



Where is the money? Why the Oslo conference must finally deliver funding for gender-based violence in emergencies

May 2019

Violence against women and girls is a global health problem of epidemic proportion. Gender-based violence is exacerbated in emergencies, where vulnerability and risks are higher and most often, family and community protections have broken down. Ahead of a high-level conference taking place this week in Oslo, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), in partnership with VOICE, is calling on donors, UN agencies and humanitarian actors attending this critical event to:

- Close the funding gap for GBV in emergencies by immediately tripling their GBV funding commitments;
- Take immediate action to grow the available pool of GBV specialists;
- Improve reporting, tracking, and coding of investments and increase transparency around donor investments so that the total amount of funding for GBV can be quantified, and;
- Ensure that the momentum created by Oslo is maintained in upcoming GBV-focused events and in other important fora, including the Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative Conference, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Heads of Government Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is present in every emergency, and research has shown that all forms of violence against women and girls increase in times of crisis. Rohingya women arriving in Cox's Bazar have reported rape at the hands of the Myanmar military, while in the refugee settlements, women and girls are often not allowed to leave their tents, isolating them from services and increasing their risks of violence from partners and family. In South Sudan, as many as 65 per cent of women and girls have experienced physical or sexual violence, and since the onset of war in Yemen, GBV including rape, sexual assault and intimate partner violence has increased by almost two thirds. Sexual exploitation of women and girls in emergencies – including by aid workers and peacekeepers – is also increasingly recognised as a problem that the humanitarian sector must address.

On 24 May 2019, the Government of Norway, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other partners will co-host *Ending Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Crises*, a high-level conference where donors and humanitarian actors are expected to announce new financial commitments, alongside other pledges.

In 2013, the IRC's *Lifesaving, Not Optional* report urged the humanitarian community to prioritise – and fund - the protection of women and girls from GBV. In 2015, our second report "*Are We There Yet?*" highlighted a continued failure to prevent and respond to GBV in emergencies. Now, ahead of Oslo, we are releasing the preliminary findings from new research, commissioned by the IRC and carried out by the new humanitarian think tank VOICE, which confirms that allocations for GBV funding aimed at women and girls still account for a miniscule proportion – **just 0.12%** - of total humanitarian funding. The early research also suggests that **two thirds of funding requests for GBV in emergencies are not being met**, and that relative to what is needed, **even these requests are shockingly small**.

The Oslo Conference has to be a turning point. Oslo must deliver a dramatic scale-up in funding for GBV risk mitigation, prevention and response services aimed at women and girls in emergencies, and secure commitments to a humanitarian system that, at every level, better prioritises and includes the needs and rights of women and girls.

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

GBV is violence faced by women and girls because of unequal power dynamics present in every culture. GBV takes many forms – intimate partner violence; sexual violence, including harassment, exploitation, assault and rape; child, early and forced marriage; and other forms of physical, emotional, psychological or economic violence perpetrated against women and girls. Its consequences are both devastating and lasting, with psychological, social and health consequences for women and girls.

Studies have confirmed that while GBV does not start because of instability, conflict, or crisis, GBV in all its forms is exacerbated in humanitarian emergencies, and remains high following immediate emergency contexts.

From rhetoric to reality

Recent years have seen a number of high-level efforts to tackle GBV in emergencies, including UN resolutions and most significantly the launch of the Call to Action on Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies in 2013, a multi-stakeholder initiative specifically aimed at driving change and increasing accountability of the humanitarian system on its response to GBV in emergencies.

In 2018, the G7 endorsed the Whistler Declaration on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action, and a few weeks ago, the G7 Gender Ministers Meeting in Paris pledged to make gender equality “a global cause” and to mobilise the international community to prevent GBV in conflict and to better meet survivors’ needs. Countries including Sweden, Canada and France have also committed to delivering a feminist foreign policy agenda. In the public eye, momentum has also grown with the rise of the #MeToo movement; the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Nadia Murad and Dr. Denis Mukwege for their work to combat SGBV in conflict, and political leaders and bodies like UN Women have added their voices to those of women and girl survivors, celebrities and activists.

Whilst these initiatives and commitments are laudable and have been valuable in raising the visibility of the issue, so far, rhetoric has not turned into enough action.

What is the funding gap?

Whilst we know that GBV funding is currently inadequate and poorly prioritised, there has been limited data on the extent of the funding gap. To help remedy this, the IRC commissioned an extensive review of current funding to tackle GBV in emergencies, drawing on a global survey, interviews with key humanitarians, and analysis of almost 3000 individual Financial Tracking Service (FTS) project sheets and Humanitarian Response Plans. The Preliminary analysis from this research reveals that:

- Funding allocated specifically to GBV in emergencies between 2016 and 2018 amounted to \$51.7 million, **just 0.12% of the \$41.5 billion** allocated for humanitarian response over the three years.
- For the same period, funding requests for GBV in emergencies totalled \$155.9 million, based on preliminary figures. **Two thirds of these went unfunded**, leaving a gap of \$104.2 million. This figure itself is likely to be a significant underestimate, as often GBV is not considered in needs analyses and so not included at high enough levels in funding requests. The amount requested for 2018 was significantly higher than the two preceding years and allocations also rose dramatically, but there continued to be a large funding gap, showing the absolutely vital need to include more appropriate funding requests.
- Funding allocated to GBV in emergencies is **extremely hard to track** as it is often wrapped up in other sectors such as health or child protection and publically available records on humanitarian funding are self-reported.
- Whilst recent media attention regarding sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by humanitarian workers has led to a rise in actions taken by humanitarian organisations, such as new and improved guidelines and mandatory training for staff, **commitments to tackle SEA has not been matched with funding**, leading to difficulties in operationalising the changes with local partner organisations and in some cases, requiring NGOs to use already over-stretched GBV budgets to deliver new protection from SEA programming.

What does the funding gap mean on the ground?

At a global level, it is difficult to ascertain the number of women and girls who are unable to access GBV services, due to the transitory nature of displacement, stigma associated with GBV, and accompanying inability to seek services. However, even without global numbers, individual country analyses from our research paint a stark picture of the extent to which women and girls' needs are overlooked:

- In the Central African Republic (CAR), rape has been widely used as a weapon of war. The country's 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) noted that almost 28,000 reports of sexual violence had been officially recorded and requested \$28.5 million for GBV programming. In response, only \$1,092,896, was committed to GBV by donors, which would have been enough funding to reach only around one quarter of the known survivors. In the end, **no funding was recorded for GBV at all.**
- In the Lebanon portion of the 2017 Annual Report on the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), the target number of women, girls, men and boys predicted to access GBV services was 140,000 out of 965,000 registered Syrian refugees, but no specific amount for GBV was specified (it was absorbed into Protection).
- According to FTS only \$680,865 was received for GBV services, out of a total \$949.8 million. This amount would have budgeted less than \$5 for each individual predicted to access GBV services. In the end, only 97,361 or 70% of the target number were reached.
- Even in the aftermath of the highly publicised kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram, who are a small proportion of women and girls abducted, the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan for Nigeria requested only \$6 million for GBV programming out of a total request of \$248 million. They received only \$726,507. In 2016, the GBV sub-cluster identified that 1.5 million people would be at risk of GBV, of whom only 521,029 individuals were reached with services.

Lack of technical expertise

Our research highlighted a pressing need for more technical staff with GBV expertise at both field and headquarters levels. Organisations with GBV specialists are able to include GBV in situational needs analyses and to make more specific requests for funding that meet the specific needs of women and girls from the onset of an emergency. Without GBV specialists on the ground from the outset, organisations are less likely to apply for and secure funding, resulting in a vicious circle in which GBV continues to be de-prioritised.

The systemic challenge of tracking funding

The research found that tracking donor funding for GBV is difficult, which makes accountability on the delivery of funding pledges challenging. For instance, publically available data on funding is self-reported. One particular example of coordinated data not matching the response is for GBV services in CAR. Though the CAR HRP in 2016 received no funding for GBV response, the IRC and many other agencies have been responding to GBV in the country for years, providing case management, women and girls safe spaces, and training on GBV response services.

Other challenges include the fact that organisations may be delivering GBV services using unearmarked funds or funding that is allocated to other sectors (health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), nutrition, etc.), with the result that these funds are not coded or counted as going to GBV. Additionally, coding practices vary between and even within NGOs and international organisations, leading to further difficulties in getting an accurate picture of the funding that has been disbursed.

Understanding trends in the nature, size and recipients of investments for GBV in emergencies is a basic building block of accountability. Without a clear knowledge of the funding for GBV prevention and response, the humanitarian sector will continue to fall short on its commitments, including those made at Oslo, and will be unable to appropriately plan and fund responses.

The Time is Now: Making Oslo a Turning Point for Women and Girls

Millions of women and girls are bearing the brunt of humanitarian crises. In the words of U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres: *“Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is not only a horrendous and life-changing crime, most often perpetrated against women and girls, it is also used as a tactic of war, to terrorize families, dehumanize communities and destabilize societies, so that they struggle to recover for years or even decades after the guns fall silent.”*

Preventing and responding to GBV in emergencies is not only a moral imperative, it is also paramount to the achievement of the Global Goals, specifically – but not limited to- SDG 5, which aims for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

The Oslo conference must be a turning point towards the tangible delivery of time-bound, ambitious, and specific commitments towards systemic changes in the way GBV prevention and response is funded, tracked, prioritised, resourced and monitored.

Recommendations

- All donors should immediately triple their GBV funding commitments in order to close the funding gap for GBV in emergencies, and concurrently should fund an increase in GBV experts to bring funding requests into line with actual need.
- Donors, UN agencies and other humanitarian actors should take immediate action to grow the available pool of GBV specialists. Greater expertise will enable funding organisations to better perceive and respond to requests for GBV funding and will enable implementing organisations to more effectively advocate for and secure those funds.
- Donors, UN agencies and other humanitarian actors should improve reporting, tracking, and coding of investments and increase transparency around donor investments in GBV in order to ensure that the sector has an accurate understanding of how fully it is responding to the need for GBV programming;
- All participants at the Oslo Conference should work together to ensure that the momentum created by Oslo is maintained in upcoming GBV-focused events, such as the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) Conference later in 2019, but also into spaces where GBV is one among many sectors. For instance, solutions and commitments put forward in Oslo should be highlighted during the Women Deliver Conference in June and, critically, the High-Level Political Forum and Heads of Government Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

About the IRC and VOICE

The IRC is a global leader in providing GBV services and resources to women and girls in crisis, delivering innovative programs in over 30 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the U.S. The IRC helps survivors to heal and thrive and works with communities and institutions to break cycles of violence.

The IRC recognises that with intentional support and investment, women and adolescent girls can transform their lives and their communities. The IRC’s Women’s Protection and Empowerment (WPE) programs aim to achieve a world in which women and girls pursue their potential, free from violence and inequality. Learn more about IRC’s work with and for women and girls by visiting: <https://www.rescue.org/article/breaking-down-barriers-women-and-girls>.

VOICE is a new global organisation confronting one of the world’s oldest and most widespread human rights abuses: violence against women and girls. VOICE challenges traditional, ineffectual methods of addressing this violence with a proven but chronically underused resource: women and girls themselves. VOICE is working towards a world where girls and women are respected leaders in the designing and implementing solutions to eradicate violence—both in their communities and within the halls of power. VOICE works in conflict and disaster settings to promote equality and leadership opportunities, creating a world where women and girls no longer face discrimination and violence, and where they are respected leaders of humanitarian responses. VOICE amplifies the voices of local women- and girl-led organisations and networks, promoting women-led solutions to violence against women and girls in humanitarian crisis. Learn more about VOICE by visiting: <https://voiceamplified.org/>.