

Gender in Humanitarian Action

Brief No. 4

Rohingya Refugee Crisis Response
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Developed by the ISCG Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group
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Interconnectedness of Gender, Age and Disability Issues in Rohingya Refugee Response

Humanitarian actors in the Rohingya refugee response are delivering humanitarian services to a population differentiated by 'age, gender and disability'. Gender is a key cross-cutting issue in all sectors of the response. This GiHA brief draws attention to how 'gender and age', 'gender and disability' and in some cases a combination of all three interact with one another to disadvantage some groups of Rohingya refugees and host communities. The interconnectedness of gender and other cross-cutting issues is such that progress made in addressing one cross-cutting issue contributes to achievements in the other. The reverse is also true. For instance, gaps in addressing age specific needs (e.g. the needs of children, older persons) and the needs of persons with disability will negate the achievement of gender equality results. Some of the challenges that affect children, older people and persons with disabilities in accessing humanitarian services in refugee camps and host communities are:

- **Limited space** in camp sites restricts establishment of latrines and the few are shared by high number of people. The majority of latrines are not gender-specific or are not built taking into consideration disabilities.
- **Lack of privacy** in bathing spaces and latrines and fear of assault prevents many women from using these facilities.
- **Lack of support services** for older people means they spend a large part of the day alone. They face challenges in accessing food and other assistance. Similarly, persons with disabilities face challenges and because of limited mobility are unable to reach services and distribution points.
- **Lack of educational services** in the camps for adolescent boys and girls and **limited activities targeting this age group** means they do not have access to proper school curriculum and are not positively engaged.
- **Lack of livelihood opportunities** exposes refugees to bonded labor in difficult and abusive conditions with little or no pay, and women and girls, in particular, are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and prostitution.

Interventions of some JRP partners, reviewed below, provide useful insights and lessons on inclusion of gender, age and disability for Rohingya refugee response.

Handicap International (HI) Supports Access to Humanitarian Services for all

People with disabilities (PwD) living in Rohingya refugee camps face significant barriers to inclusion. Children with disabilities cannot attend school and are invisible, stigmatized and exposed to exploitation, abuse and negligence. Older persons with disabilities lack functional autonomy and access to basic health and social services. Without targeted interventions, this combination of *age, gender and disability* vulnerabilities will further exclude PwD from participating in social, economic, and educational activities.

Rather than developing specific actions targeted at PwD, HI takes an inclusive approach in its interventions for Rohingya refugees and host communities by supporting access to services for all, whenever possible. Around 2,400 adults and children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups living in and around the Nayapara and Kutupalong camps and host communities in Teknaf and Ukhiya Upazilas benefit from HI rehabilitation services. Eight mobile units¹, set up to respond to the essential and specific needs of refugees, operate in Kutupalong and Balukhali extension camps and Unchiprang. The teams provide door-to-door services,



Rehabilitation Session in Zone DD in Camps 3 & 4
(Photo by Handicap International)

identifying the most vulnerable people – pregnant women, children, elders and people with reduced mobility. They offer physical and functional rehabilitation (together with the provision of assistive devices), psychological assistance, awareness sessions on protection issues and refer those in need of further assistance to specialised services. Support activities undertaken with children and families are promoting inclusive education for girls and boys, including those with disabilities.

UNHCR Supports Formation of Women, Youth and Men's Groups

To strengthen the community and their protection, UNHCR has supported the formation of women groups and concurrently formed youth and men groups across the Rohingya refugee camps. The women groups are helping to develop their leadership skills, make their views heard on protection issues, and nurture volunteer service projects focused on the needs of women. Links to both the youth and men groups are being developed in a way that allows women to retain their autonomy.

¹ Each mobile unit team is composed of 2 Rehabilitation officers, 1 Psychosocial support officer, 1 Protection officer, 1 Nurse, 1 Social worker and 1 Sport inclusion officer

Adolescent girls have also eagerly joined youth groups, through which they have been able to identify safety and security risks in the camps, and propose community based solutions to those risks. Youth have lead the design and organization of community service projects that have included awareness raising on the prevention of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and social outreach to adolescent girls who have dropped out of school.

Responses are designed to be inclusive and accessible to all demographics within the community. Apart from responding to the needs of women and girls, UNHCR’s protection teams are promoting the participation of men and boys in an accountable way. Protection also includes targeted actions to address specific needs that have been identified such as, workshops on the inclusion of people with disabilities and raising awareness on challenges of living in the camps.

Income generation and skills training is another aspect of UNHCR’s wider programme that helps Rohingya refugees gain more confidence and take control of their lives. Equal and meaningful participation of women in community outreach and various capacity development activities is being encouraged.



UNHCR Protection Team Meets Women Groups in Kutupalong Makeshift (Photo by: Jamal Uddin/ UNHCR)

HelpAge International Responds to the Needs Older People

- 100% older women and men including PwD in the targeted camps are the beneficiary of the project.
- During needs assessment, 50% female and 50% including a certain percentage of PwD were interviewed. 50% staff are male and 50% are female.
- 50% of members of management committees in each Age Friendly Space (AFS) are community volunteers and Older People (OP) representatives and 50% are protection team/group.
- All the project services are designed to proportionately provide for male, female and PwD operations.

Older people (men and women) among Rohingya Refugees have been identified to be facing challenges in accessing humanitarian services. Women face more challenges than men. HelpAge International is helping those most at risk, including older people, by providing health screenings and home-based care in the camp community, access to age-friendly latrines, and support to older people in reaching services – in refugee camps 8E, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 18.

Beneficiary data is being collected with age, sex and disability disaggregation, which has a very fruitful impact on the response. By age-disaggregated data, the variety of needs among young-old, mid-old and old-old came out very clearly which could be addressed as per priority. Similarly, sex- and age-disaggregated data, is helping to understand the difference in the needs of male and female beneficiaries. Disability-disaggregated data is being collected to identify the number of older people with disability in the areas being targeted. This information is useful in identifying the need for Home-Based Care (HBC) among older people. In addition, the project promotes inter-agency coordination at field levels and supports capacity building on humanitarian inclusion standards for Older People and PwD for inclusive service provision, sharing of research outputs as well as pilot interventions.



Older Women receiving Age Friendly kits (Photo by Jaberul Hoque, HelpAge)

HelpAge International has recently been given an FD7 to work with host communities in Palongkhali Union of Ukhiya. It will extend the same modality of its work on “Gender, Age and Disability Inclusion and Empowerment”. Four Age Friendly Spaces (AFS) in host communities. Each AFS will be operated by community-based committee with equal representation of women and men as well as PwD who will be included in decision-making processes, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of project activities.

UN Women Supports Vulnerable and Marginalized Women and Girls Access to Humanitarian Information and Relief Services

UN Women focuses on the most vulnerable and marginalized women and girls in particular, female-headed households, elderly women and adolescent girls, trying to meet specific needs: access to information, relief and services, access to resources and opportunities that will mitigate their risks of being exploited and enhance their self-reliance and participation in decision making.

UN Women’s Multi-Purpose Women’s Centre (MPWC), managed by AAB in partnership with MoWCA is offering services to an average of 70 women and adolescent girls a day. The centre is providing women who are otherwise confined and isolated in their homes, a space to relax and socialize with other women, which is critical under the circumstances. Women are getting livelihood skills training; 180 women and adolescent have completed tailoring course and another 180 women are learning tailoring in three women’s centres with UN Women



Rohingya Women Practice Cloth-cutting at the Multipurpose Women Centre in Camp 18, Balukhali (Photo by UN Women)

support; 6 Rohingya women tailoring instructors are receiving a monthly allowance of Tk2400. The trained women have already got an order to make 100 dresses from MSF.

21 women have been working as Community Outreach members to reach out to women who are not aware of the services available at the centre and are paid. They disseminate information especially to female-headed households, and gathering women’s concerns and needs in order to raise those with the Camp in Charge (CiC); the CiC has already asked for representation of women in his weekly meetings with Madjis (community leaders, all of whom are men). Another support group consisting of 5 women and 2 males monitors service delivery issues in the community and report back to the MPWC. Three female leaders from old UNHCR camps volunteered to mentor the newly arriving women on leadership skills. 467 Rohingya women and adolescent girls have received first aid medical support and 21 women received psychological first aid support at the MPWC.



Rohingya Women Practice Sewing Skills at the Multipurpose Women Centre in Camp 18, Balukhali (Photo by UN Women)

Shabujer Jatra Promotes Women, Child and Disability Rights

Shabujer Jatra (SJ) is a women-headed and rights-based organization, taking part in the Rohingya refugee response in Cox’s Bazar. Children and women with disabilities are neglected in many ways. Most of them have not attended school, which is a basic right. SJ is thus working with children on education, health and nutrition matters. Some children from host communities in Cox’s Bazar have been referred to Ministry of Social Welfare for stipends. Women with disabilities have been training on livelihoods from the Women and Children Affairs Department of the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MoWCA) and other agencies.

SJ has also organized training & capacity building sessions on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAW), and conducted courtyard meetings with women, girls and civil societies groups. SJ has established Monitoring Committees and operates a hotline to prevent trafficking and VAW.



Women & Children supported by SJ take part in International Day of Persons with Disabilities Celebrations, Dec 2017 organized by Department of Social Welfare, Bangladesh and SJ (Photo by SJ)

Challenges and Recommended Response on Interconnectedness of Gender, Age and Disability Issues in Rohingya Refugee Response

Paying attention to the interconnectedness of ‘gender and age’, ‘gender and disability’ and /or a ‘combination of all three’ is crucial to the Rohingya refugee response so no group is excluded. Notable gaps in addressing gender, age and disability issues are listed below and include the recommended response:

Challenges	Recommended Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children with disabilities face difficulties to attend schools and child friendly spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include children with disabilities in schools and support teachers in development of inclusive activities and teaching methods, Adapt school physical environment to be more accessible to PwD.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural and religious beliefs that consider individuals who have suffered from stroke, or with mental health disabilities to be possessed by Jinnis—hence their condition cannot change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create awareness of benefits of functional rehabilitation Adapt communication and messages to cultural norms and beliefs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservative male attitudes and patterns of conduct with reference to the teachings of Imams negate efforts for inclusion of women and girls in decision-making processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted programming to empower women both socially (e.g. through participation in camp committees) and economically.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing Women Friendly Spaces (WFSs) do not provide for all age groups of women. Lack of Youth Friendly Spaces excludes boys (often seen loitering looking for what to do) and girls (remain confined at home). Physical and attitudinal barriers hinder women with physical disabilities in accessing reproductive health care services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt existing WFSs and/or establish age-appropriate safe spaces for inclusion of older women and women with disabilities. Install age- and gender-appropriate WASH facilities. Establish Youth Friendly Spaces for positive engagement of youth. Empower women with disabilities and address health worker and community attitudes. Provide health and social service equipment that can help persons with disabilities in accessing services and managing personal care.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection of firewood from forests near refugee camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out of the LPG fuel and fuel-efficient stove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative mechanisms such as prostitution, trafficking and smuggling due to lack of livelihood opportunities in using skills and knowledge for production activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create more paid volunteering and work opportunities for women and men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor hygiene due to safety issues in accessing WASH facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Install locks and lights in bathing facilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of information on available services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create more awareness through volunteers who can help disseminate information.