

CALL TO ACTION on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies

Statement issued by the partners of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (Call to Action) on the occasion of the Global Refugee Forum to be held in Geneva, Switzerland, 17-18 December 2019:

On this historic occasion of the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF), the 85 Call to Action partners – comprised of Member States, international organisations and international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – urge all participants at the forum to prioritize actions that effectively prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV). We also urge the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, including the protection and empowerment of women and girls displaced by conflict and crisis.

We specifically encourage forum attendees to make bold financial and political commitments that:

1. Support GBV programming in refugee and forced displacement settings and address gender inequality, the root cause of GBV.
2. Promote gender-responsive localization and increase direct funding to local women's groups.
3. Ground programming in best practices and dedicate the financial resources necessary for effective use of technical tools to prevent and respond to GBV in all refugee settings.
4. Reinforce the key actions of the [2016-2020 Call to Action Road Map](#).

First, support GBV programming in refugee and forced displacement settings and address gender inequality, the root cause of GBV.

GBV is a pervasive and life-threatening health, human rights, and protection issue. Deeply rooted in gender inequality and norms that disempower and discriminate, gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls, though specific risk factors can vary by sex, age, disability and other intersecting factors such as sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity. It is a reality in every context that gets exacerbated in humanitarian emergencies, including refugee contexts. Available data estimates that at least 1 in 5 refugee or displaced women experience sexual violence with rates of intimate partner violence are as high as 73% in some contexts.¹ 9 out of the 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are in fragile contexts.² Despite increased attention to this issue in recent years, actions to prevent and respond to GBV remain inadequate from the earliest stages of preparedness and response to refugee situations, leading to a lack of appropriate resources and capacities to effectively respond to the staggering needs. For example, “in 2019, nearly 132 million people [needed] humanitarian aid and protection,

¹ No Safe Place: A lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan. 2017. Available at: <https://gbvresponders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/What-Works-South-Sudan-Full-Report.pdf>

² Women and Peace and Security, Report to the Secretary-General. 2019. Available at: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2019/800>

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including an estimated 35 million women, young women and girls who require lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services, and interventions to prevent gender-based violence and respond to the needs of survivors.”³ Even when strong commitments are made, effective and transparent accountability mechanisms for ensuring meaningful action in policy, funding, systems, and implementation continue to be a major gap. Transparent and strong financial commitments that support quality GBV programming, and which address gender inequality as the root cause of GBV, and the tracking of funding are essential. Moreover, women – including women’s organization’s and networks – must be meaningfully engaged in planning, decision-making and implementation.

Second, listen to and be led by women and girls and their experiences.

Women and girls are powerful agents of change within host and displaced communities, and women-led organizations are most often at the forefront of change. Women-led organizations understand context-specific responses, are known and trusted by community members, and will remain on the ground throughout the phases of response and recovery. And yet, “in the period 2016–2017, only 0.2 per cent of total bilateral aid to fragile and conflict-affected situations went directly to women’s organizations.”⁴ Policies that promote gender-responsive localization and financial commitments to increase direct funding to local women’s organizations should be considered by all. Such funding should be tracked and include capacity strengthening of these organizations. Moreover, women should be around the table in humanitarian coordination and decision-making structures.

Third, take responsibility and ground programming in best practices.

Addressing GBV is a collective responsibility that requires all elements of the humanitarian system to do their part. This includes support for the provision of specialised and quality GBV programming and services – including access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services – while harnessing the experience and expertise of local women’s organizations. Specialized services should be an essential part of refugee response. This will allow actors to respond to the needs of survivors from the start of every emergency, while taking measures to identify and mitigate GBV-related risks that need to be implemented across every programmatic sector. The humanitarian field has an array of technical resources available to guide this work – such as the Interagency GBV Minimum Standards, the GBV Accountability Framework, the Call to Action context-specific Road Maps in Northeast Nigeria and Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action – which are key achievements under the Call to Action. The IASC’s Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action is also a valuable tool for ensuring gender inequality – a root cause of GBV – is addressed in every humanitarian response. Commitments should be made to systematically

³ Women and Peace and Security, Report to the Secretary-General: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2019/800>

⁴ OECD DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker. 2016. Available at: www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/dac-gender-equality-marker.html

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use these tools – and dedicate the resources necessary for their effective implementation – in all refugee settings, as well as to listening and engaging with host and displaced communities.

Fourth, be part of collective action, reinforcing the key actions of the 2016-2020 Call to Action Road Map.

The Call to Action has mapped out many of the actions that must be taken in order to truly tackle GBV in emergencies through the 2016-2020 Call to Action Road Map. Commitments made should seek to reinforce the outcomes and key action areas in the Call to Action Roadmap. For participants that are not yet members of the Call the Action, the Roadmap can serve as a guide to take complementary actions which contribute to the collective change and prioritization of gender equality and GBV prevention and response sought by the Call to Action.

Call to Action partners are working hard to bring attention to the issue of GBV in humanitarian settings and stand ready to partner with all those endeavouring to end GBV and achieve gender equality.

Background on the Call to Action

The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (Call to Action) is a global multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2013 to fundamentally transform the way gender-based violence (GBV) is addressed in humanitarian emergencies. The aim is to drive change and foster accountability so that every humanitarian effort, from the earliest stage of a crisis, includes the policies, systems and mechanisms to prevent, mitigate and respond to GBV. For more information, please consult the Call to Action website: <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/>.