GBV AoR HELPDESK

Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies

Briefing Note on Prioritizing Safety and Support in Digital Reporting of Gender-Based Violence

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Introduction

Digital tools are more accessible than ever, which has led to a surge of technological solutions aimed at improving access to and quality of services in humanitarian settings. One area where this trend is evident is the response to gender-based violence (GBV). Digital tools have emerged as a potential game-changer for survivor reporting; however, like any innovation, these tools carry both benefits and risks. There are value propositions[1] to digitally reporting GBV, but the potential for retaliation, stigma and loss of survivors' trust adds a layer of complexity that requires diligent consideration.

This briefing note explores these complexities. It begins with a description of digital reporting and how it may be used in relation to making and collecting reports of GBV cases. It examines some of the key ethical considerations linked to establishing and using digital reporting for GBV, using a simulated reporting platform to highlight common pitfalls in designing safe and effective GBV reporting tools. It then details foundational principles that should guide any efforts to design and adapt digital GBV reporting. The note concludes with a checklist of key considerations in designing and implementing an online GBV reporting platform.

The note is written for anyone engaged in developing, working with, or overseeing digital platforms for GBV, including managers, decision-makers, technology developers, and GBV practitioners. The information included in the note is based on a desk review of GBV guidelines, digital development principles, existing digital reporting tools, and codes of conduct. Key references are included at the end of the briefing note.

Digital Reporting for Gender-Based Violence

Mobile broadband networks now reach almost the entire planet, with coverage available to an astonishing 95 percent of the global population.[2] The number of mobile internet users nearly doubled between 2015-2022, introducing a new era of internet connectivity.[3] This upsurge in mobile users has fueled the development of technological solutions for a wide array of challenges, creating new opportunities in humanitarian settings.

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[1] "A value proposition is a statement that clearly identifies the benefits a company's products and services will deliver to its customers." Pratt, M. (2023). What is a value proposition? TechTarget, https://www.techtarget.com/searchcio/definition/value-proposition-VP

[2] GSMA. (2023). The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity. Retrieved from https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/The-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2023.pdf

[3] Ibid.

GBV is one of many sectors where decision-makers are exploring how technology can be harnessed to address the issue. Despite its widespread occurrence, reporting rates for GBV remain low in many settings due to societal barriers like stigma, shame, and fear of retaliation, as well as challenges with accessibility of services. Digital technologies that allow survivors to submit reports electronically, via websites, mobile apps, chatbots or other similar platforms, may be a route to report for some women and girls who do not wish to or cannot access in-person services.

Notably, however, many existing digital reporting platforms for GBV are less focused on services for survivors than on facilitating reporting to law enforcement and/or creating pathways for individual or groups of survivors to pursue criminal or civil justice. A 2023 review of 13 mobile and online applications found that digital GBV reporting platforms tend to serve one of several purposes: 1) to document an incident for future reporting to police; 2) to capture evidence and accounts for legal redress; 3) to map trends; or 4) to seek services.[4] The majority of sites reviewed were designed to fight impunity.

While technology is playing an increasingly significant role in aid to displaced populations, including survivors, there are myriad risks to consider with digital GBV reporting. The focus of many online reporting sites on criminal justice may not align with what survivors want, what is effective, or even safe in some cultural contexts. In addition, survivors may be unable to effectively use digital reporting tools for GBV due to lack of access to technology, inadequate digital literacy, or language limitations.[5] Moreover, the introduction of digital GBV reporting tools that have not undergone proper risk mitigation and user design are likely to endanger survivor safety and wellbeing. The following section explores some of these risks.

Ethical Considerations (Risks) in Digital Gender-Based Violence Reporting

GBV survivors face a unique set of challenges when considering reporting violence online. The decision to report digitally is complex, especially for survivors already grappling with the physical, psychological, and social repercussions of the abuse. (See Figure 1).
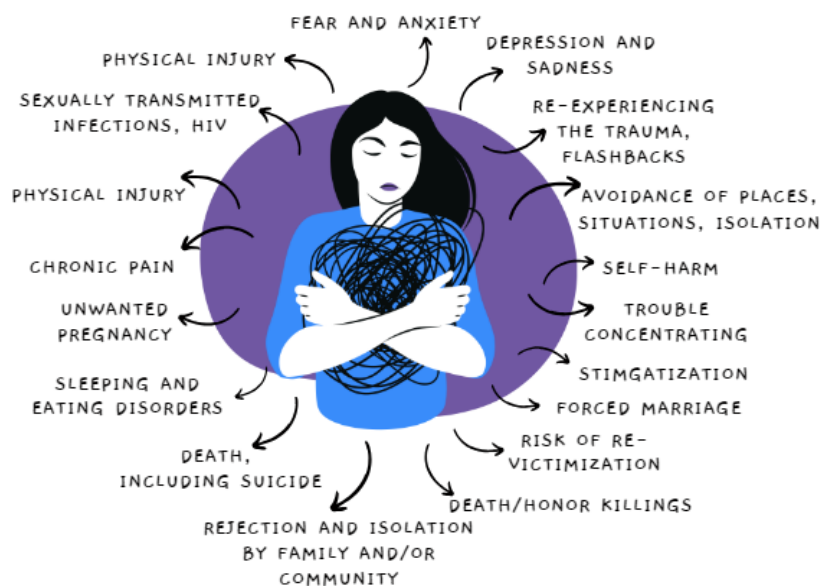

Figure 1: Consequences of GBV [6]

4 Stevens, L. et al. (2024). "Sec. Forensic and Legal Psychology. Volume 14 – 2023," Frontiers in Psychology, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1289817.

5 The digital gender divide persists in low-and middle-income countries, where women are 19% less likely to use mobile internet, leaving a gap of 310 million fewer female users compared to men, with South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa disproportionately affected. GSMA (2023). " The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023." https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2023.pdf
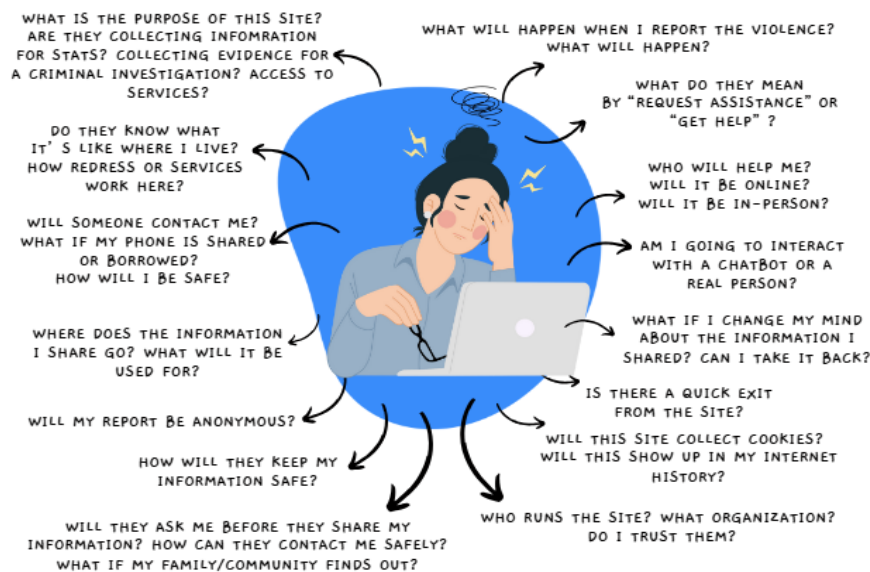
6 This list of impacts is adapted from Inter-agency Standing Committee (2015). *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in*

Reporting digitally may add to the risks survivors already face, especially in the case of failures in privacy and data security. For example, devices that are shared or borrowed from male family members, or otherwise insecure devices can compromise the confidentiality of reports. Leaks, misuse or unauthorized access to reported information may expose survivors to further violence from the perpetrator, and further stigmatization from communities.

Even where provisions are in place to secure data, lack of clarity or specificity on the digital platform about how personal information is safely stored or accessed may exacerbate feelings of disempowerment that are common after exposure to violence. Survivors may worry about being blamed, judged, and isolated by their community. They may also experience heightened fear and anxiety linked to the potential for retaliation and escalation of abuse. In addition, the reporting process itself can be re-traumatizing for survivors, especially if it involves recounting graphic details of the abuse. This can trigger harmful memories or flashbacks, which can be particularly harmful and/or destabilizing on an impersonal platform, where immediate support from a case manager or other trained professional is not available.

In particular, a focus on criminal justice and capturing evidence or mapping trends – the priority areas that are typical for digital reporting tools currently available– may not align with what survivors want, be ethical or safe. A World Bank analysis on the effectiveness of common redress measures found that while countries acknowledge the need to hold perpetrators accountable, existing laws often fail to protect survivors.[7] Criminal sanctions against perpetrators can discourage survivors from reporting abuse for fear retaliation by abusers or family members, even resulting in honor killing. Protection orders, intended to safeguard survivors, are undermined by weak enforcement and delays in implementation, leaving survivors vulnerable. Some judicial systems (particularly traditional systems) may propose or mandate mediation, which evidence strongly indicates is dangerous in most cases of GBV, particularly intimate partner violence.[8]

Figure 2 below illustrates factors survivors may weigh when considering whether to use a digital reporting platform. It captures the significant burden placed on survivors as they consider the potential dangers of digital GBV reporting tools.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS SITE? ARE THEY COLLECTING INFORMATION FOR STATS? COLLECTING EVIDENCE FOR A CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION? ACCESS TO SERVICES?

DO THEY KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE WHERE I LIVE? HOW REDRESS OR SERVICES WORK HERE?

WILL SOMEONE CONTACT ME? WHAT IF MY PHONE IS SHARED OR BORROWED? HOW WILL I BE SAFE?

WHERE DOES THE INFORMATION I SHARE GO? WHAT WILL IT BE USED FOR?

WILL MY REPORT BE ANONYMOUS?

HOW WILL THEY KEEP MY INFORMATION SAFE?

WILL THEY ASK ME BEFORE THEY SHARE MY INFORMATION? HOW CAN THEY CONTACT ME SAFELY? WHAT IF MY FAMILY/COMMUNITY FINDS OUT?

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I REPORT THE VIOLENCE? WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

WHAT DO THEY MEAN BY "REQUEST ASSISTANCE" OR "GET HELP"?

WHO WILL HELP ME? WILL IT BE ONLINE? WILL IT BE IN-PERSON?

AM I GOING TO INTERACT WITH A CHATBOT OR A REAL PERSON?

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND ABOUT THE INFORMATION I SHARED? CAN I TAKE IT BACK?

IS THERE A QUICK EXIT FROM THE SITE?

WILL THIS SITE COLLECT COOKIES? WILL THIS SHOW UP IN MY INTERNET HISTORY?

WHO RUNS THE SITE? WHAT ORGANIZATION? DO I TRUST THEM?

Humanitarian Action, p. 11. https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GBV_UserGuide_021618.pdf

[7] World Bank. (n.d.). How effective are the most common redress measures against domestic violence? https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/how-effective-are-most-common-redress-measures-against-domestic-violence

[8] For a discussion of this, see GBV AoR and Inter-agency (2017). Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines, Providing Care and Case Management Services to Gender-based Violence Survivors in Humanitarian Settings also see GBV AoR Helpdesk (n.d.) Intimate Partner Violence in Emergencies Evidence Digest.

To better illustrate practical examples of how these risks can compromise survivor safety, the mock site below shows a composite of features from existing digital GBV reporting tools that were reviewed for this briefing note. The mock site demonstrates some of the common shortcomings in design and functionality that may be problematic--even dangerous--for survivors. These include:

- *Unclear purpose:* The site offers "support" or "help" but does not clearly state what this means. Is it access to psychosocial care, legal aid, or something else? A transparent explanation of support is crucial to allow survivors to weigh the risks and benefits of reporting.

- *Missing service connection:* The site does not link survivors to essential services like psychosocial care, case management or health services. Effective reporting tools should offer clear connections to relevant, contextually-appropriate services to help survivors get the support they need.

- *Lack of informed consent:* The site does not explain how personal data and sensitive information will be handled. Survivors deserve to know where their information goes, how it is used, and how they are linked to it. This transparency allows for informed consent based on clear understanding of data handling practices.

- *Unclear digital trail:* The site's name, browsing history, cookies, etc. could leave a digital trail that exposes a survivor's activity. This is especially concerning because of the common occurrence that devices are shared or borrowed from male household members.

- *Limited accessibility:* Survivors with limited internet access, digital literacy, or language skills may be unable to utilize the tool. Inclusive design practices are essential to ensure everyone has access to reporting resources.

- *Unclear exit strategy:* The site doesn't show how to leave it quickly and discreetly, especially important in situations where survivors share devices. Safe tools should offer clear and inconspicuous ways to exit without leaving a trace.

- *Uncertain follow-up:* Survivors deserve to know what happens after they report. The site should explain how the information will be used and what kind of feedback they can expect.

- *Unclear ownership:* Survivors have the right to know who runs this site and their reputation in the community. Without this information, it is difficult for survivors to feel confident about trusting the platform with their sensitive information.

- *Harmful imagery:* The imagery used on this site shows a distressed survivor. The image could be disempowering for survivors or cause further emotional harm.

All these issues raise the question of intent: what is the intended purpose of a reporting mechanism? How are the experiences and priorities of women and girls driving this effort? Have women and girls been asked what they want, what they need, what would be effective, and what would be protective? As is discussed in the next section, if a digital reporting mechanism is desired by women and girls in the setting, these platforms should be designed with survivor safety and wellbeing at the core, and with adherence to industry-recognized ethical principles for GBV response services.

Mock GBV Reporting Site

Report GBV
Everywhere.

The wesbite lacks clarity on purpose, survivor benefits, data management, and informed consent.

The website fails to provide any information about its data management, security measures, or commitment to user privacy.

Alerts

This title is not neutral. Labeling a GBV reporting site as "GBV reporting" can pose several safety risks. Survivors seeking help might be hesitant to use a site explicitly labeled for GBV reporting, fearing identification by perpetrators or their communities. Also this may register in web browser history as GBV, raising the risk of retaliation or stigma.

Report violence wherever you are

This site is missing a quick escape button, which would allow users the ability to leave the site quickly and navigate to a more neutral site like a weather site.
The alert button suggests there could be notifications and other ways to contact the survivor.

The image could compromise user privacy by making the website's function immediately apparent. It could also be distressing for survivors.

ReportGBV is here to support you.
You can share your experience and contact information by filling out the reporting questionnaire below.

ReportGBV empowers you to take control of your situation.

Report

FOLLOW US ON @REPORTGBVEVERYWHERE

Ethical Foundations for GBV Reporting Technologies

Any adaptation or creation of digital GBV reporting tools must be grounded in well-defined minimum standards for GBV response and established principles for safe and effective digital tools. The following standards are critical for any digital reporting mechanism. If a platform cannot meet these benchmarks, developers must evaluate whether the platform risks causing harm.

Design for Safety

Prioritize efforts to "do no harm." A core principle of all humanitarian action is to avoid exposing affected populations to further harm in the process of providing humanitarian aid.[9] For any digital interventions to address GBV, this means all those involved in designing and implementing the intervention—including decision-makers, project managers, developers, and care providers—must anticipate and address any unintended consequence that might result in retaliatory violence, stigma, or other harm to a survivor or to caseworkers using the tools. User research should be required before deploying any tools. After deployment, safety should not be assumed based on the lack of negative reports. On-going monitoring, including data analysis and solicitation of user feedback, is central to understanding the platform's uptake and impact.

Ensure benefits outweigh risks. The WHO *Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies* advise that "the benefits to respondents or communities of documenting sexual violence must be greater than the risks to respondents and communities."[10] As noted previously, the main purpose of many current digital GBV reporting platforms is to fight impunity, which presumes survivor priorities are weighted toward access to justice. However, this may not be true for many survivors; in fact, access to justice may present additional physical and psychological risks for survivors that do not outweigh any benefits. Consulting with women and girls is critical to ensuring the purpose of the digital platform is in alignment with survivors' needs. The ultimate decision of whether benefits outweigh risks should not lie with product owners or project leads; these decisions should lie with women and girls. By actively consulting with women and girls, their voices and perspectives are prioritize, increasing the likelihood that the platform will be beneficial to them.

Ensure basic care and support is in place for survivors before introducing digital reporting.[11] Per WHO Ethical and Safety Guidelines noted above, before introducing any digital GBV reporting, referral pathways must be in place for survivors to access core services, most notably psychosocial support and health care. Building a strong response to GBV requires quality multi-sectoral services that are accessible, confidential, age-appropriate, and delivered with compassion.[12] A digital reporting platform should never replace GBV case management or other direct services for survivors.

Survivor informed consent is mandatory before any digital reporting takes place. All information gathering, record keeping, and information sharing is contingent on survivors' informed consent.[13] However, it can be difficult to ensure survivors have all the necessary information to provide meaningful consent with digital reporting platforms. Reporting

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[9] Sphere Project (2011). Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, p 28. Sphere Project (2011). https://spherestandards.org/handbook/

[10] This standard is outlined in World Health Organization (2007). Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies, p 10. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241595681

[11] This standard is outlined in WHO (2007), p 22.

[12] For more information about basic care and support services, see the Inter-Agency GBV Minimum Standards https://gbvaor.net/gbviems

[13] This standard is outlined in WHO (2007), p 22.

platforms must be explicit and transparent about how information will be stored; who will have access; how it will be protected; how it will be used; how survivors could/will be contacted BEFORE any of their information is disclosed to any other parties; and how survivors can remove information previously provided if they wish to do so. This should be explained in an accessible and easy-to-understand manner to ensure it is effective.

User-Centered Design

Design with users, rather than for them. The Principles for Digital Development[14] state that digital tools are best when they address the specific context, culture, behaviors, and expectations of the people who will directly interact with the technology. To ensure this, organizations must partner with women and girls (in safe ways) to determine their needs and whether/how a digital tool might address contextual risks and challenges, which can vary from one setting to another This includes being open to the idea that a non-digital solution might be more effective or preferred. This also means designing around common barriers survivors may face and seeking inputs of women and girls throughout the project lifecycle. A few examples of barriers include:

- *Limited connectivity:* Lack of access to internet-enabled devices or reliable and safe internet can deter reporting.
- *Digital literacy:* Survivors may lack the necessary digital literacy skills to utilize digital reporting platforms effectively due to the digital gender gap.
- *Language:* Language barriers can further complicate the reporting process and exclude minority language speakers.

Analyze the local ecosystem. According to the Principles for Digital Development, well-designed initiatives consider the structures and needs of end users in designing an appropriate tool.[15] Committing time to analyze contextual factors like culture, gender norms, and infrastructure is essential to ensuring the tool will be relevant and sustainable. Understanding the existing ecosystem through an analysis with local actors will help determine if and what kind of a digital reporting tool would be safe and effective in the setting.

Design for Privacy and Security

Prioritize data privacy and security. The Principles of Digital Development urge developers to approach digital tools with careful consideration of the data collected, the methods of management, and usage and sharing.[16] In relation to GBV, this requires: 1) minimizing data collection; and 2) implementing strong measures to protect user information from unauthorized access. These requirements are elaborated below.

- *Minimizing data collection* (or data minimization) is the principle that information should be limited in collection, retention, and authorized sharing as it is "directly relevant and necessary to accomplish a specific purpose." [17] Developers should prioritize identifying the minimum essential information needed for effective reporting. While comprehensive reports might be required for judicial proceedings, this should not be the

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[14] The Principles for Digital Development have been endorsed by more than 300 organizations, including donors, international organizations, and civil society organizations and focus supporting policymakers, practitioners and technologists to ensure that all people benefit from digital initiatives. See Principles for Digital Development (2024). https://digitalprinciples.org/

[15] Principles for Digital Development (2024).

[16] Ibid.

[17] For more information, see the European Data Protection Supervisor Glossary. European Data Protection Supervisor. Data minimization. In Glossary. European Data Protection Supervisor. https://www.edps.europa.eu/data-protection/data-protection/glossary/d_en#data_minimization

starting point for digital GBV reporting tools.

- *Protecting user information* and ensuring survivor privacy is critical because digital reporting can increase risk of breaches in confidentiality if information is accessed without authorization. Information should be stored in a manner that limits access. Strong encryption tools should be used for data "at rest" and "in transit" or otherwise password protected. This includes limiting access to information sharing to a "need to know" basis, meaning only essential information is shared in direct connection with the original purpose of its collection and only "with those individuals who need the information to provide the client with specific activities/interventions."[18]

Every consideration must be explored and addressed related to the likelihood and severity of potential risks of data collection, storage and sharing. This requires initial and on-going risk assessments throughout the data management process, from collection to storage and usage. Robust data security measures and a plan for destruction of data should be in place before implementation of digital reporting, and regularly updated as necessary. This also includes clear and easy-to-understand terms of use, privacy policies, and information sharing protocols to be transparent about what, with whom, and under what conditions data could be shared.

Design for Sustainability

Maximize the impact by prioritizing the sustainability of the tool. The Principles of Digital Development recommend viewing any adaptation or development of a tool with the lens of sustainability to ensure long-term stakeholder and end user support and impact.[19] This means determining, from the outset, the purpose, timeline for availability, and long-term support for production and maintenance to ensure the platform is supported without unplanned or erratic interruptions. If the platform cannot be supported in this manner, consider its utility. For long-term success, one recommendations is to develop the tool as an interagency platform.

Shared ownership across the sector and stakeholder groups ensures the tool remains relevant and widely used. This collaborative approach fosters long-term buy-in and commitment, crucial for the tool's sustainability, and the financial burden of maintenance can be shared. One example of this is the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS). Though restricted to reporting in the context of GBV case management service provision, this tool has operated as an inter-agency initiative for nearly 20 years, allowing costs of rollout and maintenance, upgrades, and feature enhancements to be shared across the multiple organizations making up its steering committee.[20]

Checklist of Key Considerations Related to Digital Reporting of GBV

To put all these principles into practice requires a thorough risk assessment that proactively engages GBV practitioners and communities (particularly women and girls). The questions below are meant to provide examples of key areas of consideration that should inform any initial or ongoing assessments, as well as any decisions about whether, why, and how to develop, implement and monitor digital reporting mechanisms for GBV. They serve as a critical assessment tool. If, after careful consideration, the proposed tool cannot meet most of these requirements, then pursuing digital reporting may not be advisable. In such cases, alternative solutions that better suit the specific context and setting should be explored.

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[18] UNHCR (2021). Technical Note on Sharing Personal Protection Data. pp. 11-12. https://www.unhcr.org/gbv-toolkit/resource/technical-note-on-sharing-of-personal-protection-data-2021/
[19] Ibid.
[20] See https://www.gbvims.com/

Ethical Soundness

- *What will be the actual experience of someone reporting through the digital tool?* Develop user personas that represent the specific needs, backgrounds, contexts, ICT access, literacy, and level of access to services and information of women and girls who are expected to use the site. Conduct a 'user journey' to determine the touchpoints with technology, possible expectations of the users, pain points and opportunities to maximize benefits and reduce risks.[21] This analysis should identify potential issues within the reporting mechanism as well as with the information flow.

- *Is there a potential safety backlash?* Conduct a safety mapping exercise with women and girls to determine the potential for harm or safety risks with any proposed digital GBV reporting tool. Safety mapping gathers insights from the community on what feels safe and what poses risks.[22] A technology focus to safety mapping would include targeted questions about potential safety vulnerabilities at each technology touchpoint. Many of the questions in this briefing note are relevant to a technology-informed safety mapping.

- *How is the data handled? Protected? Retained/Archived? How is the information on data protection shared with the user?* Consider a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)[23] to identify risks throughout the data processing and management lifecycle.

- *Will the reporting mechanism meet standards for safe and ethical GBV response?* Analyze the mechanism's alignment with GBV ethical standards outlined above and identify any potential gaps and ways to address these gaps. This includes one of the most foundational standards -- ensuring services are readily available, or that there's a system in place to connect survivors with appropriate support resources.

- *Does the reporting mechanism offer information about available services and ask the survivor if she would like to be referred?* Partner with local GBV response providers to determine safe ways to connect survivors with services.

Acceptability

- *Does the reporting mechanism fulfill a need expressed by women and girls in the setting?* Utilize a variety of research methods (e.g., key informant interviews, focus group discussions, surveys) to identify if there is a need (identified by survivors or those at risk of GBV) for a digital reporting platform, or if one exists, any frustrations with access to reporting and desires for improved reporting.

- *What is the intended purpose of the reporting mechanism? Can that purpose be fulfilled in the setting? Is the purpose of reporting clearly conveyed to survivors?* State (on the site itself) what the purpose of the site is (i.e. access to justice, law enforcement reporting, advocacy), and how the purpose was determined by research undertaken with women and girls who may use the service. Simply stating the platform is available for reporting does not answer critical questions survivors may have about the utility of it, and if it safe for them to engage with the mechanism.

- *How will the reporting mechanism ensure informed consent?* Confirm that potential users have information about the reason for data collection (in the context of reporting); the nature of questions to be asked;

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[21] A "user journey" is a visualization or narrative illustrating the steps users take, including their actions, thoughts, feelings, and motivations, when interacting with a product, and essential for understanding user experiences and improving satisfaction. A "touchpoint" is any interaction a user has with a product. A "pain point" is a difficulty or frustration users encounter while using a product or a service that reduces their satisfaction.
[22] For more general information about safety mapping, see this Safety Mapping Exercise Tool. https://gbvguidelines.org/document/safety-mapping-exercise-tool-3/#:~:text=The%20goal%20of%20safety%20mapping,where%20community%20members%20feel%20safe
[23] Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) are a crucial tool for organizations to proactively identify and mitigate risks associated with personal data processing. Wolford, B. (n.d.). Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). https://gdpr.eu/data-protection-impact-assessment-template/

potential risks and benefits; precautions taken to protect confidentiality; with whom and under what circumstances information will be shared; and the right to refuse to answer any questions.[24] Is the information about consent presented in a way that is clear, easy to understand, and appropriate for the age and literacy levels of women and girls in this context?

- *Does the reporting mechanism include language that is affirming and meets standards for psychological first aid?* Prioritize survivor-affirming terminology such as "survivor" over "victim" and utilize language that reinforces the survivor's agency and control over the situation, is empathetic, and does not imply the survivor is responsible for any abuse or violence.[25]

- *Is there long-term funding for the reporting mechanism? How will it be hosted and maintained?* Determine if the tool's maintenance is supported by grants or other ongoing funding sources. Insufficient resources or capacity lead to ineffective handling, which in turn can lead to survivor discouragement, which may negatively affect other survivors' help-seeking behavior.

- *Does the reporting platform have a sound technical architecture?[26]* Check for clear documentation (written materials like diagrams, flowcharts, and descriptions that explain the technical architecture of the platform and interactions between various system components), for easy maintainability, scalability, robust security, and 'critical component redundancy,' or built-in backups that would allow the platform to continue in the event of a failure (e.g. the use of multiple server backups).

Privacy and Data Security

- *What are the specific privacy and data security risks?* Identify specific privacy and data security risks in data collection, usage, and sharing. Determine mitigation plans that adhere to GBV minimum standards. When developing these plans, consider the context and reality of users. For example, if a mobile app is considered, this raises concerns about potential discovery on shared devices. Features like automated voice recording and connections to law enforcement raise privacy concerns that need careful consideration.

- *What security features are available?* Analyze the reporting mechanism's security measures and any vulnerabilities. Determine the likelihood and severity of security breaches and develop mitigation plans. Security measures should address not just online threats, but also the possibility of unauthorized access through shared, borrowed or monitored devices.

- *Is the name of the platform neutral, so as not to identify the purpose?* Avoid language like "GBV," "violence against women," "sexual violence," "intimate partner violence," "domestic violence," etc., in the naming of the mechanism to avoid "casual observers" (such as intimate partners or family members) from being able to observe what the survivor is reporting.

- *Is there a data protection framework in place?* Start by asking what national/international data protection laws are in place? Does this include any provisions pertaining to data residency? Create a data protection policy outlining the reporting mechanism's approach to data management.

- *Have applicable legal frameworks been considered that may impact rights of users and how data is hosted (e.g. General Data Protection Regulation[27])?* Review legal frameworks and internally document or include in

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[24] Refer to the WHO Ethical Recommendations for further guidance.
[25] Refer to The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies or GBV Guidelines for affirming language to be included in the reporting mechanism.
[26] Technical architecture is a form of internet technology architecture. It involves the development of a technical blueprint regarding the arrangement, interaction, and interdependence of all elements so that system-relevant requirements are met. For more information, see https://www.leanix.net/en/wiki/it-architecture/technical-architecture#:~:text=by%20system%20noncompliance.-,What%20does%20technical%20architecture%20mean%3F,system%2Drelevant%20requirements%20are%20met.
[27] The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a European Union regulation on information privacy in the European Union and the European Economic Area. The GDPR is an important component of EU privacy law and human rights law, in particular Article 8 of the Charter of Fundamental

the terms of use/privacy policy how the mechanism will abide by relevant legal frameworks.

Accessibility

- *In the targeted setting, what is women and girls' level of access to internet-enabled devices? Are they shared, borrowed, or monitored? What assumptions are made about access?* Undertake an information and communications technology assessment that includes questions about general population mobile technology usage, women and girls' personal usage and access, real and perceived safety risks of usage, and desired uses.

- *What is the preference for reporting pathways (e.g. hotlines, interactive voice response, unstructured supplementary service data/short messaging service)?* In user research, ask women and girls about their preferences for reporting, considering how different routes for reporting can serve the intended purpose (as it aligns with the needs of women and girls).

- *What is the site's accessibility for diverse users, including users with disabilities?* Assess accessibility needs of diverse users to design reporting mechanisms with clear navigation, keyboard functionality, and proper alternatives for non-text content.[28]

- *Does the platform function in preferred languages in the setting?* Determine the needed languages for diverse users and translate content into the most local language to ensure equitable access.

- *How can the site accommodate users with low or limited levels of literacy or limited digital literacy?* Usability testing is an essential tool for creating websites that are truly accessible to everyone. These tests can take many forms; one simple method is to observe people with varied literacy/digital literacy skills and identify areas that cause difficulty or confusion. Usability testing helps developers understand if users can find the information they need and act on that information. It reveals if instructions or language are too complex, allowing us to simplify them for better comprehension. Additionally, testing helps determine if visual elements like icons are clear and helpful.

Looking Ahead: Anticipate Risks and Design for Safety

Digital tools have the promise to aid in overcoming some of the barriers survivors may face in reporting GBV in humanitarian settings. However, careful consideration is crucial before designing and implementing digital reporting platforms due to the risks of causing further harm.

Safe and ethical practice requires that digital reporting tools are not just about recording incidents but are integrated into a comprehensive, responsive system that actively supports survivors' recovery and contributes to a culture of accountability and non-impunity for GBV. Ideally, GBV service providers would have strong relationships with reporting channels focused on fighting impunity in the setting, as well as at the global level.

Some of the core actions to support safe digital reporting for survivors include:

- *Integrated collaboration:* Service providers and legal authorities work closely together, sharing information securely and efficiently (and with informed consent of survivors) to ensure swift and appropriate actions are taken against perpetrators while safeguarding survivor confidentiality.

- *Comprehensive support systems:* Digital tools do not exist in isolation, but are part of a broader support

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Rights of the European Union. See https://gdpr-info.eu
[28] Refer to the Web Accessibility Initiative for more information. The Web Accessibility Initiative is a product of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) that develops international accessibility standards for websites, applications, and other digital content.

system that includes immediate access to counseling and legal advice via the platform. Technology acts as a bridge, not a barrier, connecting survivors with human support.

- *Transparent communication:* Clear, transparent communication with users about how data is used, who has access, and survivors' rights regarding their information is available on the platform and helps survivors build trust and confidence in the digital tools.

- *Feedback mechanisms:* Continuous feedback loops are available for users to help developers refine and adapt the digital tools to better meet survivors' evolving needs and circumstances.

Ultimately, the decision of whether to proceed with a digital reporting tool should be informed by a comprehensive assessment, including a critical appraisal of its necessity and potential impact. Involving GBV practitioners and women and girls from affected communities in problem definition and the solution design is essential. Their expertise in navigating safety and mitigation strategies is vital in determining if a digital reporting mechanism will be beneficial to and align with the priorities of survivors. Any digital reporting should be built upon the ethical foundations detailed above, and rigorously assessed against established criteria.

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The GBV AoR Help Desk

The GBV AoR Helpdesk is a unique research and technical advice service which aims to inspire and support humanitarian actors to help prevent, mitigate and respond to violence against women and girls in emergencies. Managed by Social Development Direct, the GBV AoR Helpdesk is staffed by a global roster of senior Gender and GBV Experts who are on standby to help guide frontline humanitarian actors on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response measures in line with international standards, guidelines and best practice. Views or opinions expressed in GBV AoR Helpdesk Products do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the GBV AoR, nor of all the experts of SDDirect's Helpdesk roster.

The GBV AoR Helpdesk

You can contact the GBV AoR Helpdesk by emailing us at: enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk

The Helpdesk is available 09.00 to 17.30 GMT Monday to Friday.

Our services are free and confidential.