

Violence against Women and Girls in Conflict



Preventing and Responding to Violence against Women

The Brussels Working Group on Violence Against Women in Conflict includes representatives from various NGOs and NGO networks. We coordinate closely with UN Agencies and they act as observers in our meetings. The group was established in June 2008. It has been created to combine each organization's expertise and to emphasize that there is *an urgent need of addressing sexual and gender-based violence as a priority and that the lack of consistent political action and reliable funding to address the needs of women in conflict and recovery is hindering efforts to protect and effectively respond to the needs of women affected by gender-based violence.*

This group provides the EU institutions with expertise on violence against women and girls in conflict. We seek to work with the EU institutions to increase implementation efforts and improve the existing EU policies in a number of sectors for prevention of, and response to, violence against women in conflict settings and ultimately better socio-economic conditions for women, men and children affected by conflict. The group has a holistic approach and emphasises the necessity of a multi-sector response and human rights-based approach to violence against women in conflict.

By acting together, we strive to work with the EU institutions and hold each other accountable to our commitment and responsibility to respond more effectively to violence against women and girls and their needs.

The Brussels Ad hoc Working Group includes:

CARE International, Cordaid, International Rescue Committee, Justitia et Pax, Marie Stopes International, Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium, Pax Christi International, EurAc Network, Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, World Organisation Against Torture—OMCT, and PLAN International.

The observers to this group are: The Brussels Offices of UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNIFEM; Human Rights Watch, ISIS Europe and The Norwegian Refugee Council.



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How is Violence Against Women Defined?

The term "violence against women and girls" means any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women or girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- (a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and
- (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs¹.



Why Address Violence Against Women In Conflict?

Unfortunately throughout history, Violence against Women and Girls has been an integral component of armed conflict. During armed conflict, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. Rape is used by fighting forces as a strategy to terrorize and humiliate communities, and disrupt social continuity, and is used as a method of ethnic cleansing and genocide. In addition to rape, women and girls are abducted into sexual slavery, forced into marriage and pregnancy, and forced to exchange sex for survival. When women are forced to flee their homes, they continue to be at risk of rape and may face increased levels of domestic violence².

Rape may be used as a weapon of war to intimidate and traumatize a population, in which case the perpetrators are fighting forces and perpetrators of opportunistic rape can be anyone acting with impunity in the climate of lawlessness that accompanies armed conflict. Evidence suggests that the use of rape as a weapon of war has increased in recent years in conflict-affected areas³.

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Violence against women and girls is a serious health, human rights and social issue. The fact sheets included in this packet provide basic information about violence against women and girls in conflict as it relates to **health, education, livelihoods, access to justice, and security sector reform**. We acknowledge that by limiting our focus to five key areas, we may be excluding other important issues related to violence against women and girls, and while we may expand our scope in the future, we have chosen to focus on these five issues at this time.

These fact sheets are intended to provide readers with an understanding of the wide-ranging causes and consequences of violence against women and girls in conflict, and draw attention to the need for resources to address this as a priority issue for peace, recovery and development.

In this packet of information you will find one fact sheet per topic.



Why does gender-based and sexual violence increase during conflict and displacement?

Gender-based violence during armed conflict and during peacetime should be seen not as two separate issues but as a continuum. The reasons for the increase in prevalence of gender-based and sexual violence during armed conflict, displacement and in the post-conflict phase may include:

- an underlying acceptance of violence against women in many societies;
- a general breakdown in law and order, with an increase in all forms of violence; and
- the perception of women's bodies as "territory" to be conquered. Rape can act as a "dialogue" between male opponents where the woman as a rape victim embodies the message that the more powerful opponent has conquered "human territory". Rape, forced pregnancy and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence against both women and men, are used as a weapon of "ethnic cleansing". This means sexual violence is used as part of an attempt to destroy an ethnic group physically or by demoralizing individuals and communities, undermining the sense of identity of individual women and destroying the social bonds within the group.

Why is Violence against Women in Conflict important to the EU?

The EU has committed itself repeatedly to end violence against women in conflict situations, and voiced this engagement in many EU policy documents. However, the implementation of these policy tools is often still lagging behind, and real financial and human resource commitments by the EU are insufficient to ensure direct action and results toward these EU policy objectives listed below:

- GAERC Council Conclusions on EU guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them, adopted Dec 8 2008, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=822&lang=en;
- EU guidelines on 'Violence Against Women and Girls and Combating all Forms of Discrimination Against Them' from 2008;
- The European Union's "Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security" December 2008;

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<http://www.womensdevelopmentassociation.org/>



www.unrefugees.org

- European Council's Operational Guidelines on the "Implementation of UNSCR 1325 as reinforced by UNSCR 1820 in the context of ESDP", 3 Dec 2008;
- EPSCO Council Conclusions of 17 Dec 2008, on the review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action – Women and Armed Conflicts;
- European Parliament adopted resolution 2005/2215 on 'Women in armed conflicts and their role in post conflict reconstruction'; and
- European Parliament resolution on DRC and rape as a weapon of war.

In addition, the EU and most of its member states have made political and legal undertakings to implement the following UN conventions, resolutions and declarations:

- Beijing Declaration and Action Platform which emerged from the UN World Conference on Women, and particularly Section E on Women and Armed Conflict, and the outcome document adopted by the UN's special session Beijing + 5 and Beijing + 10 on new action and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;
- The UN Security Council Resolution 1820 on Women, Peace and Security which confronts sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations;
- The Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court adopted in 17 July 1998, and particularly Articles 7 and 8 thereof, which define rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and forced sterilisation or any form of sexual violence as crimes against humanity and war crimes and equate them with a form of torture and a serious war crime, whether these acts are systematically perpetrated or not during international or internal conflicts; and
- The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, stressing the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

First steps for the European Union to take

More action is needed, particularly in commitments of financial and human resources, to effectively address the multiple needs of women and girls affected by violence in conflict. The EU should take the opportunity to step up efforts to implement the existing EU and UN policies and commitments. The Working Group on Violence Against Women in Conflict is available to collaborate with EU institutions to strengthen the implementation of efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women in conflict.

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979, article 1 and 2.

2. J. Ward, M. Marsh, Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in War and its Aftermath: Realities, Responses and Required Resources, A Briefing Paper for the Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond, UNFPA, Brussels, June 2006.

3. J. Ward, If not now, When? Addressing Gender-based Violence in Refugee, Internally Displaced and Post-Conflict Settings. A Global Overview, RHRC Consortium, New York, 2002.

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