



2024 UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs
- Online Recommendations -

Solutions, Inclusion, and Gender Equality

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Submission by:

Gender and Religious Freedom (GRF) is a global network that connects practitioners and advocates from the Christian church. Together they facilitate training, advocacy and research with a gender-specific focus. They are committed to working with all faith and belief-based organizations alongside civil society and are a voice for all faiths living with government restrictions or social hostilities.

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) is a network of churches in over 140 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

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1. Introduction

We wish to thank the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for addressing the important issues of Inclusion, and Gender Equality.

In this submission, most of our inputs are based on a three-level approach, suggested by Gender and Religious Freedom, as a way of creating an enabling environment and moving towards inclusivity.

The three levels suggested are:

- The Mindset: The worldview of the gatekeeper.
- The Structures: The 'walls' which regulate access and connection points;
- The Systems: The process which allows for navigation of those structures;

Those levels are further discussed and explained as an answer to the first question on solution and inclusion (2.1)

In addition, this submission gives several recommendations, which we hope will assist the High Commissioner in the global 2024 NGO consultations and further enrich the presentation of its outcomes at the annual meeting of the UNHCR's Executive Committee in October 2024.

The recommendations were gathered from a variety of experts within the network of Gender and Religious Freedom. They respond to 11 out of the 15 questions submitted in an online form by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in preparation for 2024 UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs.

2. Questions on Solutions and Inclusion

2.1. **What enabling environment and pre-conditions need to be in place to advance inclusion and facilitate solutions? How can relevant actors help raise awareness, trigger action, and create such an enabling environment and pre-conditions?**

In considering pre-conditions to enable solutions, it is worth recalling that the solutions will first and foremost need to remain rooted in the concrete and practical lived realities of the displaced person.

The solutions must be those which remain open-eyed to whether or not the displaced/stateless person is in a healthy and safe situation. This means that solutions will allow for the displaced/stateless person to have regular and reliable access to: Food, shelter, clothes, health services, education, basic travel options, recreation, right to retrieve personal documentation from country of origin, including DNA.

Gender and Religious Freedom (GRF) would suggest that in order to move towards inclusivity which provides solutions, change within NGO and national systems, programs and services has to happen at three different levels: within the Mindset, Structures and Systems as presented in the “MSS framework” of our joint report with FORB Women’s Alliance. (<https://forbwomen.org/forb-research/>, report p.14)

Creating an enabling environment includes these three levels:

- Mindset: the worldview of the gatekeeper
- Structures: the ‘walls’ which regulate access and connection points
- Systems: the process which allows for navigation of those structures.

If any one of these remains unaddressed, then the forcibly displaced person or stateless persons will be easily excluded. When it comes to displaced persons, solutions have to be found at all three levels. For example:

- Mindset: The baseline mindset is generally hostile to displaced persons. How do we move from hostile to enabling?
- Structures: The baseline structures favour nationals and are generally patriarchal. How do we move towards inclusive equality?
- Systems: Entry points are based on your social security number (or the equivalent) without which you cannot start a life within any national system. How do we allow for (alternative?) entry points in the systems?

Successful addressing of any of these starts with a willingness to investigate where and why inclusion is more successful for some than for others. And then make the appropriate investment in making changes. How can these be addressed? In general terms:

- Mindset: through training which involves self-reflection with regard to all potential exclusionary factors (race, gender, age, religion, education, etc.)
- Structures: through re-examination of prerequisites and agency which pathways to inclusion assume is equal for all individuals
- Systems: through re-examination of the details of processes (and process power holders) to detect bias and unequal results of existing process output

Considering all three levels will go a long way to diagnosing and addressing a framework of inclusion. Because all situations are variable, how to problem-solve is at least as important as what specific answers/solutions are.

2.2. What kind of quality and comparable data is needed to support inclusion and solutions programming at national, regional and global levels?

Inclusion begins with understanding all parties who need to be represented in programming. First, this means that data is needed on the makeup of stateless persons, including religious affiliation.

At present, there is little to no understanding of the religious diversity of stateless or displaced persons. Many such persons come from countries that understand the national registration of religion to be something assigned; registered religious affiliation may be separate and apart from a freedom of conscience choice. Noting the religious make-up of an IDP camp by their previously registered religion might miss entirely their actual belief or non-belief of choice. Because some religions have dress codes for women, her wearing of or not wearing of an expected piece of apparel increases her vulnerability. When religious diversity is understood properly, for instance, it can be connected to the need for the staff at an IDP camp to be matched to the diversity of those in the camp.

Further compounding the difficulty of knowing who to include: Data cannot be safely collected as regards religion in situations where the displaced person will be in further danger if their belief or non-belief of choice is found out. Addressing the safety of response is a first step to quality data collection. This might mean that data collection about religious diversity needs to be disconnected from their personal data.

Secondly, data is needed on the cultural assumptions, education levels and awareness levels of migrants, particularly of women and children. Inclusion can be initially hampered by communication barriers that result not just from different languages, but from communication barriers within a language. Education barriers or inequality might result in additional vulnerability for some communities of migrants who cannot understand the types of questions being asked by support or solution services along the hubs of their journeys. Without having the data to understand the level of education or cultural assumptions of displaced persons, solutions may fail to reach their intended objectives.

Thirdly, feedback data on felt inclusion of those receiving services can support future solutions. Collecting data on how included people have felt when in contact with existing programs, and why, is necessary to reinforce the effective inclusive solutions and help adapt, reinvent or stop ineffective exclusive solutions.

2.3. How can local civil society help operationalize the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)? How can international actors' partner with local actors to amplify these efforts, and ensure access to services and protection of rights?

International actors can offer a global perspective on national practices as well as understanding of universal principles of inclusion. Both of these can be offered to

national refugee management practice in order to reassess and reimagine how the refugee processing and integration journey may reflect unconscious bias (mindset) which has become embedded in structures and systems of each particular nation.

While the role of international actors can be catalysing and empowering, the local actor is often too overwhelmed to navigate the additional objectives that do not feel sufficiently practical and concrete to the local actor.

In order to best operationalize the GCR objectives, local actors need to see how these objectives are concretely connected to their local efforts – and the concrete needs they are faced with. It is up to international actors to bridge the gaps between the overarching and more theoretical aspects of care with the practical focus of most local actors.

International actors will do well, in turn, to carefully listen to local partners' concerns and especially the barriers to success which they say they are facing. If these include vulnerability factors or issues which the GCR has not specifically listed, then the GCR representative can take a learning attitude and expand their own understanding, rather than try to make the local situation match a model developed elsewhere.

2.4. How can relevant actors strengthen national protection systems and related services to ensure the inclusion of displaced and stateless persons from the onset of an emergency?

In states of emergency, all persons become equally endangered in the immediate, but not all persons are equally vulnerable. Displaced and stateless persons are particularly vulnerable when national protection systems and related services may already be stretched thinly among their citizens. This inherent inequality means that resources are first given to citizens and then to displaced persons, assuming those displaced are known by the emergency services.

When stateless persons are systematically excluded (by definition of their statelessness), they are even more vulnerable than others. In Covid, stateless persons without bank accounts could not do remote shopping. In a flood, stateless persons are not on lists of survivors to search for, and they are likely to be missed or not given proper burial. Therefore, when preparing for an emergency, preparing to be inclusive means accounting for shelter and health-care for the displaced and stateless (and calculate for larger numbers than you might expect: as we could see with COVID-19: many people lived on the street).

It is the scarcity of resources that often means that in times of emergency or natural disaster that a person's statelessness is the determining factor for the trajectory of response. There are upsetting reports where a person's statelessness results in detention in a time of emergency rather than humanitarian assistance. National

protection systems could be strengthened by a posture of amnesty regarding the criminalization of migration until the state of emergency is lifted.

Without such a posture of amnesty, the displaced or stateless person will be likely to hide from authorities and, because they do not benefit from any protections, fall further into an abused, marginalised and vulnerable existence. For women and girls this opens them further to the danger of human trafficking.

2.5. What scalable models of economic inclusion and livelihood support can be co-created by relevant actors to foster self-reliance and the long-term contribution to the economy of host countries?

We do not have a solution to recommend, however, we do see that any solution regarding an economic model will encompass an inclusive understanding of the grey area of illegal work practice where most stateless people are now forced to earn a livelihood. The grey area inherently falls outside of our structural economic organised legal, taxable and equitable economically defined areas of society.

This grey area is often unsafe, discriminatory, exploitative and abusive towards the stateless/forcefully displaced. Simultaneously, the business owner or economic actor providing a job to the stateless person risks punitive action if found out for creating livelihood options for this particular group.

If we can come to a model that accepts this grey area instead of denying its existence, it might mean:

- that a business owner can, without further ado, register (a limited number of) stateless workers;
- the grey labour market can become a slightly less grey space with reduced opportunity for exploitation;
- there would be increased inclusive job market options for stateless people, leading to less sustained social and economic issues among this group, and;
- reduced social and community unrest related to presence of vulnerable, homeless, jobless, stateless people on the streets;

2.6. How can local social services be more sustainably and systematically supported to provide inclusive services to vulnerable forcibly displaced, stateless persons and host communities?

One first step to supporting local services is to address the hostile mindset that hampers inclusive services. Local systems, in general, are hampered by national systems. National systems (see response #1 also) are inherently hostile to undocumented and stateless people – or anyone outside the system.

Local services are responsible for managing their resources. However, seen from the perspective of a stateless person, local services have all the funding and therefore all the power. Therefore, for example, if the money comes through the national government (who is upholding a law against stateless people), there is no mechanism for services without running the risk of deportation.

In order to include vulnerable persons, it is necessary to intentionally compensate for the inherent self-protectionist attitude (mindset) and lack of access (systems and structures).

Compensating for a self-protectionist mindset might mean that inclusive services need to be provided primarily by inter-governmental or non-governmental actors, without trampling the sovereignty of national governmental actors.

Structural and Systemic changes could be made to provide inclusive services such as:

- walk-in medical hours;
- walk-in judicial services;
- medical and judicial services which are free of charge ;
- medical and judicial services which are free of registration, therefore anonymity is guaranteed;
- reconsidering housing conditions and attribution, and/or;
- adapted care for elderly women (they don't come to the walk-in hubs or have access to social media, don't speak the language and are therefore completely off the radar);

3. Questions on Gender Equality

3.1. Organizations led by forcibly displaced and/or stateless women and girls play a crucial role in supporting their communities, advocacy, providing essential services, expertise and context specific insights. Their direct involvement is vital for effective humanitarian responses, organizing and mobilizing toward shared gender equality goals, systems change, and sustainable solutions. What concrete measures can Member States, NGOs and UNHCR take to enhance support to these organizations to overcome obstacles to funding, participation in humanitarian coordination and leadership?

Whilst the inclusion of stateless women and girls is essential, the process to achieve that needs to address three levels (see response #1 on Inclusion):

Mindset: Training to recognise and address unintentional or intentional prejudicial practices and attitudes of the team in the receiving country is an important first step.

This would include trauma awareness, specific cultural training of each nation and region given by a training team that has representation within the staff team by those with the right to remain.

Second of all, member states, NGOs and UNHCR can embark in training and messaging that recognises that such women have something to contribute which cannot be duplicated by the receiving nation. Mindset inhibits this posture, as very often such women are seen as ‘takers’ rather than crucial partners.

Structures: Member states can recognize how much energy stateless women and girls have to dedicate to dealing with the exclusion and deprivation within existing structures. In such cases, there is little or no energy left to bring their critical insights. Structures must address the various intersectionalities: gender, ethnic, education, cultural, religious, access to knowledge/systems/education/administrative tools/digital skills, access to (mental) healthcare (90% of all displaced people have unstable emotional health (scaled from light to heavy problems)).

Systems: In addition, intentional access points to involve these women and girls would need to begin when they are in a more stable living situation which means stabilising the movement of the displaced persons in the receiving nation so that they do not have to repeatedly ‘tell their story’ or begin relationships again. This would build continuity and confidence for these women and girls to engage as active participants.

Funding is an interesting point crossing over the whole MSS-model. Many women within the displacement dynamic have not carried full financial responsibility, or have not worked with finances within system boundaries (accountability norms, etc.). There are exceptions, of course, and these exemplary individuals rise above the rest, become known, and somehow in our minds can become normative about what displaced or stateless women can do/achieve. In reality, many such women have not managed any personal finances, let alone collective finances.

Most women who have been displaced or have to flee are not independent, financially, or otherwise. Therefore these women may be subject to power dynamics that directly affect how they will be able to deal with money/funds. To understand the power dynamics that women are caught up in is precursory to assuming financial responsibility. Anything in the woman’s life will be used as leverage to control her decisions regarding access to funds, resources, etc. Furthermore, innocently assuming equality in this area can vastly decrease the stateless/displaced woman’s security, agency and independence.

3.2. LGBTIQ+ grassroots organizations, including those led by displaced and stateless people, are knowledgeable of the context and how to navigate

challenging legal and social environments. They represent an important entry point for forcibly displaced LGBTIQ+ persons to seek services and can support humanitarian actors in developing responses that are safe and inclusive of LGBTIQ+ persons. How can Member States, UNHCR and NGOs leverage the knowledge and expertise of grassroots organizations led by LGBTIQ+ people and support their efforts within operations?

Whilst meeting the needs of people displaced by sexual orientation has value, these people will still co-exist within a displaced hostile community. Member states would do well to look for intersections within or compounded vulnerabilities with these people. For example, we can ask if they belonged to a ethnic group that was particularly vulnerable such as the Hazaras in Afghanistan or the Rohingya's in Myanmar. This could exist alongside any other disability or religious intolerance.

Religion, Gender, and Sexuality: Three Points on Freedom of Religion or Belief

3.3. How can Member States, UNHCR and NGOs ensure that forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls are treated as equal partners in the humanitarian efforts?

Member States, UNHCR and NGOs can work to increase the partnership of women and girls as equal partners in humanitarian efforts by considering improvements in three areas:

Mindset:

The premise of the question is that there is, firstly, equality between agencies and displaced/stateless persons, and, secondly, among all displaced/stateless people. While this would be ideal, this is untrue insofar as the stakeholder who seeks to treat the stateless person 'equally' has the unequal right to deport/imprison (or advise a nation state to do so). The power imbalance has to be recognised and scrutinised for the consequences of the fundamental notion of equality. This is especially apparent when the displaced/stateless find themselves being 'processed' in a state which is itself responsible for the forceful displacement of persons.

Secondly, in many humanitarian efforts, the people who are the victims of the apparent crisis come from a context with inherent inequalities. These inequalities, often shaped by pre-existing social norms, shape the vulnerabilities of people. These vulnerabilities are pervasive when life is lived normally, but become exacerbated during crises, particularly when insecurity and/or violence is increased. The_2024_Gender_Report.pdf (opendoors.org) (password: freedom) – key findings pg.3. These pre-existing inequalities and their associated vulnerabilities need to be understood during humanitarian responses so that an appropriately differentiated response will ensure a more gender equitable response.

Structures:

The women and girls in most displaced populations are starting from a structurally subordinate and dependent position. Even prior to their entry into the displacement dynamic, they have often been without personal resources, education or any other form of autonomy. This means that they are unfamiliar with navigating structures, and may not have access to any of the documentation required, or ability to follow through required steps.

Full cross-cultural participation requires language and acculturation lessons. Navigating the mindset, structures and systems by displaced/stateless woman is prerequisite for her successful inclusion into equal partnership in humanitarian efforts in the host country. For this, knowledgeable ambassadors and cross-cultural communicators and cultural interpreters are needed. This needs to urgent funding.

Systems: Processes which treat women and girls as equal partners will understand that women and girls might need different access points than men.

3.4. In an environment with increasing competing priorities and shrinking resources, how can we collectively address under-funding of GBV prevention and response programming in situations of displacement and statelessness?

Underfunding of GBV prevention and response is an issue that has roots at all three levels: Mindset, Structures and Systems (see response #1).

The Mindset issues for GBV prevention and response are difficult to address because of the invisibility of GBV and IPV. If this type of violence is invisible, the support system is also invisible and therefore inaccessible for most people.

Furthermore, much GBV work is underfunded and not supported because it's not deemed important/valuable for the causes we want to achieve. It's the spiral of denial, and often in the case of GBV/IPV it's connected to deep beliefs on both sides (perpetrator and victim) that this violence is the basis for love/security.

Our structures for action that have been shaped through patriarchy deny that GBV /IPV are related to the problems on the table. Therefore, until this is addressed and integrated into our worldview, structural and systemic principles and practice, nothing will change.

For NGOs and activists who are working in this field and are seeking resourcing because they know and understand the need, it's exactly those resources that are scarce. This is due to the unequal distribution of financial resources and where the current power structures create limitations.

See FoRB Women's Alliance report; Women at the Table (March 2023)

Key Finding 2: Exclusion from power structures additionally marginalizes, undermines, under-studies and under-resources efforts to address FoRB violations committed against women and girls and limits their capacity to effectively act.

Key Finding 5: Structural change is the necessary accelerator for addressing Women's and FoRB Rights and requires an external catalyst. It is not within the agency of the unempowered to have the necessary resources or create a space for themselves at the table.

Recommendation 5: Funders and other leaders should recognize that the future vitality and health of the movement depends on their support for individuals and organizations working on women and fund accordingly. Women and girls working on FoRB-related activities, especially at the grassroots level, provide much of the movement's energy, yet their activities are inadequately resourced.

<https://forbwomen.org/forb-research/>

3.5. How can we innovate to collectively enhance the protection from GBV of forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls in all their diversity while they move along key mixed movement routes?

The vulnerability of women to GBV along mixed movement routes is a pernicious and pervasive knot; innovation is surely required. However, so is practical reality. In reality, much migration happens in a context where the migrant is in the hands of another person who will use exactly the tools of GBV and IPV for their own gain. Again, the power balance has to be understood in all situations.

Unfortunately, the assumption that you can increase safety for women and girls on these trajectories is a falsehood. While women are migrating on routes controlled by criminal gangs, their movement is completely devoid of safety measures. The only place that we can mitigate for safety is in the hubs. As long as movement or migration services are in the hands of criminals, it will be next to impossible to enhance the protection of vulnerable women.

Migrants are most often completely unprepared for the context that they are arriving in. For instance, in some countries, it is not safe for women to call the police after GBV; instead, they need to ask to be taken to a hospital.

Education can be specified to the nationality and to the migration route. Communication via social media needs to be accessible: the social media that is most used in their home country and in the user's language, whether across tiktok, instagram, blogs, facebook, telegram, etc. Furthermore, multiple types of communication to reach multiple learner styles: social media is useful for younger

generations, but wherever possible, supplementary posters at hubs are necessary. Video, audio, infographics and posters are needed side-by-side.

The communications can best be linked to each trajectory of the journey of the migrant; It needs to follow from one hub to the next (starting outside the EU and following the main routes inside the EU), pointing forward where they can find the next safe space (and all mentioned above).

In all cases, language needs to be simple; where possible, cultural translators, ambassadors and the older ones need active communication to compensate for the lack of education, awareness and access to online communication.

For the EU, identify hubs on the periphery of the migration route like Belgrade, Izmir, Nodur, Tunis, etc. and inside the EU like Athens, Paris, Calais, Marseille, Trieste, where there are safe spaces for women to find:

- women's hygiene and healthcare
- emergency beds
- helpline in preferred language
- safe taxi service to the hospital
- safe services which are not the police
- safe houses
- All of this through collaborative local initiatives.