

**Women's Refugee Commission Submission for the
High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement (HLP)
*Ensuring the Meaningful Participation and Leadership of IDP
Women and Girls***

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The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) is a research and advocacy NGO working to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflicts and crises.

Introduction

Responding to internal displacement – whether caused by disasters, conflicts, climate change, or development – is fundamentally about protecting the human rights of all internally displaced persons (IDPs). Yet too often, States and other actors do not respect the human rights of IDPs, particularly IDP women and girls.

WRC's submission focuses on a key issue that we feel – if prioritised by the High-Level Panel (HLP) – will help to promote greater respect for the human rights of all IDPs: **the pivotal need to meaningfully include all internally displaced women and girls, in all their diversity, and support their leadership in order to prevent, respond to, and find solutions to internal displacement.** WRC looks forward to engaging further with the HLP as it develops its recommendations.

The Meaningful Participation of IDP Women and Girls

IDP women and girls frequently find themselves in highly vulnerable situations during displacement, but are all too often inadequately involved in identifying needs, designing responses, decision-making, or identifying solutions. Women-led and feminist civil society organisations that represent, and are of, IDP communities are often the least likely to receive the resources necessary to enable them to self-organise and effectively take leadership roles and advocate for their communities' interests.¹ The need for women's participation has been widely acknowledged by States, UN resolutions, legal and policy documents. The key challenge remains implementation.

The United Nations (UN) Security Council has recognised that refugee and internally displaced women and girls are at heightened risk of various forms of human rights violations and abuses.² The Council also emphasised that persistent barriers to the full implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda “will only be dismantled through dedicated commitment to women's empowerment, participation, and human rights, and through concerted leadership, consistent information flows and action, and support, to ensure women's full and equal participation at all levels of decision-making.”

The [Women in Displacement](#) project, undertaken by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, and WRC, looked at

¹ For example, one study found that only 1% of gender equality funding goes to women's organisations: *Only 1% of gender equality funding is going to women's organisations – why?* The Guardian, July 2019: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/02/gender-equality-support-1bn-boost-how-to-spend-it>

² UN Security Council, Presidential Statement on 28 October 2014, UN Doc. S/PRST/2014/21.

ways of supporting opportunities for women’s equal and meaningful participation in camp governance structures.³ The project found that the systematic assessment of barriers and enablers to the participation of IDP women and girls in camp and camp-like settings can lead to a better understanding of needs and ways to respond to those needs. Intentional efforts are required to improve the participation of women and girls, in all their diversity, in camp governance. Even when efforts are made to ensure women’s participation, women with disabilities are often left behind: targeted efforts must be made to ensure their engagement through accessible means and materials. Increasing access to livelihoods opportunities and access to, and control over, resources to help women be economically productive, can positively contribute to women’s participation in decision-making.

Access to Livelihoods and Cash and Voucher Assistance

IDP women and girls may experience the loss of livelihoods, which puts them at greater risk of human rights abuses and has a significant impact on their wellbeing. Ensuring their existing skills and market assessments inform the design of livelihoods programming are essential to ensuring their protection and self-reliance. Creating a more just and equitable economy, mobility, and access to the labour market is important to be able to generate an income and to achieve economic inclusion for women, which includes access to labour markets, finance, entrepreneurship, and economic opportunities for all, including non-citizens and underserved or marginalised groups. Cash and voucher assistance (CVA) can enable women and girls to meet their basic needs with autonomy and self-determination, while also supporting local markets and host communities. CVA can play an important role in preventing and responding to gender-based-violence by helping, for example, to address economic drivers related to early or forced marriage or supporting GBV survivors to access essential health or legal services.

Ensuring an Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) Approach

Different factors can influence how women and girls in all their diversity experience forced displacement, in particular through the distribution of resources and who holds power in displacement settings. An age, gender, and diversity, including disability (AGD) approach is essential to ensuring protection and non-discrimination in all IDP responses. Disability, education, ethnicity, religion, displacement and citizenship status, income, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other diversity factors can all shape an individual’s experiences, impact their ability to participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives, and contribute to multiple forms of discrimination and specific protection risks. Displaced women and girls with disabilities, for example, can face increased risks of exclusion, discrimination, and violence. *(For more information, please see our joint submission to the HLP: “Leaving No One Behind: Ensuring an Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) Inclusive Approach to Internal Displacement”).*

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

IDP women and girls do not just stop having reproductive health needs during displacement. Lack of access to sexual and reproductive health care and rights (SRHR), including contraception and access to safe abortion, increases the risk of maternal mortality and morbidity; unintended pregnancy; and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; and gender-based violence (GBV). Adolescent girls and young women are an overlooked group within IDP populations whose sexual and reproductive health needs remain largely unmet. In countries with already weak health care systems, they can face barriers when trying to access care. Complications during childbirth, in the absence of skilled birth attendants or emergency obstetric care, often lead to death or serious injury, such as obstetric fistula. Medical, legal, and social services should include targeted outreach to IDP women and at the onset of situations of internal displacement, and particularly for survivors of gender-based violence.

³ <https://womenindisplacement.org/>

Gender Equal Nationality Laws

Nationality laws in 25 countries currently prevent women from passing their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men. Roughly 50 countries deny women equal rights with men in their ability to acquire, change, or retain their nationality or to confer nationality on non-national spouses. This discrimination results in wide-ranging human rights violations, violates international law, inhibits sustainable development, and remains a top cause of statelessness. In displacement contexts, gender-discriminatory nationality laws impact even greater portions of a population, while further exacerbating protection concerns and the vulnerability of IDPs. IDPs often face family separation and the loss of civil documents, underscoring the need for each parent – regardless of gender – to have the right to confer nationality on their child. Those lacking identity documents as a result of discriminatory nationality laws may be denied freedom of movement and often face obstacles in securing equal access to healthcare, education, and other social services. Eliminating gender discrimination in nationality laws is essential to ensure gender equality and the rights of IDP women and girls, as well as preventing them from further harm.

Recommendations for the High-Level Panel to Consider:

- Promote the intentional and meaningful participation of all IDP women and girls and their representative organisations, including in leadership roles, as a means to contribute to better responses to internal displacement.
- Governments must understand the importance of scaling up financial and technical support for inclusive health care for IDPs, including sexual and reproductive health care.
- Ensure women and girls, in all their diversity, can access and participate in livelihoods programming and leadership and education opportunities.
- Recommend that States reform nationality laws that still discriminate on the basis of gender to prevent statelessness, uphold equal rights, and protect IDP women and girls.
- Cash and voucher assistance (CVA) should be promoted as an effective means to respond to internal displacement when it takes into account age, gender, and diversity, including disability, considerations and is used to prevent gender-based violence (GBV).

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