



The Agenda for Protection: Contributions of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

Introduction

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children actively participated in the Global Consultations on International Protection and the development of the Agenda for Protection (AfP). We view the AfP as an important tool to advance the protection and empowerment of refugee women and children. The following is a brief synopsis of some of the Women's Commission's ongoing activities aimed at addressing the key protection concerns of displaced women and children.

Women's Commission Activities to Advance the Agenda for Protection

AfP Goal 1, Objective 2, Improved Individual Asylum Procedures: The Women's Commission has actively advanced greater protection of women and child asylum seekers in the United States by encouraging full and fair access to asylum procedures and a general understanding of how gender and age related persecution fits within the refugee framework. This work has included development and implementation of evidentiary, procedural and legal guidelines to inform the adjudication of children's asylum claims.

AfP Goal 2, Objective 1, Better Identification and Response to the Needs of Asylum Seekers in the Context of Broader Migration Flows: The Women's Commission has served as a strong voice advocating for better protection of Haitian refugees in the wake of the most recent cycle of violence in that country. This has included encouraging countries in the region to undertake measures to identify adequately those Haitians who have a fear of persecution in their homeland and cannot safely return home.

AfP Goal 2, Objectives 2 & 3, Strengthened International Efforts to Combat Trafficking and Better Research on the Nexus between Asylum and Migration: The Women's Commission has launched an international assessment to analyze the nexus between trafficking and displacement. It is advocating for a rights-based approach to victim protection that ensures that women and children who would face persecution if returned are provided effective protection.

AfP Goal 3, Objectives 3 & 4, Strengthened Partnerships for Protection with Civil Society and Empowering Refugee Communities: Through its Protection Partners initiative, the Women's Commission has joined with local NGOs to empower refugee communities to identify and address their own protection priorities, including enhanced cooperation with UNHCR. The Women's Commission has also actively advanced fulfillment of the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women, which includes a commitment to ensuring equal and effective inclusion of refugee women in decision-making.

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An independent organization formed
with the assistance of the International
Rescue Committee to advocate for the
solution of problems affecting refugee
women and children.

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AfP Goal 3, Objective 5, Refugee Issues Anchored Within National, Regional and Multilateral Development Agendas: The Women's Commission is piloting workshops on the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in refugee, IDP and returnee contexts as a model for engaging government, development agencies and women's civil society to recognize these populations and reach common goals. The Women's Commission is also working in partnership with other agencies to advocate for support for education in emergencies in numerous MDG processes, including through statements at UNICEF's annual Executive Committee.

AfP Goal 4, Objective 2, Keeping the secretary General and Security Council Seized with the Issue: Since 2000, the Women's Commission has annually sponsored women to address the Security Council on refugee and IDP needs as related to Security Council Resolution 1325. The Women's Commission regularly contributes to Secretary General reports, studies and other policy fora to strengthen attention to refugee concerns.

AfP Goal 4, Objective 4, Prevention of Age-Based and Sexual and Gender-based Violence: The Women's Commission has advanced best practices in the area of reproductive health in conflict settings. Most recently, this has included encouraging the implementation of the Minimal Initial Services Package in emergency settings and improved responses to gender-based violence in IDP settings. Our work on education is also grounded in the recognition that education is a critical tool in ensuring the security of refugee children and youth, especially girls.

AfP Goal 5, Objective 3, Strengthened Cooperation to Make Repatriation Sustainable and Goal 1, Objective 10, More Effective and Predictable Responses to Mass Influx Situations: The Women's Commission is building upon its global survey on education in emergency settings to advance the effective provision of quality and appropriate education to displaced children from the onset of an emergency throughout the cycle of displacement. The provision of quality and appropriate education can greatly facilitate the successful post-conflict reintegration of children who are returning to their homelands, where they often play a critical role in achieving peace and stability and rebuilding their societies.

AfP Goal 6, Objectives 1 & 2, Measures to Improve the Framework for the Protection of Refugee Women and Children: The Women's Commission undertook the 2002 evaluation of UNHCR's implementation of the Policy on Refugee Women and the Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women. The evaluation has informed UNHCR's Age and Gender Mainstreaming Initiative, a process in which the Women's Commission is collaborating with UNHCR to ensure that age and gender concerns are adequately considered in all UNHCR programmatic activities. The Women's Commission participated in the evaluations of the age and gender mainstreaming pilot project; participated in the development of the global age, gender and diversity global rollout plans and methodology; is undertaking complementary research to inform UNHCR's gender mainstreaming process; and is participating in the gender mainstreaming training and implementation.

The Women's Commission has also advanced awareness of the Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women through development and distribution of a field-friendly version of the guidelines.

In collaboration with UNHCR, the Women's Commission contributed to the development of the General Comment No. 6 (2005) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, helping to ensure that this General Comment addressed the particular protection problems faced by unaccompanied and separated girls.

Finally, the Women's Commission has played a critical role in raising awareness about the impact of detention on women and child asylum seekers. In the United States, this work led to an overhaul of the custodial arrangements for child asylum seekers, leading to vastly improved care and placement services that better meet the best interests of unaccompanied and separated children.