

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most obvious expressions of unequal gender relations in a society. It is a grave violation of human rights with detrimental effects on individuals, families and societies. GBV is both an expression of unequal gender relations, and a means through which these are upheld,¹ both a consequence and a cause of gender inequality.² This brief gives an overview of what GBV is, and how Sida works to prevent and respond to GBV. For more in-depth information, please see Sida's Technical Note on GBV.

GBV - WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

GBV is a broad umbrella term and takes a multitude of forms.

Sida defines GBV as any harm or suffering that is perpetrated against a woman or girl, man or boy, or non-binary person that causes physical, sexual, psychological and/or economic harm, and has negative impact on the development and identity of the person. The cause of this violence is founded in gender-based power inequalities and gender-based discrimination.

The OECD-DAC sector purpose code's definition of GBV includes, but is not limited to: intimate partner violence (domestic violence), sexual violence, female genital mutilation/cutting, child, early and forced marriage, acid throwing, honour killings, and trafficking of women and girls. Sida reports against the DAC sector purpose code 15180 to track aid for ending violence against women and girls.³

Globally, one third of women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner, or sexual violence by a non-partner, during their lifespan⁴.

Women and girls are statistically by far the most affected by GBV as victims and survivors, and most perpetrators are men.⁵ Men and boys may also be

victims and survivors of GBV. Groups and communities that are already marginalised and face other types of discrimination, such as women and girls with disabilities, migrant women and girls and LGBTIQ persons are particularly at risk. Intersectional power imbalances where gender intersects with other identities such as age, disability, ethnicity, social class, race and sexual orientation and gender identity are key to understand GBV and mitigate risks.⁶

The costs of GBV

The costs of GBV, both direct and indirect, are enormous at individual, family, community and society levels.⁷ Costs of GBV may be up to 3.7 percent of GDP, which is more than double of what most countries spend on education.⁸ In spite of this, the aid spending on GBV is low. Over the years 2018-2023, only 0.2 percent of overall aid and development spending targeted GBV prevention.⁹ Furthermore, in humanitarian assistance, GBV remains one of the least funded areas under the protection cluster.¹⁰

Box 1¹¹ – Forms of gender-based violence

Physical violence is any act which causes physical harm as a result of unlawful physical force, such as serious and minor assault, deprivation of liberty and manslaughter.

Sexual violence is any sexual act performed on an individual without their consent, such as rape or sexual assault.

Psychological violence is any act which causes psychological harm to an individual, such as threats, coercion, defamation, verbal insult or harassment.

Economic violence is any act or behaviour which causes economic harm to an individual, such as property damage, restricting access to financial resources, education or the labour market.

GBV and SRHR

Sida uses the Guttmacher-Lancet definition of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), which reads "a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction".¹² Work against GBV is a component of SRHR and it includes prevention, detection, immediate services and referrals for victims and survivors of GBV.¹³ In order for this to be realised systems need to be in place, including, but not limited to health, education, justice and social services. In addition, in

humanitarian and conflict settings, integrating SRHR in GBV risk mitigation efforts across sectors can significantly strengthen humanitarian response's ability to prevent and respond to GBV.¹⁴

Moreover, GBV and its consequences cause various sexual and reproductive health problems, such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies. Unintended pregnancies can have serious repercussions, including unsafe abortions, death due to high-risk pregnancy for girls, and exclusion by family members leading to social isolation, suicide and sometimes murder.¹⁵

GBV in conflict and crisis

The risks of GBV increase in crises and emergencies, such as those arising from armed conflicts, war, natural disasters and climate change. In humanitarian settings, 70 percent of women experience GBV.¹⁶ Poor welfare services and the break-down of social networks and justice systems make it more difficult for victims/survivors of violence to escape and receive support and health care and leave the perpetrators unpunished.¹⁷

Different situations of crises and conflicts also increase the vulnerability of exposure to sexual corruption, such as, but not limited to, sex in exchange for basic needs such as food, water, education and health care.¹⁸

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) refers to all forms of sexual violence against women, men, girls, boys and non-binary persons that are directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. CRSV is widespread and includes for example rape and sexual slavery but also forced prostitution, pregnancy, abortion, sterilization and forced marriage.¹⁹ Involving men and mainstreaming gender equality improves the response to CRSV.²⁰

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS GBV?

GBV is a human rights violation and when committed in the context of conflict it may amount to a violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).²¹ Tackling GBV is crucial for sustainable development including the fulfilment of the SDGs and for poverty reduction. Evidence suggest that unless GBV is ended, at least 14 of the 17 SDGs will not be fulfilled.²² Further, poverty may increase the risk of being exposed to violence, particularly for women and girls facing multiple forms of discrimination.²³

Box 2²⁴ – SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and all other types of exploitation.

Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

International commitments and policy frameworks

There are numerous international human rights treaties and policy frameworks dedicated to the elimination of GBV. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women from 1993 laid the foundation for today's understandings of and efforts to tackle GBV.²⁵ The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and the following resolutions marks a milestone for the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, which is key in the work against CRSV. Moreover, Resolution 1820 (2008) recognized for the first time sexual violence as a weapon of war and a war crime.²⁶

Key regional frameworks

Apart from international human rights commitments there are regional frameworks based on human rights that address GBV. Some of the most notable are the Inter American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women;²⁷ the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa;²⁸ and the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women.²⁹ In Europe and thus in Sweden, the Istanbul Convention sets out obligations for states to prevent violence, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators.³⁰

HOW IS SIDA ADDRESSING GBV?

Sweden has a long history of prioritising gender equality in general and working to prevent and respond to GBV in particular.³¹ Sida works in accordance with Sweden's policy for international development assistance and is committed to;

- combatting all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, promoting protection of - and support to - victims of violence, and involving men and boys in the work;
- supporting action against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation in prostitution and human trafficking, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and forced sterilisation;
- prioritising efforts to combat child marriage in relevant contexts in locations where it is customary or legal, with a view to strengthening legislative work and action against child marriage; and
- contributing to accountability in conflicts, especially for sexual violence and abuse.³²

SEAH

Sida has developed an approach to ensure effective and comprehensive action to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH), which is integrated in contribution management, agreements and follow-up.³³ The approach is in

accordance with OECD DAC's recommendation on ending SEAH in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Sida addresses GBV in two ways – through supporting prevention efforts and response mechanisms.

Prevention, to stop GBV from happening, is mainly done through transforming norms of gender roles, behaviour and acceptability of violence that underpin GBV. Most perpetrators are men and failure to recognise and address the need to transform gender relations can contribute to the perpetuation of GBV.

Increasing access to education, SRHR and women's economic empowerment (WEE) are key to the long-term prevention of GBV, and central for women's ability to leave abusive relationships.³⁴

Prevention efforts also include increasing women's and girls' empowerment, participation and influence in general. In contexts of conflict, prevention also includes supporting the women, peace and security agenda.³⁵

In Sida's humanitarian assistance, Sweden strives to guarantee that protection is at the core, with an emphasis on reducing protection risks and ensuring that the population is effectively protected from violations. Acknowledging the high risks of GBV in humanitarian contexts, Sida supports humanitarian partners to integrate and implement prevention and mitigation measures to reduce GBV risks across all levels and sectors of humanitarian response.

Examples of prevention efforts are identification of risks and implementation of mitigation measures; empowerment of women and girls; work to change attitudes, norms and behaviour; legal reforms; and strengthening institutional capacity to integrate prevention in all sectors.. Please see box 3 for an example of how Sida works.

Box 3³⁶ - GBV Prevention Evaluation Framework

Sida is supporting InterAction to strengthen the capacity of humanitarian organisations to address the risk of GBV through the development and roll-out of the GBV Prevention Evaluation Framework (GBV PEF). The aim is to help organisations measure and evaluate the outcomes of their GBV prevention efforts in humanitarian settings around the world. The GBV PEF can be accessed here: [Gender-Based Violence Prevention: A Results-Based Evaluation Framework - Interaction RBP](#)

Response, the direct protection and support to victims and survivors as well as support to legal and policy frameworks that allow prosecution of perpetrators.³⁷ Sida works to strengthen and enhance stand alone protection and multi-sectoral interventions and services at all levels. This includes supporting systems

that allow for perpetrators to be held accountable and for victims and survivors to receive redress.

Examples of response mechanisms are access to legal assistance, one stop centers, safe houses/safe shelters, psychosocial counselling and health care; training personnel to respond more effectively to the needs of victim/survivors; and ensuring investigation, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of violence, including IHL defined grave violations.

Box 4³⁸ - Feminist movements make a difference

The present historic number of laws and policies addressing different forms of GBV is to a large extent due to sustained and strategic advocacy from women's rights organisations across the globe. Research has shown correlation between strong and independent feminist movements and comprehensive legal frameworks protecting women from violence.

Women's rights organisations often have a deep contextualized knowledge and long experience of supporting and providing services to victims and survivors of GBV.

ENTRY POINTS AND KEY MESSAGES

While prioritisation and design of interventions always need be context specific, the following areas illustrate important entry points and potential areas for dialogue.

Dialogue with partners and other stakeholders

- Apply a victim/survivor centred approach, i.e. inclusive participation of victims and survivors in decisions effecting them;
- Recognise the link between prevention, mitigation and response;
- Highlight relevant policy and legal frameworks, such as IHL, international and regional human rights conventions and the SDGs;
- Build on a country's human rights commitment to address GBV;
- Support national systems, strategies and policy work for a holistic approach to prevent and address GBV and efforts to ensure state responsibility when possible;
- Emphasise the inclusion of an intersectional perspective and a Gender Transformative Approach;
- Support systematic monitoring and evaluation of results from a results-based approach;³⁹
- Stress the need for broad engagement of women and girls, as well as men and boys, and non-binary persons as actors of change to end GBV;
- Recognise that men and boys can be perpetrators of GBV, but also victims and survivors;
- Support services for victims and survivors of GBV;
- Push for inclusive and evidence-based programming which involves experts and partners;

- Support efforts which can increase funding for women's and LGBTIQ rights organisations;
- Support media and civil society to raise awareness of GBV to change attitudes of the population, and to hold governments to account;
- Integrate protection and risk reduction in programming;
- Emphasise the link between GBV and women's human rights, education, SRHR, women's economic empowerment, women's participation in decision-making and the women, peace and security agenda;
- Strengthen legislation so it is respectful of gender equality and human rights, and supports justice for survivors;
- Emphasise the importance of bridging the gap between legislation and implementation, to end impunity;
- Strengthen accountability and redress;
- Strengthen legislation indirectly linked to GBV, such as family law and women's legal rights to property/land, inheritance, employment, and financial services;

- Support research and data collection;
- Integrate GBV prevention, mitigation and response in other sectors;
- Stress the importance to work with private sector actors to prevent GBV.

FURTHER READINGS AND RESOURCES

[UN Women – Facts and figures: Ending violence against women](#)

[UNFPA – Gender-based violence](#)

[RESPECT – Preventing violence against women: A framework for policymakers](#)

[Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies](#)

[Gender Based Violence Area of Responsibility](#)

[Sexual Violence Research Initiative \(SVRI\)](#)

[United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict](#)

Endnotes

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- See Convention [here](#).
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- [Asean regional plan of action on the Elimination of Violence against](#)
- [Council of Europe \(2014\). Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(also referred to as the Istanbul Convention\)](#)
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- See also [How Sida works with Gender Equality](#)