

2021 Economic and Social Committee Humanitarian Affairs Segment

Preventing and responding to gender-based violence in humanitarian contexts

Monday 21 June from 16:00 to 17:30 (Geneva time) (link to join below)

Organisers: CARE, UNICEF, UNFPA, OCHA, Secrétariat du Forum des ONGI RDC, African Women and Youth for Development and Save the Children

Co-sponsors: European Union, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Permanent Mission of Norway in Geneva and Plan International

This is one of the virtual side events to be convened on the margins of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year's HAS theme: *“Strengthening humanitarian assistance to face the challenges of 2021 and beyond: mobilizing respect for international humanitarian law, inclusion, gender, innovation and partnerships”*.

1. Background and objectives of event

Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the most pervasive yet least visible human rights violation in the world. It includes physical, sexual, mental or economic harm inflicted on a person because of socially ascribed gender imbalances between males and females. It also includes the *threat* of violence, coercion and deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private. Deeply rooted in gender inequality and norms and systems that disempower and discriminate, GBV is exacerbated in humanitarian emergencies where vulnerability and risks are high, yet family and community protections often break down. While GBV can affect both females and males, globally women and girls are disproportionately affected. As much as 70 per cent of women experience gender-based violence (GBV) in humanitarian contexts compared with 35 per cent worldwide¹.

The unprecedented frequency, intensity and scope of humanitarian emergencies have dramatically amplified these risks for millions of women and girls. At the same time, prevention of and response to GBV are not consistently undertaken from the earliest stages of emergencies. The humanitarian community is ultimately accountable to the women and girls we serve, including GBV survivors – to provide lifesaving care and sexual and reproductive health services. Addressing all forms of GBV is a priority in humanitarian settings. Specialized services for GBV survivors in emergencies are lifesaving.

It is imperative that humanitarians adopt a strong focus on gender inequality as a root cause of GBV. Addressing gender inequality, including recognition of the disproportionate impact on women and girls and its gendered drivers, should represent the *backbone of our response*. With this in mind, women's and girls' participation in a humanitarian response is critical. While their

¹ Global Humanitarian Overview 2021.

voices are not always heard, they should be driving the response. The particular risks faced by women and girls can be heightened when humanitarians overlook women's strength and agency and when they do not work with local women's organizations and female leaders.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated GBV and violence against children. UNFPA predicts 15 million additional cases of gender-based violence for every three months of lockdown. The pandemic's effects could also potentially bring about an additional 13 million cases of child marriage.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of many tragic illustrations of the severity of GBV in humanitarian emergencies, with a very high prevalence of GBV across all the different humanitarian emergencies in DRC. Of particular note is the prevalence of sexual violence by armed actors, accounting for the majority of reported cases

In the DRC, in line with data from around the world the COVID 19 lockdown of 2020 increased risks for girls and women's, with the national health information system recorded significant increase of reported cases. This is a scourge that will impact generations.

Sexual violence in conflict affects children as well as women, and is one of the six grave violations identified and condemned by the UN Security Council. More than 20,000 cases of conflict-related sexual violence against children have been verified by the UN since 2006. Its most recent report on Children and Armed Conflict included 749 confirmed cases of sexual violence against children in 2019 alone. Of these, 98 percent were committed against girls. The verified cases, however, are likely to represent only a fraction of actual cases, as revealed by Save the Children's recent research [Weapon of War - Sexual violence against children in conflict](#). This grave human rights violation requires urgent and collective action, including more resources for specialized services for survivors, legal response to perpetrators, and prevention initiatives to tackle root causes

The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies is a global initiative of governments and donors, international organisations (IOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The Call to Action complements and reinforces other existing initiatives by providing an overarching framework through a Global Roadmap. Its aim is to drive change and foster accountability from the humanitarian system to address GBV from the earliest phases of a crisis. It underscores that GBV survivors have the right to assistance and support and that all humanitarian actors have a role to play.

The objectives of the Call to Action are:

1. Establish specialized GBV services and programs that are accessible to anyone affected by GBV and are available from the onset of an emergency.
2. Integrate and implement actions to prevent GBV and to mitigate GBV risk across all levels and sectors of humanitarian response from the earliest stages of an emergency and throughout the program cycle.
3. Mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls throughout humanitarian action.

The Call to Action complements and reinforces other existing initiatives and serves as a powerful reminder that we all have a role to play in ensuring access to life-saving services and information, and coordinated and effective prevention and response.

Objectives

- Take stock of the progress and of the gaps to address GBV in humanitarian settings and sexual violence against children in conflict, with a particular emphasis on violence against girls/adolescent girls
- Propose concrete measures on how all actors could further develop joint work to address gender-based violence in humanitarian settings and to ensure that the rights and needs of survivors are met
- Increase investment in the prevention, mitigation and response to se gender-based in humanitarian settings, including culturally sensitive mental health and psychosocial support
- Mobilise and strengthen collective responsibility for the mitigation, response, and prevention of gender based violence in emergencies.
- Showcase the role of local and women-led organisation to prevent and respond to GBV in humanitarian settings
- Addressing gender inequality as an important element in the fight to end all forms of gender-based violence.
- Highlight challenges, gaps, and good practice in specific humanitarian context, including the DRC

2. Discussion points or guiding questions

Gaps and weaknesses in addressing GBV in emergencies including sexual violence against children in conflict

- What are currently the main gaps and weaknesses in addressing GBV in humanitarian crises? What great strides have been made?
- In a country like DRC, what are currently the main gaps and weaknesses in addressing GBV in the humanitarian crises in the country?
- What are the main trends in terms of sexual violence against children in conflict?

The role of local and national women-led organisations in the prevention and response to GBV (with a focus on DRC)

- What is the role of local and national women-led organisations in the prevention and response to GBV?
- How could this role be strengthened?
- What are the barriers to strengthen this role and how could these barriers be addressed?

Accountability for GBV and for sexual violence against children in humanitarian settings

- What are the main reasons explaining the lack of accountability for GBV and for sexual violence against children in humanitarian settings?
- How could perpetrators be held accountable? Which role IHL could play both in the prevention and in the response to GBV?
- What should be the role of humanitarian actors to strengthen accountability for GBV and sexual violence against children?
- What does leadership in the prevention of GBV in emergencies look like, and why do we need more?

Mental health and psychological support (MHPSS)

- What are the key GBV interventions that address MHPSS, both in terms of prevention and response?
- What are the gaps?
- Which interventions could be taken to scale?

Prevention and response to GBV in humanitarian settings

- What needs to be prioritised for prevention and response (in a country like DRC and globally)?
- How could it be prioritised?

Covid-19 has exacerbated GBV and sexual violence against children. Concrete examples of the impact of Covid-19 and responses to this impact would be mentioned in the response to these guiding questions.

Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages

- Prioritisation of GBV in the 2022 Global Humanitarian Overview and in HRPs including risk mitigation across all sectors/clusters.
- Enhancing partnership, participation and decision making of women's led organisations in the humanitarian response
- Holding ourselves accountable, as the humanitarian community, to leave no woman or girl behind.
- Ensure GBV is proportionally funded as compared to an overall appeal
- Addressing gender-based violence is a collective responsibility, and requires collective action from all stakeholders in the humanitarian system.

Format of the side event

Welcome by the chair, Ms.Hala Mahfooz – 5 min

Video (UNFPA) – 2 min

Opening remarks: Ms. Lotte Machon, State Secretary for Development Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark - 5 min

Video statement by Ms. Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Executive Director – 3 min

Video statement by Ms. Natalia Kanem, UNFPA Executive Director – 3 min

Panel discussion – 45 min

Q&As 15 min

Concluding remarks: Mr Andreas Papaconstantinou, Director for Neighbourhood and the Middle East in DG ECHO

Wrap up by the chair 5 min

Chair and moderator

Chair and Moderator of the panel discussion: Ms. Hala Mahfooz

Panel composition

Panel:

- Ms. Tine Morch Smith, Ambassador – Permanent Representative to the UN and other international organisations - Norway
- Ms. Monica Ferro, Director of Geneva Office, UNFPA
- Ms. Birgitte Lange, CEO - Save the Children Norway
- Ms. Monique Mianda, REFED – Democratic Republic of Congo
- Ms. Gratias Kibanja, EJADH – Democratic Republic of Congo
- Ms. Edem Wosornu, Chief, Response Support Branch, UN OCHA

Connection details to join the event

Registration to this side event is available [here](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_jatjPNx0QtSXS7v2AAB6tA)
(https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_jatjPNx0QtSXS7v2AAB6tA)

Translation in French, Spanish and Arabic will be available

Contact(s)

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