

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

"Sexual and gender-based violence is now perpetrated as a weapon of war in armed conflicts the world over, with devastating impacts on the health, mental health and socioeconomic status of women and girls. This narrative needs to change."

– Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act perpetrated against a person's will, and which is based on socially ascribed gender differences between females and males. 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 private.

Crises can deepen SGBV risks for women and girls. For example, they can be attacked as they perform gender roles, such as fetching water, food and firewood, and during mobility.

Therefore, humanitarian actors must ensure that their actions and initiatives prevent and address SGBV. Conflict-related sexual violence presents a huge challenge and has become more prevalent. Addressing rape or other forms of conflict-related sexual violence is a priority in humanitarian settings because they have immediate and life-threatening health consequences.

One of the Priority Commitments in the OCHA Policy Instruction on Gender Equality (2016-2020) is for OCHA to leverage its leadership in humanitarian action to strengthen collective efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV.

What does OCHA say?

1. Identify and address the inequalities, exclusion and discrimination that exacerbate risks of SGBV

The prevention of and response to SGBV should be based on a gender analysis, including sex- and age-disaggregated data (SADD), that examines differences, inequalities, protection risks and other drivers of SGBV.

2. Engage women and girls in humanitarian decision-making

Humanitarian actors must enable the meaningful participation of women and girls in humanitarian action by including them in humanitarian decision-making processes at all levels. This is fundamental to promoting civilian protection from SGBV.

3. Ensure humanitarian leadership on SGBV

As a humanitarian coordinating organization, OCHA will leverage its leadership in humanitarian action to ensure that protection from SGBV, including the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence, are positioned as immediate life-saving priorities across all sectors and clusters.

What is OCHA's role in preventing and responding to SGBV?

OCHA is the part of the United Nations Secretariat responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors for a coordinated response. OCHA integrates SGBV prevention and response into all areas of its core mandate: in the planning and implementation of programmes, policies and procedures, and in reporting and results assessments.

IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action

The guidelines aim to support humanitarian actors by:

- 1) **Reducing the risk of GBV** by implementing prevention and mitigation strategies from pre-emergency to recovery stages of humanitarian action.
- 2) **Promoting resilience** by strengthening national and community-based systems that prevent and mitigate GBV, and by enabling survivors and people at risk of GBV to access specialized support.
- 3) **Aiding recovery** of communities and societies by supporting local and national capacity to create lasting solutions to GBV.

Coordination: OCHA contributes to the prioritization of SGBV prevention and response through Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams and inter-cluster/sector working groups. It requires all sectors/clusters to incorporate concrete actions into their plans to prevent and respond to SGBV in emergencies. OCHA is strengthening partnerships with women's organizations, specialized agencies and other actors, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap).

Advocacy: OCHA leverages its inter-agency role on advocacy and information management to ensure the prioritization of gender equality and women's empowerment, the prevention of and response to SGBV, and women's participation in humanitarian action.

Information Management: OCHA strives to ensure that Information Management highlights SGBV trends as well as prevention, mitigation and response actions in humanitarian reporting. OCHA requires all partners to apply a meaningful gender analysis, including the collection and use of SADD in cluster programming.

Humanitarian Financing: OCHA advocates gender-responsive projects. It ensures the systematic inclusion of SGBV programming through the mandatory use of the Gender Marker in funded initiatives, and in reports on how gender and SGBV were addressed during project implementation.

Policy: OCHA refers to and disseminates key guidelines of the IASC, such as the IASC GBV Guidelines. OCHA also participates in coordination mechanisms such as the GBV Area of Responsibility, and in global policy processes such as the global Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies.

Key SGBV initiatives

In 2013, OCHA became a signatory to the global Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, including implementing actions in the five-year road map. OCHA commits to ensuring that the prevention and mitigation of and the response to Violence against Women and Girls are incorporated into humanitarian response plans, and that humanitarian leadership strengthens SGBV programming.

OCHA is a member of the multilateral Real-Time Accountability Partnership with UNFPA, UNICEF, IRC, USAID and UNHCR. The partnership promotes initiatives to strengthen system-wide accountability and recognition of the prevention of and response to SGBV as life-saving actions at the start of emergencies.

OCHA is also a member of the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative. It works with other agencies on knowledge- and evidence-building, protection of civilians, strengthened response, and targeted advocacy to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

To find out more

- OCHA Policy Instruction on Gender Equality (2016-2020)
- IASC Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action
- IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery
- IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap)
- IASC Protection Standby Capacity Project (ProCap)
- IASC Gender Marker
- IASC Gender Reference Group
- GBV Area of Responsibility
- Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
- UN Action Against Sexual Violence
- Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies Road Map 2016-2020
- Hands-on Guidance for Staff, and Implementation Toolkit

Contact:

Hilde Sjobo
Gender Specialist
OCHA New York
sjobo@un.org

April 2017