



Sexual violence against children

Children should be protected from all forms of sexual violence and exploitation and child survivors shall have access to appropriate response mechanisms, as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (articles 19 and 34). However, sexual violence and exploitation of children is widespread though often hidden. In situations of forced displacement where social support systems and protective mechanisms are broken down by conflict, these abuses are often exacerbated for both boys and girls. Refugee and displaced women, girls, and boys are disproportionately at risk of sexual violence in particular, whether during flight or in conflict, when sexual violence is used as a weapon of war.

*Emergency and harsh living conditions can push girls and boys to engage in survival sex in exchange for material goods, aid or food. **Addressing sexual violence is an “urgent” and strategic priority for UNHCR**; preventing and responding to sexual violence against children is a significant part of the SGBV, Child Protection and Education global strategies.*



All humanitarian personnel should therefore assume and believe that GBV, and in particular sexual violence, is taking place and is a serious and life-threatening protection issue, regardless of the presence or absence of concrete and reliable evidence.”

Guidelines for GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Settings

Key messages

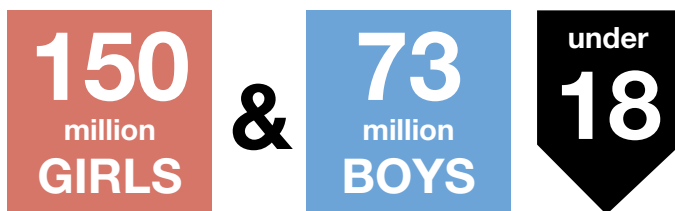
- ➔ The specific needs of children and adolescents need to be reflected in SGBV programs. Girls and boys require specific care and **age-appropriate interventions** according to their age and maturity.
- ➔ Engage with **communities, especially men and boys, to prevent** sexual violence against children.
- ➔ Prevention and response to sexual violence against children requires a **coordinated, multi-sectoral** response which respects the child’s views and **best interests**.
- ➔ Strong **linkages** between Child Protection, Education, and SGBV programs is **crucial for effective prevention and response** to sexual violence against children.
- ➔ From the onset of an emergency, **put in place safe and adequate services** and complementary reporting mechanisms, **taking into account the particular needs of children**.



This briefing note has been produced by the Child Protection Unit, Division of International Protection, for field operations as a quick reference note on key thematic child protection issues.

Why are children different from adults?

- Children, especially young children, are less likely than adults to **understand** what has happened to them is harmful, wrong or criminal.
- Children are **less likely to report sexual violence** as the cultural environment in many societies does not encourage children to raise their voice. They might be afraid of the consequences of speaking out and announcing adult offenders, especially when it may be someone known, or even close to them.
- Children are more easily deceived or **coerced** into situations of abuse or exploitation than adults, and have more restricted **decision-making** power over their lives generally than adults.
- Children are **dependent on adults** who are entrusted with their care for their happiness, livelihoods etc.
- Depending upon their stage of physical development, children are also at a **higher risk of getting injured, contracting sexually transmitted infections and HIV**, and incurring complications during and after pregnancy (i.e. in the event of rape).
- It is well established that the **psychosocial consequences** of violence and abuse during childhood and adolescence have lasting effects and can inflict heavy damage on someone's life, even in the adult stage. Children will need to feel safe and trust adults again. Children and families need to heal from the impact of sexual violence; children need to resume schooling and rebuild relationships with peers.



EXPERIENCED FORCED SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

or other forms of sexual violence involving physical contact

World Report on Violence Against Children, 2006

Key concepts

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (WHO 2002). Sexual violence is a form of SGBV, although some sexual violence can be perpetrated without any relation to gender discrimination. It includes sexual harassment, rape, prostitution, slavery, sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes. This includes profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

SURVIVAL SEX/TRANSACTIONAL SEX: The exchange of sex for money, food, access to shelter, education and other goods or services.

MANDATORY REPORTING: This refers to laws and policies, which mandate certain agencies and/or persons in helping professions (teachers, social workers, health staff, etc.) to report actual or suspected child abuse (e.g., physical, sexual, neglect, emotional and psychological abuse, unlawful sexual intercourse). To appropriately comply with mandatory reporting laws, service providers must have a thorough understanding of the mandatory reporting laws in their setting and remember that the best interest of the child should always be the primary consideration when taking actions on behalf of children.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

specifically addresses the responsibilities of international peacekeeping and humanitarian actors to prevent and respond to incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by UN, non-governmental organisation (NGO) and inter-governmental organization (IGO) personnel against colleagues as well as beneficiaries of assistance, and to take action as quickly as possible when such incidents do occur.



Girls and boys are **protected from sexual violence**, and survivors of sexual violence have **access to age-appropriate information** as well as a **safe, responsive and holistic response**.”

Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Standard 9: Sexual Violence

Key actions: What UNHCR and partners can do

Legal & Policy Framework

- ➔ Be aware of the national legal and policy framework regarding sexual violence, including child specific provisions, the age of consent and mandatory reporting laws.
- ➔ Identify gaps in the national legal framework related to the protection of survivors of sexual violence and advocate for change.
- ➔ Support the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on CP and/or SGBV highlighting key actors and areas of responsibilities for UN agencies and NGOs as well as the host government. Ensure that any such procedures are child-friendly.

Knowledge & Data

- ➔ Work with governments to assess the child protection system, its relevance to the specific needs of child survivors, and to map operational gaps to identify areas for improvement.
- ➔ Be aware of **harmful practices** that are consequences of sexual violence, e.g. child survivors being forced to marry the perpetrator.
- ➔ Carry out assessments to better understand the nature or scope of sexual violence, protective and risk factors for violence and available services and gaps. Assessments should disaggregate among specific at-risk groups and tailor interventions to their needs (i.e. girls and boys with disabilities, LGBTI youth).
- ➔ Support the set up and use of information management systems such as the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS).
- ➔ Support the work of country-level task forces established for monitoring, and reporting on sexual violence in conflict and grave violations against children in armed conflict in line with SCRs 1612 (MRM) and 1960 (MARA).

Coordination

- ➔ Participate in or establish coordination mechanisms for child protection, and ensure linkages between sectors (SGBV, Education and Health).
- ➔ Coordinate with other sectors to minimize risks of sexual violence for children (camp management, food distribution, etc.).

Human & Financial Capacity

- ➔ Ensure adequate financial resources are allocated for prevention and response to sexual violence. Make sure funding proposals take into account child-specific elements of SGBV responses.

- ➔ Train frontline responders such as social workers, health workers, police, and local organizations in child-friendly and age-appropriate procedures and approaches, as well as psychological first aid, guiding principles and SOPs.
- ➔ Promote the code of conduct and train all UNHCR staff and partners on PSEA and issues of survival sex. Put in place safeguarding procedures for all people in contact with children (police, teachers, health workers, staff, partners and volunteers).

Prevention & Response

- ➔ Train teachers and school-based staff on child protection and SGBV, including the identification of children survivors of sexual abuse and referral mechanisms.
- ➔ Promote safe learning environments (Code of Conduct for all school staff, child-centered pedagogy, child participation) (See UNHCR's Education Strategy (Action 2)).
- ➔ Support the participation and retention of girls in schools through specialized programmes including the recruitment and retention of female teachers.
- ➔ Support existing community-based child protection mechanisms as they play a critical role in preventing and responding to sexual violence against children.
- ➔ Ensure a coordinated system for identification, registration, and follow-up of children-at-risk, including child-headed households, separated or unaccompanied children, children with disabilities, etc.
- ➔ Ensure **services are adapted to the needs of children**, e.g. psychosocial services should be age-appropriate as children will not respond to the same services designed for adults.
- ➔ Promote social and economic **reintegration** of child survivors in their communities.
- ➔ Provide social and life skills for girls and boys to enable them to protect themselves against sexual violence and exploitation.

Advocacy & Awareness

- ➔ **Raise awareness** in communities about children's rights and sexual violence and exploitation.
- ➔ Carry out awareness campaigns **targeting children and adolescents**, on SGBV, how to report incidents, as well as the response services available to survivors.

Linking SGBV to child protection systems

Identifying gaps in the national legal framework, contributing to strengthen national data collection systems on SGBV and supporting governments to improve prevention and response services for SGBV survivors are key actions that contribute to wider child protection system strengthening.

Agencies also need to consider how linkages between child protection and SGBV can be established in order to avoid duplications of efforts. Coordination with other sectors such as security and justice is crucial in order to foster a comprehensive strategy and work towards a more cohesive system to protect children of concern from SGBV.

UNHCR and partners in Action: Examples from the Field

Girls' Clubs in Namibia

In the Osire refugee camp, the Jesuit Refugee Service team found an inventive way of not only promoting girls' education, but also reducing violence against them. A girls' club was established with the aim of keeping girls in school. Soon afterwards, male teachers suggested that boys should be educated in non-violent behaviour and respect towards women. The teachers felt that by raising awareness on issues such as teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, violence, and conflict resolution, the programme would help to change the patterns of life in the camp. Ten mentors were identified and the club was expanded. Some 2,700 young males and females, aged between 10 and 20 years, have participated in the club.

Children's Forum in Nepal

Partners worked with children living in refugee camps to establish the Children's Forum. The Forum was divided into sub-committees and developed a work plan to tackle specific issues such as child trafficking and child sexual abuse and exploitation. Members of the Forum work together to create a monthly magazine to disseminate messages about child rights, organize awareness raising events such as drama, music and sports, as well as reporting specific incidents to the Forum facilitator, a trained refugee worker.

Working with the government in Jordan

UNHCR is supporting the Family Protection Department (FPD), the government's one-stop shop for all matters related to family violence, including sexual violence against children. FPD has centers in all governorates of Jordan and is handling cases against refugee children in the same manner as cases for Jordanian nationals. FPD employs multidisciplinary teams, able to respond to the medical, legal, psychosocial and protection needs of children and their families. FPD staff are trained specifically in working with children and refugee, and its centers include interview rooms designed to be child-friendly. FPD are members of the BID panels in Amman as well as in Zaatari refugee camp.

For More Information:

UN AGENCIES AND COORDINATION

- The GBV AoR <http://gbvaor.net>
- The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG) <http://goo.gl/0Z86Ox>
- UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action) <http://www.stoprapenow.org/about>
- Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN and related personnel, <http://goo.gl/ywVDO>

KEY RESOURCES

- IRC, 2012. *Caring for Child Survivors Guidelines*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/EV92yR>
- CPC Learning Network Policy Change Brief, 2010. *Rethinking Gender-Based Violence*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/72Wef8>
- UNHCR, 2012. Working with men and boys survivors of SGBV in Forced Displacement. Available at: <http://goo.gl/CGuzZb>
- UNHCR, 2006. *Standard Operating Procedures for Prevention of and Response to Gender-Based Violence*.
- UNHCR, 2003. *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Guidelines for Prevention and Response*, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/3f696bcc4.html>
- UNHCR, 2008. *Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*, available at <http://goo.gl/3Vrsbw>
- UNHCR, 2010. *Heightened Risk Identification Tool (User Guide): Developed to enhance effectiveness in identifying refugees at-risk by linking community-based/participatory assessments and individual assessment methodologies*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/QlliYy>
- GBV Area of Responsibility, 2010. *Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*, available at: <http://goo.gl/EbEUW1>
- IASC, 2008. *Gender-based Violence Resource Tools supporting implementation of the Guidelines for GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence in Emergencies*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/NWbnZR>
- WHO, 2007. *Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies*, <http://goo.gl/MHyFBg>
- *Action against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: An Updated Strategy* (June 2011), <http://goo.gl/oi7gl0>