

GBV AoR HELPDESK

Gender Based Violence in Emergencies

Research Query: Brief Overview of Research, Evidence and Learning on the Links between Food Insecurity and Gender-Based Violence in Conflict-Affected Settings



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Introduction

Globally, food security and nutrition status are deteriorating at an alarming rate. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has impacted global and national economies, disrupted food systems, and threatened livelihoods of people around the world, with devastating impacts on the food security of families and individuals. The United Nations (UN) estimates that between 720 and 811 million people faced hunger in 2020 – this is 161 million more people than in 2019.¹ More than one in ten people, around 928 million, or about 12% of the global population faced food insecurity in 2020. This is 148 million more than in 2019 – an unprecedented increase equal to the total increase in the numbers of food insecure people across all the previous five years combined.² In June 2021, the UN warned that 41 million people across 43 countries are at the “edge of famine” and declared that famine is already present in Ethiopia, Madagascar, South Sudan and Yemen.³

Many of today's food crises are linked to violent conflicts, in so far as conflicts often result in disruption of agricultural and other food production, supply chains and markets, as well as dependency on humanitarian food aid. The number of people affected by conflict-driven food crises increased from 74 million in 2018 to more than 77 million one year later, across 22 countries – particularly in north-eastern Nigeria, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen.⁴ Food insecurity has intensified in some of these settings during COVID-19, as movement restrictions have made it difficult for humanitarian assistance to reach refugees and internally displaced persons (IPDs).⁵

The global rise in food insecurity has disproportionately affected women: whereas the prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity was 6% higher in women than men in 2019, it was 10% higher in women than men in 2020.⁶ Food insecurity is not only affecting women disproportionately, but has a range of gendered impacts, including well-established links to gender-based violence (GBV).⁷

¹ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2021) “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all”, <http://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/cb4474en.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ United Nations (2021) “Famine knocking at the door of 41 million worldwide, WFP warns”, UN News, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1094472>

⁴ Kemmerling, B. et al. (2021) “Addressing Food Crisis in Violent Conflict”, Food Systems Summit Brief, <https://bit.ly/3D7lrqa>

⁵ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2021) “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all”, <http://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/cb4474en.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Fraser, E. (2020) “Food Security, VAWG and Nutrition”, <https://bit.ly/3F46fLg>

Box 1: Definitions

Hunger: The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines hunger as “an uncomfortable or painful physical sensation caused by insufficient consumption of dietary energy. It becomes chronic when the person does not consume a sufficient amount of calories (dietary energy) on a regular basis to lead a normal, active and healthy life.”⁸ FAO uses prevalence of undernourishment as an indicator to estimate the extent of hunger in the world.

Food insecurity: FAO describes that food insecurity in an individual occurs “when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life” and that food insecurity in an individual occurs “when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.”⁹ This can be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food. Food insecurity is categorized at different levels of severity: mild food insecurity; moderate food insecurity; and severe food insecurity. Severe food insecurity is described as when someone has run out of food and gone a day without eating. Hunger and food insecurity is closely related, as someone who is severely food insecure is likely to also have experienced hunger.

Famine: Famine occurs when food insecurity and hunger is experienced in severity and at scale: it is declared when at least 20% of households in an area face extreme food shortages with a limited ability to cope; acute malnutrition rates exceed 30%; and the death rate exceeds two persons per day per 10,000 persons.¹⁰

This report focuses on the linkages between food insecurity and GBV, including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) against women and girls.¹¹ in conflict-affected settings. The report has a particular focus on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, however, given the limited evidence available from the region, it also draws on wider evidence from conflict-affected settings outside MENA as well as from non-conflict settings. After synthesizing evidence of what is known about these linkages, the paper outlines recommendations targeting donors, GBV practitioners, and food security actors.

This report was developed in response to a query request to the GBV AoR Helpdesk and is based on rapid desk-based research of English-language evidence of these linkages (in conflict-affected countries globally and with specific focus on the MENA region). While some practice-based evidence such as situation reports, gender analysis and broader assessment have explored these linkages, there is a lack of systematic evidence on these linkages – indicating that this is an area that requires further review. For a bibliography of references, see Annex 1. For a summary of the methodology used to research information in this report, see Annex 2.

Understanding the linkages between food insecurity and GBV

Evidence from needs assessments and situational analyses, as well as service-delivery data, offer insight into GBV risks and incidents in settings affected by food insecurity. However, there is no systematic way in which this data is organized or analyzed to shed light on how GBV risks link specifically to food insecurity. To facilitate a very preliminary analysis, three broad ‘conditions’ associated with food insecurity have been identified below that appear to heighten risk of exposure to different forms of GBV for women and girls. These are: 1) the lack of food; 2) the search for food; and 3) access to food aid.

⁸ FAO (2021) “Hunger and Food Insecurity” <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ UN (2011) “When a Food Security Crisis becomes a Famine” <https://bit.ly/3HeoFKU>

¹¹ In the humanitarian sector, the term sexual exploitation and abuse refers to SEA perpetrated by those working in, or with, humanitarian organizations and within peacekeeping missions. SEA is driven by various forms of abuse of power and structural inequalities, including but not limited to gender inequalities. As such, anyone who has less power vis-a-vis perpetrators (in this context, staff or representatives of humanitarian organizations or peacekeeping missions) can be at risk of being targeted for SEA. However, due to systematic and structural gender inequalities, women and girls are more likely to be targeted for SEA, which is then a form of GBV. For further discussion in the differences and overlaps between SEA and GBV, see [this](#) Safeguarding Support Hub (RHS) bitesize resource.

Food insecurity in conflict-affected settings



Figure 1: Food insecurity in conflict affected settings

Lack of food

When household are food insecure, this elevates household stressors, which in turn contributes to different forms of GBV, including intimate partner violence (IPV), other forms of family violence and child marriage, as described below.

IPV: There is strong evidence that food insecurity at the household level is associated with IPV through three main pathways:

- 1) acute food insecurity leads to conflict over food distribution and resources;
- 2) poor households are more prone to stress and shocks, while having reduced capacity to deal with stressors; and
- 3) food insecurity and poor nutrition outcomes impact individuals on a physiological level, such as impeding the cognitive functioning and ability to control emotions.¹²

A study of the relationship between drought conditions and IPV across 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (some of which are conflict-affected) found that drought was associated with women's risk of physical and sexual IPV.¹³ The authors suggest that food insecurity can explain this association – drought is likely to disrupt agricultural production and food production and have negative consequences on household savings and income. The risk of IPV increased according to severity of drought conditions, with severe drought associated with a 15% increase in reports of physical violence and 29% increase in reports of sexual violence compared to non-drought settings.

Other studies have attributed increased partner control in times of food insecurity to men's loss of ability to provide for the family – arguing that when the role of 'breadwinner' is compromised by food insecurity, men may increase

¹² Gibbs, A. et al. (2020) "New learnings on drivers of men's perpetration, and women's experiences, of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence and the implications for prevention interventions", <https://bit.ly/3cgfcEV>

¹³ Epstein, A. et al. (2020) "Drought and intimate partner violence towards women in 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa during 2011-2018: A population-based study", <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003064>

controlling behaviors, including violence.¹⁴ In South Africa, men who were food insecure were twice as likely to perpetrate IPV as those who were not food insecure.¹⁵

In contexts where women are responsible for feeding the family, they may be at increased risk of IPV and domestic violence during times of food shortage if they are seen as not fulfilling this role.¹⁶ In these and other examples, women who are living in food-insecure households will often be more dependent on men and have less power in household decision-making, which is likely to make it harder for them to leave an abusive relationship.¹⁷

Family violence: Food insecurity is also associated with other forms of family violence against women and girls, such as violence by in-laws and siblings. For example, a randomized controlled trial in Afghanistan found that physical violence by mothers-in-law, siblings and siblings-in-law was associated with household food insecurity and having to borrow money for food.¹⁸ The study also suggests that household food insecurity can drive intergenerational violence, as women who experienced violence from their mother-in-law used violence against their own children more frequently.

Child marriage: There is growing evidence that child marriage may increase in times of food insecurity when parents are struggling to make ends meet and feed all family members.¹⁹ A Rapid Gender Analysis

in Iraq and Lebanon found that child marriage increased during the COVID-19 crisis, where financial insecurity and related food insecurity provoked some parents to marry their daughters to reduce the number of children to feed.²⁰ In Syria, child marriages have spiked during the crisis, with parents marrying their daughters to access dowry money and at the same time reduce the family size, easing economic stress and alleviating food insecurity challenges in families.²¹

It is important to note that lack of food not only drives different forms of GBV; in some instances, it is itself an expression of GBV. Women in violent partnerships may be food insecure because their partners control access to food.²² Women and girls in a 2019 assessment in Syria reported that denial of resources, including food, is an increasingly prevalent form of violence that women are facing a decade into the conflict.²³ This form of violence may

IPV in Sudan

An analysis of the provision of humanitarian assistance to Ethiopian refugees in east Sudan highlights that the economic impacts of COVID-19 have increased food insecurity and led to subsequent protection risks for refugee women and girls. In the first 6 months of 2021, Sudan saw a sharp increase in inflation rates and an acute shortage in fuel and food supplies. Women and girls reported scarcity of food as a contributing factor to increased levels of IPV in the camps settings, along with men's alcohol consumption.

Source: ACT Alliance and Carita (2021)

"Sudan: Provision of Humanitarian assistance to Ethiopian Refugees in East Sudan – Concept Note"

Child marriage in Yemen

Child marriage has increased in Yemen during the conflict. Anecdotal evidence from pre-COVID-19 suggests that rising food prices during the conflict in Yemen has caused an increasing number of families to arrange marriages for their daughters to obtain money to meet the family's basic needs and repay debts using the dowry money – while at the same time reducing the cost of feeding the family. According to an Oxfam report, there are: *"hundreds of cases of child marriage across the country, with numbers increasing over the years of conflict."*

Source: (Oxfam, 2019, p.6), cited in GBV AoR and UNFPA (2019) *Voices from Syria 2019: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*

¹⁴ Hatcher, A. M. et al. (2019) "Pathways from Food Insecurity to Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration Among Peri-Urban Men in South Africa", <https://bit.ly/3wND4t3>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ CARE (2020) "Left out and Left Behind: Ignoring Women will Prevent us from Solving the Hunger Crisis", <https://bit.ly/31YeFBs>

¹⁷ Gibbs, A. and Bishop, K. (2019) "Combined Economic Empowerment and Gender-transformative interventions", <https://bit.ly/3CpXmts>

¹⁸ Jewkes R, Corboz J, Gibbs A (2019) 'Violence against Afghan women by husbands, mothers-in-law and siblings-in-law/siblings: Risk markers and health consequences in an analysis of the baseline of a randomised controlled trial'. PLoS ONE 14(2): 0211361, <https://bit.ly/30G8NjU>

¹⁹ Fraser (2020) "Food Security, VAWG and Nutrition", <https://bit.ly/3qJAxyJ>

²⁰ Phelps, C. (2020) "Rapid Gender Analysis – Covid-19. Middle East and North Africa Region", <https://bit.ly/3obptHK>

²¹ GBV AoR and UNFPA (2019) "Voices from Syria 2019: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview" <https://bit.ly/3kp9tRs>

²² Fraser (2020) "Food Security, VAWG and Nutrition", <https://bit.ly/3F46fLg>

²³ GBV AoR and UNFPA (2019) "Voices from Syria 2019: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview" <https://bit.ly/3kp9tRs>

be more pronounced in marriages where age asymmetry is high (i.e. the husband is significantly older than the girl bride).

Search for food

In many communities, women and girls are responsible for preparing food for their families, including obtaining food, water and firewood for cooking. Particularly in conflict-affected settings, these responsibilities for searching for food and related cooking supplies may increase for women and girls. Activities related to searching for food can increase women's and girls' risk of various forms of GBV, including IPV, physical and sexual violence and sexual exploitation.

IPV: Food systems are often heavily disrupted in times of conflict, affecting livelihood opportunities and altering households' and individuals' strategies to obtain food. When women have to spend more time finding food and water and have less time to complete their other household and family responsibilities, household tensions may increase and result in violence.²⁴

Physical and sexual violence: In some conflict-affected contexts in MENA, women's responsibility to go out for food for the family has increased so as to prevent exposure of men and boys to armed groups and forced recruitment.²⁵ In MENA and other parts of the world, when food and other resources are scarce, women and girls are often forced to travel further in the search for food and other resources to prepare food, heightening their risk of physical and sexual violence by armed actors and men outside their communities. For example, as food insecurity increased and famine was declared in part of South Sudan in 2017, women were forced to move further distances from their communities in search of food and water. Some walked for days in search for food, crossing front lines, victims of rape, abduction and killings.²⁶

Sexual exploitation: Disruption of livelihoods and food insecurity in conflict-affected settings also expose women and girls to increased risk of sexual exploitation. Male-out migration in search for livelihood opportunities to alleviate poverty and food insecurity leads to increased numbers of female-headed household, where women and children are left behind with little or no resources, exposing them to increased risk of sexual exploitation when they try to access food and meet basic needs. This was for example found to be the case during the 2017 drought in Somalia, where men's migration coupled with women's loss of livelihoods as female-dominated market trade and agricultural activities were halted, increased women's and girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation by men and boys who often have greater control over resources and access to opportunities.²⁷

Access to food aid

Food assistance is a critical component of humanitarian assistance to alleviate food insecurity in the short-term and in the most acute phases of a crisis. However, existing evidence suggest that food distribution can also present GBV risks for women and girls.

Physical and sexual violence and harassment: Women and girls can be at risk of multiple forms of GBV, including physical and sexual violence as well as harassment by men and boys at food distribution sites, and also when traveling to and from distribution sites by foot or transport.²⁸ In Lebanon, disorganized, chaotic and overcrowded food distribution sites were grounds for sexual harassment and targeting of women and girls by men and boys who were also at the distribution sites to receive food aid.²⁹

SEA: Aid workers and officials involved in delivering and distributing food assistance have been found to sexually

²⁴ GBV AoR (2021) "Climate change and gender-based violence: What are the links?" <https://bit.ly/3coki8> and Gevers, A. et al. (2020) "Why climate change fuels violence against women", <https://bit.ly/3nlbwYC>

²⁵ Stites, E. and Bushby, K. (2017) "Livelihood strategies and interventions in fragile and conflict-affected areas", <https://bit.ly/3oEPLTj>

²⁶ The crisis in conflict-torn and famine-affected South Sudan was described as a 'double-crisis' of GBV and food insecurity for women and girls. See InterAction GBV Working Group and Protection Working Group (2017) "Famine-Affected Countries Gender-Based Violence and Protection Concerns", <https://bit.ly/3uGQTIv>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ CARE and GWI (2020a) "Empowered Aid: Transforming gender and power dynamics in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Participatory action research with refugee women and girls to better prevent sexual exploitation and abuse", Lebanon Results Report, <https://bit.ly/3D4rZ92>

exploit and abuse women and girls in numerous humanitarian settings, including in the MENA region.³⁰ In addition to gender inequality, intersecting factors such as poverty, young age, displacement, and being a female head of household put women and girls in positions of reduced power vis-à-vis men who are in control of food distribution.

A study in Lebanon found that in addition to SEA risks at food distribution sites, travel to and from distribution sites was the second most frequently mentioned risk factor for SEA in relation to the aid distribution process.³¹ Travel to and from food distribution was highlighted as particularly risky when it involved transporting heavy food rations, which may lead women and girls to have to seek help from men to get the food home. It was reported that both aid workers and taxi drivers offer to drive women home in exchange for sex, including incidents where taxi drivers would drive into unknown places and demand sex for driving women home.

Reports from Lebanon and Syria have also highlighted the issue of forced marriages, where women and girls have been forced to 'marry' officials for a limited period of time to access food and other necessities. Similar cases have been reported from Lebanon, where men who distribute aid have entered sexually exploitive 'marriages' with refugee women and girls which typically last only for few days.³²

There is some evidence that the risk of and fear of GBV, including SEA, in relation to food distribution prevents women and girls from accessing food assistance, creating an ongoing cycle of food insecurity and GBV. Women and girl respondents in a recent study conducted in Syria highlighted that some women and girls do not go to the distribution sites because of the risk of being subject to SEA by men working in the food distribution process.³³ The risk of SEA was noted to be particularly high for widows, divorced women, adolescent girls and women from female-headed households. An earlier assessment in Syria similarly highlighted that widows in particular withdrew from accessing humanitarian assistance due to the high risk of SEA.³⁴ This in turn, heightens their food insecurity and likely puts them at risk of ongoing exposure to multiple forms of GBV.

SEA at food distribution sites in Syria

A recent assessment from Syria highlights adolescent girls, widows and divorced woman, or other women without male companion, as being at particular risk of SEA in connection to humanitarian aid distribution. Female-headed household are almost five times more likely than male-headed households to be asked for physical or emotional relationships in exchange for assistance. SEA concerns listed by women and girls in the assessment included harassment and sexual or physical abuse, being photographed, and being asked to share their phone numbers in exchange for extra aid.

Source: GBV AoR and UNFPA (2021) [Voices from Syria 2021: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview](https://bit.ly/3wzQCbb)

³⁰ CARE and GWI (2020a) "Empowered Aid: Transforming gender and power dynamics in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Participatory action research with refugee women and girls to better prevent sexual exploitation and abuse", Lebanon Results Report, <https://bit.ly/3D4rZ92> and GBV AoR and UNFPA (2019) "Voices from Syria 2019: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview" <https://bit.ly/3kp9tRs>

³¹ CARE and GWI (2020a) "Empowered Aid: Transforming gender and power dynamics in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Participatory action research with refugee women and girls to better prevent sexual exploitation and abuse", Lebanon Results Report, <https://bit.ly/3D4rZ92>

³² GBV AoR (2018) "Voices from Syria: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview from Syria 2018", <https://bit.ly/30aZ7xT> and CARE and GWI (2020a) "Empowered Aid: Transforming gender and power dynamics in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Participatory action research with refugee women and girls to better prevent sexual exploitation and abuse", Lebanon Results Report, <https://bit.ly/3D4rZ92>

³³ GBV AoR and UNFPA (2021) "Voices from Syria 2021: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview", <https://bit.ly/3wzQCbb>

³⁴ GBV AoR and UNFPA (2019) "Voices from Syria 2019: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview" <https://bit.ly/3kp9tRs>

Conflict, famine and GBV in Ethiopia's Tigray Region

In November 2021, a year since the start of the civil war in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, the humanitarian situation remains dire. The conflict is spreading to other regions in the country, causing a surge in humanitarian needs and the number of internally displaced people (IDPs).³⁵ The conflict has been marked by brutality against civilians, including sexual violence against women and girls. Ethiopian and Eritrean troops have also been accused of destroying crops and killing livestock – using food insecurity as a weapon of war in the conflict.³⁶ Humanitarian actors have struggled to deliver aid to affected areas due to shortages in fuel and trucks, and over 400,000 people are living in famine-like conditions, suffering from 'catastrophic hunger levels'.³⁷ Even if the conflict does not intensify, the UN warns that the food situation is expected to worsen if food assistance continues to be insufficient and sporadic, especially since the agricultural planting season has been missed due to the conflict, causing a shortage of food stock which in turn has caused market prices to surge.³⁸

Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by loss of livelihoods due to the crisis, as women face multiple barriers to accessing informal work and casual labor opportunities due to social norms, childcare responsibilities and movement restrictions.³⁹ A gender analysis by the International Rescue Committee found that their limited access to livelihoods and shortage of food and cash have led to women and girls being sexually exploited for food and small amounts of cash, with female-headed households, single, divorced and widowed women being particularly vulnerable.⁴⁰ According to a recent situation analysis, cases of SEA are reportedly on the rise.⁴¹

In addition to SEA, widespread use of conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls has been reported, including by armed actors and other men in uniforms.⁴² Women and girls have been targeted from the onset of the conflict, during flight and in IDP and refugee camps.⁴³ Displaced women and girls have also reported fear of attacks from host communities when traveling to and from food distribution points, with reports of women and girls being attacked and raped when they have left the camps to collect water and firewood. The conflict has also exaggerated other forms of GBV that were prevalent before the conflict, including IPV and child marriage.⁴⁴

The ongoing famine and inability to ensure people's basic needs are met are contributing to high rates of GBV in the Tigray region.⁴⁵ Women have described a growing taboo surrounding talking about experiences of sexual violence, and report that GBV has become 'deprioritized' in the response as there are other issues that are perceived as more acute, including the need for food, water, and shelter.⁴⁶

³⁵ OCHA (2021) "Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update", Situation Report, Last updated 30 September 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia> [Accessed October 2, 2021]

³⁶ Uddin, S. et al. (2021) "In Ethiopian civil war, famine and sexual violence shatter Tigray region", *abc News*, June 23 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/ethiopian-civil-war-famine-sexual-violence-shatter-tigray/story?id=78411088>

³⁷ OCHA (2021) "Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update", Situation Report, Last updated 30 September 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia> [Accessed October 2, 2021]

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Cone, D. (2021) "Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse", <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2021/8/23/women-in-tigray-face-increased-risk-of-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>

⁴⁰ IRC (2021) "Ending the Hunger Crisis: Response, recovery and resilience", <https://bit.ly/3D12V2K>

⁴¹ OCHA (2021) "Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update", Situation Report, Last updated 30 September 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia> [Accessed October 2, 2021]

⁴² Cone, D. (2021) "Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse", <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2021/8/23/women-in-tigray-face-increased-risk-of-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>

⁴³ Habte, A. and Afework, M. (2021) "CARE Rapid Gender Analysis [Ethiopia] – [Tigray Crisis]", version 01, <https://bit.ly/3npiGLH>

⁴⁴ IRC (2021) "Ending the Hunger Crisis: Response, recovery and resilience", <https://bit.ly/3D12V2K>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Recommendations

A growing body of evidence from conflict-affected settings links food insecurity to risks of GBV against women and girls. There is already keen awareness of these linkages by many in the GBV sector and among food security actors, and work is already underway to address GBV risks in the food security sector by the FAO and others. Guidance has been developed which draws attention to the ways food insecurity exacerbates GBV risks, and sets out key priorities for both sectors. However, as illustrated by the evidence presented above, the problem not only persists, it has been intensified by the COVID-19 crisis and the unprecedented increase in food insecurity across the globe. For women and girls, this means a double crisis of food insecurity and GBV.

This report attempts to organize the risks for various forms of GBV across three basic conditions of food insecurity – the lack of food; the search for food; and distribution of food aid. The reason for this is to assist stakeholders to consider critical interventions that target needs according to these different conditions – essentially to help simplify a complex topic. Building on the evidence highlighted in this report, and drawing from existing guidance, the recommendations below attempt to capture a few key priorities for action for donors, GBV specialists and non-GBV specialists working in humanitarian settings. The recommendations are accompanied by a list of relevant resources for each group of recommendations.

Recommendations for donors

Prioritize funding for GBV programming from the early onset of food insecurity and famine conditions. Ensuring funding for GBV programming from the onset of a food crisis is instrumental to allow GBV actors to establish and accelerate GBV prevention and mitigation efforts associated with food insecurity, and ensure the continuation of GBV services.

Include detailed requirements to prevent and respond to SEA in funding requests for all food distribution programming. Donors are in a position to drive up standards and demand accountability by humanitarian actors when it comes to ensuring prevention and response to SEA is integrated throughout the project cycle for food aid in conflict-affected settings.

Support the role and leadership of women’s rights organizations and women-led organizations in the food security sector and humanitarian response. Women and girls are best placed to understand and speak to the issues of GBV risks in situations of food insecurity and SEA in the food distribution process – women’s participation and leadership in action for food security will be key to bringing greater attention to the issues and intensifying action for solutions.

Support the development of a framework for understanding and addressing the linkages between food insecurity and GBV. While there is a growing body of evidence shining light on these linkages and existing guidance that speaks to food security actors on the one hand, and GBV actors on the other, this evidence and guidance are yet to be conceptualized in an encompassing framework that can provide guidance to GBV and food security actors to work in a coordinated way to address GBV and SEA risks associated with food insecurity conditions before they happen, and mitigate the risks in situations of food insecurity.⁴⁷

Key resources:

- IASC (2015) [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Action: Food Security and Agriculture](#)
- CARE (2020) [Left Out and Left Behind: Ignoring women will prevent us from solving the hunger crisis, Policy Report](#)
- IRC (2021) [Ending the Hunger Crisis: Response Recovery and Resilience](#)
- CARE and GWI (2020) [Empowered Aid: Reducing Risks of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Aid Distribution, Lebanon Policy Brief](#)
- FAO (2020) [Applying an inclusive and equitable approach to anticipatory action](#)
- Jay (2021) [Research Query: GBV and Anticipatory Action Approaches, The GBV AoR Helpdesk](#)

⁴⁷ This could for instance explore the potential of addressing GBV and SEA risks associated to food insecurity conditions through anticipatory action approaches, building on a recent [GBV AoR Helpdesk query](#) (Jay, 2021) which explores the potential of integrating GBV in anticipatory action, and existing guidance by [FAO](#) (Jones et al., 2020) on how to apply an inclusive and equitable approach to anticipatory action.

Recommendations for GBV practitioners

Ensure that the GBV coordination mechanism operating in humanitarian crisis coordinates with food security actors to stay informed of current food insecurity levels and early warnings that food insecurity is intensifying in severity and scale.

Link the early warning information to the evidence of related GBV risk factors in households and communities in order to do targeted prevention work before and in the early stages of food insecurity, and mitigate the GBV risks faced by women and girls, including risks for IPV, child marriage, non-partner sexual and physical violence, and sexual exploitation.

Develop strategies for how to address GBV in the conditions present in contexts of food insecurity, including how to address the specific GBV risks and incidents women and girls face within the household and are subjected to while searching for food. Ensure that the development of these strategies is participatory and meaningfully engages women and girls and supports their leadership in the design of responses.

When food insecurity and famine-like conditions are anticipated or present, ensure that survivor-centered GBV services are in place and are prepared to respond to the anticipated surge in GBV.

Ensure that the linkages between food insecurity GBV risks are recognized in GBV risks assessment and gender assessments and that the incident types are monitored, including the risk for child marriage, IPV, and men's controlling of women's access to food.

Recommendations for food security actors

Build out more effective SEA monitoring systems at food distribution sites. While significant progress has been made in addressing SEA in humanitarian contexts, including in the distribution of food aid, the ongoing risks faced by women and girls in the food distribution process suggest that this remains an area of concern that requires ongoing action and improvements. Food security actors can further strengthen monitoring and reporting systems for SEA, ensuring accountability to women and girls.

Learn from existing recommendations developed by women and girls on how to make food distribution processes safer⁴⁸, and build on good practice in participatory action research and other approaches to engage women and girls⁴⁹ in the design of food distribution processes (including the travel to and from the distribution site) and mechanisms to report and monitor incidents.

Key resources:

- IASC (2015) [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#) (food and agriculture section)
- IASC (2015) [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Action: Food Security and Agriculture](#)
- Anticipation Hub (2021) [Mitigating gender-based violence risks: how anticipatory action supports safety and access to services for women and girls](#)
- Jay (2021) [Research Query: GBV and Anticipatory Action Approaches](#), The GBV AoR Helpdesk

Key resources:

- FAO (2017) [How can food security interventions contribute to reducing gender-based violence?](#)
- CARE and GWI (2020) [Empowered Aid: Transforming Gender and Power Dynamics in the Delivery of Humanitarian Aid, Lebanon Results Report](#)
- IRC (2021) [Ending the Hunger Crisis: Response Recovery and Resilience](#)
- IASC (2015) [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Action: Food Security and Agriculture](#)
- IASC (2020) [Interim Guidance: Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak \(action points for Food Security and Nutrition\)](#)

⁴⁸ See CARE and GWI (2020b) "Empowered Aid: Reducing Risks of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Aid Distribution", Lebanon Policy Brief, <https://bit.ly/3HxcSrn>

⁴⁹ For instance, see the "Empowered Aid" project by the Global Women's Institute, <https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/empowered-aid>

Coordinate with GBV actors to ensure access to GBV response services. Food security actors can coordinate with the GBV coordination mechanisms where one exists, or else other actors with GBV expertise in the area to ensure women and girls who experience GBV and/ or SEA in relation to food distribution can access GBV response services. All frontline workers in food assistance interventions should receive training in how to respond to disclosures of GBV and SEA and refer survivors to GBV services in the area.

Coordinate with the GBV coordination mechanism and ensure that key information and reports from early warnings systems and food security and nutrition monitoring systems is shared with the GBV coordination mechanisms, in order to support timely decision-making and planning to mitigate GBV risks linked to escalating food insecurity conditions.

Implement the essential actions to address GBV in the food security and agriculture sectors, as set out by the IASC *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action* for the food security and agriculture sector.⁵⁰ This includes actions for addressing GBV through the entire project cycle – from assessment, analysis and planning, to implementation, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation. The guidance puts emphasis on women and girls’ participation at key stages, building staff understanding of GBV, and consulting with GBV specialist for support and guidance.

Explore ways to better integrate gender and GBV risk analysis in food security and nutrition monitoring systems, including early warning systems, in order to strengthen GBV responsive food security planning and interventions.⁵¹ For example, this could entail developing a set of basic indicators for heightened risk for GBV linked to food insecurity that typically can be analyzed through existing data (e.g. existing information about the scope of the problem of GBV; gendered attitudes and norms around food; levels of poverty; issues of sexual exploitation in the affected area; etc.). Food security actors can work with GBV specialists to access this information.

⁵⁰ IASC (2015) “Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Action: Food Security and Agriculture”, https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/TAG-FSA-08_26_2015.pdf

⁵¹ For instance, drawing on the work of Pepper (2019) “Integrating Gender Analysis into Food and Nutrition Security Early Warning Systems in West Africa”, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/abd5f499-en.pdf?expires=1637267151&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=113CDE506CC0BDB81E4FD830F910A375>

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Annex 2: Methodology

Research strategy: Evidence was identified through online desk-based research as systematically as possible, under tight time constraints. The search strategy used key words, phrases and acronyms associated with food insecurity, famine conditions, conflict and GBV and SEA, including but not limited to: food insecurity and terms associated with the condition (e.g. malnutrition, poor nutrition outcomes, hunger, drought), and variations of search terms on gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse (e.g. GBV, VAWG, SEA and specific forms of violence such as IPV; early, forced and child marriage; physical, sexual emotional and economic violence), and search terms related to food distribution and humanitarian aid (e.g. response, services, support, programmes, assistance, distribution etc.). The search focused specifically on identifying evidence from conflict-affected countries and countries in the MENA region (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen) but also considered global evidence.

Limitations: The evidence is limited to English documents, and only include publicly available online materials. The research focused on resources published between the years 2011 to 2021 but prioritized more recent evidence given the substantial impact of COVID-19 on both food insecurity and GBV.

Availability of resources: A recent evidence review with similar focus found that most studies to date focus on South Asia and East Africa as geographical focus, and that IPV is the most studied form of GBV in relation to food insecurity, and there are few studies focusing on sexual violence in conflict or in humanitarian contexts (Fraser, 2020). The results of this rapid research echoes this, nevertheless, there are some limited evidence of linkages between food insecurity, conflict and GBV and SEA from the MENA region. It should be noted that this evidence is often part of broader assessments, gender analysis and situation analysis rather than focused research that explores these linkages in-depth. While evidence of linkages between food insecurity and GBV has been synthesized with a focus on public health emergencies (see Fraser, 2020), there are fewer studies with specific focus on conflict-settings and appears to be no systematic synthesis of this body of evidence to date.

The GBV AoR Help Desk

The GBVAoR Helpdesk is a unique research and technical advice service which aims to inspire and support humanitarian actors to help prevent, mitigate and respond to violence against women and girls in emergencies. Managed by Social Development Direct, the GBV AoR Helpdesk is staffed by a global roster of senior Gender and GBV Experts who are on standby to help guide frontline humanitarian actors on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response measures in line with international standards, guidelines and best practice. Views or opinions expressed in GBV AoR Helpdesk Products do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the GBV AoR, nor of all the experts of SDDirect's Helpdesk roster.

The GBV AoR Helpdesk

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*The Helpdesk is available 09.00 to
17.30 GMT Monday to Friday.*

Our services are free and confidential.