



Brussels, 22.7.2013
SWD(2013) 290 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Gender in Humanitarian Aid: Different Needs, Adapted Assistance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Strengthening the gender approach within the European Union's (EU) humanitarian aid is a commitment made in the **European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**,¹ which highlights the need to integrate gender considerations, to promote the active participation of women in humanitarian aid and to incorporate protection strategies against sexual and gender-based violence.

In 2009, the Commission carried out a **review of gender issues in humanitarian aid**,² which concluded that it should actively promote a shared understanding of what gender-sensitive humanitarian assistance means in practice.

Building on these commitments and inputs, the present Staff Working Document further develops the **framework for systematically integrating gender perspectives into the European Union's humanitarian assistance, in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of its actions**. The aim of this document is to help foster a common understanding between staff and partners, aimed at promoting adequate humanitarian responses to the needs of women and men of all ages. This text also builds on the practical experience gained by our field-based experts and is the result of consultations with relevant stakeholders. As such, it will help serve as a guide particularly from an operational point of view.

This document covers aspects linked to advancing gender integration, such as programming, capacity building, advocacy and accountability. It also describes new working tools to ensure that humanitarian aid is more gender sensitive, namely a gender and age marker. However, it does not address issues related to gender balance and equal opportunities in staffing (unless related to humanitarian operations), since these are covered by an overall policy of the Commission.³

Equally, this document does not cover sectoral issues. Recommended guidance on mainstreaming gender in the different technical sectors is already available.⁴ Therefore, this document does not explore sector-related areas that are of great relevance to gender-sensitive humanitarian assistance — such as men and women's reproductive health, or specific nutritional needs of new-borns, children under five years, pregnant and lactating women and older persons, etc.

2. GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Natural disasters and human-made crises are not gender neutral — they have a different impact on women, girls, boys and men.⁵ Thus, in order to respond effectively to the differentiated needs of various gender-related groups, humanitarian assistance supported by the European Union must take considerations of gender into account. The systematic integration of a gender approach into humanitarian aid is an operational

¹ Signed in December 2007 by the Council, Parliament and Commission, the [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#) sets out the values, guiding principles and policy scope of EU humanitarian aid.

² Transtec (O' Gorman and Clifton-Everest), [Review of gender issues including strategies against gender-based violence in humanitarian interventions](#), commissioned by ECHO, 2009.

³ European Commission, [Strategy on equal opportunities for women and men within the European Commission](#) (2010 – 2014), (SEC(2010) 1554/3).

⁴ Namely in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), [Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, Women, girls, boys and men — Different needs — equal opportunities](#), 2006.

⁵ Please note that while various formulations (such as women, girls, boys and men) are used throughout this document in order to avoid long sentences, this policy generally refers to women and men of all ages.

requirement for **effective quality programming**, as well as a matter of compliance with the EU humanitarian mandate and international law and commitments.

Gender-insensitive operations are less effective because they may not reach a large part of the affected population — often the most vulnerable — or may fail to respond adequately to their specific needs. Moreover, they can expose beneficiaries to serious risks (even life-threatening ones), such as sexual and gender-based violence.

Ensuring that gender is not disregarded is also about being accountable to beneficiaries, complying with the imperative need to assist the most vulnerable and acting in accordance with **humanitarian principles**, particularly humanity and impartiality. Having a direct influence on vulnerabilities and needs, gender dynamics are at the core of the EU **humanitarian aid mandate**: to support needs-based *‘operations on a non-discriminatory basis to help people in third countries, particularly the **most vulnerable among them, and as a priority those in developing countries, victims of natural disasters, man-made crises, such as wars and outbreaks of fighting**’*.⁶

The purpose of gender-sensitive humanitarian actions is to support all vulnerable groups according to their specific needs. While

WHAT IS GENDER? *‘The term gender refers to the social differences between females and males throughout the life cycle that are learned, and though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures’*.⁷ Gender has a direct influence on roles, relations, vulnerabilities, needs and capacities.

While acknowledging that, worldwide, gender discrimination particularly affects women and girls, the Commission supports a **broad understanding of gender**, which does not only focus on women and girls but also takes into account the different needs of men and boys. The needs of other gender-related groups, such as lesbians and gay, bisexual transgender or intersex persons, should also be recognised. However, considering the difficulties in identifying these groups in crisis situations and in order to avoid stigmatisation or counterproductive effects it may not be recommended to target their needs separately in the context of humanitarian aid.

Furthermore, recognising that beneficiaries are not a homogenous group, the Commission considers that a comprehensive understanding of vulnerabilities must take into consideration **multiple aspects of diversity** (age, disability, minorities, etc.), which can intersect with gender to produce multiple discrimination and greater vulnerability.

Finally, fostering gender-sensitive humanitarian assistance can also contribute to **enhancing resilience and increasing the sustainability of aid**, by improving the capacity of all community members — including the most vulnerable ones — to cope with, and recover from, crises as well as to be better prepared for those to come. Ensuring that certain gender-related groups are not marginalised in preparedness, response and recovery efforts means that they can contribute to livelihood diversification, prevention, education and community capacity building. Moreover, promoting the participation of disadvantaged beneficiaries in the design and implementation of humanitarian operations and attending to their needs empowers them. Certain aid modalities (e.g. cash versus food) and processes (e.g. community-based) have the same impact. Empowering the

⁶ Council Regulation (EC) No [1257/96](#) of 20 June 1996 concerning Humanitarian Aid.

⁷ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, [Women, girls, boys and men — Different needs — equal opportunities](#), 2006.

most vulnerable people to participate in relief efforts can lead to greater effectiveness and sustainability of aid. Thus, improving gender sensitivity is also a strategic choice aimed at enhancing the cost-efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in the long term.

2.1. Why gender matters in humanitarian crises

Gender matters in humanitarian assistance because **women, girls, boys and men are affected by crises in different ways**. They have differentiated needs, suffer from different vulnerabilities, face particular risks, do not necessarily have access to the same resources and services, develop diverse coping or survival mechanisms and possess specific capacities to support their families and communities during and in the aftermath of disasters and conflict. For instance, distribution of non-food items should take into account the specific sanitary needs of women and girls. Also, older women and men may eat less after a disaster as part of their coping strategy.

Crises also have a major **impact on community and family structures**, such as increasing numbers of single or child headed-households. For those in charge of caring for their families — frequently women — crises will often imply an additional burden. This is due to a number of factors such as men's participation in the hostilities and an increased number of sick, injured and dependants to care for with fewer resources.

Moreover, in most countries around the world, gender inequalities repeatedly make **women and girls** more vulnerable and disadvantaged. However, women are not simply victims. They can also play an active and important role in contributing to peace and resilience. Likewise, men can be victims of violence or suffer from specific vulnerabilities or risks (e.g. recruitment of boys as child soldiers or sexual violence targeted at boys or men).

Indeed, different gender-related groups have particular capacities, knowledge, and perspectives, which they can use to contribute to recovery, build peace, promote resilience and foster disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction (DRR). Thus, while taking into consideration these specific **capacities** to respond to and recover from crises, as well as to prepare for future ones, proper calibration of humanitarian assistance can help to make aid more effective.

Besides, while **crises often aggravate existing gender inequalities**, social changes **can also create a window of opportunity** to challenge gender-based discrimination and inequalities. Indeed, traditional gender roles and relations often change during crisis situations, when women, girls, boys and men may be obliged to take on unconventional responsibilities or activities.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), North Kivu, the European Union supported a food security project for displaced families that introduced the innovative use of fuel-efficient stoves. By limiting firewood consumption, the stoves contributed to reducing the time women spent collecting firewood outside the camp, where they faced risks of violence. Their workload was reduced while their security was improved.

Lastly, gender is also relevant in humanitarian contexts because **sexual and gender-based violence** often increases during crises and in post-crisis periods. This can be due to the disruption of law and order, weakening of family and community protection structures, displacement and resettlement or lack of livelihood options. During conflicts, armed groups at times use sexual violence, including rape, as a weapon of war and as a tactic to terrorise communities.

Sexual exploitation and abuse can also occur. This is a specific form of sexual and gender-based violence resulting from actual or attempted abuse of those in a position of vulnerability. Unequal power dynamics in humanitarian situations create the risk of beneficiaries (especially the most vulnerable) feeling compelled to trade sex for basic provisions.

2.2. Risks of ignoring the gender dimension

Without a gender-sensitive approach, humanitarian projects risk being off-target, failing to meet their objectives, inadvertently doing harm and being in breach of the humanitarian mandate and principles.

Any analysis of a humanitarian situation that does not take into account the different needs and capacities of all beneficiaries may **fail to ensure that assistance is properly targeted at the most vulnerable**. In addition, their **specific needs may be disregarded** if the action treats all beneficiaries as a homogenous group.

Women, girls, boys and men may also face specific obstacles in accessing resources or services made available through humanitarian aid. For instance, medical services may be open only during periods of the day that are not convenient for children attending school. In certain societies, women may not be allowed to benefit from relief services provided by all-male humanitarian teams. Or women with disabilities, including victims of mines, might not be able to use heavy wheelchairs designed for men. By not factoring in these limitations, **some groups might be deprived of vital assistance**.

During the 2011 cholera outbreak in Haiti, mortality rates disaggregated by sex revealed that cholera was killing more men than women. Consultations with the population indicated that men did not have accurate information about cholera symptoms, confusing them with those of HIV. Given the social stigma related to the latter disease, men did not seek medical care. In response to these findings, humanitarian workers developed health messages targeted at men, which led to a decrease in their mortality rates.

Moreover, the delivery channels of humanitarian aid **can expose beneficiaries to risks, notably sexual and gender-based violence**, if minimum protection strategies are not put in place. Analysing the different vulnerabilities, needs, roles and responsibilities of men and women of all ages helps to develop adequate protection strategies. For instance, services should be provided in a location and at a time that do not oblige beneficiaries to walk long distances to return home at night, when they could face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence or other kinds of violence.

3. Current policies, achievements and challenges

3.1 EU and international policy environment

The European Union has championed the cause of **gender equality** within and beyond its borders. This commitment was strongly reaffirmed in the Lisbon Treaty, which recognises equality between women and men as a fundamental value and an objective of the European Union. The Strategy for Equality between Women and Men⁸ presents the

⁸ Between 2006 and 2010 various commitments towards gender equality were listed in a [Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men](#) (COM(2006) 92). As follow-up to this roadmap, the [Strategy for Equality Between Women and Men](#) (COM/2010/0491) was adopted in 2010.

Commission's work programme in that field for the period 2010-2015, identifying gender equality in external actions as one of its six priorities. In 2010, the Commission also adopted the Women's Charter,⁹ a political declaration that addresses gender beyond the Union as one of five key areas for action.

Recently, the EU has developed several strategies to promote **gender equality in external action**. A Communication on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation¹⁰ was adopted in 2007 and complemented by a Plan of Action for the period 2010-2015.¹¹ In 2008, the EU adopted Guidelines on violence against women and girls¹² as well as a Comprehensive Approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security.¹³ In 2010, the Council adopted 17 indicators¹⁴ to follow up the

European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid

2.5. Gender dimension in Humanitarian Aid

23. *Recognising the different needs, capacities and contributions of women, girls, boys and men, the EU highlights the importance of **integrating gender considerations** into humanitarian aid.*

24. *The EU recognises that the active **participation of women** in humanitarian aid is essential, and commits to promoting that involvement.*

3.2. Providing adequate and effective aid

39. *In responding to humanitarian needs particular vulnerabilities must be taken into account. In this context, the EU will pay special attention to women, children, the elderly, sick and disabled people, and to addressing their specific needs. Moreover, **protection strategies against sexual and gender based violence** must be incorporated in all aspects of humanitarian assistance.*

implementation of the Comprehensive Approach by the Commission and the EU Member States. In 2012, the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy were adopted.¹⁵

Strengthening the gender approach within EU humanitarian aid is also enshrined in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Finally, the Commission has developed humanitarian policy guidance documents that address gender issues in the areas of resilience,¹⁶ WASH,¹⁷

nutrition,¹⁸ food assistance,¹⁹ protection,²⁰ child protection²¹ and HIV.²²

⁹ European Commission, Women's Charter (COM(2010) 78).

¹⁰ European Commission, Communication on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation, (SEC(2007) 332).

¹¹ The EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development is part of the Council Conclusions on the MDGs, 14 June 2010. Two implementation reports have been published in the meantime.

¹² EU guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them, 2008.

¹³ Joint Commission and Council Comprehensive Approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security, 2008.

¹⁴ Indicators for the Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security, adopted on 14 July 2010.

¹⁵ EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, of 25 June 2012.

¹⁶ European Commission, Communication on The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises, COM(2012) 586 final.

¹⁷ European Commission, Staff Working Document on Humanitarian Wash Policy, (SWD(2012) 277final).

¹⁸ European Commission, Staff Working Document on Addressing Undernutrition in Emergencies, (SWD(2013)72final) and Communication on Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition in External Assistance (COM(2013) 141final).

¹⁹ European Commission, Communication (COM(2010) 126) and Staff Working Document (SEC(2010) 374) on Humanitarian Food Assistance.

²⁰ European Commission, Humanitarian Protection DG ECHO's funding guidelines, 2009.

The EU's efforts to promote gender equality are in line with **international conventions and commitments**.²³ Furthermore, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and Refugee Law, which provide a framework for EU humanitarian aid, also define important clauses on the protection of life, health and dignity of individuals and on the prohibition of torture, cruel treatment or discrimination. These include specific provisions for the protection of women and children. IHL, which is the set of rules that applies during armed conflicts, specifically prohibits discrimination based on sex as well as all kinds of indecent attacks, in particular rape and forced prostitution against women, girls, boys or men. It also calls for pregnant women and mothers to be given additional protection.

3.2. Recent achievements and key guidance

In recent years, the humanitarian community has made **efforts** to include a gender perspective in its work. Indeed, a significant number of gender policies have been developed, although humanitarian actors still face challenges in making these fully operational.

Various internationally accepted **guidelines** have also been produced and should be used as reference tools for designing and implementing gender-sensitive projects. Recommended operational guidance includes the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance) operational guidelines on how to integrate gender²⁴ and gender-based violence²⁵ concerns into humanitarian projects in various sectors. The Sphere Standards²⁶ also address gender as a cross-cutting issue. Moreover, gender awareness **training**²⁷ for humanitarian actors has been developed and should be further disseminated to generate a "gender reflex".

Most donors and agencies now recruit **gender experts**, including as field staff. Likewise, the IASC Gender Standby Capacity initiative (GenCap)²⁸ deploys gender advisers to support humanitarian country teams and clusters in a number of humanitarian settings.

Finally, in order to improve programming and measure results, some agencies have adopted **gender markers**, such as the IASC gender marker.²⁹ These are tools that attribute a certain flag to projects, in order to track gender-sensitive and gender-focused actions and financial allocations. At the EU level, the Commission uses a gender equality

²¹ European Commission, [Staff Working Document on Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations](#), (SEC(2008) 135).

²² European Commission, [DG ECHO HIV Guidelines](#), 2008.

²³ Among which the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, and the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), 1995.

²⁴ IASC, Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, [Women, girls, boys and men — Different needs — equal opportunities](#), 2006.

²⁵ IASC, [Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings](#), 2005.

²⁶ [Sphere Handbook](#), revised in 2010.

²⁷ E.g. the IASC e-learning course '[Different Needs — Equal Opportunities: Increasing Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action for Women, Girls, Boys and Men](#)', which offers practical guidance for operational sectors — available online at www.iasc-elearning.org.

²⁸ [GenCap](#).

²⁹ The [IASC gender marker](#), used by cluster teams, gives projects submitted to funding appeals a code (0-2) indicating if it is well designed to advance gender equality.

policy marker³⁰ within development cooperation and is committed to an increased use of gender sensitive indicators.

3.3. Addressing obstacles to gender integration in humanitarian aid

Despite the progress mentioned above, some obstacles continue to hinder a systematic and meaningful integration of gender in humanitarian aid. **Limited institutional capacity and lack of accountability** remain key challenges. As a cross-cutting issue that should be mainstreamed by all staff members — who often face competing priorities and may lack sufficient knowledge — gender is frequently not tackled in an effective manner, also because there is not enough dedicated staff with clear responsibilities. In this respect, concrete action plans with clear assignments and strong leadership are crucial for delivering results.

More specifically, a certain **lack of understanding** on the part of some humanitarian actors about the gender implications in a humanitarian crisis and what a gender approach means in practice, can lead to implementation gaps. Ingrained stereotypes and misconceptions also need to be redressed (e.g. mistakenly understanding gender as a ‘women only’ issue).

During the response to the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, some partners increased access to health services for women, encouraged the creation of women’s groups, trained and employed women and targeted assistance at widows. However, agencies addressed gender as a women’s issue rather than considering the differential roles of men and women. Therefore, some important aspects of men’s lives were overlooked, such as the disruption in migrant employment or their reproductive health needs. Also, opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes through men and boys’ engagement may have been missed.

For instance, there is a general degree of **reluctance** among humanitarian workers to take on what is at times considered to be a non-essential additional workload, especially given the urgency of humanitarian projects. Yet, integrating a gender approach is often not about doing different (additional) projects but rather about doing them differently. While in some cases, gender-related issues can be rather complex and require technical capacity (e.g. addressing sexual and gender-based violence), minor adaptations are frequently all that is needed to ensure adequate responses to differentiated needs (e.g. distributing food packages that are not too heavy to be carried by all beneficiaries, including older women).

Building on existing experiences and know-how to overcome obstacles, the humanitarian community must accelerate the systematic integration of gender and be able to measure its impact.

4. PRINCIPLES

In EU humanitarian aid, gender integration is pursued **in accordance with humanitarian principles (humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence)**, the ‘do no harm’ concept and other EU values, such as **non-discrimination**. Furthermore, it is guided by a **people-centred approach** (the interest of beneficiaries is at the centre of operations and humanitarian assistance is tailored to their differentiated needs) and the principle of **gender equality**.

³⁰ OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Gender Marker.

As regards the latter, the Commission underlines that while gender equality and empowerment of women are pursued with a view to reducing inequality-driven vulnerabilities and promote resilience, any risks of backlash must be mitigated. Such risks may stem from gender transformative³¹ or empowering actions carried out in the context of short-term humanitarian assistance. For example, the risk of domestic violence as a response to changes in intra-household power relations following a cash-for-work programme targeting women should be carefully assessed. Mitigating measures should be put in place to avoid any negative consequences, both during and after the action.

5. OBJECTIVES

In line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the **principal objective** of the European Union's gender approach to humanitarian aid is to improve the quality of humanitarian operations by systematically tailoring responses to the specific needs of women and men of all ages, effectively helping the most vulnerable.

The **specific objectives**, based on the gender-related commitments made in the Consensus, are: gender integration, participation and protection.

5.1. Gender integration

Gender integration means systematically providing assistance that is adapted to the specific needs and capacities of women, girls, boys, men and older women and men.

As a result, gender-sensitive humanitarian responses are adapted to the differentiated needs and risks, mindful of the diverse cultural backgrounds and coping mechanisms and designed to foster the capacities and potential contributions of various gender groups.

5.2. Participation

Guaranteeing the participation of women and men of all ages in the design, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian operations is crucial to ensuring adapted assistance.

The pursuit of this objective may require specific measures, such as same-sex consultation groups and child-friendly techniques, aimed at ensuring that certain groups are not excluded. In particular, boys and girls are encouraged to participate, in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

5.3 Protection

Humanitarian actions must take into account particular vulnerabilities and incorporate gender-related protection strategies,³² aimed at safeguarding beneficiaries from risks related to the context or even arising from the relief operation itself, including sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

³¹ Actions that respond to practical needs in a gender sensitive way are **gender responsive** because they acknowledge the existence of gender norms and gender inequalities and try to compensate for them by providing assistance according to specific needs. Actions that in addition respond to strategic needs, seeking to change the gender norms that perpetuate inequalities, are **gender transformative**.

³² For further information, see the [Humanitarian Protection DG ECHO's funding guidelines](#), 2009.

While humanitarian agencies may not be in a position to eliminate all context-related risks, any adverse impacts that the context in which humanitarian crises occur may have on affected populations should be mitigated as far as possible. At the same time, humanitarian interventions must not create, exacerbate or contribute to perpetuating gender inequalities or discrimination and must not put beneficiaries at risk, in accordance with the abovementioned ‘do no harm’ principle.

Each month, unaccompanied minors flee from Eritrea to seek refuge in Ethiopia. Most of these young boys face threats of human trafficking. In the refugee camp of Tigray, the EU funded a gender and protection sensitive programme, led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which supports these boys through family reunification, community-based child protection structures, psychosocial support and activities to promote awareness of children’s rights.

One particular type of protection aims at preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. Nonetheless, gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities equally need to be incorporated into other protection-related responses. Protection risks may have numerous gender specificities. For example, in a society affected by conflict, where women are traditionally confined to their homes, men are perhaps more likely to suffer from targeted killings, disappearances and arbitrary arrests, while women may lack access to humanitarian assistance.

6. FRAMEWORK FOR OPERATIONS

This section outlines the framework for gender-sensitive humanitarian operations funded from the EU humanitarian budget.

The design and implementation of all humanitarian actions should take a gender perspective into consideration, to ensure that assistance is effectively adapted to the differentiated needs of beneficiaries. This means that every intervention in any sector, context or location and in any type of emergency or crisis, **must be gender-sensitive** (i.e. must respect the abovementioned principles and objectives and be in line with the framework described below), throughout the project management cycle, from needs assessment to lessons learned. Given the relevance of gender in humanitarian assistance (as explained in section 2), the Commission considers gender to be a quality criterion in the selection of humanitarian projects.

In Sri Lanka, the EU supported gender-sensitive mine clearance operations, implemented by the Foundation for Sustainable Development and the HALO TRUST. An analysis of gender-based roles influenced the choice of areas to be cleared, the aim being to ensure safe access to key sites for both women and men. In addition, female mine clearance team leaders were recruited.

6.1. Phases of intervention

The integration of a gender approach applies to all phases of intervention. When responding to a new acute crisis, in contexts where humanitarian actors were not present before, it can prove challenging to have to immediately draw up a very detailed gender analysis and corresponding response. Nevertheless, **a gender perspective should be incorporated from the very first stages of a crisis response**, so as to understand and effectively respond to the differentiated needs as well as to avoid excluding certain groups or putting them at risk. Even without developing an in-depth gender analysis, it is still possible to identify, from the onset of a crisis, the key vulnerabilities, needs and

capacities of women, girls, boys and men and design urgent actions that adequately respond to these factors.

Furthermore, the large majority of the projects supported by the European Union are implemented in contexts where the humanitarian community has been involved for several months or years. In such recurrent situations, humanitarian actors are expected to conduct a more detailed gender analysis and **systematically design and implement strategies that meet the specific needs of women and men**. In these contexts, support for projects that do not address gender issues should only be provided in exceptional and duly justified circumstances.

The 2005 earthquake in Pakistan mostly affected communities that practised purdah (women's seclusion and concealment from men). Understanding this practice and its implications in the early stages of the operation was crucial for developing an effective and culturally appropriate response. In a project led by Oxfam, the beneficiaries were consulted and, as a result, toilet and bathing blocks were designed to ensure additional privacy, so that such facilities would be used by women and girls. Special menstruation units were also created, for women to do their washing without feeling exposed.

Moreover, **preparedness and recovery phases**, where there is a lower degree of urgency, can open windows of opportunity to promote transformative approaches, aimed at challenging inequalities and empowering disadvantaged groups, in order to reduce vulnerability.

Finally, contexts in which the European Union provides humanitarian aid during longer periods, such as **protracted crises**, offer the possibility to assess the gender-related impact of assistance over time.

6.2. Forms of intervention

The abovementioned objectives are pursued through the following forms of intervention, following a three-track approach: **mainstreaming, targeted actions and capacity building**.

6.2.1. Mainstreaming

Humanitarian assistance systematically integrates a gender perspective into the needs assessment, appraisal, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions and in all aspects and sectors of assistance.

Gender-sensitive humanitarian operations respect the following **quality criteria**:

- **A gender-sensitive needs assessment and a gender analysis** are carried out to gain a better insight into, *inter alia*, the roles, access to resources, existing inequalities and supportive local structures (including women's organisations), specific needs, vulnerabilities, risks (such as sexual and gender-based violence), coping strategies and capacities of women, girls, boys and men. Gender analyses take into consideration pre-crisis situations as well as the impact of the crisis on the abovementioned parameters. They also consider potential limitations or risks related to accessing assistance, as well as whether the needs of particular groups have to be addressed through targeted assistance.
- **Sex and age disaggregated data** is systematically collected, analysed and used to inform project response analysis, implementation and evaluation. If it is not possible

to collect sex and age disaggregated data (e.g. in the early stages of a crisis where the partner was not present before), estimates should be provided.

- **Young, adult and older women and men are consulted** and their views, concerns, needs and capacities inform the action's design and implementation.
- **Humanitarian teams are composed of both female and male staff with gender expertise**, so as to ensure adequate access to all beneficiaries and properly adapted responses. Including female staff in field teams remains a challenge that has to be tackled through sound recruitment policies and adequate working conditions, taking cultural sensitivities into account.
- **Assistance is adapted to specific needs**, since the action clearly builds on the findings of the gender analysis and is adjusted to the particular context of intervention. Activities are designed and implemented in such a way that women, girls, boys and men benefit equitably and access services (e.g. healthcare), goods (e.g. food) and opportunities (e.g. training, cash for work), according to their needs and capacities.
- The action is guided by **gender-sensitive objectives, results and indicators**, indicating a coherent approach to gender issues.
- **Minimum protection strategies and mitigation of potential negative impacts** ensure that beneficiaries are protected from existing risks, are not put at risk by the humanitarian operation and have safe access to humanitarian aid. Potential negative effects that the action might have on any gender group or gender-related issue (e.g. reinforcing inequalities) are mitigated. Opportunities are also used to raise awareness among women, girls, boys and men about gender-based discrimination and violence.
- Gender issues are systematically addressed during the **monitoring** phase.
- **Reporting** includes sex and age disaggregated data and explanations regarding the results of efforts made to ensure that the needs of women, girls, boys and men of all ages are adequately met, as well as challenges encountered and lessons learned.
- **Evaluations** assess whether humanitarian operations have responded effectively to the differentiated needs of beneficiaries, whether equitable access to assistance was ensured and whether the actions had any gender-related (positive or negative) impact.

6.2.2. Targeted actions

In order to respond to specific gender-induced vulnerabilities, needs or risks — particularly when one group is clearly more vulnerable than others — actions **targeting** that specific group may be deemed necessary. Such actions should respond to a **clear need** that has been identified through a gender analysis and cannot be adequately addressed through mainstreaming. This type of action should be understood as special or corrective measures that help to redress inequality (positive discrimination).

For several years the EU has been funding a post-trauma and rehabilitation project for Palestinian ex-detainee children, in the West Bank. With a view to combating stigma and reintegrating ex-detainee children into their families, schools and communities, Save the Children offers counselling and vocational training to boys between the ages of 14 and 23.

Frequently, targeted actions address the needs of women and girls, as these are often among those most affected by discrimination, violence and lack of access to basic items or services. Obviously, actions targeting boys and men may be appropriate in a number of cases. Furthermore, targeted actions can be also designed to respond to the needs of gender-related sub-groups, such as female-headed households, adolescent girls or boys, mothers or fathers and their children as well as older or disabled women and men.

While assistance may specifically target one group, the **participation of other groups** may prove crucial for reaching the expected impact. For instance, those actions seeking to challenge or reduce gender inequalities need to consider the involvement of women, girls, boys and men, in order to lower resistance and avoid any negative repercussions on targeted beneficiaries.

In a project implemented in Colombia, women who attended hygiene promotion sessions demonstrated a significant increase in hygiene awareness although they lacked sufficient access to soap. Since household budgetary decisions were taken by men, they were invited to participate. The sessions were then scheduled to take into account their working hours and focused on economic arguments (a small investment in soap meant fewer healthcare costs). In the end, some men recognised that, despite some initial reluctance, consulting their wives on household expenditures was useful and actually improved family relations.

Moreover, **potential negative**

side effects are identified and mitigated, namely to ensure that implementation will not stigmatise the targeted group or create a gap for other groups. Indeed, if actions are targeted at a specific group without considering the need for other groups to be involved, there is a risk that the needs of some beneficiaries will be overlooked and that the action may actually contribute to maintaining or even reinforcing existing gender-based

During a project in Haiti, the distribution of seeds and tools for crop production (identified as male livelihoods) was not accompanied by any measures targeting women (for whom activities like vegetable gardening or poultry were more appropriate). Overlooking livelihood strategies for women increases their dependence on men for their (and their children's) subsistence.

stereotypes, discrimination and inequalities. Evidence shows that gender-sensitive livelihood opportunities in humanitarian assistance remain limited. For example, cash for work projects can at times neglect opportunities for women or only propose very stereotyped activities that can contribute to locking women into their traditional roles. Another example is the case of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons,

who may be particular targets for perpetrators of gender-based violence. In this case, there should be careful consideration before addressing protective measures exclusively at this group, since these could make them more easily identifiable and even expose them to further violence.

6.2.3. Capacity building

Given the previously mentioned limited capacity of humanitarian actors to understand and address gender issues, there is a need to stimulate capacity building for gender-sensitive programming. The Commission is, therefore, committed to strengthening the ability of those involved in humanitarian aid to assess, plan, deliver, monitor, evaluate and advocate for gender-sensitive humanitarian aid, in a coordinated way. Support for operations aimed at building capacity in this field is provided mainly through the Enhanced Response Capacity initiative, financed by the EU budget.

Capacity building efforts should be **sustainable** beyond the funded action and **coordinated** among the relevant actors, at the local, national or global levels. They should also **promote shared learning**, through the dissemination of good practice.

7. SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Sexual and gender-based violence remains an **under-reported and under-addressed** issue in humanitarian crises. For a variety of reasons — including fear of retaliation or stigma, shame and lack of access to adequate care — survivors often remain silent. This makes the provision of life-saving responses extremely difficult and leaves violence largely invisible.

Moreover, sexual and gender-based violence is a **very complex issue**. Indeed, its forms, perpetrators and survivors can greatly vary. Women and girls suffer disproportionately, although boys and men can also be targeted. While humanitarian actors have focused heavily on sexual violence in conflict, the understanding of sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises should not be reduced to sexual violence or rape. **Other types of sexual and gender-based violence** — including domestic violence, harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and honour crimes, as well as socio-economic violence — can be widespread in affected communities and **should not be ignored**.

As part of a psychosocial project run by Médecins Du Monde in Palestine, the EU supported successful awareness-raising activities on the dangers of early marriage, with the support of the community's elders and imams.

Most importantly, the lack of accurate data, the complexity of the issue, the limited means and the obstacles to addressing it (such as dysfunctional justice systems) should not prevent humanitarian actors from tackling this problem.

Clearly, humanitarian aid interventions, especially in their early stages, may not be able to address all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Efforts to tackle these require a long-term commitment, particularly to address their root causes, such as inequality, discrimination and impunity. Nevertheless, an awareness of their frequency, nature and relation to vulnerability can help humanitarian actors to design and deliver more effective protection and assistance strategies. Thus, while not all funded actions necessarily integrate a component of protection against sexual and gender-based violence, humanitarian operations supported by the Commission **should take into consideration any risk of gender-based violence and, where necessary, put in place appropriate protection strategies**.

Actions addressing sexual and gender-based violence may include both prevention and

In 2007, in Liberia, the EU funded an IRC project aimed at taking care of survivors and raising the population's awareness of sexual and gender-based violence. Men and local authorities were actively engaged, in informing other men and boys about sexual and gender-based violence and challenging their traditional male behaviour and notions of masculinity.

response components. **Prevention** efforts can be pursued through measures aimed at empowering women, girls, boys and men to reflect upon and challenge attitudes that condone violence. In this area, **engaging with men and boys** is crucial for the success of interventions. As (independently of the victim's sex) the perpetrators are most often men or boys, they should be involved through awareness campaigns, education and community-based activities.

According to the Commission's approach to sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian assistance, services should be **accessible to all survivors** and efforts are made to provide support to secondary victims who have witnessed or been forced to

perpetrate violence. Moreover, a **survivor-centred approach** responds to the needs of victims according to his/her wishes, the guiding principles being safety, respect and dignity.

In line with internationally accepted guidance,³³ sexual and gender-based violence is also addressed through a **comprehensive multi-sectorial approach** including medical care, psychological support, referral to legal services and, if possible, livelihood support or socio-economic assistance. With regard specifically to sexual violence, medical care is a core component of a comprehensive response.

In the DRC, the EU provides care to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and helps them to reintegrate into their communities. The aim is to reactivate the protection mechanisms of local communities by supporting timely access to health services and psychosocial support, including protection and livelihood activities, and by encouraging partners to increase coordination.

In relation to **safety** concerns, safe entry points for survivors to access assistance are identified. The action is also adapted to the context of intervention and respects ethical and safety considerations regarding the collection, storage and sharing of data.

Moreover, **sensitisation and awareness-raising strategies** must be pursued to fight stigma against victims of rape and to challenge the gender norms leading to sexual and gender-based violence.

Finally, the implementing agency is actively engaged in **coordination**³⁴ (through the GBV Area of Responsibility of the Protection Cluster or any other relevant coordination mechanism) and the project builds on local structures and initiatives where they exist, so as to avoid creating unsustainable parallel services.

As regards **sexual exploitation and abuse**, specific measures and coordination between humanitarian agencies are necessary to protect beneficiaries. These include the adoption and implementation of codes of conduct and the development of collective reporting and investigation mechanisms, as well as corrective measures, the aim being to ensure zero tolerance for any abuse.

8. COORDINATION AND ADVOCACY

8.1. Coordination with other stakeholders

The Commission **promotes coordination and ensures complementarity with other stakeholders** in the field of gender in humanitarian assistance. Accordingly, there is a regular dialogue with partners, other donors, humanitarian and development actors and other relevant stakeholders.

At **EU level**, a regular exchange of views and lessons learned on the gender dimension of EU humanitarian aid takes place in the framework of the Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA). The Commission also liaises with the relevant counterparts within its services and in the European External Action Service.

³³ IASC, [Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings](#), 2005.

³⁴ For more information, consult the Global Protection Cluster [Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings](#), 2010.

By systematically integrating a gender dimension into its work and by addressing sexual and gender-based violence, the Commission pursues **policy coherence**, in line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. At the same time, it contributes to the EU's agenda on gender equality and women, peace and security.

The **Comprehensive Approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security** calls for '*humanitarian actors to take great care so that their own activities and their secondary effects do not put victims at risk and [...] if particular risk factors have been identified, assistance should be provided that helps avoid them*'.

Given that addressing some gender-related issues with an impact on humanitarian assistance (e.g. redressing gender discrimination, tackling sexual and gender-based violence, etc.) requires long-term strategies, the Commission reinforces efforts aimed at **linking relief, rehabilitation and development**.

At the **global level**, coordination and complementarity are also promoted in collaboration with partners. Having endorsed the humanitarian cluster approach to coordination, the Commission is supportive of efforts to mainstream gender into the work of the clusters and to promote coordination with humanitarian gender-related structures, such as the IASC Sub-Working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action,³⁵ the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility³⁶ of the Protection Cluster and the IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.³⁷

8.2. Advocacy

Strategic dialogue and advocacy can foster gender-sensitivity in humanitarian aid. The Commission and like-minded partners and donors can contribute significantly to **steering the humanitarian community towards developing gender-sensitive strategies**. In this respect, the Commission advocates, at the political and working level, for actions that meet the needs of women, girls, boys and men and do not put beneficiaries at risk of gender-related violence or discrimination. There are multiple opportunities for advocacy, such as, *inter alia*, strategic dialogues, participation in international events, conferences or board meetings and regular interaction with NGOs, UN agencies and international organisations.

In parallel, **communication and outreach also target non-humanitarian actors**. The Commission can use its leverage at the political level to play a strong advocacy role towards other stakeholders, including Member States, third-country governments and development actors, urging them to increase their efforts to address gender inequalities and gender-based violence, in order to reduce existing vulnerabilities and needs.

9. FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: ENSURING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Ensuring gender-sensitive humanitarian operations, as detailed in previous sections, requires resources and commitments. These final considerations focus on **institutional aspects** related to implementing an effective and fully operational gender policy.

The first and key deliverable for the implementation of this policy approach will be introduction of a **Gender and Age Marker** into the Commission's humanitarian aid

³⁵ [IASC Sub-Working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action](#).

³⁶ [GBV Area of Responsibility](#) of the Protection Cluster.

³⁷ [IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#).

programme. This tool will foster and track gender-sensitive humanitarian projects funded from the EU budget. It is based on a collaborative approach promoting a systematic and constructive dialogue between the Commission and its partners on how to adapt humanitarian assistance to the specific needs of women and men of all ages. The design of this tool will build on the lessons learned from existing markers, such as the one developed by the IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee).

Furthermore, policy implementation must be fostered through an **institutional environment conducive to gender responsiveness**. This entails revising procedures and practices to ensure that the gender dimension is systematically and coherently integrated in all steps of humanitarian programming, from needs assessment to strategies and evaluations. Equally, implementation of this policy approach will be ensured through an adequate **resource allocation, leadership commitment** and monitoring of **results**. Additionally, with a view to reinforcing **institutional knowledge and capacity**, the Commission will disseminate the gender policy approach and make appropriate **guidance and training opportunities** available. These will contribute to a common understanding by staff and partners of the gender dimension in EU humanitarian aid and will also promote the sharing of best practices.

Finally, an **Implementation Framework**, including an internal action plan with time-bound and measurable results and clearly attributed responsibilities, will be developed and periodically revised.

The abovementioned commitments and tools for effective implementation of gender policy will ensure that the Commission moves towards a **systematic approach to gender integration** aimed at improving the **quality of humanitarian assistance**.

ANNEX A — GLOSSARY

Gender *‘refers to the social differences between females and males throughout the life cycle that are learned, and though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures. ‘Gender’ determines the roles, power and resources for females and males in any culture’ (source: IASC).*³⁸

Gender equality is *‘the concept meaning that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally’(source: EU).*³⁹

Gender analysis *‘is the study of differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers, etc. between women and men on their assigned gender roles’(source: EU).*

Gender integration in humanitarian aid means taking into consideration gender specificities in all aspects of humanitarian assistance, namely through mainstreaming or targeted actions.

Gender mainstreaming is *‘the systematic integration of the respective situations, priorities and needs of women and men in all policies and with a view to promoting equality between women and men and mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account, at the planning stage, their effects on the respective situations of women and men in implementation, monitoring and evaluation’ (source: EU).*

Sexual and Gender-Based violence — according to the IASC guidelines, 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 (gender) differences between females and males. The nature and extent of specific types of gender-based violence vary across cultures, countries and regions. Examples include sexual violence, including sexual exploitation/abuse and forced prostitution; domestic violence; trafficking; forced/early marriage; harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation; honour killings; and widow inheritance’(source: IASC).*

Sexual exploitation and abuse is a particular form of sexual and gender-based violence. *‘Sexual exploitation means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Similarly, the term sexual abuse means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions’(source: UN).*⁴⁰

³⁸ IASC, Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, [Women, girls, boys and men — Different needs — equal opportunities](#), 2006.

³⁹ European Commission — [100 words for equality](#) - A glossary of terms on equality between women and men, 1998.

⁴⁰ UN Secretary-General’s bulletin [Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse](#), 2003.

ANNEX B — ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

COHAFA	Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid
ECHO	European Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
DIPECHO	Disaster Preparedness ECHO
DRC	Democratic Republic Congo
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EU	European Union
GenCap	Gender Standby Capacity Initiative
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IHRL	International Human Rights Law
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
Sphere	Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolutions
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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