protection, assistance, and solutions. 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.

UNHCR offices across Europe regularly communicate and consult with persons of concern to ensure the priorities and capacities of women, men, girls and boys are taken into account in protection, assistance and solutions planning and in the implementation of activities.

Concerted efforts are being made across Europe to strengthen participatory and community-based approaches. The **Refugee Coalition for Europe** was established in 2017 with the aim of providing a platform for refugee participation and consultation. It comprises refugees living in different countries in Europe including Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, and Sweden. Coalition members have been consulted during important processes including the drafting of the Global Compact on Refugees, and the 2018 UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs. The initiative continues to evolve positively in 2018, with refugee members taking the lead on formulating the structure and objectives of the Europe-wide coalition. In addition, coalitions have or will be established at the country level to

inform the activities and output of the Europe-wide coalition, as well as UNHCR activities. Seven country operations – Bulgaria, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Malta, Montenegro and Sweden - have volunteered to be champions in this regard and will establish or draw upon existing platforms to enhance communication and engagement with refugees.

In **Cyprus**, asylum-seeking and refugee women, men, girls and boys from diverse nationalities and religions participated in the UNHCR Country Operations Plan multi-stakeholder meeting for 2018. Similarly, participation of various gender, age and nationality groups was ensured during contingency planning. Refugees and asylum-seekers shared their priorities, and engaged in extensive discussion on how UNHCR could support their communities. The articulation of refugees' own experiences has often been utilised and incorporated in the office's advocacy strategy, either through direct participation of refugees in official meetings or integration of their concerns in UNHCR's advocacy interventions.

The office in **Turkey** held 54 brainstorming sessions with 500 asylum seekers and refugees of various nationalities in 14 locations across the country in 2017. Information obtained through detailed discussions with refugees on their priority areas of concern was coded to facilitate an analysis of how frequently particular issues were raised. Through this methodology, UNHCR obtained a comprehensive picture of the most serious concerns indicated by refugees, and used this information as the basis of assumptions underpinning the operation's planning sessions. Nearly 53% of the participants in these consultative processes were female refugees.

The implementation of all UNHCR activities in **Georgia** are accompanied by regular meetings with persons of concern that take place in the Open House, a community mobilisation centre in Tbilisi. In 2017, the Open House established an "advisory board", a platform for refugees to raise concerns with UNHCR and its partner UNAG. The issues raised were subsequently reflected in advocacy interventions and follow-up in individual cases.

The office in **Spain** used conclusions and opinions gathered from participatory assessments with persons of concern to inform recommendations to the Government of Spain. These recommendations included a strong AGD component and stressed the need to consult and empower persons of concern, and to establish mechanisms for the identification and referral of persons with specific needs. The document also recommended the establishment of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on SGBV and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), including a prevention and response mechanism and Code of Conduct sessions for UNHCR and partner staff.

In 2016, the office in **Ireland** conducted 80 structured interviews with Syrian persons of concern, including resettled refugees and beneficiaries of the Syrian humanitarian admissions programme. Challenges and concerns documented through the interviews have informed the office's approach to the development of a community sponsorship programme in Ireland and advocacy in relation to the new Irish humanitarian admissions programme.

**Communication and Transparency:** Women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds in all operations have access to timely, accurate, and relevant information on (i) their rights and entitlements, and (ii) UNHCR and its partners' programmes. At a minimum, all country-level protection and solutions strategies will detail the operation's approach to communicating with women, men, girls and boys of diverse backgrounds, through means that are appropriate and accessible to all groups in a community.

The [help.unhcr.org](https://help.unhcr.org) website is a refugee-facing portal established to provide refugees and asylum-seekers with critical information on their rights and obligations. The site is a one-stop shop where asylum-seekers and refugees can find critical information, including on asylum procedures and the range of available services such as health, legal assistance, SGBV, child protection, LGBTI support, integration, education, birth registration, and support for voluntary repatriation. In Europe, **six such sites have been established in Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Turkey, and Ukraine** providing country-specific information in an easy to understand manner and in various languages, including Arabic, English, Farsi, French, German, Greek, and Turkish. The sites for Greece and Turkey include platforms for complaint and feedback mechanisms, and to report fraud and SEA. Complaints and feedback registered online are channeled to the reg-

ular complaints processing mechanisms in the offices. Prior to the full launch of the website, operations conducted field testing with persons of concern to consult and obtain feedback on the design and content.

In **Italy**, UNHCR has entered a strategic partnership with the NGO ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana) to promote access to national protection services through a website and telephone hotline. The website features a multilingual mapping of services, including over 850 national services. The hotline, available in 32 languages, is a national toll free number which asylum-seekers and refugees may call to access information and counselling on rights, procedures and services. The website can be accessed at <https://www.jumamap.com>.

In **Croatia** and **France**, child friendly leaflets have

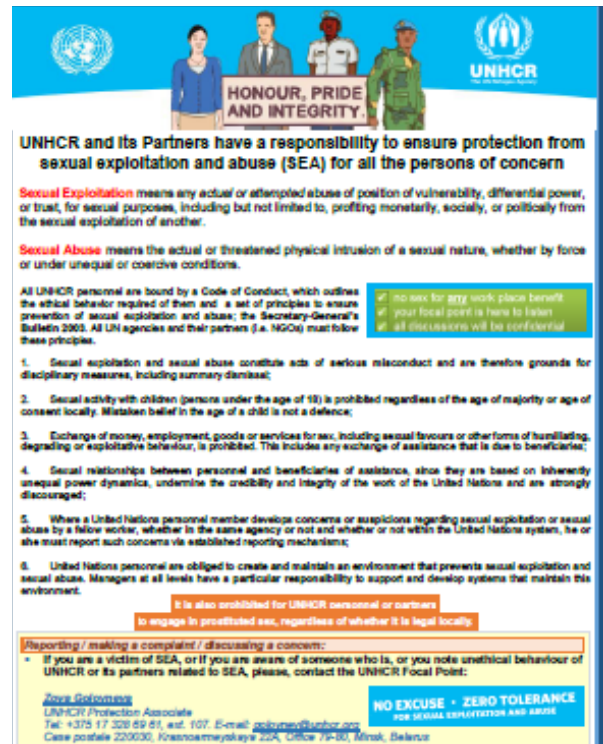
been produced in Arabic, Croatian, English, Farsi and French, and with pictures for those who cannot read, to provide information to unaccompanied and separated children, for example on asylum proce-

dures, their rights within the national child protection system and under Dublin procedures. Children were consulted to collect feedback and adapt the leaflets accordingly.

**Feedback and Response:** Formal and informal feedback from persons of concern is systematically received and responded to, and corrective action taken as appropriate. At a minimum, all UNHCR operations will establish and promote feedback and response systems, including for confidential complaints.

In **Belarus**, extensive consultations with persons of concern in six regions took place to evaluate and re-design community feedback mechanisms. The office consulted communities on how they preferred to communicate with UNHCR and partners. People consulted informed the office that face-to-face sessions over the weekend were preferable to postal or written feedback, and that they would appreciate monthly UNHCR visits to temporary accommodation centres. Consequently, the office commenced more frequent visits to these accommodation centres, in addition to continuing in-person consultations which take place on a daily basis in the office in Minsk.

In the **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, interagency Information and Advice Desks (IADs) were initially piloted in Children and Family Support Hubs and were then introduced in two reception and transit sites from the beginning of 2016. The main objectives of the IADs were to disseminate information about available services and processes at the reception sites, and to serve as a complaints and feedback mechanism. Feedback and complaints were systematically recorded and a report generated every week to refer to relevant service providers or make interventions as required. The IADs are operated in Arabic, English and Farsi, with the support of interpreters. Staff working at the IADs hold a roving function to enhance community outreach and information dissemination, complemented by television screens with continuous information displays.



Several activities were adjusted or improved as a result of feedback received through the IADs, including a shift from collective distribution points to household level distribution, and the introduction of an anonymous complaints box. The establishment of the IADs was supported by UNHCR’s Innovation Unit and has informed best practice guidance on community complaints and feedback mechanisms.

## Advancing Gender Equality

**Women and Girls have Access to Comprehensive SGBV Prevention and Response Services:** At a minimum, UNHCR operations will adopt and implement SGBV standard operating procedures, operationalizing the four main referral pathways for all survivors (safety/security, legal, medical and psychosocial) and promote the same with partners, including governments.

UNHCR takes measures to prevent and respond to SGBV on the assumption that it takes place in all contexts of displacement. In the European context, UNHCR has promoted safe and appropriate access to national services, effective identification and referral, and coordination between asylum and migration authorities and service providers in line with concerns reported by practitioners working with SGBV survivors and UNHCR guidelines on multi-sectoral response. In addition, feedback from communities on the causes of SGBV are consistently taken into consideration when designing prevention activities.

UNHCR works with D.i.RE (Donne in Rete Contro La Violenza) in **Italy**, a network of 80 organisations facilitating access to safe houses and SGBV response services for asylum-seekers and refugees across the country, on the same basis as Italian nationals. In **Albania**, participatory assessments with women resulted in a new partnership with the Centre for Legal Initiatives, an NGO specialised in legal and psycho-social support for female survivors of domestic violence.

In **Belarus**, four 2-day educational seminars attended by border guard psychologists and socio-cultural specialists from educational institutions helped to increase awareness of SGBV, including relevant legislative frameworks and their implementation, and identification and referral of survivors. These activities contributed to the practical implementation of SGBV SOPs that were put in place in Belarus.

In **Croatia**, UNHCR, along with the Ministry of Interior and its partner the Croatian Red Cross, has

developed SGBV SOPs for reception centres hosting asylum-seekers. The Croatian Red Cross organises a “women’s space” in reception centres for asylum-seekers four times a week to hold workshops and focus groups on issues relating to SGBV.

Continuous training and sensitisation of UNHCR and partner staff in **Armenia** has strengthened the identification and referral of SGBV survivors and other women at risk to appropriate services. Sensitisation sessions on SGBV, including prevention, response and identification, have also been included in training for border guards, the State Migration Service, National Security Services and NGOs. The joint development of SGBV SOPs by UNHCR, the Armenian Red Cross and 10 key stakeholders culminated in a widely publicised signing ceremony during the 16-day campaign against gender-based violence in 2017.

To address socio-economic conditions as a contributory factor to SGBV identified during consultations with persons of concern, UNHCR in the **Russian Federation** provided Russian language and vocational courses in sewing, hairdressing and manicure for 79 refugee women in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and assisted refugee women to participate in a bazaar to promote income generating activities.

The office in **Romania** has produced and is distributing a leaflet with information and services relating to domestic violence, which was consistently reported as a concern during 2017 participatory assessments.

**Women and Girls Participate Equally and Meaningfully in all Decision-making, Community Management and Leadership Structures, and Committees of Persons of Concern:** At a minimum UNHCR will ensure 50 per cent female participants in management and leadership structures under UNHCR's authority, and will advocate the same with partners, including governments.

In **Turkey**, UNHCR has made consistent progress towards promoting and strengthening women's participation. UNHCR facilitated participation in community leadership and municipal structures, and provided equal access to livelihood opportunities. For example, over half of the members of the Refugee Council established to engage in local decision-making structures in Kecioren municipality of Ankara are women. One of the female members of the Council attends coordination meetings held by local authorities to present the refugee perspective. Approximately 46% of community leadership and

management structures roles supported by UNHCR were held by women in 2017 – an increase of around 12% compared to 2016. UNHCR and partners also supported new Syrian women's committees in urban areas of Adana, Gaziantep, Hatay, Izmir and Kahramanmaraş, which focused on raising awareness of women's rights, SGBV prevention and response, and identification and referral of women at risk. Similarly, UNHCR encouraged refugee participation and contact with municipal authorities through city councils in urban centres such as Istanbul.



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**Women and Girls have Equal Access to Economic Opportunities, including Decent Work, Quality Education and Health Services:** At a minimum, UNHCR will ensure women and girls have equal access to livelihood, education and health programmes it delivers, and advocate with partners, including Governments, for their equal access to public services.

Participatory assessments undertaken by UNHCR in 2016 and 2017 in **Turkey**, as well as context-specific research and assessments, strongly pointed to a rising engagement of asylum-seeker and refugee communities in harmful traditional practices such as child and forced marriages, and other forms of SGBV including survival sex, domestic violence, harassment and exploitation. Women and girls reported limited access to livelihood opportunities and poor conditions of work including the need for relevant skills and education, no insurance cover, lower rates of pay than for Turkish nationals, and lack of day care services. To address some of these challenges, the office supported a small scale Community Support Project

which identified women working on the streets of Ankara, who are at heightened risk of SGBV due to their vulnerable socio-economic status. This included female heads of households, as well as families with one or more specific protection needs identified within the household. The women identified are supported through multi-sectoral interventions, including Turkish language classes, daily incentives to enrol children in child-friendly spaces, and enrolment in vocational courses. Ensuring self-reliance for women reduces their vulnerability to SGBV and enhances their prospects for integration.



*Women's solidarity group in Istanbul*

## Targeted AGD Programming

### Specific Activities Targeting Children

In 2017 UNHCR, UNICEF and IRC released “**The Way Forward to Strengthen Policies and Practices for Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) in Europe**” (hereinafter “The Way Forward”), a comprehensive document outlining the challenges faced by UASC arriving in Europe, and providing recommendations to governments and operational guidance for the protection of UASC. The publication was informed by consultations with around 100 practitioners, including guardians, psychologists, social workers, lawyers and teachers from most countries in Europe affected by the refugee and migrant crisis in 2015/16; a roundtable with nine European states; EU level actors, and over 50 UASC living in Europe. “The Way Forward” is used widely as a guide and reference for advocacy and operational child protection interventions. A number of child protection projects have subsequently been implemented in different countries across Europe in line with recommendations from “The Way Forward”, and are described below.

In **Sweden**, UNHCR has initiated a two-phased project called “Co-Lab 2.0” with the aim of developing a holistic, lean and efficient reception procedure for UASC, which will mainstream best interests’ considerations and child protection standards. The first phase was completed in 2017, and mapped current reception standards in order to identify gaps impacting the protection of children. The second phase has commenced in 2018, and engages different stakeholders in a consultative process, including children, to develop and propose improved reception models taking into account specific considerations for children. In addition to multi-stakeholder workshops, one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions on the current reception system and how it may be improved are being held with relevant authorities (e.g. police, child protection and social welfare authorities), and children themselves. At the end of 2018, a proposal for a revised model will be presented during a high-level stakeholder meeting to which Swedish and other Northern European authorities will be invited.

With the support of EU DG Justice, UNHCR is implementing a project building on “The Way Forward”

with a focus on **Western Europe**, including Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK. The project aims to strengthen best interests’ procedures for children of concern and improve reception systems for UASC at regional and national level. The project will run over the course of 18 months (November 2017 – April 2019) during which time various activities will be completed, for example mapping existing reception models for UASC, with the aim of proposing improved systems; training for guardians; and recommendations for legal representation for UASC. The views of UASC have been sought in each country on their experiences with reception and child protection systems, which will inform recommendations to strengthen reception and best interests’ processes.



Based on concerns observed through protection monitoring and reports of partners, UNHCR in **Greece** has taken several measures to strengthen the protection of UASC, as large numbers of new arrivals in the past years have presented several challenges. The common use of institutional care and detention to accommodate UASC led the office to support the use of foster care through the Greek foster family scheme, and to initiate a project for supported independent living (for older UASC) in coordination with relevant authorities. Case management capacity of the national authority responsible for child protection (EKKA) was also strengthened through the secondment of four technical experts.



UNHCR **Serbia** has entered into a partnership with the local think tank IDEAS and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, to collaborate on a project to strengthen the protection of asylum-seeking and refugee children. The aim of the project is to enhance the effectiveness of guardians and improve the general protection of refugee children through the identification, recruitment, training, supervision and monitoring of cultural mediators. In 2017, a training curriculum was developed, along with terms of reference and manuals for guardians and cultural mediators. A professional system for guardianship was developed and 19 guardians and 7 cultural mediators were trained. The oversight provided by guardians has led to enhanced awareness of serious protection concerns faced by UASC in reception centres, for example exposure to sexual abuse, and the introduction of mitigating measures to address these, including transferring children to safer accommodation.

UNHCR **Italy** works with two local partners to address protection challenges as identified through regular interaction and communication with UASC. One partner enhances UASC participation by training cultural mediators to act as a bridge between UASC and cross-cutting services, including guardians from the host community. The second partner provides UASC

with information and legal assistance.

Although pre-dating this report, it is worth recalling the innovative “**Blue Dots**” initiative launched during the emergency in November 2015. In a coordinated effort to enhance protection for growing numbers of refugee women and children on the move in Europe, UNHCR, UNICEF and ICRC established “Children and Family Support Hubs” using the neutral Blue Dot logo were installed along the most frequently used migration route in Europe. The hubs built upon services which were already in place, but introduced a recognisable logo associated with the three organisations. They provided children and families with standardised critical minimum interventions including family tracing and reunification, child friendly spaces, dedicated mother and baby/toddler areas, psychosocial support and legal advice. The centres also served as information and advice points with referral systems for survivors of violence or specialised medical assistance. The hubs were set up in partnership with local organisations to build the capacity of local service providers. Participation was a guiding principle of the Blue Dot SOPs, and regular consultations were held with refugees and migrants to ensure Blue Dot services continued to respond to needs in an accurate and culturally appropriate manner.



UNHCR/ V. Borizovski

## Specific Activities Targeting Youth

Youth activities have been undertaken in many operations in Europe in acknowledgement of the specific needs of this age group.

For the first time in 2018, UNHCR's **Youth Initiative Fund** was launched at the regional level in Europe. Small grants were awarded to youth-led projects aimed at enhancing social cohesion in ten countries across Europe: Armenia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Turkey. Projects were innovative and diverse, including language exchange, sports activities, youth camps and a film festival. Requirements for project submissions included a strong component of community engagement, with youth engaged in every stage of project management from design to monitoring, to ensure projects related to the needs and interests expressed by youth, but also to build upon their skills and capacity. For example, the projects featured activities which enhanced language capacity and skills to participate in the labour market.

In 2017, UNHCR signed a partnership agreement with the international NGO "**European Youth Parliament**" (EYP), a programme which brings together young people from across Europe to discuss current topics in a parliamentary setting. The EYP is a network of independent associations present in 40 European countries, and organises over 500 events every year (<https://eyp.org/>). The partnership is two-fold: on the one hand UNHCR provides technical expertise on the topics discussed by youth (both related to refugee and statelessness issues) and on the other hand, UNHCR funds participation of young (former) refugee and stateless persons at EYP events who can represent the voice of their community through this forum.

In 2017, the office in **Turkey** was awarded a grant through the DIP-led global Youth Initiative Fund to implement a project aimed at enhancing social cohesion that was designed and implemented by a group

of 20 Syrian, Iraqi and Turkish youth. The project directly benefitted approximately 230 participants through a Youth Discussion Club, summer camp and stakeholders meeting. The project provided a unique occasion for identifying, developing and utilising youth capacities, facilitating youth networking and information sharing as well as establishing a core group of committed youth which can play an important role in community mobilisation. Based on the success of this pilot, the project was expanded to engage more youth in 2018. Other activities targeting refugee youth networks in Turkey in 2017 included a digital-story telling workshop, organised in collaboration with Hacettepe University in Ankara. The workshop, entitled "Stories without Visa" took place in May 2017, and offered an opportunity to young Syrian refugees to tell their stories of displacement using a variety of multimedia tools. An event was held to screen the digital stories produced by the youth, and facilitate an accompanying discussion. The activity also included empowerment and skills-building components for the youth involved.

In **Ukraine**, UNHCR organised missions to Svyatohirsk, Mariupol and Dnipro to meet with youth organizations, youth IDPs, and displaced university students to jointly assess and analyse the challenges faced by conflict-affected young people. Based on the analysis of prevailing protection risks, a three-day seminar was conducted for IDP, refugee and host community youth with the support of a professional facilitator, in order to build their capacities and raise awareness on social inclusion and active citizenship. The seminar created a platform for young people to continue their exchange and contribution to youth projects. UNHCR is continuing its work with youth in 2018 through follow-up activities to the 2017 youth seminar, training of trainers' sessions for youth on SGBV and organizing exchanges of youth organizations from eastern and western Ukraine.

## Specific Educational Activities

Participatory research undertaken by UNHCR found that teachers in western European countries face multiple challenges following the large number of arrivals into Europe of asylum-seekers and refugees in 2015/16. Host community children frequently asked questions on the subject, and teachers struggled with the inclusion of asylum-seeking and refugee students in their classrooms, in light of psycho-social support needs, language and cultural barriers. To address these challenges, the Regional Representation for Western Europe developed a set of **teacher training materials** on the topic of refugees, asylum and migration, currently available in French and English and soon to be published in Dutch and German. The toolkit includes a module with professional guidance on teaching refugee children in the classroom, and deal-

ing with symptoms of stress and trauma. Dissemination of the toolkit and teacher training will take place through strategic partnerships in different countries including Ministries of Education, educational institutions, and NGOs. The teacher toolkit is available at [www.unhcr.org/teachers-toolkit.html](http://www.unhcr.org/teachers-toolkit.html).

Interventions to raise awareness amongst children and teachers of the situation of asylum-seekers and refugees have also taken place in **Cyprus**, where UNHCR has undertaken a series of visits to schools to promote social cohesion as part of the office's anti-racism campaign. The office also organised a workshop to train educators on specific challenges faced by refugee children in collaboration with the Ministry of Education's Pedagogical Institute.



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## Specific Activities Targeting Minorities

The Regional Representation in **Georgia** has supported the rehabilitation of existing community infrastructure, including schools, in partnership with other agencies in Abkhazia, and in consultation with affected communities, to strengthen integration and access to existing services for IDP returnees.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** the office has implemented a project for the educational inclusion of Roma IDP children to address a lack of will on the part of parents to ensure their children attend school, as

understood through participatory assessments and feedback from service providers. This involved preparing children for enrolment in local schools, and working with parents and counselling them on the importance of education for their children. During these activities, the families were also taught various social skills to help them integrate within the local community. The activities were used to identify the children who were of age for the enrolment in the compulsory pre-school preparation programme.

## Specific Activities Targeting Stateless People

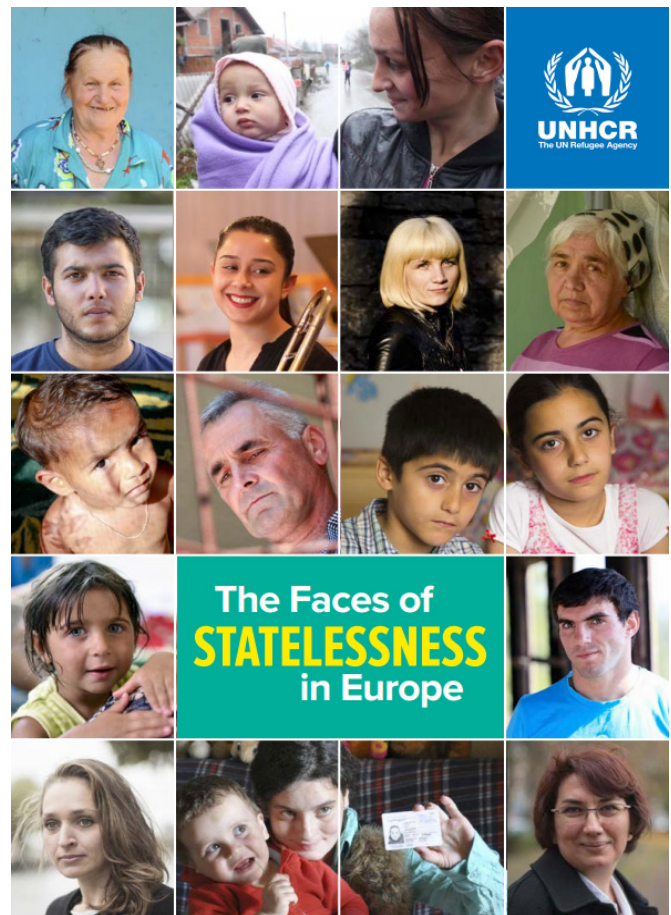
Targeted interventions to assist people who are stateless, or at risk of statelessness, are carried out in country operations where related protection concerns were identified in consultation with persons of concern, and in light of the specific protection risks which stateless people face including hindered access to rights and services.

In April 2018, UNHCR launched “**The Faces of Statelessness in Europe**”, a brochure to highlight the issue of statelessness and challenges people face as a result, through stories of stateless people across Europe. The publication highlights the impact of statelessness on peoples’ lives, and will inform programme and advocacy efforts to achieve UNHCR’s mandate in relation to statelessness.

In **Ukraine**, a media campaign was launched in 2017 to raise awareness and share information about statelessness determination procedures, targeting various ethnic groups, elderly and people residing in the Russian Federation border regions. A hotline was established in 2016 to provide information and assistance regarding individual legal status issues for people at risk of statelessness.

Throughout the **Western Balkans**, UNHCR and UNICEF coordinated to campaign and raise awareness on birth registration procedures, and the challenges which can arise when a birth is not registered. Partners have been supported to provide legal counselling and representation to children and their families who are stateless, or at risk of statelessness. Advocacy has taken place to simplify rules on school attendance and facilitate access to education for children lacking birth registration.

UNHCR and UNICEF have also developed an **advocacy brief** on ending childhood statelessness in Europe, outlining challenges and recommendations for States, the EU, Council of Europe and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.



## Specific Activities Targeting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersex Individuals

Operations across Europe have made efforts to address challenges faced by LGBTI persons of concern, and ensure their specific needs are taken into account in protection programming.

In **France**, the office conducted awareness-raising sessions with a local organization and shared good practices for the reception and interaction with LGBTI asylum-seekers, especially on the issue of confidentiality.

In **Malta**, UNHCR staff met with LGBTI persons of concern to offer information related to integration, and made referrals to “Project Integrated”, a partner programme providing individualised integration support including vocational training and educational grants.

In **Ukraine**, the office conducted training for service providers on improving the protection of displaced LGBTI persons, including the promotion of HIV prevention. The training led to the establishment of a referral pathway with a network of NGOs providing services to LGBTI persons. In Turkey, training on sexual orientation and gender identity took place in partnership with local LGBTI organisations for over 250 NGO staff to build a network and enhance services for LGBTI persons of concern.

In **Cyprus** ongoing monitoring of refugee status determination (RSD) applications and training of el-

igibility officers is carried out to ensure that LGBTI persons are receiving appropriate treatment in the asylum procedure.

In **Spain**, a working group on reception conditions and integration of LGBTI asylum-seekers and refugees was established in 2016, following increased harassment and violence against persons with this profile in reception centres. The working group is comprised of NGOs working on asylum and LGBTI issues, including the Spanish LGBTI Federation - a network of more than 60 LGBTI organisations across Spain, as well as reception authorities, with the objective of achieving enhanced reception conditions for LGBTI asylum-seekers and refugees. After an initial assessment, several interventions have been planned or are underway including the transfer of LGBTI persons from islands to the mainland, establishment of LGBTI support groups, sensitisation of reception site staff, creation of safe spaces within reception centres, and transfer of LGBTI asylum-seekers from islands to the mainland. The office in Spain has held three meetings with LGBTI refugee support groups where issues regarding their empowerment, personal process and reaffirmation, exchange of cultural experiences, concerns and problems regarding the asylum procedure and the reception system were shared and informed the office’s strategy and planned interventions regarding LGBTI issues.



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## Specific Activities Targeting Other Persons with Specific Needs

In **Greece**, in view of inadequate living conditions, community networks were identified as strong support mechanisms for people with specific needs, including older persons, and persons with disabilities. To combine community and family support with improved shelter conditions, UNHCR piloted a programme to support community-based care arrangements in Athens, including for persons with disabilities. Identified caretakers expressed interest through an open application system processed through an NGO partner Kinoniko Ekay. The NGO shared information about the initiative through mobile outreach activities, and developed ToRs for the caretakers with community members. UNHCR, an accommodation partner and a specialised agency have coordinated to train and support refugee carers to support persons with specific needs.

The Greece operation submitted a winning idea for DIP's 2017 Child Protection Urban Innovation Challenge called "Integrating children with disabilities". The project involved working with the Greek National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) to provide training to frontline staff on the identification of disabilities, undertake consultations

with refugees with disabilities to inform advocacy and integration into the NCPD's work, and support NGOs providing accommodation to asylum-seekers and refugees with more efficient referral pathways to national services for persons with disabilities.

In Greece, older persons contributed to addressing specific concerns identified in the community to support each other and other groups in the community. For example, older refugees of the Nea Kavala site established a network of experienced women to provide care, support and advice for pregnant female heads of household.

In **Ukraine**, following participatory assessments in 2017 revealing serious psychological support needs, community-based volunteers have been identified amongst the asylum-seeking and refugee population, with a focus on youth and older persons, to offer initial psycho-social support to other community members in Kiev and Bila Tserkva. The group of volunteers include a number of men, who are also engaged in SGBV sensitisation sessions. In Odesa, UNHCR's partner for social assistance has two psychologists – one male and one female – to offer services at the



individual and community level. The provision of male psychologist services is important, as it was previously reported during community consultations that services for male survivors of violence were insufficient.

The Ukraine office in partnership with NGOs in 2017 also administered small grants to mobilise and empower communities across central and western Ukraine to implement solutions for specific concerns identified by IDPs along with host communities and local authorities. Identification of communities took place through targeted field and monitoring visits, as well as through community members approaching UNHCR and partners following announcements

about the programme on local media and the internet. Communities analysed their own problems, and then prioritised and planned action to address them. UNHCR then convened multi-functional committees to decide whether to support the proposed action. Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of activities was also undertaken by the community. One example involved the IDP community in Odesa who organised itself to repair and build ramps for all IDP and host community members with disabilities to access their homes.

## Suggested Areas to Further Strengthen AGD Interventions

### *Advancing Gender Equality*

While many operations have prioritised and deployed efforts to place emphasis on SGBV prevention and response, interventions focusing on promoting gender equality are less systematically reported. Additional information should be compiled on how UNHCR and partners are working with persons of concern, authorities and key stakeholders to engage

women and girls within asylum-seeking and refugee communities with a view to ensure that asylum and other assistance processes do not perpetuate gender inequality. This includes working with men and boys within communities, as promoting gender equality will not be successful without their engagement.

### *Measures to Support Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities*

A focus on strengthening and advocating for access to services to assist older persons and persons with disabilities is not apparent from reports in many operations in Europe. Further reporting would be

beneficial to demonstrate efforts made to take into account the needs of these groups, who tend to be “hidden” and thus less able to seek support independently.

### *Strengthened Engagement of National Systems for Assistance and Support, including for Child Protection*

Offices should further highlight efforts being made to extend and strengthen existing national services to support persons of concern. While the past few years have seen an increased focus on child protection and the particular challenges faced by unaccompanied

and separated children, it is important to build upon existing national child protection systems and advocate for non-discriminatory access for children of concern, including for best interests’ processes.

## Communication with Communities

While all offices undertake participatory assessments on an annual basis, further efforts are underway to shift to more continuous dialogue and two-way communication with persons of concern. This will take place through existing representative platforms or – as in some countries – through ongoing activities to establish “Refugee Coalitions” for consistent communication. In addition, a Refugee Outreach Volunteer programme, with a focus on enhanced outreach and communication with communities, is being piloted in 2018 in France, Hungary, Spain and Sweden with this objective.

While noting areas requiring improvement, it is worth highlighting that many UNHCR country offices in Europe operate in largely urban contexts where authorities are the main or only actors delivering assistance to persons of concern. Community management and leadership structures are not as apparent or accessible as they tend to be in camp-based contexts. Staffing levels are much lower, with some countries completely covered through Regional Representations, and others with limited numbers of staff. Conse-

quently, community-based approaches and ensuring activities are implemented through an AGD lens may be more challenging than in camp-based contexts and operations where UNHCR staff engage with persons of concern on a daily basis for direct service provision. Nevertheless, while many UNHCR country offices in Europe have traditionally engaged extensively with authorities for advocacy on a range of legal and policy issues affecting asylum-seekers and refugees, a shift towards more operational and community-based approaches both directly and within advocacy efforts has gradually been made during the emergency over the past few years and should be sustained/further expanded.

There will always be challenges while implementing an AGD approach, particularly given the varying resources and capacities of UNHCR country offices in Europe. Nevertheless, UNHCR Regional Representations and country offices make continuous efforts to systematically mainstream AGD, participatory and community-based approaches in prioritised areas of their work.