



HOW TO PREVENT

GBV

in emergencies

“Prevention refers to taking action to stop GBV from first occurring. Primary prevention aims to tackle the root causes of GBV - gender inequality, exclusion and discrimination. Prevention approaches focus on behavioral modification and attitudinal change in addressing harmful social norms and also structural issues related to gender inequality. GBV prevention approaches can be integrated into the design of GBV response services (e.g. health, psychosocial support and case management). Long-term social norm and structural change is central to protracted and recovery stages of humanitarian crises”. - *GBV AoR Strategy 2021-2025*. p. 36.

1 Create safe spaces for women & girls' safety and empowerment

Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) are physical spaces where women and girls can be **free from violence and harassment**, usually perpetrated by men and boys in public and private spaces.

They encourage women and girls to:

- ◆ **Seek, share, and gain knowledge, skills and information**
- ◆ **Access services** that are safe, ethical, accessible, free, confidential and non-discriminatory including GBV response services
- ◆ **Express themselves**
- ◆ **Enhance psychosocial wellbeing** where their physical and emotional safety is respected
- ◆ **Foster opportunities** for mutual support
- ◆ **Nurture leadership and collective action** in their community
- ◆ **More fully realize their rights** including their reproductive and sexual health rights.

WGSS provide other resources and support fundamental to women's and girls' empowerment including life skills sessions, livelihoods and social and recreational activities.

PRINCIPLES

- Feminist
- Survivor-centered
- Empowerment
- Inclusion
- Collaboration
- Solidarity
- Accountability



“Evidence suggests that the establishment of women- and/or girl-only spaces helps to reduce risks and prevent further harm during acute emergency responses.”

IRC & UNFPA (2017) [Safe Spaces for Women and Girls \(SSWG\) Standardization and Technical Guidance - How to set up a SSWG in practice.](#)

2 Engage men & boys to become allies and shift social norms

Working with men and boys is essential to promoting gender equality and preventing GBV.

Interventions that target men and boys as allies and agents of change vary; some work with men and/or boys exclusively, others target males and females in separate but related activities, and yet others work with males and females together.

These prevention programs are mostly **community-based**, seek to **transform masculinities** and **shift social norms** in order to prevent men's violence against women even before it occurs. Fundamentally, they **must be accountable to women** and **empower women at all levels** (from individual to societal).

GBV prevention in emergencies is the least invested area of addressing GBV in emergencies and there are few interventions - and evaluations - that focus on engaging men and boys in primary prevention of GBV have been implemented in emergency settings.



POPULAR MALE ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

- ◆ **Challenge understandings of masculinity to build more nonviolent and gender-equitable norms**
- ◆ **Engage individuals or leaders from traditionally masculine professions and sports as role models to promote non-violent behaviors (provided their own behavior aligns)**
- ◆ **Encourage men who are not violent to intervene with other men who are sexist and aggressive (e.g. bystander intervention approaches)**
- ◆ **Face-to-face educational programs with boys and young men (and sometimes women and girls) that promote critical reflection on gendered behaviors and norms**
- ◆ **Social marketing strategies to shift attitudes on men's use of violence**

3 Advocate for implementation of laws, policies and protocols that address GBV

KEY ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- ◆ **Prioritize collaboration with local women's groups and organizations:** Local women's organizations with knowledge and experience working in GBV should be empowered and resourced to lead on advocacy and prevention measures.
- ◆ **Advocacy to and training of law & enforcement and justice actors:** In humanitarian settings where the police and the justice system are adequately functional, conducting advocacy for the enforcement of existing laws and frameworks protecting women and girls, as well as capacity-building of security and justice actors in GBV may be relevant.

GBViE actors should be aware of limitations, such as strong systemic patriarchal biases, and ensure that all actions remain survivor centered and accountable to women and girls.

- ◆ **Conduct advocacy for preventative policy and legislation and implement plans for its effective implementation:** Through awareness-raising campaigns and/or engagement with government officials, consider advocating for increased and/or improved legislation providing mechanisms for holding perpetrators of GBV accountable, upholding the rights of GBV survivors and women and girls' safety and protection.

Any policy and legislative advocacy must be accompanied by gender-transformative interventions and specialized GBV programming and service delivery, as legislation alone cannot eradicate the harmful norms driving GBV.

Resources

- ◆ International Rescue Committee (2021) [EMPOWER Framework](#).
- ◆ World Health Organization (2019) [RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence Against Women](#).
- ◆ IASC (2015) [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#).
- ◆ International Medical Corps (2021) [Traditions and Opportunities: A Toolkit for GBV Programs to Engage Community Leaders in Humanitarian Settings](#).
- ◆ What Works (2020) [A Rigorous Global Evidence Review of Interventions to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls](#).

