

# OCHA on Message: Gender-Based Violence

## What is gender-based violence?

Gender-based violence (GBV), sometimes also referred to as 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. The term 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. Examples include rape; intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence; forced and/or coerced prostitution; child, early and forced marriage; and trafficking for sexual exploitation and/or forced labour.

“Failure to take action against GBV represents a failure by humanitarian actors to meet their most basic responsibilities for promoting and protecting the rights of affected populations.” – Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

### GBV in humanitarian emergencies

GBV is deeply rooted in gender inequality and discriminatory gender roles and norms. During humanitarian emergencies, gender dynamics may be affected and inequalities worsened.

Crises can deepen GBV risks for women and girls, especially when family and community protections have broken down. Domestic violence, rape, trafficking, early and forced marriage, sexual harassment, and

sexual exploitation and abuse are some of the types of GBV common in humanitarian emergencies. In particular, women and girls may be attacked as they perform gender roles, such as fetching water, food and firewood. They may be also be targeted by armed actors who use sexual violence as a tactic of war, control and exploitation. Addressing all forms of GBV is a priority in humanitarian settings because such acts pose immediate and life-

threatening health consequences. It is therefore important that humanitarian actors ensure that their actions and initiatives prevent and mitigate GBV from the onset of emergencies.

Some forms of GBV, in particular sexual violence, can affect both females and males. As a result of structural gender inequality, however, women and girls are disproportionately affected.

## What is OCHA's role in addressing GBV?

Given OCHA's coordination mandate, it plays a unique role in ensuring coherent humanitarian responses that prioritize gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. This includes highlighting funding needs and prioritizing GBV programmes.

OCHA's Policy Instruction on Gender Equality (2016–2020) defines a shared vision on gender equality within OCHA's core

mandate of humanitarian coordination, information management, advocacy, humanitarian financing and policy. One of the priority commitments is for OCHA to leverage its leadership in humanitarian action to strengthen collective efforts to prevent and respond to GBV.

OCHA is responsible for ensuring that GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response are prioritized

as immediate life-saving priorities across all sectors and clusters.

OCHA commits to ensuring that the Humanitarian Programme Cycle is gender-responsive, that Humanitarian Needs Overviews/Humanitarian Response Plans explicitly incorporate gender and GBV risk mitigation across all sectors, and that humanitarian leadership is held accountable.



*“We need to focus on prevention and address gender inequality – the root cause of sexual and gender-based violence. This requires challenging attitudes and behaviours that condone or accept violence.”*

– Mark Lowcock,  
Under-Secretary-  
General for  
Humanitarian Affairs  
and Emergency Relief  
Coordinator, United  
Nations Office for the  
Coordination of  
Humanitarian Affairs  
(OCHA)

OCHA integrates GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response into all areas of its core mandate, as follows:

**Coordination:** OCHA facilitates gender- and GBV-responsive decision-making through Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams and inter-cluster/sector working groups, requiring all sectors/clusters to incorporate concrete actions into their plans to address GBV. OCHA is strengthening partnerships with women’s organizations and GBV specialists, and has strong collaborations with the IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project.

**Advocacy:** OCHA leverages its inter-agency advocacy role to ensure the prioritization of gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment; GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response; and women’s participation in humanitarian action.

**Information management:** OCHA ensures that information management highlights GBV trends as well as prevention, mitigation and response actions in humanitarian reporting. OCHA requires all partners to apply a meaningful gender analysis and GBV risks, including the collection and use of sex- and age-disaggregated data in cluster programming.

**Humanitarian financing:** OCHA advocates for gender-responsive projects. It ensures the systematic inclusion of GBV considerations across all sectors through the mandatory use of the IASC Gender with Age Marker and in reports on how gender inequality and GBV were addressed during project implementation.

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

## What does OCHA say?

### 1. 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 GBV and accountability to affected populations.

### 2. Ensure humanitarian leadership on addressing GBV

OCHA will leverage its leadership in humanitarian action to promote accountability for GBV prevention and response, including ensuring that GBV is positioned as an immediate life-saving priority across all sectors and clusters.

### 3. Identify and address the underlying causes of GBV

GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response should be based on a gender analysis, including sex- and age-disaggregated data, that examines differences, inequalities, protection risks and other drivers of GBV.

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#### To find out more

- OCHA Policy Instruction on Gender Equality (2016–2020)
- IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action
- IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery
- Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies Road Map 2016–2020
- GBV Area of Responsibility

