



# Action Coalition 1: Gender-Based Violence

Interlinkages between the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and the work of the Generation Equality Action Coalitions and the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

## SUMMARY

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which affects nearly one in three women worldwide<sup>1</sup>, is rooted in patriarchal norms, hierarchies, and power relations. The belief in men's dominance and superiority over women allows for the creation and maintenance of social, political, and structural systems, including laws, that perpetuate the oppression, devaluation, and marginalisation of women and populations who do not conform to gender stereotypes. SGBV is a direct manifestation of gender inequality, which exists because of patriarchal norms, bolstered by structural violence, that discriminate against women's economic, social, civil and political rights. Militarised and violent masculinities in particular contribute to SGBV by glorifying violence as part of men's societal roles. Patriarchy, sex and gender inequalities, militarised masculinities, and discriminatory power structures inhibit inclusive peace and violate the fundamental human rights of women, including their right to safety, dignity, and a life free from violence. In order to address the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence, it is critical to understand and address the ways in which the human rights of women, girls, and people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) are denied, watered down, and criminalised around the world. Comprehensive action to address SGBV must prioritise long-term investments in prevention, as well as meeting the needs of all survivors according to their own priorities.

## THE ISSUE

### Background

SGBV takes many forms, and, because it is rooted in structural inequalities, is also experienced differently by diverse women, girls, and people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), in relation to their intersecting identities. Women and girls with disabilities are at least two to three times more likely than women without disabilities to experience GBV, including violence that consists of limits on their personal autonomy and barriers to accessing their rights.<sup>2</sup> Transgender women and gender-non-conforming people are faced with disproportionately high rates of violence, including murder. Furthermore, in conflict settings, SGBV is often used as a weapon

1 World Health Organization. 2017. "Violence against Women." <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

2 Women Enabled. n.d. "The Right of Women and Girls with Disabilities to be Free from Gender-Based Violence," <https://www.womenenabled.org/pdfs/Women%20Enabled%20International%20Facts%20-%20The%20Right%20of%20Women%20and%20Girls%20with%20Disabilities%20to%20be%20Free%20from%20Gender-Based%20Violence%20-%20ENGLISH%20-%20FINAL.pdf?pdf=GBVEnglish>

of war, exacerbating the disproportionate impact of violence and instability on women, girls, and other marginalised populations. Displaced women and girls, including migrants and refugees, are at a greater risk of and more heavily impacted by sexual violence, while survivors of sexual violence in displacement camps often face the same trauma to which they were initially subjected.

*Patriarchy, sex and gender inequalities, militarised masculinities, and discriminatory power structures inhibit inclusive peace and violate the fundamental human rights of women.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has put displaced women and girls at increased risk of SGBV, including intimate partner violence, human trafficking, and forced and early marriage as well as making such cases of violence more difficult to report.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, while states who proclaim themselves as gender champions support survivors of SGBV in conflict zones, albeit mostly through rhetoric rather than concrete action, they may deny services, including access to shelters and healthcare, to migrant and refugee women in their own countries.<sup>4</sup>

## What are the links between SGBV and Militarisation?

Militarisation fuels both SGBV and armed conflict and must be addressed as part of any comprehensive strategy to end violence against women and girls, and people of diverse SOGIESC. Militarisation and securitisation are significant drivers of violence and insecurity throughout the world, both within and beyond conflict-affected countries. Security forces, including militaries, armed groups, police, peacekeepers, and prison guards, are frequent perpetrators of SGBV. Furthermore, globally, women and girls are adversely affected by the accumulation, possession, and use of weapons.

Arms transfers, including to conflict-affected countries, contribute to increased insecurity for women and girls. Weapons facilitate human trafficking, forced prostitution, and domestic violence, and they are often used to kill, threaten, or intimidate women and girls in their homes and communities. In 2018, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched a new disarmament agenda, which called on all states to refrain from authorising arms and ammunition exports if there is an overriding risk of gender-based violence.<sup>5</sup> Yet arms exports continue to be facilitated and subsidised directly and indirectly while the international community fails to hold to account states whose continued arms transfers violate the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and other international legal frameworks.

## How effective are current responses to SGBV?

Like sexual and gender-based violence, responses to SGBV are also rooted in and shaped by systems of inequality and discrimination that prioritise the maintenance of patriarchal power over the lives and rights of women and other marginalised populations. This is exemplified by the chronic underfunding and de-prioritisation of care structures, including services for survivors. In 2019, less than 1 percent of global humanitarian funding was dedicated towards GBV prevention and response,<sup>6</sup> while a recent study calculated that the estimated GBV spending for women and girls in humanitarian settings amounted to less than \$2 per person.<sup>7</sup>

3 Devon Cone. 2020. "Exacerbating the Other Epidemic: How COVID-19 is Increasing Violence against Displaced Women and Girls," <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/7/31/exacerbating-the-other-epidemic-how-covid-19-is-increasing-violence-against-displaced-women-and-girls>

4 The Guardian. 2020. "Domestic Abuse Bill Fails to Protect Children and Migrant Women." <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/03/domestic-abuse-laws-to-be-brought-back-before-parliament>

5 UN Office for Disarmament Affairs. 2018. "Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament." [https://front.un-arm.org/documents/SG+disarmament+agenda\\_1.pdf](https://front.un-arm.org/documents/SG+disarmament+agenda_1.pdf)

6 UN OCHA. 2019. "Gender-Based Violence: A Closer Look at the Numbers," <https://www.unocha.org/story/gender-based-violence-closer-look-numbers>

7 International Rescue Committee. 2019. "Where's the Money? How the Humanitarian System is Failing to Fund an End of Violence Against Women and Girls." <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/3854/wheresthemoneyfinalfinal.pdf>

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Furthermore, survivors of all genders often lack non-discriminatory access to services that meet their unique needs and priorities, including safe housing, medical and psychological care, reparations and socio-economic reintegration, and justice. In areas affected by armed conflict and crisis, rates of SGBV often increase, but survivors face additional barriers to accessing services, including access to safe abortion and comprehensive services related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), without discrimination.

## How are women human rights defenders impacted?

Of additional importance for policy discussions and decision-making processes on addressing SGBV is the rising level of gendered and racialised violence against activists, including women human rights defenders, peacebuilders, Indigenous leaders, and environmental defenders, which threatens or denies their right to free expression and participation across all decision-making spaces. Where women, girls, and other marginalised communities have subverted power structures to advocate for change, they have increasingly been met with pushback, ostracism, and violence. The 2019 annual report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders demonstrated that the increase of misogynistic, sexist, and homophobic rhetoric by political leaders led to the normalisation of violence against women human rights defenders.<sup>8</sup> More than 300 human rights defenders, 13% of whom were women, were killed in 2019.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, women human rights defenders, including those who have engaged with the UN system, often at the invitation of the UN and member states, have faced reprisals, violence, intimidation, and harassment. As a result, they also have experienced adverse impacts on their mental and physical health, which influences their ability to do their work and live in safety.

## What needs to change?

The protection of women, girls, and other marginalised communities requires addressing the root causes and gendered implications of both the violence and the responses and solutions available. Human rights, including women's human rights, and gender equitable international humanitarian law, must inform every aspect of efforts made by the UN, governments, and civil society to address the needs of survivors. Indeed, Women, Peace, and Security Resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), and 1960 (2010) call for the strengthening of local and national institutions to support victims of sexual violence, the participation of women in the development of mechanisms intended to protect women from violence, and the creation of institutional tools to address impunity, while Resolution 2467 (2019) calls for a survivor-centred approach to addressing sexual violence in conflict.

The Generation Equality Forum, the Action Coalitions and the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action present an opportunity to focus momentum and implement commitments on the Women, Peace and Security agenda to shape a feminist future. We urge UN Women, Member States, Action Coalition leaders and other stakeholders to ensure that the Women, Peace, and Security agenda is reflected in the priorities of the coalitions and the compact for continued implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its contribution towards the full realisation of human rights for all.

8 UN OHCHR. 2019. "Women Human Rights Defenders Face Worsening Violence, Warns Un Human Rights Expert." <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24232&LangID=E>

9 Frontline Defenders Global Analysis. 2019. [https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/global\\_analysis\\_2019\\_web.pdf](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/global_analysis_2019_web.pdf)

## Priority actions

**Address the root causes of and prevent gender-based violence through the establishment of comprehensive and gender-sensitive legal and policy frameworks.** International law prohibits gender-based violence, including domestic violence. Policies and programmes must seek to address harmful cultural norms, laws and policies while focusing on prevention measures, direct services, and access to justice for survivors, centred on their needs and priorities. Governments must also develop and implement early warning indicators that are used to track the rates in gender-based violence, with a goal towards ensuring prevention, as well as ensuring women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all such efforts.

**Advance gender equality and women's social, political, and economic empowerment by implementing universal obligations related to addressing and preventing gender-based violence.** Member states must incorporate gender impact analyses as an obligatory annual review method, with sufficient funding allocated for implementation and a robust monitoring and evaluation framework in place to assess impact and accountability.

**Adopt an integrated approach to addressing gender-based violence and leverage the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for feminist peace,** working towards structural changes rather than temporary fixes. Governments must invest in care economies and protecting and promoting social economic and cultural rights; institutionalise leadership for peace; and strengthen gender-responsive budgeting.

**Develop a comprehensive, non-discriminatory, survivor-centred approach, per UNSCR 2467, when addressing gender-based violence,** including in conflict settings, that is centred on the local needs and experiences of women, persons of diverse SOGIESC, and other survivors of gendered violence. Governments should work towards securing access to reparations and socio-economic integration of survivors of gender-based violence; reform and improvements in health care, including psychological support and sexual and reproductive health care; ensuring access to housing and other mechanisms for financial stability; and reforming legal and judicial capacities for the prosecution of gender-based violence. Additionally, the specific needs of women ex-combatants must be accounted for in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration efforts.

**Address the role of militarisation, including the proliferation and possession of weapons, in fuelling sexual and gender-based violence and conflict.** Governments must halt trade in arms and ammunition and fully implement the legally binding provision on gender in Article 7.4 of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT); shift funding away from the military and toward human security; and tax global expenditures on violence (i.e., global arms tax).

**Adopt comprehensive strategies to protect human rights defenders, with specific measures for women human rights defenders** that account for the heightened risk they take to conduct their work in volatile conditions. Governments should also acknowledge and support the critical work of women human rights defenders and ensure that emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic measures, are not used as a pretext to target or silence them. In addition, governments should promptly investigate any murders, attacks or threats against them.

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