

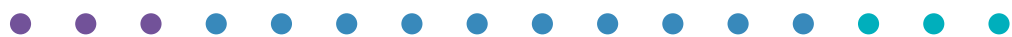
# THE INTER-AGENCY MINIMUM STANDARDS

for Gender-Based Violence in  
Emergencies Programming





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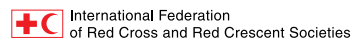
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# INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a horrifying reality and human rights violation for women and girls globally. During emergencies, the risk of violence, exploitation and abuse is heightened.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, national systems, including health and legal systems, and community and social support networks weaken. This breakdown of systems can reduce access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, and legal services, leading to an environment of impunity in which perpetrators are not held to account. When systems and services are disrupted or destroyed, women and girls face even higher risk of human rights violations such as sexual violence, intimate partner violence, exploitation and abuse, child marriage, denial of resources and harmful traditional practices. GBV has significant and long-lasting impacts on the health, and psychosocial and economic well-being of women and girls, and their families and communities.<sup>2</sup>

“Gender-based violence” is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.<sup>3</sup> The term “GBV” is most commonly used to underscore how systemic inequality between males and females, which exists in every society in the world, acts as a unifying and foundational characteristic of most forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls.<sup>4</sup> The term “gender-based violence” also includes sexual violence committed with the explicit purpose of reinforcing gender inequitable norms of masculinity and femininity.<sup>5</sup>

Under international human rights law, acts of GBV are considered violations, as articulated in international conventions, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women”.<sup>7</sup> The Declaration emphasizes that violence is “a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to the domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women”.<sup>8</sup>

## GBV is a violation of human rights

GBV violates international human rights law, humanitarian law and principles of gender equality.<sup>9</sup> International humanitarian law establishes protections for civilians, including women and girls, during times of conflict.<sup>10</sup> Successive UN Security Council resolutions have specifically prohibited the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.<sup>11</sup> The full exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms by girls and women is a prerequisite for sustainable development and peace.<sup>12</sup> Humanitarian actors have an ethical imperative to prevent and respond to GBV. It is morally unacceptable to fail in our duty to prevent and respond to this violence, or worst, to provide humanitarian support in ways that increase the risk.<sup>13</sup>

Prevention and mitigation of, and response to, GBV are classified as life-saving interventions in humanitarian settings.<sup>14</sup> All agencies involved in humanitarian response have a responsibility to protect those affected by GBV. This includes implementing programme interventions to reduce the risk of GBV, designing initiatives to promote community resilience to GBV, supporting survivors and other women and girls at risk to access care and support services, and strengthening local and national capacities (government, other authorities and civil society) to establish systems to prevent and respond to GBV in a sustainable manner.

## What is the purpose of these Minimum Standards?

This resource presents 16 Minimum Standards for GBV prevention and response programming in emergencies. As a whole, the 16 Minimum Standards define what agencies working on specialized GBV programming need to achieve to prevent and respond to GBV, and deliver multisectoral services.

*“Adequate quality” means  
(1) reflecting good practice and  
(2) not causing harm.*

The objective of the Minimum Standards is to establish a common understanding of what constitutes **minimum** GBV prevention and response programming in emergencies. “Minimum” means “of adequate quality”; for the purposes of this resource, **adequate quality** means (1) reflecting good practice and (2) not causing harm. As such, each Standard in this resource represents common agreement on what needs to be achieved for that specific programmatic element to be of adequate quality. When a GBV programme actor decides

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