

We
welcome
support
stand **#WithRefugees**



World Refugee Day 2016 Policy Paper



World Association
of Girl Guides
and Girl Scouts

We are currently facing the world's largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. 4.6 million people have been forcibly displaced from Syria alone, and millions more have fled conflicts in Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East¹.

In September 2016, world leaders will come together at the UN General Assembly, as well as at a Global Summit convened by President Obama, to discuss the international response to this immense crisis. On this World Refugee Day, we call on world leaders attending these fora to adopt an approach that is based on empathy and a recognition of the fundamental human rights of refugees.

A Holistic Response

In their response to the refugee crisis, we urge governments and humanitarian agencies to ensure that the services offered to refugees are holistic and comprehensive. Refugees need more than just food, water, and shelter to rebuild and move forward with their lives. We ask that particular attention is paid to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of girls and young women, which too often go unrecognized, and that additional resources are devoted to the following areas:

1. Protection and support for victims of SGBV

For all refugees, the journey to safety can be a harrowing experience, but particularly for women and girls. At all stages of their journey – in their country of origin, while in transit, and in the cramped quarters of camps or settlements – women and girls are exposed to the constant threat of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and human trafficking. It is obviously difficult to obtain reliable statistics on the percentage of women affected, but leading experts concur that the risks are ubiquitous and the rates are staggering.

Given the levels of physical and sexual violence experienced by women and girl refugees, it must be recognized that protection and safe spaces for women and girls are not a luxury, but a basic necessity in the delivery of the humanitarian response. As women and girls are now fleeing in increasing numbers, it is becoming an even higher priority to address protection issues around SGBV. As of January 2016, roughly 55 per cent of refugees arriving in Europe were women and children – a sharp jump in comparison to only 27 per cent in June 2015².

1 ECHO (2016). 'Syria Crisis Factsheet.' http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf

2 UNHCR (2016). 'Refugee women on the move in Europe are at risk.' <http://www.unhcr.org/569fb22b6.html>

The current humanitarian response is failing to recognize or prioritize the needs of women and girls. We call on member states and humanitarian agencies to act on the recent recommendations made jointly by the UNHCR, UNFPA, and Women's Refugee Council and take immediate steps to:

- Establish a coordinated response system within and across borders that protects women and girls, including cross-border referral mechanisms;
- Deploy specialist personnel – not only in camps, but also along migration routes – specifically to prevent, identify, and respond to SGBV;
- Create safe spaces in camps for women and girls that give them privacy and dignity, and create opportunities for survivors to access psychosocial support and health services;
- Ensure the response to SGBV is appropriately tailored to the needs and circumstances of refugee women and girls, recognizing that they will often be moving on quickly and will be unlikely to stop to access comprehensive services;
- Provide legal pathways to protection and justice for SGBV survivors, and prioritize these refugees in relocation and resettlement opportunities³.

2. Education

As the conflicts in Syria and elsewhere become increasingly protracted, we face the prospect of a lost generation: millions of children and young people, traumatized by conflict, deprived of their right to education, demoralized and ill-equipped for an uncertain future. In Syria alone, 6 million girls and boys have been affected by the conflict, and more than half of Syrian refugees living in neighbouring countries are not in school.

Education is a critical factor in restoring some semblance of normalcy and hope to the lives of displaced children and young people. In order to expand access to educational opportunities, we call on governments to:

- Allow for inclusive and flexible registration and documentation systems that allow refugee children to enroll in and attend formal education wherever they are;
- Ensure all educational opportunities – whether formal, non-formal, or informal – are inclusive and accessible for all children and young people, including girls;
- Allocate increased resources to non-formal and informal educational opportunities, recognizing and supporting the vital role of NGOs as collaborative partners in this provision⁴.

3. Livelihoods and Skills

Many refugees arrive having left the majority of their assets behind and having paid exorbitant fees to smugglers for safe passage. Protracted stays in camps where they are unable to work further deplete their remaining reserves and push refugees into deeper debt. These economic pressures are driving parents to send their children into exploitative labour or forcing desperate women and girls into survival sex and early marriage. Livelihoods and skills training can provide young people with a pathway out of debt and poverty, giving them an opportunity to realize their potential and create a safer future for themselves.

We urge host countries to:

- Integrate jobs training and skills development programmes into the humanitarian response;
- Take steps to ensure that these opportunities are accessible for young women as well as young men;
- Lift restrictions on refugees entering the labour market and allow refugees to work legally, so that that they can benefit themselves and their families⁵.

3 UNHCR, UNFPA, WRC. (2016). Initial Assessment Report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis. <http://www.unhcr.org/569f8f419.html>.

4 NGO Joint Position Paper. (2016). Supporting Syria and the Region.

https://plan-international.org/sites/files/plan/joint_ngo_position_paper_london_syria_conference.pdf

5 Ibid.

To make any of these activities possible – and to ensure that the full range of refugees’ needs are met – much greater levels of funds must be devoted to the humanitarian response. We urge governments and humanitarian agencies to:

- **Allocate more resources to the response**

The current response to the refugee crisis is severely inadequate. We call on governments to firstly honour existing resource commitments – including those pledges made at the recent Supporting Syria conference in London – and to then increase levels of financial resources dedicated to supporting vulnerable refugee populations.

- **Track whether those resources help women and girls**

Currently many humanitarian agencies do not break down their resource allocation by gender and cannot track whether their resources specifically support the needs of women and girls. We urge humanitarian agencies to put in place systems to track the gendered impact of their resource allocation and demand that at least 15% of humanitarian aid can be demonstrably shown to meet the needs of women and girls.

- **Work with NGO partners**

Local and international NGOs can provide essential support and prove a valuable asset to the humanitarian response. We encourage governments and traditional humanitarian agencies to explore partnerships with civil-society organizations – in particular youth- and women’s organization – to pool resources and expertise to meet the demands of this unprecedented crisis.

Finally, we urge Member States of the UN to keep their borders open to all those fleeing active conflict and to respect refugees’ human right to seek asylum from violence and persecution. We encourage governments to act with compassion and to accept greater numbers of refugees into their countries. We call on leaders, and on all peoples, to reject the logic of fear, hatred, and austerity, and instead to welcome refugees in recognition of our common shared humanity.