



“Addressing the impact of Gender-Based Violence on Food Insecurity for Women and Girls in the Sahel and Horn of Africa” in the margins of the ECOSOC HAS 2022

Organizers: UNFPA, UNHCR, IOM, OCHA

Member State Co-Hosts: Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations and the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations in New York

Date and Time: 1:15-2:45, Thursday 23 June 2022

Background and objectives of event:

Food insecurity remains a familiar challenge to many women and girls. This, coupled with new and protracted conflicts, natural disasters, and the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic conspire to make the world a dangerous place to be for women and girls. Food insecurity has a range of gendered impacts including well-established links to gender-based violence (GBV).

Just last March, the UN Secretary General warned of “a hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food system” as a consequence of the Ukraine crisis.¹ The World Food Programme estimates that Russia and Ukraine represent more than half of the world’s supply of sunflower oil and about 30 per cent of the world’s wheat. Eighteen African countries import at least 50% of their wheat from Ukraine, and are now in a further precarious situation as world leaders race against time to find a pathway to export the current harvest. The recent conflict in Ukraine has illustrated the global food system’s level of interconnectedness and fragility.

The food insecurity gender gap, which has already increased between 2019 and 2020, and it is set to widen with the far-reaching effects of the current crisis in Ukraine.

Despite calls for a “global ceasefire”, the risk of GBV has increased especially in already fragile contexts like the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa where food insecurity is acute.

When food insecurity rises, women and girls are at the highest risk of hunger and of violations of their rights. Food insecurity together with conflict and displacement and insecurities due to violent extremism act to increase levels of intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence, sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, and child marriage. Scarcity of food and water may contribute to community conflict over resources and increased incidents of violence against women and girls. Women and girls often bear a disproportionate burden to provide for their families - whether going without meals to feed others or

¹ Secretary-General António Guterres’ address to the UN Security Council 14 March 2022.



trekking long distances to find water and suitable food making them vulnerable to sexual assault. Lack of food items can lead to exploitation in exchange for necessities. Moreover, when women have to spend more time finding food and water and have less time to complete their other household and family responsibilities, household tensions may increase and result in violence.²

When families are unable to meet their basic needs, evidence suggests that the risk of child marriage increases significantly for girls.³ Communities under stress may adapt more conservative or customary patriarchal practices. Resilience and protective factors are breaking down as seen by the closure of 6000 schools due to violence in the Sahel (UNHCR 2022).

Food distribution and aid delivery may all potentially elevate GBV risks for women and girls. In Chad, WFP has reported that spousal violence increases in the days following food distribution. Risk mitigation is not just about food distribution but also includes post - distribution.

With protection risks growing and limited access to needed services, women's and girls' involvement in the development and management of early warning systems is crucial. Women's active participation in household decision-making, supported by higher levels of formal education, can challenge prevalent socio-cultural norms which unequally distribute food between genders.⁴

Ultimately, food insecurity must be seen as a protection crisis by all actors to ensure the drivers of risks, underlying root causes and the fundamental rights of women and girls are at the forefront of the national authorities' and international community's response. It is critical that the needs of women and girls are explicitly prioritized in countries most affected by food insecurity and that there is a focus on establishing or ensuring continuity of life-saving services in light of increased GBV risk. These services must be provided within an overarching framework of gender transformative, human rights-based approaches.

Women in communities most affected by food insecurity may also be the strongest voices upon which we need to rely to discern needs and support responses. All our work in preparedness and response, including anticipatory action, must be delivered with a view to limiting the risk of exposure to GBV for women and girls and building their adaptive capacity through increased resilience as individuals but also the resilience of communities and health and protection systems. Preparedness and emergency operations cannot be supported without recognition of the specific and varied needs of women and girls as well as addressing the systemic and structural discrimination that hinder their resilience and adaptive capacity.

² GBV AoR (2021) "Climate change and gender-based violence: What are the links?"

³ See Le Masson, Virginie, Colette Benoudji, Sandra Sotelo Reyes, and Giselle Bernard, 2018. "Violence against women and girls and resilience: links, impacts and perspectives from the Chadian context."

⁴ Bapolisi, W.A., Ferrari, G., Bisimwa, G. *et al.* Gendered determinants of food insecurity in ongoing regional conflicts, North and South Kivu, the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Agric & Food Secur* 10, 13 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40066-021-00285-x>



The event will bring together key stakeholders including member states, diplomats, humanitarians, civil society, and survivors to engage in dialogue about key issues and experiences, and promising practices to address GBV in the context of food insecurity.

Discussion points or guiding questions:

What are some promising examples of progress in incorporating an understanding of the particular risks for women and girls in addressing food insecurity and its effects?

How can we further leverage the leadership of women-led organizations in the conversations around conflict and food insecurity? Where are opportunities for this to happen more?

What can be done to mitigate the risk of GBV within the context of food security?

Objectives:

1. To amplify the key message that food insecurity (lack of food, a search for food and food distribution) and aid delivery may all potentially elevate GBV risks for women and girls in humanitarian contexts and promote the importance of gender integration in food security humanitarian planning and response.
2. To showcase regional examples of best practices and challenges from practitioners and specialists in mitigating, preventing and responding to the GBV dimensions of food insecurity in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa contexts.

Key Messages/ Takeaways

- Ultimately, food insecurity must be seen as a protection crisis by all actors to ensure the drivers of risks, underlying root causes and the fundamental rights of women and girls are at the forefront of the national authorities' and international community's response. Humanitarian actors have the responsibility to pursue actions to mitigate GBV risks within their areas of operation. This includes strengthening of GBV response services as well as prevention and GBV risk mitigation across sectors.
- Women's and girls' involvement in the development and management of early warning systems and anticipatory action is key in lessening the impact of food insecurity and building community resilience. Reducing the risk of GBV requires the full engagement and leadership of women and girls from local to national levels.
- It is critical that the needs of women and girls are explicitly prioritized in countries most affected by food insecurity and that there is a focus on ensuring continuity of life-saving services in light of increased GBV risk. These services must be provided within an overarching framework of gender transformative, human rights-based approaches.
- Full funding of regional and country GBV sector humanitarian response and increased direct funding to women-led organizations must be prioritized by donors in order to effectively address GBV and provide survivors of GBV access to quality and comprehensive services.



Format of the side event:

Introductory Remarks:

- Robin Brooks, Director, State Department’s Office of International Organizations, US Permanent Mission to the United Nations

Chair and Moderator: Marcy Hersh, Gender and GBV Advocate and Independent Consultant

Panel composition:

- Gloria Soma, Director of Titi Foundation, South Sudan
- Ugochi Daniels, Deputy Director General of IOM
- Representative, Government of Niger (TBC)
- Ruven Menikdwela, Director, UNHCR New York Office
- UNFPA Country Representative (TBC)

Closing Remarks: Representative, European Union Delegation (TBC)

Background Material *(please click below)*

[GBV AoR: Brief Overview of Research, Evidence and Learning on the Links between Food Insecurity and Gender-Based Violence in Conflict Affected Settings.](#)

[FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO \(2021\). “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all”](#)

Registration

[Please click here](#)

Connection Information:

For colleagues who wish to participate virtually, the connection details will be shared with registered participants.

Contact(s):

	<i>Focal Point</i>	<i>Focal Point</i>
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