



BRIEFING NOTE MITIGATING RISKS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN EMERGENCIES THROUGH WASH

What is gender-based violence (GBV) in emergencies?

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the most pervasive yet least visible public health issues and human rights violation in the world. It includes physical, sexual, mental or economic harm inflicted on a person because of socially ascribed power imbalances between males and females. It also includes the threat of violence, coercion and deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private. In all societies, women and girls have less power than men – over their bodies, decisions and resources. One in three women worldwide experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.

GBV can occur at any point in a person's life, in times of peace or instability. But in crisis settings, threats soar. Humanitarian emergencies exacerbate and increase the risk of pre-existing violence and, in some cases, present new forms of GBV. Armed conflict, natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies can significantly weaken a society's ability to protect women

and girls from GBV. Survivors of GBV suffer devastating short- and long-term consequences to their physical and mental health.

What are UNICEF's commitments to addressing GBV and how does it relate to WASH?

UNICEF's commitment to addressing GBV in emergencies lies at the heart of the agency's mandate to protect the safety, health, and well-being of children and women. Addressing GBV is in the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs), the 2021-2030 Strategic Plan and the Gender Action Plan. UNICEF aims to (i) support GBV survivors with access to comprehensive services; (ii) mitigate the risk of GBV across humanitarian sectors; and (iii) prevent GBV by addressing its underlying conditions and drivers. UNICEF WASH sections and their partners can primarily contribute by **mitigating risks of GBV** arising from WASH services (ii above).

What is GBV risk mitigation?

For WASH, GBV risk mitigation means that **WASH services are safe, effective and responsive** to the needs and rights of women and girls. Integrating GBV risk mitigation into WASH programmes means that we will also be strengthening accountability to affected populations, accessibility for many different types of people (not only girls and women), and quality of our work.

Integrating GBV risk mitigation promotes better, safer programming for all. Concretely, this means ensuring WASH service delivery:

- (1) does not increase the likelihood of GBV occurring by creating or exacerbating GBV risks;
- (2) seeks to identify and mitigate GBV risks;
- (3) conducts ongoing monitoring of access and barriers to services, particularly for women and girls; and
- (4) Staff are equipped to safely and confidentially refer survivors of GBV using available GBV referral mechanisms or where there is not referral mechanism the GBV Pocket Guide.¹

What are the WASH Sector Commitments?

- 1. Assessment:** Consult separately girls, boys, women, and men, including people with disabilities, to ensure that WASH programs are designed to provide equitable access and reduce GBV risks.
- 2. Design:** Ensure that girls, boys, women, and men, including older people and those with disabilities have access to appropriate and safe WASH services.
- 3. Response:** Ensure consultation with women and girls, particularly adolescents. It is important that response for WASH and GBV risk mitigation is contextualized against the required standards and environment.
- 4. M&E:** Monitor and evaluate the safe and equitable access to, and use of, WASH services.² Ensure that girls, boys, women, and men, including those with disabilities have access to feedback and complaint mechanisms so that actions can address their specific protection and assistance needs.

What actions³ can we take to mitigate GBV risks in WASH programming?

Policies and Standards

- Incorporate GBV prevention and mitigation strategies into the policies, standards and guidelines of WASH programmes (e.g., equal employment of females; procedures and protocols for managing protected or confidential information about GBV incidents; agency procedures to report, investigate and take disciplinary action in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse; etc.)
- Advocate for the integration of GBV risk-reduction strategies into national and local policies and plans (including emergency/crisis preparedness plans) related to WASH, and allocation of specific funding.

Capacity, partnerships and coordination

- Equip and train UNICEF and other WASH personnel on the IASC GBV and WASH Guidelines and how to safely and appropriately support survivors who disclose their experience. Reach out to the EAPRO WASH team for example training materials that can be used for your partners.
- Establish partnerships with the Protection Cluster/Sector and the GBV Area of Responsibility.
- Plan and advocate for GBV risk mitigation into WASH Cluster/Sector objectives in your humanitarian response plan.
- Undertake proactive measures for hiring and retaining women as staff, hygiene promoters, and ensure women benefit from paid roles in WASH, rather than just volunteers.
- Develop proposals for WASH programmes that reflect awareness of GBV risks for the affected population and strategies for reducing these risks.
- Establish WASH partnerships with women-led organizations.



¹ CCC 2.4.1, p. 68; UNICEF Reference Guide: Integrating GBV into UNICEF Emergency Preparedness and Response.

² WASH Minimum Commitments for Safety and Dignity of Affected People.

³ Guidelines for GBVIE: WASH Actions, 48; UNICEF Program Kit: WASH Checklist, 12-15, UNICEF GBVIE Operational Guidance.



Example: Systematic collaboration between WASH and Protection Clusters in South Sudan

UNICEF South Sudan's focused work on GBV integration began with the WASH sector and the WASH/GBV collaboration has been used as a model for UNICEF's other programmatic sectors.

The WASH Cluster included GBV risk mitigation into the WASH Cluster objectives in the humanitarian response plan (HRP objective 2: mitigate WASH-related GBV) and included a safety

indicator into standard monitoring and reporting tools for partners (safe access to water, sanitation, and hygiene, which included definitions of safety). Funds from the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund were then invested into HRP objective 2 on GBV risk mitigation for WASH and acted as an incentive for Cluster partners to integrate GBV risk mitigation into their projects and funding proposals. As a result, USD 2.4 million was allocated to this objective.

To make this work in practice, the WASH Cluster and GBV sub-cluster set up formal collaboration for joint GBV risk assessments of boreholes and latrines. This brought GBV technical capacity to the WASH sector. To facilitate these, WASH Cluster partners were provided with a list of all GBV actors by state, and GBV actors were requested to respond to requests for WASH actors. WASH actors arranged field assessments as normal and GBV actors allocated staff time of one expert for the risk analysis. Together, the WASH and GBV actors jointly consulted with girls and women on siting of new facilities.

WASH has emphasized promoting participation and leadership of women and girls in WASH programming; making GBV risk mitigation a systematic component of their service-delivery standards; and developing practical monitoring and evaluation tools that incorporate safety considerations, such as a latrine minimum checklist. Malakal was the first Protection of Civilians (POC) site where UNICEF South Sudan integrated GBV risk mitigation into WASH programming in a systematic way. During a 2017 assessment, 100% of women and girls who took part in focus group discussions in Malakal POC reported that safety had improved around WASH facilities compared to 2 years earlier.⁴

Source: Global WASH Cluster 2021 Annual meeting side event "GBV risk mitigation in WASH" by Cristina Mena Lander, 28 April 2021 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1glFYu8lxtZ6yH17kTqhb-Hara8G_yRh6/view

Assessment and Design

- Ensure meaningful and safe consultation with women and girls to identify safety risks in WASH programmes, and measures to address and mitigate these risks, for example, using safety audits (refer to the [Violence, Gender and WASH Toolkit](#)). Additional tools to assist in consultations with girls about WASH in Schools facility design are included in this [publication by Emory University and UNICEF](#).
- Ensure early engagement with authorities, shelter and site management to advocate for sufficient space for WASH services.
- Assess gender and community norms and practices related to WASH that may increase the risk of GBV (e.g., responsibilities of women and girls for water collection, water storage, waste disposal, cleaning, and taking care of children's hygiene; management and maintenance of WASH facilities; etc.)

- Facilitate participatory planning and design with at-risk groups, including women and girls, older people, people with disabilities and others with specific protection concerns.
- Collaborate with women and girls to determine the design siting of WASH facilities.

Implementation Response

- Identify, analyse and mitigate physical and psychological barriers that prevent safe access to WASH facilities to identify associated risks of GBV (e.g., travel to/from WASH facilities; sex-segregated toilets; adequate lighting and privacy; accessibility features for persons with disabilities; etc.)
- Use checklists to ensure that all considerations for GBV risk mitigation have been made, such as [those produced by the Oxfam SaniTweaks project](#).

⁴ UNICEF South Sudan GBV Risk Mitigation Programmatic Highlights, 2017.

- Implement specific measures to make WASH programming safer and more responsive to the needs of women and girls (i.e., menstrual hygiene management; installing lights; locks on toilets and bathing facilities; gender-separate toilets and bathing facilities; appropriate drying facilities for MHM products; consider household toilets and bathing areas and rather than shared).
- Ensure appropriate distribution systems that ensure access to menstrual management services MHM kits and mitigate increased risks of GBV.
- Collect and analyse sex, age and disability disaggregated WASH data to understand who is being reached and who is missing out and address gaps and improve targeting.
- Establish accessible and safe community feedback, complaint and accountability mechanisms.

Resource Mobilization and Reporting

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Conduct ongoing safety audits with women and girls as part of regular programmatic monitoring and evaluation for WASH activities.
- Ensure that appropriate resources are mobilized within the WASH sectors and allocated for GBV risk mitigation interventions.
- Document and report on GBV risk mitigation interventions, and lessons learnt within the WASH sector for continuous learning and programming.



Example: Women-led design of WASH services in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, following the Rohingya refugee crisis, a WASH sector assessment and safety audit in 2018-2019 found that many women and girls are fearful of using the water points, toilets and communal bathing facilities and most toilets and bathing facilities are not gender segregated.

Oxfam initiated a 'Social Architecture Project', with support from UNICEF and UNHCR and in collaboration with the WASH Sector, to address this issue. Oxfam carried out research with Rohingya women and adolescent girls living in Cox Bazar refugee camps to identify the barriers and enablers of using WASH facilities in the camps. The research was led by two women architects to work with women and girls to adapt the design of existing facilities, and to design new facilities to meet their needs. To do this, the architects and women identified the problems through consultations, on-site visits and safety walks and a collaborative design workshop. From discussions with women and girls, the main problems with the existing WASH facilities were lack of safety, privacy and dignity.

The architects developed designs and approaches to meet women's needs and concerns and undertook validation meetings with women to ensure their views have been represented in the designs.

Source: UNICEF, Gender, GBV and inclusion audit WASH sector and capacity development assessment in Cox's Bazar, Summary Report 2019 Oxfam, Women's Social Architecture Project: Project 1 Final Report, 2018-19

Key Resources

- Violence, Gender & WASH Toolkit
- Oxfam, SaniTweaks
- Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action: WASH guidelines
- WASH Cluster Minimum Commitments for Safety and Dignity of Affected People
- UNICEF GBVIE Operational Guide
- UNICEF Podcast: GBV Risk Mitigation into Global WASH cluster
- Toolkit for GBV Risk Mitigation in UNICEF-Led Clusters/AoRs: WASH cluster
- UNICEF Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Quality Framework
- UNICEF WASH and Dignity Kit- First Response Guidance Note
- GBV Pocket Guide
- UNICEF Tip Sheet: Consulting with Women and Girls
- UNICEF: How to guide to GBV Safety Audits