

Policy

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

IASC Reference Group on Gender and
Humanitarian Action

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INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE POLICY ON GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to guide the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to make gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a core principle of its humanitarian action. The Policy harnesses progressive thinking on humanitarian preparedness and response, peace building, and development, to be transformative, inclusive and uncompromising towards achieving the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action. Implementation of this Policy will lead to humanitarian action which is more just, coherent, effective and cost efficient, and thus will save more lives.

B. SCOPE

This Policy is a framework that specifies principles, standards, and actions that IASC Bodies, Members and Standing Invitees should abide by at global and field level to integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls into all preparedness, response and recovery efforts. IASC Members and Standing Invitees are urged to implement the Policy alongside existing policies of their own, and in doing so to work in an inter-agency fashion. IASC Bodies should align all existing and new policy and operational guidance with this Policy.

This Policy will support the IASC to comply with international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, and other normative frameworks¹ in upholding the rights to protection and assistance of women, girls, men and boys affected by conflict and disaster, and meeting their needs and priorities equitably. It builds on the IASC Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action Policy Statement (2008), the findings of the 2015 review of its implementation, and the gender policies of IASC Members and Standing Invitees.

This Policy should be used alongside the IASC Gender Handbook and the IASC Gender Marker. It is accompanied by an Accountability Framework to monitor implementation and progress.

¹ See Annex A for a list of key normative frameworks.

C. RATIONALE

This Policy comes at a time of great risk and insecurity worldwide, not least for those experiencing discrimination, exclusion, and abuse because of their gender. Crises have become more complex and persistent, due to more protracted conflicts and exposure to climate change-related disasters. They are characterised by large movements of people, deepening poverty, insecurity and fragility, and the erosion of resilience.

Crises do not affect everyone equally: gender and other aspects of social identity related to age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, caste, ethnic and religious affiliation, economic and migration status are drivers of inequality and interact to determine the capacities and vulnerabilities of women, girls, men and boys. Women and girls are severely constrained by gender inequalities and by differences in power, privilege and opportunity. Consequently, they die in larger numbers in natural disasters.² They are also disproportionately exposed to loss of livelihoods, increased domestic responsibilities, and to Gender-based Violence (GBV), as well as to threats to many aspects of their health and well-being, especially with the breakdown of law and order, and the disruption of social networks. This is particularly true for women and girls living with a disability, and those from indigenous or other marginalised communities. The impact of crises on women and girls are further exacerbated by their restricted opportunities to influence humanitarian action. Men and boys are also affected by crises in specific ways, including as fatalities of armed conflict as combatants, and both survivors and perpetrators of violence.

The structural gender inequalities which lead to the differential impact of disaster on women, girls, men and boys, can also create and perpetuate crises and insecurity.³

There is a consensus that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (GEEWG) are human rights imperatives and requirements for effective humanitarian action. This principle is enshrined in international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law, and in UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) from 1325 (2000) to 2242 (2015). It is also reflected in recent global agreements, such as those from the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) (2015), the Sendai Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (2015), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Roadmap (2015), and the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (2016).

Such global agreements and resolutions have identified emerging themes which have implications for GEEWG in humanitarian action. These include the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, new financing mechanisms, and localisation (i.e. the allocation of resources and decision making to local actors including women's rights organisations). They also reinforce critical gender equality concerns, such as the need to (a) adopt and implement measures to eradicate GBV and violence against women and girls (VAWG); (b) recognise women's capacities, as well as

² Neumayer, Eric and Plümper, Thomas (2007) The gendered nature of natural disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981–2002. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97 (3). pp. 551-566.

³ Addressing Inequalities: the Heart of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Future We Want for All. Global Thematic Consultation. Henk-Jan Brinkman, Larry Attree, Sasa Hezir, February 2013.

vulnerabilities; (c) extend the focus on women's participation to their transformative leadership in humanitarian action and peace building; (d) expand the notion of gender, to include persons who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI); (e) support non-militarised solutions to conflict; (f) strengthen women's economic empowerment, which will also speed recovery and increase the resilience of communities; (g) address the care responsibilities women are expected to shoulder; and (h) enable their equal access to all services in humanitarian contexts. The commitments made under the international agreements mentioned above inform this Policy⁴, and can be summarised by the five core priorities identified at the WHS.⁵

Within the IASC, the introduction of the Transformative Agenda (TA) and its Protocols, the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), the Cluster Coordination System, and new systems for Humanitarian Financing, have presented opportunities and structures for programming on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Specific efforts to better institutionalise gender equality into the IASC have been many, and they include the establishment of Gender Reference/Working Groups (global and national); the GenCap Project; and the GBV Area of Responsibility. These have been strengthened by the development of the Gender Marker and by the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).

While much has been achieved by humanitarian actors, existing policies and strategies on gender in humanitarian action are not always implemented, and advancing gender equality is too often considered optional and additional, rather than critical and lifesaving. In response, this Policy offers a framework for translating into practice gender equality commitments made by the global humanitarian and peace building community.

D. POLICY STATEMENT

The IASC commits to the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action. This entails making provision to meet the specific needs of women, girls, men and boys in all their diversity, promote and protect their human rights, and redress gender inequalities.

⁴ See 'Summary Report. Fit for the Right Purpose: updating the IASC gender equality in humanitarian action policy statement', 2017.

⁵ 'Women and girls: catalysing action to achieve gender equality'. 1. Empower women and girls as change agents and leaders, including by increasing support for local women's groups to participate meaningfully in humanitarian action; 2. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, for women and girls, as well as men and boys; 3. Implement a coordinated global approach to prevent and respond to GBV; 4. Ensure that humanitarian programming is gender-responsive; 5. Fully comply with humanitarian principles on women's empowerment and women's rights.

In order to achieve this, the Policy commits the IASC to the following principles, standards, roles and responsibilities.

E. PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS

Principles

- The realization of human rights is the prime motivation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action.
- Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a critical component of achieving effective and life-saving humanitarian action, and is a responsibility to be owned by all actors. It is not optional or additional.
- Gender is understood as beyond the man-woman binary to include persons who identify as LGBTI.⁶
- The knowledge, capacities and agency of women and girls, alongside those of men and boys, are recognised and strengthened in all humanitarian action, with equitable participation in planning and programming.
- Achieving sustainable change on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and strengthening resilience, requires robust action *throughout* disaster risk reduction, humanitarian response and development, as well as conflict resolution and peace-building.
- Non-militarised solutions to conflict are fundamental to realising sustained peace and security as agreed in resolutions concerning Women, Peace and Security.⁷

Standards

The goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls must be central to all coordinated preparedness and response programmes, as well as to the organizational practices of all IASC Bodies, Members and Standing Invitees. This requires all humanitarian actors – including UNHCR coordination in mixed situations⁸ - to make harmonized efforts to adhere to the following standards.

a. Programmes

1. Analysis, Design and Implementation:

⁶ As a consequence, in this Policy all references to women, girls, men and boys, are inclusive of those who identify as LGBTI

⁷ [www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20(1).pdf)

⁸ A 'mixed situation' is one in which the population of humanitarian concern includes refugees, IDPs and other affected groups

- Carry out joint context-specific gender analyses, with the collection of sex and age disaggregated data (SADD), to identify the gender inequalities that lead to different power, vulnerabilities, capacities, voice and participation of diverse women, girls, men and boys, and how these intersect with other inequalities. Use the results of gender analyses to inform humanitarian action at each stage of the HPC.
- Use both gender mainstreaming and targeted action for GEEWG in preparedness, response, and recovery. These should be rights-based and gender transformative, meet the specific needs and priorities of women, girls, and men and boys of all backgrounds, and provide them with equitable and safe access to quality assistance and protection services.
- In all sectors adopt strategies that recognize, reduce and redistribute the unpaid care and household responsibilities assigned to women and girls; that safeguard their dignity; and that enable their access to innovative technologies (including information technology)
- Support women's economic empowerment through livelihoods and employment interventions (including cash-based programmes) which are accessible and minimize risk to women and girls.
- Make specific provision for sexual and reproductive health for women and girls, as well as for men and boys.
- Fulfil the duty of all humanitarian actors to prevent, mitigate and respond to GBV and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), through systematic gender mainstreaming that addresses harmful societal and institutional gender norms; supporting national policies; adhering to global initiatives such as the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, and the Real-Time Accountability Partnership; and working with men and boys as both potential survivors and perpetrators of GBV.
- Recognise the common goal of the IASC commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations/PSEA, the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action (2016), and this Policy, and employ common strategies and plans at country level, for example the use of information and feedback mechanisms which are gender-sensitive.

2. **Participation & Leadership:**

- Tangibly promote the meaningful and safe⁹ participation, transformative leadership, and collective action of women and girls of all backgrounds at all stages of humanitarian action, also reinforcing similar efforts in conflict prevention, peace building and state building.

⁹ Safety implies being 'safe from' (violence, exclusion, exploitation) and 'safe to' (participate fully, control resources, make own decisions, learn)

- Work with men and boys in achieving the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action, and in promoting positive masculinities.
- Collaborate with local, national and regional women's rights organisations (including those working to advance WPS), LGBTI and other gender-progressive groups. Invest in their capacities to prevent, prepare for and respond to disasters of all types, resource them financially, and protect the spaces in which they can operate, in support of localisation. Foster common platforms across these actors for the coordination of GEEWG programming. In working with private sector actors, promote IASC gender standards and policies.
- Engage with national gender machineries and encourage gender progressive national policies, including gender responsive budgeting, as these will create enabling environments for GEEWG programming in humanitarian action.

b. Organizational Practices to Deliver on Programme Commitments

- **Financial Resources:**
 - All IASC Members and Standing Invitees to make financial provision to fully resource GEEWG programming for both mainstreaming and targeted action, creating specific budget lines for the purpose.
 - Include GEEWG requirements in all formats used by IASC-led coordination and pooled funding mechanisms to apply for, and report on, funding for humanitarian action.
- **Human resources:** Strengthen human resources for the implementation of GEEWG commitments through the following: (a) deploy gender advisory expertise in all teams and IASC Bodies, including surge staff, and deploy IASC GenCap advisors as necessary (b) achieve gender parity, and active and equal participation of women and men in all teams (including HCTs and clusters), as well as in summit and conference panels (c) appoint senior Gender Focal Points for programme support, and Gender Champions for leadership (d) where appropriate, establish and resource Gender Reference/Working Groups and (e) transform discriminatory attitudes amongst personnel at all levels, and strengthen their capacity for GEEWG programming through inspiring and innovative staff development initiatives.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability:**
 - Use M&E systems and indicators able to measure quality, progress and impacts on GEEWG (including the IASC Gender Marker), and build evidence and report systematically on what works to achieve GEEWG in humanitarian action.
 - Use job descriptions, terms of reference and performance reviews to create ownership towards GEEWG outcomes, encourage progress, and hold personnel accountable at all levels.

- **Workplace policies and practices:** Employ gender equitable workplace policies and practices in recruitment, remuneration and career opportunities, including supporting women into leadership positions; provide appropriate and safe facilities; foster an enabling organisational culture; and guarantee the protection of personnel from harassment, abuse, exploitation and violence.

F. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section identifies roles and responsibilities at all levels of the IASC, particularly in providing clear and consistent guidance at field level, to enable the implementation of this Policy and uphold its standards.

IASC Body, Member or Standing Invitee	Roles and Responsibilities
A. GLOBAL LEVEL	
Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct the implementation of this Policy in all aspects of the IASC’s work • Be accountable for the implementation of this Policy by IASC Bodies, Members and Standing Invitees
Working Group, Emergency Directors Group, and Peer to Peer Support (to be updated as appropriate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate and champion the Gender Policy and its Accountability Framework to all IASC Bodies, Members and Standing Invitees, and hold them accountable for implementation • Integrate GEEWG and the principles and standards of this policy as a primary focus in all IASC work, and consistently articulate the relevant commitments from this Policy in all IASC policies, directives, operational guidance and other products, ensuring alignment of gender positions and definitions • Advocate for adequate levels of humanitarian financing to fully resource GEEWG programming, including support to women’s rights organisations • Articulate commitments to gender equality within each strategic priority in the WG’s annual work plan. • Address relevant gender policy commitments in the TORs of Operational Peer Reviews, Peer to Peer support missions, and other support initiatives • Assign the Gender Reference Group (GRG) the status and clear tasks needed for it to be an effective technical resource for GEEWG within the IASC, and to coordinate the implementation of this Policy • Reflect commitments to GEEWG in the TOR, job descriptions and performance reviews of Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs), and in all guidance for Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) • Make GEEWG a standing item in all WG and EDG meetings.
Members and Standing Invitees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote compliance and consistency with this Policy within individual organisations by communicating it and providing operational guidance • Reflect commitments to GEEWG in the TORs, job descriptions and performance appraisals of all personnel, including those of senior managers

Subsidiary Bodies	<p>Gender Reference Group (GRG):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the systematic dissemination of this Policy throughout the IASC and champion its adoption on an on-going basis • Support all IASC Bodies on GEEWG programming, based on agreed tasks and clear ways of working • Facilitate dialogue between humanitarian bodies and global women’s rights organisations and networks, within the UN system and beyond, also as a way of tracking relevant trends and emerging issues • Build linkages with all UN entities working on women, peace and security (WPS) <p>Other Subsidiary Bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make specific reference to GEEWG in policies, operational guidance, TORs, objectives and annual work plans • Nominate a gender specialist or a senior Gender Focal Point, to support the integration of GEEWG in the work of teams, with clear ways of coordinating with the GRG
To be determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the implementation of this Policy against the Accountability Framework and report progress to the WG
Global Clusters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include GEEWG in annual work plans and cluster guidance with the support of a senior Gender Focal Point, in liaison with the GRG, and with global women’s rights organisations and networks • Strengthen the capacities of global cluster members and working groups to incorporate GEEWG in programmes, including in Harmonised Training Packages and Modules which should be regularly audited for gender content • Provide guidance and capacity-building to country level clusters on integrating GEEWG throughout the planning and implementation of the coordinated response effort • All clusters to include GEEWG considerations in their efforts to mainstream protection
B. FIELD LEVEL	
Humanitarian Coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate leadership on GEEWG in all aspects of humanitarian action, in both cluster and HCT activities, including in JDs, TORs, performance evaluations, and funding allocations • Establish and support a Gender Reference/Working Group, with sufficient gender expertise and resources, to promote mutual learning and collaboration across HCTs and clusters • Allocate a gender advisor, or appoint a senior Gender Focal Point, to support and enhance the capacity of HCTs • Establish targets for gender parity in HCTs and other operational teams, particularly in surge teams • Consistently raise awareness of this Policy, and encourage ownership and coordinated action among all actors
Humanitarian Country Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate GEEWG considerations in the Multi-cluster Initial Rapid Assessment, Joint Needs Assessment, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Strategic Response Plan, Humanitarian Response Plan and appeals, with appropriate budgets. For this purpose, prepare, implement and monitor a country-specific plan on GEEWG. • Include strategic gender issues in HCT advocacy and communication materials, as well as in the agenda of their meetings and other humanitarian coordination fora

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with national and local women's rights organisations, including those active in WPS issues, for better coordination, mutual learning, and impact on GEEWG in humanitarian action. Where possible designate a seat on the HCT for a representative of such organisations
Cluster Coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully integrate gender equality considerations in all cluster strategies, work plans, needs assessments, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, on the basis of the collection and analysis of SADD Ensure access to sufficient gender expertise by designating a gender advisor or senior Gender Focal Point, and by collaborating with women's rights organisations on sectoral issues Strengthen capacities and accountability of cluster actors to deliver on GEEWG Make gender a standing item at cluster meetings
Members and Standing Invitees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainstream gender in all internal strategies, work plans, operational guidance, and implementation, with financial and other resources clearly allocated Raise GEEWG issues, and share information on GEEWG approaches, at cluster meetings Participate in cluster and HCT initiatives and events related to GEEWG programming, and share capacity building opportunities Contribute to and support the work of the Gender Reference/Working Group
Inter-Cluster Coordination Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that gender is fully mainstreamed in all inter-cluster strategies, work plans, guidance and activities, such as needs assessments, analyses, planning, and monitoring and evaluations Commission and coordinate joint participatory gender analysis, to inform planning and implementation by all clusters and partners at all levels Undertake studies on the capacities of women and girls to prevent and respond to crises, to counteract the frequent exclusive focus on their vulnerabilities

MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE

The Policy is accompanied by an Accountability Framework to monitor its implementation.

The contents of this Policy will be reviewed every 5 years.

Annex A: Selected References for GEEWG Programming in Humanitarian Action

Legal and Normative References

- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BFPA), 1995
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW) 1979
- Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities, 2006
- Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1999
- The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and its 1967 Protocol
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, 2000
- UN Security Council Resolution 2242, to Improve Implementation of Landmark Text on Women, Peace, Security Agenda, 2015
- UN Security Council Resolution 1265 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 1999

International Agreements

- Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, 2016
- CSW Resolutions 54/2 and 56/2 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Natural Disasters, 2012
- Global Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, and its Roadmap, 2015
- One humanity: shared responsibility Report of the Secretary-General for the World, 2016
- Humanitarian Summit. UN General Assembly, 2016
- New York Declarations on Refugees and Migrants, 2016
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), 2015
- UN SG Special Measures for protection from sexual abuse and exploitation: a new approach, 2017
- World Humanitarian Summit - Women and Girls: Catalysing action to achieve gender equality. Core commitments, 2016
- Paris Agreement, 2015

IASC and UN Operational Guidelines

- IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action, 2006 (*under revision*)
- IASC Gender Marker, 2012 (*under revision*), and sector Tip Sheets, 2012
- IASC Guidelines for Integrating GBV interventions in Humanitarian Action, 2015
- IASC Guidelines to implement the Minimum Operating Standards for PSEA by UN and non-UN personnel, 2013
- IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016
- IASC Statement by the IASC Principles on Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2015
- UN System-wide Action Plan, 2012
- UN SG Special Measures for protection from SEA: A New Approach, 2017

- UNDG Gender Equality Marker, 2013

Annex B - TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Empowerment of Women and Girls refers to the ability of a woman or girl to control her own destiny. This implies that she must not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health) and equal access to resources and opportunities (such as land and employment), but that she must also have the agency to use these rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions.¹⁰

Gender Analysis is the systematic gathering and examination of sex and age disaggregated data and information to identify, understand and redress gender inequalities. Gender analyses should be integrated into all humanitarian needs assessments and situational analyses and used to inform the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all humanitarian interventions.

Gender-based Violence (GBV) refers to any harmful act perpetrated against a person's will and based on socially ascribed differences between women and men, and between girls and boys. GBV includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivation of liberty, perpetrated in public or private spheres. The nature and extent of the different manifestations of GBV vary across cultures, countries and regions.¹¹ Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is any act of GBV that results, or is likely to result, in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, and is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women.

Gender Equality refers to the equal enjoyment by women, girls, men and boys of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards. It does not mean that women and men are the same but that their enjoyment of rights, opportunities and life chances are not governed or limited by whether they were born female or male.¹²

Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) programming is a term which indicates that programming intends to promote both *gender equality*, i.e. the equal enjoyment of men, girls, men and boys of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards, and *the empowerment of women and girls*, i.e. the ability of women and girls to control their own destiny. It also indicates that to achieve such goals it adopts the twin track approach of gender mainstreaming and targeted interventions.

Gender Equality Targeted Action addresses gender inequalities per se, through focused action to overcome the specific barriers and vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls, or, men and boys, in the exercise of their rights and in the redress of gender inequality.

¹⁰ Gender Equality, UN Coherence and You, n.d.

¹¹ UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993

¹² IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action, 2006

Gender Mainstreaming is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, plans and programmes in all spheres - political, economic, social, environmental - so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is eliminated.