

# OCHA on Message: Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action



## What is Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action?

During a humanitarian crisis, the needs of women, men, girls and boys are different and distinct. Addressing gender equality during a humanitarian crisis means planning and implementing protection and assistance according to the needs of the different groups in a community. This ensures that the humanitarian response benefits all people affected equally and avoids putting some at greater risk.

Although men and women are different, their enjoyment of rights, opportunities and life chances should not be governed or limited by their gender (whether they were born female or male). Protecting human rights and promoting gender equality must be central to the humanitarian community's commitment to protect and provide assistance to all those affected by emergencies.

### **A gender-equality programme includes two main strategies:**

**Gender mainstreaming:** All activities are designed taking into account the different needs of women, men, girls and boys. Gender roles and relations in the affected population are analysed and integrated in project activities and outcomes. The project benefits women and men.

**Targeted actions in response to gender analysis:** Specific projects or actions to advance gender equality that: (a) assist women, men, girls or boys who suffer from discrimination, thereby creating a more level playing field, or (b) focus all activities on building gender-specific services or more.

### **Gender vs. Sex Defined**

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through the socialization process. They are context- and time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man, a girl or a boy in a given context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level or ethnic group. Sex refers to our biological differences. (See OCHA's Gender Equality Tool Kit for more information.)

## What is OCHA's role?

### **Advocacy**

OCHA seeks to ensure that the humanitarian community recognizes and responds to the protection and assistance needs of women, men, girls and boys. OCHA highlights the gender dimensions of issues, such as protection of civilians, needs assessments and contingency planning, and calls on its partners to develop strategies to fill relevant gaps.

### **Technical Guidance**

OCHA also works with the humanitarian community to strengthen the capacity to mainstream gender equality. It does this by facilitating the development of gender standards in the form of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Handbook and development of the IASC gender e-learning course.

OCHA has also initiated and continues to guide the IASC-Norwegian Refugee Council Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap). GenCap

seeks to build the capacity of local humanitarian actors to integrate gender-specific programming into all sectors of humanitarian response. As of December 2011, 57 GenCaps have been deployed to 30 humanitarian situations as an inter-agency resource to support Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators, humanitarian country teams and cluster/sectors leads in the initial stages of sudden-onset emergencies, and in protracted or recurring humanitarian situations.

*“To ensure women and girls, boys and men have equal access to and benefit from humanitarian assistance, we must ‘follow the money’. We need to know how we spend money and who benefits. This is why we are instituting a system of tracking funding, called a Gender Marker. Only in this way can we be sure we target all the population equally, and make sure they receive the resources needed to help them to build back better after emergencies.”*

- Valerie Amos,  
Under-Secretary-  
General for  
Humanitarian Affairs  
and Emergency Relief  
Coordinator

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## Data Collection

OCHA’s work on gender mainstreaming focuses on understanding how conflicts and disasters affect women, men, girls and boys through collecting sex- and age-disaggregated data (SADD). This is critical to the overall effectiveness of humanitarian response.

OCHA has also developed a public service announcement titled “Stop Rape Now” ([www.stoprapenow.org](http://www.stoprapenow.org)). It supports the elimination of rape as a weapon of war and provides a strong

platform for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

OCHA is a founding member of UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict. OCHA supports research on the role of non-state actors in perpetrating conflict-related sexual violence. This research will lead to strengthened prevention work. OCHA also plays a leading role in the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) by humanitarian aid workers, and has led inter-agency forums to ensure

staff uphold the zero-tolerance policy. OCHA works with the IASC Task Force on PSEA to hold the humanitarian community accountable to strengthening PSEA efforts. In 2012, OCHA will contribute to pilot efforts to establish effective community-based complaints and feedback mechanisms. This is part of the overall IASC Transformative Agenda to be more accountable to affected people (see *OCHA IASC Transformative Agenda*).

## What does OCHA say?

1. Wars, disasters and related emergencies have profoundly different affects on women, boys, girls and men. All services and activities should be based on a gender analysis.
2. The risks that women, men, girls and boys face are not the same; the way they act and react are different. Taking gender into account may well be a matter of life and death.
3. Knowing how women, men, girls and boys are affected, and how a crisis may have changed their traditional roles, will help ensure that humanitarian assistance meets the entire population’s needs.
4. One size does not fit all in an emergency. To be effective, we must identify and address the different needs of women, men, girls and boys.
5. OCHA encourages its partners to seek the participation of women, men, girls and boys in all aspects of information gathering, planning, project implementation, and monitoring and evaluation to ensure their needs are met.

## To find out more

- OCHA Gender Equality Policy and Tool Kit: <http://ochaonline.un.org/OCHAHome/AboutUs/GenderEquality/tabid/5881/language/en-US/Default.aspx>
- IASC Gender Handbook: <http://humanitarianinfo.org/iasc>  
IASC Guidelines for Gender-based Violence: <http://onerresponse.info/crosscutting/gender/Documents/GBV%20Guidelines%20-%20English.pdf>
- IASC E-learning: Different Needs - Equal Opportunities: Increasing Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action for Women, Girls, Boys and Men: [www.iasc-elearning.org/home/](http://www.iasc-elearning.org/home/)
- IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap): <http://gencap.onerresponse.info>
- Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: <http://pseataaskforce.org/ou> or visit the PSEA website on iSEEK: [www.un.org/pseataaskforce](http://www.un.org/pseataaskforce)