The Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery* (2015) describe Gender-based violence (GBV) as an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.

**The Situation**

While the broadest interpretation of gender-based violence (GBV) is sometimes understood to include specific types of violence against men and boys, the term has historically been and continues to be used primarily as a way to highlight the vulnerabilities of women and girls to various forms of violence in settings where they are discriminated against because they are female. Examples of GBV affecting women and girls throughout the lifecycle include, but are not limited to, sex-selective abortion, differential access to food and services, sexual exploitation, abuse and violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, sexual harassment, dowry/bride price abuse, honor killing, domestic or intimate partner violence, deprivation of inheritance or property, and elder abuse.

A fundamental aspect of GBV against women and girls is that the violence is used in cultures around the world as a way to preserve and maintain females’ subordinate status in relation to males. In other words, acts of violence against women and girls are both an expression of and a way to reinforce male domination—not just over individual women and girls, but females as a whole class of people. The violence is “rooted in power imbalances and structural inequality between men and women.”

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) makes the link between gender-based oppression and violence against women and girls clear in emphasizing that the violence is “a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to the domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full

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1 For example, “protected persons are entitled, in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, their honour, their family rights… they shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof… Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.” (Convention IV, Article 27)

1 CRC, Articles 19 and 34
advancement of women.” The declaration further defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

Clarifying gender discrimination as a central component in the perpetration of all forms of GBV against women and girls reinforces states’ obligations to work towards the elimination of violence against women and girls as part of their responsibilities for protecting and promoting universal human rights.

Natural disasters and armed conflicts may make it particularly challenging for states to uphold this obligation. In these situations, systems of protection are weakened and disrupted, such as police, legal, health, education, and social services. Displacement and separation of families and communities place women and girls at increased risk of violence and abuse. Sexual violence may be used as a method of warfare to brutalize and instill fear in a civilian population.

GBV has been reported in many of the world’s most recent conflict zones, including South Sudan, Central African Republic, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Myanmar and Mali, among others. In several natural disasters, such as the Nepal earthquake (2015), typhoon Hagupit in the Philippines (2014), Indian Ocean tsunami (2004) and cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (2008), sexual violence, including assaults and trafficking were reported to have increased in the immediate wake of the disasters.

Social norms around unacceptability of violence and respect for girls and women are weakened in the context of war, and population displacement may break down systems of social rewards and punishments that uphold those norms. Reliable prevalence data on the scope of GBV in conflicts remain very difficult to obtain. Even so, a growing body of evidence is bringing to light what Radhika Coomeraswamy characterized as “one of history’s great silences,” particularly in conflict-related settings. Although overall more men than women continue to die as a result of conflict, women and girls suffer myriad debilitating consequences of war, including sexual and other forms of violence. So much so, according to a report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, that “women and children are disproportionately targets” and “constitute the majority of all victims” of contemporary armed conflicts.

Survivors of sexual violence are at risk of suffering severe and long-lasting health and psychosocial problems. Sexual violence increases survivors’ risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and unwanted pregnancy that could lead to unsafe abortion, fistula and uterine prolapse. Potential psychological consequences of GBV include anxiety, shame, depression, guilt, lack of trust,

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2 CRC, Articles 19 and 34
3 “Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms” CEDAW, Article 1
and post-traumatic stress, among others. Social consequences of GBV include stigmatisation, rejection from spouse, family and community, survivor blaming, and isolation.

Despite their increased vulnerability, care for those who have survived sexual violence is limited in humanitarian settings. Service providers are often ill-equipped to treat survivors and facilities may lack supplies and trained providers at the height of insecurity. Distance to a health facility and stigma associated with sexual violence are also barriers to accessing care. Post-rape care, including post-exposure prophylaxis, may not be considered a vital part of regular health emergency services. These barriers often keep both women and child survivors from accessing needed health and psychosocial care, including protection services.

Evidence suggests that armed actors are not the only potential perpetrators—and in some situations are not even the primary perpetrators—of sexual violence in conflict-affected settings. Opportunistic and exploitative sexual violence can be perpetrated by civilians who may be affected by the conflict, but have no direct involvement with fighting forces. Thus, sexual violence prevention activities with armed actors should run parallel to and, whenever possible, be linked with prevention efforts that engage the broader community.

In these settings, humanitarian actors have a duty to ensure the safety, well-being and rights of those at risk for GBV, regardless of whether data exists on the true scope of the problem. Any available data on GBV, including reports from police, legal, health, or other sources, will likely represent only a very small proportion of the actual number of incidents of GBV. Therefore, it should be assumed that GBV will be an issue in every emergency, requiring that all humanitarian actors (such as those working within and across the sectors of water and sanitation, health, nutrition, logistics, education, protection, etc.) take steps to address it.

### Key International Instruments on GBV

UNICEF has at its disposal a number of international instruments that specifically address GBV. For example, sexual violence is prohibited within the Geneva conventions and is described in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court/ICC (1998) as a crime against humanity and a war crime. The following documents also speak to the issue:

- **United Nations General Assembly Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** (CEDAW), 1957: Known as the International Bill of Women’s Rights.7
- **United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women, A/RES/48/104, 20 December 1993.8**

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7. CEDAW, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice in times of peace, conflict and natural disaster.

8. DEVAW was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 in recognition that violence against women presents a major obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace. The importance of addressing violence against women as set out in the Declaration was recently reaffirmed at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2013.
• UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008): Recognises conflict-related sexual violence as a war crime and a threat to international peace and security.
• UN Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009): Establishes a Special Representative to the Secretary General to address sexual violence in conflict.
• UN Security Council Resolution 1882 (2009): Strengthens the protection of children in situations of armed conflict through the development of additional complete, time-bound action plans to halt killing and maiming of children, and rape and other sexual violence against children.
• UN Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010): Expanded mandate to comprehensively address sexual violence when used as a tacit weapons of war, or resulting in a consequence of conflict, and established Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA.)

UNICEF and GBV
Ending GBV against women and children, girls in particular, lies at the heart of UNICEF’s mandate, and is also critical to achieving UNICEF’s Equity Agenda. In 2007, UNICEF commissioned the study From Invisible to Indivisible: Promoting and Protecting the Right of the Girl Child to be Free from Violence, that highlights the gender dimensions of girls’ vulnerabilities to violence that were largely missing from the first Secretary General’s Report on Violence Against Children (2005). The 2007 study, as well as numerous other studies and reports, emphasized the importance of addressing discrimination and violence against women and girls in order to achieve any and all of the Millennium Development Goals. Similarly, the eradication of GBV will be a central theme within the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the same year, UNICEF produced the State of the World’s Children Report: Women and Children—the Double Dividend of Gender Equality. The report’s introduction by then Secretary-General Kofi Annan declares discrimination against women as an issue that goes to the heart of UNICEF’s mission to protect the rights of all children. He notes that “…discrimination against women of all ages deprives the world’s children – all of them, not just the half who are girls – of the chance to reach their potential.”

UNICEF acknowledges that GBV prevention and response programming is a lifesaving measure in emergency contexts. It also recognizes that protecting the rights of children in emergencies cannot be achieved without addressing GBV. UNICEF is directly involved in addressing GBV across some of the world’s most intense and complex conflict and other emergency affected areas. The focus of UNICEF’s GBV work is to ensure that women and children, particularly girls, feel safe, survivors get support and justice, positive norms are promoted, and social norms that perpetuate GBV are transformed in emergencies.

UNICEF’s Strategy
UNICEF’s strategy for addressing GBV in emergencies is based on the need for a comprehensive approach that prioritizes access to services for survivors, while also fostering a protective environment.

Key elements of UNICEF’s comprehensive response to GBV in emergencies include:

- **Making good quality, life-saving, multi-sectoral services and systems for survivors available:** Survivors of GBV have the right to good quality services and systems to support their physical and psychosocial healing and recovery, to protect them from further violence and to facilitate access to justice where it is available.

- **Scaling up GBV prevention and protection programming:** Stopping GBV in emergency contexts involves a four-pronged approach:
  1. Reducing children and women’s vulnerability through targeted resilience and empowerment activities;
  2. Mitigating risk of GBV across all humanitarian assistance and sectors;
  3. Ensuring that duty-bearers and other actors responsible for protecting children and women and girls act in accordance with relevant legal norms and standards;
  4. Implementing evidence based primary prevention initiatives promoting gender equality and social norm change.

- **Making sure that GBV prevention and response is prioritized and coordinated:** As a co-lead of the GBV AoR UNICEF has a key role in ensuring effective leadership of GBV coordination at national and sub-national levels.

A pivotal focus of UNICEF’s work on GBV in emergencies is to prioritise active participation of women, girls, boys, and men at all stages of programming – a foundation of a rights-based approach. At the same time, UNICEF promotes a multi-sectoral and multi-level actions that builds the capacity of government and other duty bearers to ensure health, social welfare, legal and security systems and policies are in place to monitor and respond to GBV.

**Progress and Results**

*Country-level action*

At the country level, UNICEF's approach to GBV builds on our unique capacities and mandate. We work to reinforce government systems and civil society to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. This helps to prevent GBV and to create capacity to respond to it. Our approach is “survivor-focused” which entails addressing the impact of GBV on families, communities and whole societies, including efforts to fight against the stigmatization of survivors.

UNICEF works to build multi-sectoral services through fundamental health, social welfare, protection, and legal/justice systems. It aims to prevent violence before it happens and to mitigate the impact of violence while ensuring that survivors can access services that uphold their rights, wishes, confidentiality and dignity.
In countries such as the DRC, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia, and South Sudan, UNICEF works with implementing partners to provide health and psychosocial support as well as case management, including referrals to basic services. It supports capacity building of service providers to provide appropriate care and is working to create safe spaces for adolescent girls and women. These spaces ensure that girls and women have platforms through which to access psychosocial support and information on how to access it in a non-stigmatizing manner.

In several countries UNICEF is chairing or co-chairing GBV coordination groups in collaboration with agencies such as UNFPA. These groups work to improve adherence to national and international standards, to ensure quality of care and delivery of services in a timely manner, and to mobilize risk reduction strategies to promote protection from GBV.

*Global level-action*

**Key Partnerships**

UNICEF is involved in several key partnerships and areas of collaboration to improve the prevention of and response to GBV in emergencies on the global level. UNICEF and UNFPA share leadership of the global GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) under the global Protection Cluster. The GBV AoR is the global forum for coordinating prevention and response to GBV in humanitarian settings. It brings together independent experts as well as NGOs, donors, academics and UN entities from over 60 different agencies under the shared objectives of ensuring more predictable, accountable and effective approaches to GBV prevention and response and facilitates development of inter-agency tools to support field action, such as the 2010 *Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*.

UNICEF is a member of UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action), which unites the work of 13 UN entities with the goal of ending sexual violence in conflict. It is a concerted effort by the UN system to improve coordination and accountability, amplify programming and advocacy, and support national efforts to prevent sexual violence and respond effectively to the needs of survivors.

UNICEF also works in close collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Sexual Violence in conflict.

**Developing and Promoting Standards and Field Capacity**

UNICEF is involved in developing and promoting standards at the global, regional, and country office levels. For example, on behalf of the GBV Area of Responsibility, UNICEF has been leading the revision process for the 2005 Interagency Standing Committee GBV Guidelines (now called the "Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action"). Following extensive inter-agency, regional and field based consultations and testing over the course of two years, the revised Guidelines will be launched globally in mid-2015. The overarching goal of the revised Guidelines is to ensure that *Humanitarian programming in all emergencies is designed and implemented – across all sectors, through all stages and by all stakeholders – in a manner which substantially reduces the risk*
and promotes resilience of affected populations, and supports lasting solutions to the problem of GBV.

UNICEF works in partnership with agencies such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to develop guidance and training resources to improve direct services to child survivors of GBV. This includes the development, translation and dissemination of the 2012 Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Guidelines for Health and Psychosocial Actors in Humanitarian Settings “CCS Guidelines”.

UNICEF also serves on the Steering Committee of the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS), together with UNHCR, UNFPA and IRC. The GBVIMS aims to ensure that reported cases of GBV are rigorously and ethically collected, analysed and managed to inform country-level programming and advocacy.

UNICEF is working with an inter-agency team to develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy (SAFE) Cooking Fuel Strategy. This framework is meant to help demonstrate the value that SAFE programming can have for women and girls from a variety of perspectives (protection, camp coordination and camp management, emergency shelter, environment and national resource management, food and nutrition, health, livelihoods, development and food security.)

Developing Programming Tools and Resources
UNICEF is developing programming tools and resources and strengthening the evidence base for GBV programming in emergency contexts. It has developed the following tools to further the goals of preventing and responding to GBV.

UNICEF’s is developing a GBViE Programme Resource Pack to provide guidance and tools to support Country Offices to design, implement and monitor comprehensive GBV interventions appropriate to the context and phase of emergency response. The Resource Pack reflects UNICEF’s programming framework and role as a key development and humanitarian partner and a ‘development to relief to development’ continuum that characterises an efficient and effective approach to emergency response.

The Resource Pack includes information and resources for implementing a minimum package of essential services for GBV protection and response in the aftermath of an emergency or population displacement. It also contains guidance for expanded programming covering all of the elements required for a comprehensive response to GBViE - for example, guidance on reducing vulnerability to GBV through economic strengthening for adolescent girls and distributing gender sensitive NFI as well as guidance on preventing prevalent forms of GBV.

UNICEF’s Minimum Package of Essential Services
- Age-appropriate clinical care for sexual assault, crisis support and safety options for GBV survivors.
- Community-based safety planning and action.
- Risk mitigation across humanitarian sectors.
- Effective coordination of humanitarian action on GBV.

UNICEF is piloting the Communities Care: Transforming Lives and Preventing Violence Programme in Somalia and South Sudan. The programme aims to advance approaches to prevention of and response to GBV, especially sexual violence against women and girls affected by conflict and disaster. It is a participatory, community-based intervention with the goal of creating safer communities through transforming harmful social norms that contribute to sexual violence into social norms that uphold women and girls’ equality, safety and dignity. The development of evidence-based ‘good practices’ from this project will inform future GBV prevention and response programming and guidance.

Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Survivors and Their Children Born of Sexual Violence in Conflict. Drawing from experience with the Innocenti Research Centre, UNICEF has developed a research toolkit that describes processes for safe and ethical qualitative research on survivors of sexual violence and children born of sexual violence in conflict. UNICEF is promoting the toolkit’s use to inform both short and long term response and prevention efforts to support the strengthening child protection systems at national, provincial and community levels.

Key websites:
- UNICEF: http://www.unicef.org/
- Gender-Based Violence Information Management System: http://www.gbvims.com/
- Gender-based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR): www.gbvaor.net
- Inter-agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises: http://www.iawg.net/
- Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence Against Women and Girls: http://www.endvawnow.org
- The United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action) http://www.stoprapenow.org

Key resources:

*Humanitarian Response Documents*


International Legal and Normative Framework

A detailed list of IHL protections afforded to women is provided in the annex to the ICRC Guidance Document **Addressing the Needs of Women Affected by Armed Conflict**, 2004, available at [www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/ihl-women__icrc_002_0840.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/ihl-women__icrc_002_0840.pdf)


Information about implementation of the key operational elements of resolution 1960 can be found in the **Provisional Guidance Note. Implementation Of Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010) On Women, Peace And Security (Conflict-Related Sexual Violence)**. [http://www.pakresponse.info/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=C6ILr2CUI%3D&tabid=71&mid=433](http://www.pakresponse.info/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=C6ILr2CUI%3D&tabid=71&mid=433)


**Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse**

The ECHA/ECPS UN and NGO Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse is the forum responsible for promoting global policy and guidance on PSEA for humanitarian actors. To this end, the Task Force has developed a PSEA tools repository of guidelines, tools, training materials, and other resources developed by the Task Force as well as other partners: [http://www.un.org/en/pseataskforce/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/pseataskforce/index.shtml)

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