UNHCR and international organizations have developed guidelines, best practices, and other measures to improve protection of refugee women and girls. However, weaknesses in its staffing process and training limit the effectiveness of these measures. UNHCR lacks a formal strategic workforce plan that links the organization’s objectives, resources, and staffing; its staff assignment and rotation policies have resulted in extended vacancies at key protection posts; and it provides little practical training for most UNHCR and implementing partner staff on protection concepts and techniques.

UNHCR could also make better use of partnering arrangements with nongovernmental and international organizations to boost its protection capacity.

In response to allegations in 2001 of sexual abuse and exploitation of women and girl refugees by relief workers and peacekeepers, the U.N. and other international organizations introduced policies and procedures to address the problem, such as codes of conduct and mechanisms to report and act on new allegations of abuse of power. While these efforts have raised awareness among workers in refugee settings, international organizations face continuing sexual exploitation of women by relief workers, and the issue remains a real and significant problem.

The U.S. government, through the Department of State, supports the protection of refugees and other vulnerable populations primarily through its funding to international organizations. It is also a strong advocate at the United Nations, within international organizations, and at the country level to increase protection efforts.