

Background Reading on the Project

The Project

The [Refugee Women and Girls – Key to the Global Compact on Refugees](#) project has been continuously funded by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade since 2018. It has contributed to facilitating and monitoring the implementation of gender commitments made in the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#). Underpinned by [UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\) Policy](#), these commitments seek to improve international protection for refugee women and girls, support gender equality, women's participation and leadership, and address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The project explores ways in which the high-level principles articulated in the GCR are impacted by **local socio/political circumstances**, and addresses the challenges noted by many key stakeholders, that **'one size does not fit all'** when designing solutions.

The Project Team

The multi-stakeholder project is led by researchers Linda Bartolomei and Eileen Pittaway from UNSW's Forced Migration Research Network (FMRN). With a team of refugee women from the five UN regions, they undertook the Gender Audit of UNHCR's Thematic meetings which informed the development of the GCR. Working in partnership with refugee women, academics, service providers and UNHCR, the project has developed and trialled a suite of implementation tools and monitoring and evaluation strategies in three refugee hosting countries in the Asia Pacific, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand, and at UNHCR in Geneva. It uses the concept of intersectionality and the UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity policy as a framework for analysing barriers to and strategies to increase gender equality.

Project partners in each country

In **Malaysia**, Tenaganita, the Malaysian Social Research Institute (MSRI), Asylum Access Malaysia (AAM), the Gender Studies Programme, Universiti Malaya (UM), UNHCR, Women led organisations from the Yemini, South Sudanese, Somali, Rohingya, Burmese, Pakistani and Afghan communities.

In **Thailand**, the Karen and Karenni and Muslim Women's Organisations, the Border Consortium (TBC) and Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University.

In **Bangladesh** the main partners were Relief International (RI), the Centre for Peace and Justice, BRAC University, Women led organisations in the Cox's Bazar camps and UNHCR.

Two key **Regional organisations**, Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) and Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) also contributed to the project.

Project Findings

These resources, are outcomes of the project based on evaluation and analysis by all partners. They are informed by the concept of the intersectionality of multiple forms of discrimination as a framework for analysing gender equality. It examines how socially and culturally constructed categories, such as race, class, socio-economic status, gender, sexuality, religion, and ability, intersect to contribute to systematic social inequality. Importantly, it addresses the fact that in every site in which Pittaway and Bartolomei have worked in this project and in 22 other countries over the 25 years, women have identified

rape, gender-based violence and sexual harassment (SGBV) as **THE** major barrier to participation, and gender equality in all aspects of their lives.

A very obvious, but still key finding was that that every refugee context is different and there are unique political and socio-economic challenges in each specific site including the ideological, cultural stance and power held by key stakeholders. When seeking to address the gender commitments laid out in the GCR and the social constructs which underpin them, we are seeking to change the status quo and challenge the accepted power structures which so often dominate the humanitarian and development sector.

Successful **participation** means ceding power from the dominant group of stakeholders, i.e. host and donor governments, and humanitarian aid providers at all levels, and sharing it with the refugee communities.

In each site in which we worked there was a clear message from the women, that they saw the way forward through strengthening and supporting women's refugee led organisations. This was clearly demonstrated when these women were very often the first and most effective responders during the COVID-19 crisis.

Major findings demonstrated that while we often talk the talk of *inclusion, participation, refugee-led, human rights, lived experience, diversity and gender equality*, which are the major pillars of the gender commitments in the GCR these are rarely clearly defined and the obstacles to achieving them are not clearly understood. (Definitions of these terms are explored in each section of the resource).