

## **Round table on gender equality: better protections for all refugees.**

When we are talking about gender we are talking about every single person – women and girls, men and boys. When we are talking about diversity we are talking about everyone too – different genders, ages, sexual orientation, religion, ability, marital status etc.

**Making a strong commitment to adopt gender and diversity sensitive approaches means honouring the commitments already adopted by the UNHCR and other relevant UN bodies, yet making sure that they are implemented efficiently involving people affected by the displacement.**

Gender and diversity cuts across and is equally important on all stages of the journey. For example, if we are not sensitive to gender at the point of identification, we risk that women will be registered only together with men when we all know that women must be registered independently. Another example, if we are not sensitive to gender and diversity when providing services we are risking placing women in the mixed accommodation subjecting them to further risks of sexual and gender based-violence. Similarly, if we are rejecting the right of transgender women to identify as women regardless of their documentation, and are placing them in all male shelter, not only we are subjecting them to violence, we are denying them safety and freedom.

Further, if we are not recognising that gender intersecting with other identities may result in further vulnerabilities we may miss the fact that women with disabilities are twice more likely to be raped compared to women without disabilities, as well as experience other forms of SGBV such as forced sterilisation or abortion.

For us to know this all, **sex-, age, and diversity disaggregated data collection is paramount.** Collecting data that is not limited to age, sex and disability but includes sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity or marital status ensures that we have evidence-based understanding of people's needs, of course taking into

account specific context and the privacy. **I restate that sex-, age-, and diversity disaggregated data collection must underpin both the policy and the practice.**

The next step is to identify the vulnerable populations from the very beginning to ensure that their specific needs are met throughout the cycle of displacement. For this, **the use of the Heightened Risk Identification tool is vital.**

Let me make you an example, lesbian women often suffer multiple discrimination due to their gender coupled with their sexual orientation. They are commonly subjected to harm not only by the state actors but also by their families and communities. In Australia, I work with lesbian refugee women. All of them experienced different forms of sexual and gender-based violence. They were subjected to corrective rape as a way to enforce normalised sexual and gender identities by strangers, family members or husbands when they were forcibly married again as an attempt to correct their sexuality. Many lesbian women human rights defenders experienced sexual torture at the hands of police.

For an effective response, it is thus important to acknowledge the intersections of their identities and respond adequately. We need to ensure that regardless of the settings, camps or urban, LGBTI people or other groups at the risk of family and community rejection and violence including from service providers have access to safe spaces.

It is imperative to implement impartial and rapid risk assessment that include vulnerable to abuse groups, as well as ensure that UNHCR officers and other relevant staff in transit or receiving countries **are trained on gender and diversity**, they know how to provide gender sensitive and trauma-informed care, they are trained on the use of appropriate terminology and are aware of the particular protections risks of LGBTI people, women human rights defenders or other relevant groups.

Furthermore, **all available programs need to be benefiting both refugees and the host communities focusing on providing trauma-informed, age-, gender, ability and sexuality sensitive social support.**

Detention should be the last resort and children should never be detained. However, whenever it is used, conditions must take into account women's and children's needs.

We need to ensure that LGBTI people are resettled to countries able to uphold their rights or that people with disabilities are resettled to countries able to provide them with appropriate care. If women are returned to their home countries, we must ensure they are returned to safe conditions, where perpetrators of SGBV are held accountable, women have documentation and rights to land and property on their own independently from men.

In conclusion, **the recognition of diversity and specific needs of vulnerable groups needs to be reflected across - from admission and reception until the resettlement and returns.** In other words, it is important throughout all four pillars of the CRRF.

I'd like to reiterate again that when our responses are gender and diversity-sensitive, it means we are meeting the needs of everyone; both refugees and host countries and communities will benefit; and we are contributing to a better world for everyone.