



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2015, BUILDING AWARENESS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) IN SYRIA

IASC guidelines for GBV in Humanitarian settings

All humanitarian actors must take action, from the earliest stages of an emergency, to prevent sexual violence and provide appropriate assistance to survivors/victims.

Introduction

International Women's Day is held annually on 8 March to celebrate women's achievements, recognize challenges, and focus greater attention on women's rights and gender equality. It is also known as the United Nations (UN) Day for Women's Rights and International Peace. This year the focus for the day was "Empowering Women: Empowering Humanity".

One of the challenges women face worldwide is Gender-Based Violence (GBV) which normally increases during crises as women are often abused out of frustration and desperation. In addition, due to the collapse of social norms and the breakdown of law and order, many women face violence and abuse at the hands of armies or militias.

In the past many Syrian girls grew up in a cohesive community, went to school, learnt skills and had their own choices. However, as a result of the crisis in Syria which has now entered its fifth year, many young women are rapidly married off to outsiders who offer the desperate families some life-saving money or a promise of security for the young girl.



The age of marriage in Syria is 18 for males and 17 for females according to the Article 16 of the Personal Status Law. There could be an exception to decrease the age to 13 according to the Article 18 of the same law under 3 conditions: puberty, the approval of a judge and the consent of the guardian, father or grandfather.

On top of this, Syrian women and girls are finding it increasingly difficult to access services such as healthcare and education. As a result of the crisis, an estimated 1,480 women give birth in dire conditions every day due to the erosion of the healthcare system which has also led to outbreaks of communicable and vaccine-preventable diseases including polio and measles. It is also estimated that 3.9 million women and children are now in need of preventative and curative nutrition services with 12.2 million people requiring livelihood supports.

Furthermore, women and adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence due to forced displacement, family separation, lack of basic structural and societal

protections and limited availability of and safe access to services. Expansion of SGBV prevention and response services should include safety audits, creation of safe spaces for women, psychosocial support services, case management, establishment and development of existing SGBV referral pathways, Psychosocial Support (PSS) and Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) trainings for health workers, livelihood activities for survivors, provision of material and cash-based assistance and empowerment of women.

Although GBV statistics are not easy to collect as GBV is usually passed over in deep silence, the majority of GBV complaints from assisted women in Syria is about domestic violence, while sexual violence within marriage accounts for about 20% and rape for about 1%.

The international legal framework



One of the main instruments in relation to GBV is the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The global engagement of the international community to address GBV, led by civil society organizations has been manifested by the growing number of international conferences organized to put pressure on governments to take immediate action to combat GBV, including the recent Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict which was held in London in 2014.

Some of the main conventions and resolutions pertaining to GBV include:

1979	UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which established gender discrimination as the root cause of violence against women.
1993	At the World conference on Human Rights, women's right were recognized as human rights, and VAW was identified as an abuse and violation of those rights
1993	The UN adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women which asserts that all states should condemn violence against women and not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to justify its continued existence.
1994	International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) urges countries to eliminate all forms of exploitation, violence, abuse, and harassment of women, adolescents and children through preventive actions and the rehabilitation of victims and survivors.
1995	During the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, violence against women was defined as a violation of women's human rights.
2000 - 2013	UN security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, ensuring increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in institutions and programs devoted to the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. UNSCR 1820 (2008), 1888 and 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010) and 2106 (2013) built upon 1325 and brought a sharper focus to eliminating conflict-related sexual violence
2008	Launch of the 2008-2015 campaign, UNiTE to End Violence Against Women
2013	57th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) recommitted itself to the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and children following the precursor 1993 Declaration on the Elimination and Prevention of all forms of Violence Against Women

Moreover, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) which was established in 1992 in response to UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance has developed guidelines to enable humanitarian actors and communities to plan, establish and coordinate a set of minimum multi-sectorial interventions to prevent and respond to gender-based violence with concentration on sexual violence during the early phase of an emergency.

While the IASC guidelines focus on the early phase of an emergency, they also aim to inform and sensitize the humanitarian community on the existence of GBV during emergencies, which is a serious and life threatening protection issue, as well as offer concrete strategies for including GBV interventions and considerations in emergency preparedness planning and during more stabilized phases of emergencies. The guidelines are applicable in any emergency setting, regardless of whether the “known” prevalence of sexual violence is high or low.



The Syrian context

The Syrian government has ratified most international conventions related to GBV with minimum reservations. Moreover, some legal progress regarding this issue has been achieved in Syria. For instance in 2009, the Personal Status Law was finally amended through a decree that repealed Article 548 of the Syrian Legal Code related to honor killing, replacing this with an article that enforces a minimum jail sentence of five years for honor killing perpetrators.

Before the crisis few developments relevant to GBV occurred in the country such as the establishment of the National Observatory on GBV and the first shelter for battered women including the victims of violence and trafficking as well as the adoption of the GBV protocol for medical staff. However, a lot more work still needs to be done in relation to GBV.

Law 11 (2013) amended Article 489 of the Syrian Penal Code:

- 1. Whomever coerces any person into participating in a sexual act using violence or threat shall be sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor.**
- 2. The offender should be sentenced to death if:**
 - a. The victim is under 15 years of age,**
 - b. the Sexual assault has been committed at gunpoint.**

The Protection Sector Response

The Protection Sector promotes and coordinates strategies and activities to prevent and combat GBV in Syria, in accordance with the IASC guidelines. Training on clinical management of rape, psychosocial counseling, women's and girls' empowerment, support to women's shelters, health centers and safe spaces can all mitigate the effects of the crisis on women and girls in Syria.

In 2014, the Protection Sector reached over 1.1 million people. Key achievements include the provision of psychosocial support, awareness raising activities on protec-

tion principles including on child protection and Gender Based Violence (GBV), protection activities including learning and recreational activities and socioeconomic activities.



There are significant challenges related to the lack of women staff and volunteers on the ground, which has hampered humanitarian actors' ability to access female beneficiaries, and assess and respond to their needs.

The sector achievements also include GBV assessments, access to child-friendly spaces and mobile child protection units, establishment of community centers and community-based initiatives in support of dignity and self-reliance, mine risk education, advocacy and capacity building and training for partners.

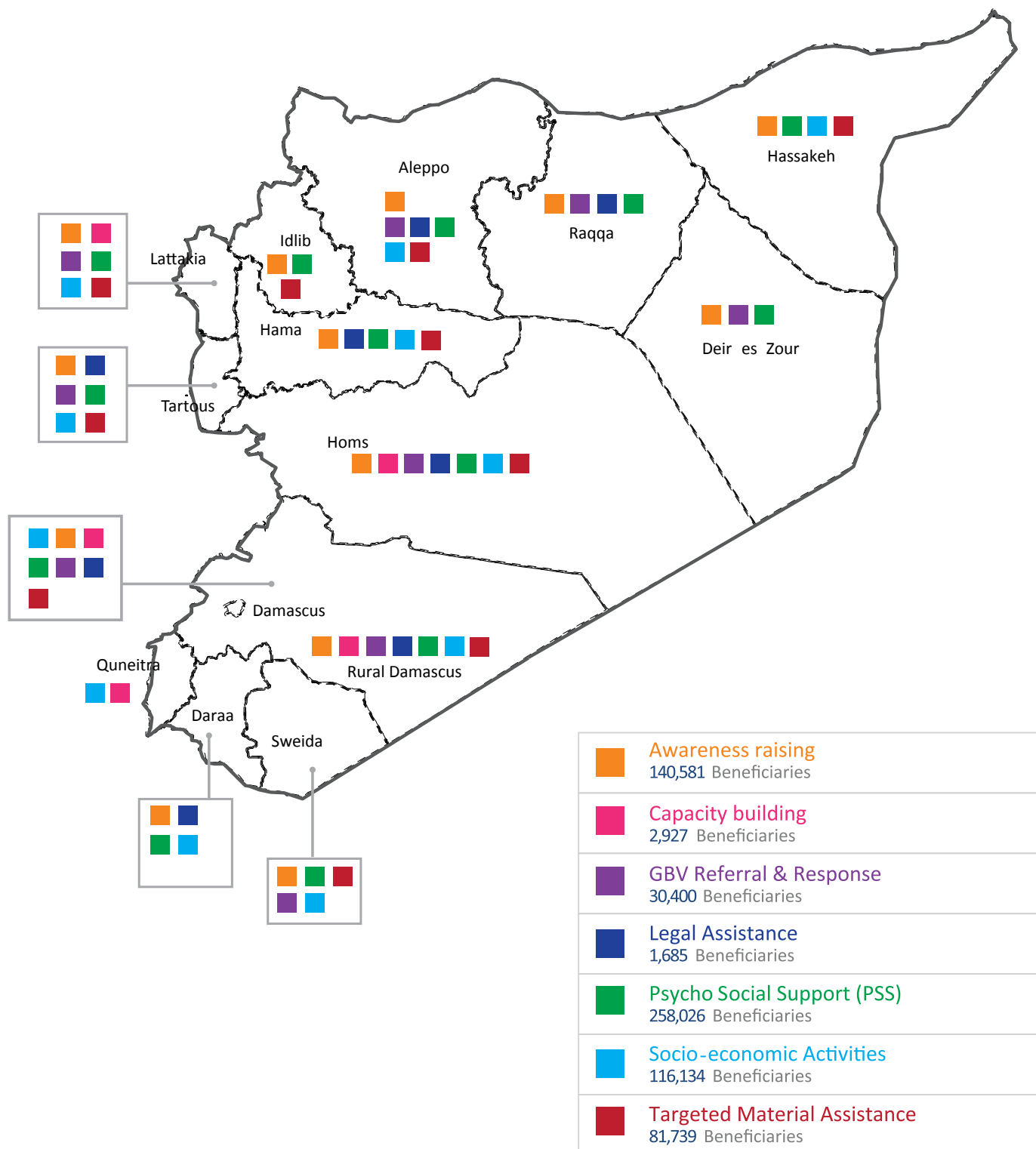
With sufficient technical and human resource capacity, the following gender responsive actions should be prioritized:

1. Analyze gender across the response to provide a better and distinct understanding of the different effect of the crisis on women, girls, boys and men and adapt the humanitarian response accordingly.
2. Dedicated gender advisors to support the integration of gender analysis into assessments and response coordination at the sector/cluster level, including gender sensibility training for sector/cluster members.
3. Collect sex and age-disaggregated data, mainstreamed across all sectors.
4. Women's empowerment, including equal opportunities in training, assistance and targeted actions.

One of the most important recent developments in relation to GBV was on 01 December 2014, when UNHCR on behalf of the Protection Sector, and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) signed a framework agreement on establishing a Women and Children Protection unit. The Unit, in line with the 2014 Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) and the 2015 Strategic Response Plan (SRP) is concerned with developing and implementing strategies, plans and programmes related to protection concerns in accordance with the relevant rules of international law.

Protection Sector Response GBV Activities

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