

Gender Based Violence in Disasters Information Sheet

International Disaster Law project

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Gender Based Violence (GBV) can be defined as:

"Any harmful act that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to a woman, man, girl or boy on the basis of their gender."¹

Gender based violence (GBV) is therefore any act or threat of harm inflicted on a person because of their gender.² Specific factors which can facilitate increased rates of GBV during a disaster include: the weakening of community and institutional protection mechanisms; disruption of services and community life; destruction of infrastructure; separation of families; displacement; and limited access to justice and health services.

In addition, while risk factors are often pre-existing, the disaster itself and efforts to respond to it can exacerbate GBV occurrence.



Image: Sexual Violence in Conflict (UNDP)

Types of GBV which can occur during disasters

- Sexual, psychological, physical and emotional abuse.
- Rape and sexual assault.
- Forced trafficking and prostitution.
- Early and forced marriage.
- Domestic violence.
- Denial of resources, opportunities or services.

Acts of GBV during and in the aftermath of a disaster are often widespread and have serious impacts on individuals, families and society as a whole.

Why is it important to address GBV in times of disaster?

The IFRC reports that women and children are 14 times more likely to die or be subjected to extreme violence in situations of disaster:³

- ❖ 31.4% of 4,841 respondents questioned in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis felt an increased fear that they might be subject to sexual assault or rape.
- ❖ 20.4% were worried about the increased likelihood of sexual violence at home.⁴

In 2015, an IFRC study on GBV prevention and response in disaster settings, *Unseen, Unheard: Gender-based Violence in Disasters*, highlighted lack of secure shelter, inequitable relief distribution, stress and economic hardship after disasters as some of the factors that can contribute to the increase in GBV.

Both state and non-state actors must recognise that GBV is often perpetuated by disasters, and take steps to prevent, mitigate and respond to all instances of GBV within disaster settings.

How do GBV considerations vary across all phases of the disaster management cycle?

Different actions and considerations arise across the phases of disaster management (prevention, disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response, recovery and rehabilitation). So it is essential for governments and humanitarian organisations to understand the risks of GBV in disasters. Such an approach is key to preventing and addressing instances of GBV and responding to these accordingly at all times.

For resources from the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence, see: www.gbv.ie

For more information, see: <http://disaster-law.ucc.ie>

Prevention

Global estimates published by WHO indicate that nearly one out of every three women worldwide has experienced psychological, physical or sexual partner violence during their lifetime.⁵

All actors:

- Assume that GBV is taking place, even if no reliable data is available.
- Train all persons involved in humanitarian relief and judicial procedures on gender-sensitive issues.
- Engaging women in disaster preparedness and planning allows for more appropriate and responsive assistance.
- Promote awareness of the heightened risk of GBV during disasters – engagement with communities is key, particularly men and boys to address practices and beliefs that contribute to GBV.
- Report all instances of GBV to the relevant authorities.

States:

- Ensure effective law enforcement mechanisms are in place and enforced, in particular relevant criminal provisions.
- Ratify relevant international guidelines, doctrines and legal instruments, such as the 1979 UN [Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#).
- Ensure inclusion of GBV prevention within disaster risk reduction and management plans.

Non-State actors:

- Rigorously screen staff / have proper HR mechanisms in place before and during deployment of staff. This is particularly important when recruiting staff for urgent response teams.
- Develop and ensure implementation of internal codes of conduct for prevention and response to GBV.
- Implement specific GBV prevention policies when planning all relief operations and displacement camps, e.g. distribution mechanisms, location of latrines and other facilities, and safe space provisions.

¹ IFRC, [Preventing and Responding to Gender-based Violence \(GBV\) in Disasters](#).

² Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence, [Gender Based Violence, Poverty and Development](#) (Nov 2014).

³ IFRC, [Unseen, Unheard: Gender-based Violence in Disasters](#), Global Study (2015).

⁴ Tripartite Group, [Post-Nargis Joint Assessment \(PONJA\)](#) (2008).

⁵ WHO, [Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Against Women Fact Sheet](#) (Nov 2017).

Response

States:

- Develop locally appropriate processes to ensure that all victims of GBV can report instances to the relevant authorities in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Ensure that information on GBV is collected systematically before and during a disaster.
- Establish measures which ensure that people living in temporary shelters after disasters are safe.

IASC Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action (2015)

Initially developed by an inter-agency Task Team led by UNICEF and UNFPA, the aim of the [GBV Guidelines](#) is to assist humanitarian actors and communities affected by armed conflict, disasters and other humanitarian emergencies to coordinate, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate essential actions for the prevention and mitigation of GBV across all sectors of humanitarian action.

Non-State actors:

- Basic care and appropriate services for survivors must be available before commencing any activity involving individuals disclosing information about experiences of GBV.
- Improve reporting mechanisms for victims, notably safe methods for reporting instances of GBV for victims within camps, and a strong support mechanism for those affected.
- Ensure implementation and adherence with staff codes of conduct.
- Improve reporting mechanisms and systems for data collection in emergencies.

Handbook for Co-ordinating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Settings (2010)

The Global Protection Cluster's [GBV Area of Responsibility \(GBV AoR\)](#) is the global forum for coordination and collaboration on GBV prevention and response in humanitarian crises.

Their [2010 Handbook](#) provides detailed guidance on all aspects of GBV in humanitarian crises, including disasters, particularly in regard to camp management.

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