



**Launch of the Joint study- Status of Women's Rights in
Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in AFRICA: The
Context of AGA and APSA –**

**Organized on the occasion of the International Day for the
Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict 2021**

18 June 2021



SAVE THE DATE

June 18, 2021

11:00 AM - 12:30 PM EAT

LAUNCH OF THE STUDY:

**‘STATUS OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN
REFUGEE AND INTERNAL
DISPLACEMENT SETTINGS IN AFRICA:
THE CONTEXT OF AGA AND APSA’**

I. INTRODUCTION

On 18 June 2021, the African Union Commission - Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) organized a virtual event to launch a joint study titled “Status of Women’s Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in AFRICA: The Context of AGA and APSA”. The event took place on the International Day for Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict and aimed at bringing to the forefront the key findings and recommendation of the study and garnering multi-stakeholder partnerships around concrete actions to mitigate the gendered impact of displacement within the context of AGA and APSA. The platform brought together women and girls who are IDPs, policy makers from the AU, Civil Societies and development partners to share the protection challenges faced by women IDPs, best practices and strategies to address the issue. Moreover, the key findings and recommendations of the study were presented during the event.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the dialogue were to:

- Bring to the forefront the key findings and recommendation of the study;
- Create a platform that facilitates 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.

III. ATENDANCE

The launch was attended by over 100 participants including AU Organs and Specialized Agencies UN Agencies, AUC Staff from different Departments including from AGA APSA, representatives of CSOs, youth representatives, Development Partners and women refugees,

IV. OPENING SESSION:

The session began with welcoming remarks by the moderator **Ambassador Salah S. Hammad (PhD)**, the Head of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) who welcomed all participants and gave a brief introduction of the commencing event.

UN Women- Dr. Moez Doraid, Regional Director, a.i. East and Southern Africa:

Dr. Doraid noted that the gathering to launch the study provides an opportunity to bring to forefront the impact of displacement on women and girls in Africa and spotlight relevant policy instruments that can underpin durable solutions. He highlighted that the leading cause of forced displacement in Africa is conflict and the consequences of such conflicts for women and girls among many other things include Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and heightened risks due to displacement and the breakdown of normal protection structures and support. He further added that there is a need to prioritize and fund SGBV prevention and response programmes to prevent Sexual Exploitation and abuse, establish/strengthen Community Based Complaint Mechanisms.

Dr. Doraid encouraged development partners to support the African Union in advancing the implementation of the gender mainstreaming guidelines that accompany the study in ensuring that the experiences of women and girls living in refugee and IDP contexts are integrated in policies, strategies and processes at all levels.

OHCHR- Mr. Marcel Akpovo, Director and Regional Representative of OHCHR East Africa Regional Office:

Mr. Akpovo highlighted the importance of recalling how pre-existing gender inequality, human rights violations and gender discrimination are exacerbated in conflict and displacement settings. Additionally, he underscored that displaced women and girls are not merely victims but take important roles as active agents of change. Mr. Marcel highlighted the relevance of the joint study to illustrate progress made on a global and regional scale to advance the rights of forcibly displaced women and girls while acknowledging persisting gaps in the ratification, domestication and implementation of relevant regional and international instruments to protect displaced women and girls' human rights. He also noted that multi-stakeholder collaboration and in particular, synergies between AGA and APSA are pivotal to put in place a strong framework of coordination that addresses the underlying root causes of exclusion and discrimination against female refugees, IDPs and returnees.

UNHCR- Mr. Cosmas Chanda, Representative to the AU and UNECA (RAUECA)

Mr. Chanda lauded the study as an exemplary cooperation between the African Union and United Nations. He noted that the launch was a flagship event in the context of the twin events of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict and the commemoration of World Refugee Day 2021.

He underscored that the study's findings are aligned with UNHCR's priorities which has taken numerous steps to increase the meaningful and active participation of refugees and other forcibly displaced women with the aim of ensuring greater influence in the decision-making that impacts them, their families, and their communities.

Mr. Chanda reminded national governments of their responsibility in accordance with legally binding instruments under international law to ensure that displaced women receive the protection and assistance they require. He urged national authorities to establish strong and effective mechanisms for the domestication and implementation of laws and policies that protect refugee and IDP women.

Keynote Speech: Ambassador Salah on behalf of AUC-H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, African Union Commission:

His Excellency Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (AU-PAPS) recalled the significant progress made over the years in promoting the rights of women and girls' refugees and IDPs, including

the development of NAPs in 30 Members States, the adoption of specific national laws, the creation of FEMWISE-Africa. H.E. Ambassador Bankole pointed out the importance of the leadership and political participation of women and girls in Africa to support the prevention of conflict and consolidate peace, to combat sexual violence at all levels, and to ensure women's empowerment. He noted the African Union's aspiration and commitment to achieve a better financial and economic inclusion of African women through the new African Women Decade 2020-2030, and outlined the main AU instruments for GEWE such as the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000), the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003), the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) in 2004, the 1969 OAU Convention on Refugees, the 2009 AU Convention on Internally Displaced Persons, the AUC Gender Equality Policy (50/50) and the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018-2028. He encouraged Member States that have not yet done so to sign, ratify, domesticate and implement all relevant international, continental and regional instruments. H.E. Ambassador Bankole highlighted the ongoing AU institutional reform that will put the AGA and APSA under "the same roof", and will support the inclusive conflict prevention, mediation with particular emphasis on gender equality, women's protection and prevention of SGBV and ensure meaningful engagement of women, including female refugees, IDPs and returnees, in all AU efforts aimed at promoting peace and security. He committed to support the implementation of the study's recommendations and noted the call of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) made at its 833rd meeting held on 19 March 2019 that echoes the development of the guidelines.

V. PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY: '*Status of Women's Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in AFRICA: The Context of AGA and APSA*'

Ms. Nebila Abdulmelik, the co-author of the study gave a brief background of the study stating it was conducted in 2019 aligned to AU's theme for the year of 2019 and 2020, "Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa" and "Silencing the Guns in Africa respectively". She further added that the study remains relevant in 2021.

The study provides a contextual analysis and lays out the relevant policy and legal frameworks and their implications. Moreover, the study has an accompanying gender mainstreaming guideline for the integration of the needs of women and girls in IDP and Refugee situations in the context of AGA and APSA. The guidelines were developed in response to the AU's Peace and Security Council Open Session which took place in March 2019, the Session called for development of guidelines. The guidelines are

intended as simple and accessible tool with elaborated set of questions to guide policy makers in ensuring the needs and realities of refugee and IDP women are at the forefront of decision-making at highest levels - both politically and technically.

As part of the study, field visits to three countries namely Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Nigeria were conducted. The study countries were selected due to their sizable and varied populations of forcibly displaced people.

The main findings of the study

- Pre-existing inequalities, violations and discrimination are exacerbated during displacement.
- Vulnerabilities are compounded by other factors due to the varied realities of forcibly displaced women such as teenage mothers, elderly and widowed women, women living with disabilities and living with HIV/ AIDS.
- Displaced women experience violence from range of actors, such as family members, armed groups and those in-service sectors.
- Sexual and Reproductive Health services are dire due to inadequate resourcing.
- Subordinate position of women in the community often perpetuates power imbalance between women and men and boys and girls.
- Gender Equality is fundamental to well-being and rights, must be at centre of interventions and approaches.
- Education/Healthcare are disrupted for all, but even more so for women and girls and are at increased risk of child labour and child marriage.
- Women are not meaningfully nor consistently engaged in formal peace processes.
- Women are Insufficiently represented in decision making in the camps for displaced people.
- There is a clear correlation between the meaningful participation of women within decision making processes and effectiveness of policies and programs.
- A number of Member States are yet to ratify, domesticate or report on relevant treaties, including the Maputo protocol, the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child, the Kampala Convention and the AU Convention on Refugees.
- The complexity of displacement necessitates a framework of coordination of various actors and mechanisms that seek to address not only the immediate causes and consequences of displacement but also deal with the underlying root causes of displacement and seek to prevent it.
- AGA and APSA are opportune mechanisms that must be leveraged to seek and attain truly durable solutions. Coherence and synergy between the two architectures must be fostered.

The study provides recommendation to range of actors, which includes Member States, AU Organs and Regional Economic Communities and Development Partners & Humanitarian Actors. Some of the recommendations are,

- **Member States** need to ensure equal participation and effective representation and leadership of women and girls in decision-making processes as well as in prevention, management, resolution, and Post-conflict Reconstruction, Development and Peacebuilding efforts.
- **AU Organs and RECs** need to consistently employ Guidelines as standard benchmark to ensure the rights of refugee and IDP women and girls are taken into account in decision making as well as in the design and implementation of AGA and APSA programming.
- **Development Partners & Humanitarian Actors** need to provide greater financial and technical support to Women Right Organisations to shift patriarchal sociocultural and gender norms and practices.

VI. DISCUSSION: ‘Refugee Woman call for inclusive leadership policies’

The policy dialogue aimed to offer opportunity for dialogue between women refugee, RECs and CSOs. However, due to technical issues experiences by panelists due to internet connectivity, interactive dialogue was not able to take place. However, a women refugee based in Uganda was able to share her intervention.

Ms. Rebecca Arwal, a South Sudanese refugee woman based in Uganda appealed for the inclusion of women in the higher echelons adding that so far, women’s engagement has remained at the grassroot and community levels. She also pleaded for greater empowerment by the AU and the United Nations. She reiterated the expansion of safer spaces in IDP settlements and refugee camps to reduce the increasing incidence of SGBV cases.

She acknowledged the support being provided by UN and host governments which enabled women to establish and strengthen their social connections and exposure further empowering them to extend assistance to relatives in their native countries. She said skills and knowledge acquired through education have offered them better means and ways to organize women refugee communities, peacebuilding, and networking with local and international NGOs who support women with material and legal support as effective response to SGBV cases. She added that NGOs have trained them in creating channels that have improved protection and assistance for girls and women who are vulnerable to SGBV.

VII. CLOSING SESSION

Ms. Lehau Victoria Maloka, the Acting Director of the African Union Commission - Women, Gender and Youth Directorate thanked His Excellency Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner of AU-PAPS for his support and commitment. She commended the key UN partners - UNWOMEN, OHCHR and UNHCR - for their continued support in developing and launching this important study on the Status of Women's Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in AFRICA: The Context of AGA and APSA. She outlined the need to recognize the role and place of the women and girls' refugees and IDPs among the stakeholders in peace processes, as they are the most affected during crisis, and need specific protection. Ms. Maloka recalled the development by the AUC of the Maputo Protocol scorecard and index, an important instrument to help in monitoring the implementation of Women's rights in Africa. She concluded by congratulating and appreciating the work of the consultants who developed the study.

Ms. Maloka reaffirmed the commitment of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate to continue working with the UN partners and coordinating the internal AUC mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the report and the dissemination of the guidelines to the Member States and other stakeholders.

VIII. ANNEXUR

Agenda

Launch of the Joint study- Status of Women's Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in Africa: The Context of AGA and APSA

18, June 2021

Time: 11:00 – 12:30 EAT

Moderator – Amb. Salah S. Hammad, Ag. Head of the AGA Secretariat (AUC)

11.00 – 11.15 Opening Session:

Dr. Moez Doraid, UN Women, Regional Director, a.i. East and Southern Africa
Regional Office

Mr. Marcel Akpovo, OHCHR, Regional Representative of OHCHR East Africa
Regional Office

Mr. Cosmas Chanda, UNHCR Representative to the African Union and the UN
Economic Commission for Africa (RAUECA)

11,15-11.25 Keynote speech & official launch

H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and
Security, African Union Commission

***Group photo**

11.25 – 11.40 • Presentation of the study on “Status of Women’s Rights in Refugee and Internal Displacement Settings in AFRICA: The Context of AGA and APSA”- by Nebila Abdulmelik

11.40 – 12.20 Discussants- (moderated session)

▪ **Ms. Rebecca Arwal**, Nyumanzi settlement in Adjumani district, West Nile
Province, Uganda

▪ **Ms. Memouna Baboni**, Expert on Gender, Benin Ministry of Social Affairs and
Microfinance, Chair of the STC on GEWE Bureau

- **Ms. Marie Concessa Barubike**, Executive Director of AFRABU (Association of Repatriated Women)-Burundi
 - **Dr. Bolanle Adetoun**, Acting Director, ECOWAS Gender and Development Centre
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12.20 – 12.30 Closing Session:

- Ms. Lehau Victoria Maloka, Acting Director, African Union Commission Women, Gender, Youth Directorate (AUC-WGYD)
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