I. Background

Forced displacement – one of the major consequences of conflict, insecurity and disaster in Africa – leaves women and girls disproportionately vulnerable. Indeed, women and girls represented more than half of the 41 million people worldwide living in internal displacement at the end of 2018. They experience displacement differently from men and boys, facing specific challenges that must be better understood to provide them with the support they need.

Women and girl refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) face specific risks including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and other human rights violations. Displaced women and girls tend to be at greater risk of deprivation, insecurity, abuse, neglect and a general deterioration of their well-being. Often, their sex and age also impede them from making their voices heard or participating in decisions on matters that affect them. These risks exacerbate already present health, livelihood, education, and security concerns, as well as hindering their effective participation in peacebuilding and decision-making more broadly.

During the 31st Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly held on 1-2 July 2018 in Nouakchott, Mauritania, the Heads of States and Government of the African Union adopted Decision AU/Dec.707(XXXI) declaring 2019 as “the Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa” This was a vivid recognition, by African leaders, of the profound challenges that forced displacement poses for the achievement of the seven aspirations of Agenda 2063 - the Africa We Want - and the seventeen sustainable development goals of the global 2030 agenda.

Agenda 2063 - the Africa We Want - sets out a clear vision for our continent namely “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena.” Agenda 2063 resonates well with the 2030 global agenda on sustainable development. The seven aspirations of Agenda 2063 and the seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs) may not be fully realized if the African continent does not address the challenges posed by humanitarian crises and forced displacement. Aspiration 3 of Agenda 2063 envisions “An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.” Aspiration 4 envisages ‘A Peaceful and Secure Africa.’ Both aspirations 3 & 4 dovetail
neatly into the sustainable development goal (SDG) No. 16, which aims to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. “Furthermore, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Maputo Protocol, ensures in its Articles 4 and 10 the protection and participation of refugee women in local mechanisms, national, regional, continental and international decision-making.

The African Union has developed a robust normative framework to address forced displacement in Africa, including the OAU Refugee Convention and the AU Kampala Convention. Despite the efforts of Member States, the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Special Rapporteurs and other national and local actors – as well as the introduction of legal and policy frameworks to address the gendered issues arising from conflicts in Africa – considerable work remains to be done. There are major implementation gaps to be filled to achieve full protection and participation of women, ensure gender parity and support the achievement of durable solutions, including by mainstreaming gender in this discourse.

II. The joint study: Status of Women’s Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in AFRICA: The Context of AGA and APSA

As the AU declared 2019 the “Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa,” it become even more pertinent to capitalize on the momentum behind this issue to ensure that future interventions capture the lived experiences of women and girls. This is necessary in order to adjust and align their inclusion within the AU’s core governance, peace and security mechanisms and processes – mainly in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA).

In the context of AU’s 2019 theme of the “Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa” and the 2020 theme, “Silencing the Guns: Creating conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development”, the AU, UN Women, OHCHR and UNHCR, commissioned this continental study. The study provides a contextual analysis of the forced displacement of women and girls in Africa, maps out relevant legal and policy frameworks, and makes policy recommendations to the AU, Member States and relevant stakeholders to fast-track the implementation of women’s rights within the context of AGA and APSA. Such analysis provides a crucial underpinning element in any durable solution for refugees, IDPs and returnees in Africa.

The study benefited from field visits to three key countries with sizeable and diverse populations of forcibly displaced persons, namely Central African Republic (CAR), Ethiopia, and Nigeria. As part of this study, gender-mainstreaming guidelines were developed to support and promote the integration of not only gender considerations within
AGA and APSA but also to help both architectures become more reflective of the importance of the participation of displaced women and girls (IDPs and refugees) in decision-making, policy development, planning, programming, implementation and monitoring.

The study was first commissioned in 2019 and has since gone through a validation process in March of 2020 and was finalized in October 2020. It was presented at the 8th annual humanitarian symposium organized by the AU and UNHCR in November 2020.

III. Proposed Launch

To ensure the dissemination and effective use of the joint study: Status of Women’s Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in AFRICA: The Context of AGA and APSA, its key findings, recommendation and ‘Guidelines for the Integration of the Needs of Women and Girls in Internal Displacement and Refugee Situations in the Context of AGA and APSA’, AUC in collaboration with UN Women, OHCHR and UNHCR is proposing series of activities to launch the study.

a. Social media launch

- Live countdown to the launch will be placed on the respective websites/social media pages of partners to create anticipation and visibility.
- On the final date of the countdown, a video message from respective agency principals will be posted on all partners’ social media platforms containing:
  - Discussing the relevance of the study to their respective mandate
  - Highlighting briefly key findings and recommendation
  - Making commitments and calling for action
- The post of the video will also include a caption of the link to the AU website where the study will be made available.

b. High-level launch dialogue

- A high-level launch dialogue platform highlighting the outcomes of the study and a panel discussion.
- Presentation of the key outcomes and recommendation of the study by technical experts from AU and UN.
- A moderated panel discussion of Member States and RECs, AGA/APSA, CSOs and a woman refugee.

c. Infographic launch:

- A two-pager infographic highlighting:
  - Key outcomes
  - Recommendations
- disseminate through partners’ networks with an official message of the launch from AUC and social media platforms with the link of the document leading to AUC website.
IV. Objective
• Bring to the forefront the key findings and recommendation of the study;
• Create a platform that facilities the instrumentalization of the ‘Guidelines for the Integration of the Needs of Women and Girls in Internal Displacement and Refugee Situations in the Context of AGA and APSA’;
• Garner multi-stakeholder partnerships around concrete actions to mitigate the gendered impact of displacement within the context of AGA and APSA.

V. Expected outcomes
• The joint study on the Status of Women’s Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in AFRICA: The Context of AGA and APSA popularized
• Multi-stakeholder commitment to use the Guidelines for the Integration of the Needs of Women and Girls in Internal Displacement and Refugee Situations in the Context of AGA and APSA garnered.

VI. Participants
The event will be attended by Experts from Ministries in Charge of Gender and Women’s Affairs, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), UN Agencies, policy makers, representatives of CSOs, youth representatives, Development Partners, AU Organs and Specialized Agencies, AUC Staff from different Departments, media, women refugees, AU staff from AGA and APSA, etc.

VII. Proposed time and date
The launch will be conducted virtually on 18th June 2021 at 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM EAT at the margins of ‘the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict 2021’.

VIII. Language
• Simultaneous interpretations will be available in – English- French, French-English for the high-level launch dialogue.
• The infographics will be produced in – English and French.

IX. Contacts of focal persons
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