

Mainstreaming VAWG Prevention into the Humanitarian Sector



Humanitarian emergencies can exacerbate existing violence and lead to new forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Preventing and mitigating violence is therefore a collective, life-saving responsibility across the entire humanitarian system, as set out in the [IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#) and the [United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund \(CERF\) life-saving criteria](#).



Approximately 70% of women experience VAWG in humanitarian contexts compared with 30% worldwide. ([ActionAid 2017](#), [WHO 2024](#))

Why mainstream VAWG prevention?

- **Supports effective humanitarian delivery:** Embedding prevention prioritises women's and girls' safety and enables their participation across all phases of humanitarian action, preparedness, response and recovery. Without preventing VAWG first, interventions will not be accessible or accountable to affected populations (AAP), resulting in lost opportunities to maximise and sustain impact.
- **Improves access to aid, reduces stigma and strengthens local community-level support:** Removing barriers to access for the most at-risk groups and survivors ensures that those who may otherwise be excluded can receive lifesaving services.
- **Prevents further harm:** Humanitarian crises can intensify multiple forms of VAWG, including sexual exploitation and trafficking, while girls living in conflict-affected areas face a 20% higher risk of child marriage.¹
- **Supports national recovery:** VAWG is one of the most serious protection challenges in humanitarian emergencies, traumatising survivors and weakening community resilience.² Preventing violence reduces ongoing harm, helping communities recover and rebuild.
- **Delivers on key international commitments:** Aligning with the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Emergencies, CEDAW and UNSCR 1325 reinforces leadership in multilateral fora and promotes the effective implementation of key formal agreements and frameworks.

¹ Save the Children (2022). [Girls living in conflict face 20% higher risk of child marriage](#).

² IASC (2015) [IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#).

Key actions to mainstream effectively

- 1. Champion community-led, gender-transformative approaches through social norms change.** Collaborate with local women-led organisations (WLOs) and community leaders to provide context-specific prevention strategies. The Transforming Masculinities project in the Democratic Republic of Congo engaged with faith leaders and community members, reducing intimate partner violence (IPV) from 69% to 29% and non-partner sexual violence from 24% to 4% after 2 years.³

In Syria, VAWG prevention pilots have been integrated into an FCDO-funded food security and livelihoods programme called Building Local Resilience in Syria (BLRS). The pilots combine social and economic empowerment curricula with community-level interventions to prevent IPV and child marriage. Preliminary endline findings are showing early promise in improving outcomes for women and reducing women's experience of IPV in one of the pilots.

- 2. Invest in local WLOs and women and girls' safe spaces (WGSS).** Provide reliable, flexible multi-year funding to WLOs, which are best placed to identify VAWG risks. In Ukraine, funding cuts caused 72% of WLOs to report severe disruptions to their activities, with approximately 1 in 3 at risk of closure without additional support.⁴ Direct funding strengthens locally led, relevant and sustainable prevention efforts. In South Sudan, UNICEF's Communities Care programme - implemented through WLOs - combined community engagement on social norms with a strengthened multi-sectoral response, leading to significant reductions in harmful beliefs linked to VAWG.⁵ Investment in WGSS also provides safe, private spaces for prevention activities and livelihood support.
- 3. Embed VAWG prevention with specialist expertise.** Integrate and budget for prevention within humanitarian sectors with technical support from VAWG specialists.⁶ VAWG specialists can also provide expert capacity-strengthening across all sectors aligned with IASC Guidelines and other relevant approaches.
- 4. Strengthen an enabling environment for prevention.** Build the capacity of local justice and security systems where possible through awareness-raising and training, while advocating for laws on gender equality, to support sustainable, gender-transformative VAWG prevention.

Further resources

- IASC (2015) [IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#)
- GBV AoR Helpdesk (2023) [How to Prevent GBV in Emergencies](#)
- IMC (2021) [Traditions and Opportunities: A Toolkit for GBV Programs to Engage Community Leaders in Humanitarian Settings](#)
- What Works (2020) [What works to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian crisis: Synthesis Brief](#)

³ What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls: Impact at Scale (n.d.). [Tipsheet 1: What is prevention.](#)

⁴ UN Women. (2025). [Impact of United States Funding Suspension on Ukrainian Women's Organisations.](#)

⁵ UNICEF (2021) [Communities Care: Transforming Lives and Preventing Violence.](#)

⁶ An ethical pre-requisite for prevention is access to confidential, survivor-centred services to respond to GBV (e.g. counselling, psychosocial support etc). to ensure consistent, accessible service delivery