

Disability and Older Age Inclusion in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Humanitarian Interventions

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In humanitarian settings, persons with disabilities and older people experience increased risks to gender-based violence (GBV) and face a range of barriers which reduce their access to life-saving GBV services and assistance. Evidence on effective strategies for disability and older age inclusion (DOAI) in GBV interventions in humanitarian settings is lacking. To address this gap, Elrha¹ and VOICE² undertook a rapid review to identify and document promising examples of inclusion of people with disabilities and older people in GBV interventions.

Definition of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is “an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.” Women and girls are disproportionately affected by GBV due to the systemic inequality between males and females globally. However, the term GBV may also be used to describe gendered violence against men and boys, and individuals from sexual and gender minority groups.

IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action (2015)

What do we know about GBV against persons with disabilities and older people?

- Women with physical disabilities who are isolated in their homes may experience rape and intimate partner violence.³
- Women, men, girls and boys with intellectual disabilities are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation due to a lack of information on GBV and protective peer networks.⁴
- Female care-givers of persons with disabilities, including adolescent girls, may also face barriers in accessing GBV activities.⁵
- Older people report experiencing violence before, during and after displacement,⁶ with one study reporting that over 15% of women reporting to health services for support for sexual violence were over the age of 55 years.⁷

Promising Practices and Field Examples

Including questions on disability and older people in your GBV assessments and service mapping

The [Whole of Syria \(WoS\) GBV sub-cluster](#) have added questions to assessment tools to better target women and girls with disabilities and their care-givers, and get their feedback on how accessible, relevant and appropriate GBV services are for them. The operational mapping (4W: Who, What, Where, When) is also being revised to include a question on disability to assess the extent to which GBV partners are providing response services to women and girls with disabilities.

Integrating DOAI into your GBV training, awareness raising and referral mechanisms

UNICEF and the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) developed two [guidance documents on disability inclusion for GBV actors in Lebanon](#), providing practical tools to a) support safe identification and referral, and b) improve GBV case management. Training was conducted in partnership with the Lebanese Association for Self-Advocacy (LASA) – an organization of persons with intellectual disabilities – and included interactive activities with GBV case managers on informed consent and supported decision making.

Strengthening referral mechanisms for older GBV survivors

HelpAge International and its partners are running “Age Friendly Spaces” for older Rohingya men and women. These spaces serve as a hub for protection information services and assistance, including safe identification and referral of GBV survivors.

Working with organizations of women and girls with disabilities

The [National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda \(NUWODU\)](#) is a women-led organization of persons with disabilities. They conducted a consultative meeting on GBV with both refugee and host community women and girls with disabilities to identify GBV risks, barriers to accessing services and these more accessible. Women and girls with disabilities demonstrated not only improved knowledge and awareness on GBV and where to access services, but also an interest in sharing this information with others and contributing to the wider empowerment of women and girls in the settlement and host community.

Useful Tools and Resources

[Humanitarian Inclusion Standards \(HIS\) for Older People and People with Disabilities](#) sets out clear actions that can be taken to protect, support, and engage older people and people with disabilities in protection activities, including GBV prevention and response.

[Guidelines for Including Ageing and Older People in Development and Humanitarian Policy and Practice](#) outlines a policy framework for engaging with older people in development and humanitarian action, including internal organizational systems, external programming, and the role of advocacy.

[Building Capacity for Disability Inclusion in Gender-Based Violence Programming in Humanitarian Settings: A Toolkit for GBV Practitioners](#) provides a collection of tools to support GBV staff to identify and address barriers to persons with disabilities accessing activities, including guidance for case workers.

[Gender-based Violence against Children and Youth with Disabilities: A Toolkit for Child Protection Actors](#) provides training on disability inclusion for staff and a series of participatory activities to engage children and youth with disabilities the planning and implementation of community-based violence prevention activities.

[Working with Adults and Children in Lebanon Who Have Been Hurt or Treated Very Badly](#) has information about GBV and child protection in an Easy-to-Read format.

For more information about the rapid review, including the full report and case studies, please visit: <https://www.elrha.org/tools-and-research-home/>

¹ Elrha is a global charity that finds solutions to complex humanitarian problems through research and innovation. Elrha is an established actor in the humanitarian community, working in partnership with humanitarian organisations, researchers, innovators, and the private sector to tackle some of the most difficult challenges facing people all over the world.

² VOICE is a for impact organization working globally to amplify the voices of women and girls in crises. Our vision is a world where women and girls no longer face discrimination and violence, and where they are recognized and respected as the leaders that they are in humanitarian responses—both on the ground and within the halls of power.

³ Women’s Refugee Commission & International Rescue Committee (2015) “I See That It Is Possible”: Building Capacity for Disability Inclusion in Gender-Based Violence Programming in Humanitarian Settings.

<https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/document/945-building-capacity-for-disability-inclusion-in-gender-based-violence-gbv-programming-in-humanitarian-settings-overview>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ American Association for the Advancement of Science (2017) Age is No Protection: Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence Among Men and Women Over 49 Years of Age in Five Situations of Protracted Displacement.

<https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/s3fs-public/reports/AgelsNoProtection.pdf>

⁷ Harvard Humanitarian Initiative & Oxfam (2010) Now, the World is Without Me: An Investigation of Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. <https://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/now-world-without-me-investigation-sexual-violence-eastern-democratic-republic-congo>