



Gender: Different needs, adapted assistance

ECHO FACTSHEET

Gender refers to socially constructed differences between women and men that are integral to any culture and have a direct influence on roles, relations, vulnerabilities and needs.

A **gender approach** allows humanitarian projects to be on-target, to effectively respond to the differentiated needs of beneficiaries and to have positive spin-off effects on resilience.

In accordance with the commitments of the **European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**, gender considerations shall be systematically taken into account in EU humanitarian assistance and protection strategies against sexual and gender based violence must be incorporated in all aspects of humanitarian assistance.



Afghanistan

Key messages

- **Crises are not gender neutral** - they have a different impact on women, girls, boys and men. People suffer from different needs, face diverse risks and vulnerabilities and have different capacities to cope with disasters or conflicts.
- Gender sensitive approach in humanitarian aid is needed to ensure **quality programming**. It is also in compliance with the EU humanitarian mandate and international humanitarian law and commitments.
- **Gender insensitive projects are at risk** of being off-target, not reaching those that might need assistance most and inadvertently doing harm.

Humanitarian situation and needs

Background

The **European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid** highlights the importance of integrating gender considerations, incorporating protection strategies and promoting the participation of women in humanitarian aid.

The **European Commission** is committed to strengthening **gender sensitive humanitarian assistance**. It is currently finalising a gender policy for humanitarian aid and considering the adoption of a gender-age marker, aimed at fostering and tracking gender sensitive projects.

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Major needs and related problems

Crises have a different impact on women and men. For instance, conflict often leads to more single or child-headed households and creates additional workload for women or girls due to men's participation in the hostilities and an increased number of sick, injured and dependents to care for with scarcer resources. **Humanitarian assistance needs to be adapted to appropriately respond to the differentiated needs of women and men** (e.g., distribution of non-food items to women should include sanitary pads). Also, gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are reported to increase during and in the aftermath of crises.

Moreover, gender inequality can leave women and girls in a more vulnerable position. Yet **women also have specific capacities and skills to contribute to recovery, build peace, foster disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction and promote resilience.** While crisis situations can intensify disparities, humanitarian crises are also windows of opportunity for challenging gender-based inequality.

The European Union's Humanitarian Response

Adapted Assistance

Integrating a gender approach in the EU's humanitarian response means doing projects differently rather than doing different projects. At times, minor adaptations are all that is needed: for instance, building separate latrines with locks and lights to reduce the risks of sexual violence against women and girls; distributing food packages that are not too heavy to be carried by elderly women or children who are heads of household or including activities to prevent the recruitment of boys and girls by armed groups.

In Sri Lanka, in the context of a demining action supported by DG ECHO, a gender analysis informed the choice of areas to be cleared in order to ensure safe access for both women and men.

Protection

Humanitarian assistance needs to take into account gender-related vulnerabilities in order to incorporate needed protection strategies aimed at safeguarding beneficiaries from risks related to the crisis, the context or the relief operation. These include the risk of gender-based violence. For instance, in a society affected by conflict where women are traditionally confined to their homes, men are perhaps more likely to suffer from targeted killings, disappearances and arbitrary arrests, while women may lack access to humanitarian assistance.

In North Kivu (DRC), the Commission funded a food security project that introduced the use of fuel-efficient stoves for IDP families. By limiting firewood consumption, women spent less time collecting it in the woods, where they were at risk of sexual violence.

Participation

All beneficiaries should be encouraged to participate in the needs assessment, consultations, design, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian interventions, in order for their views to be factored-in. A participatory approach together with sex and age disaggregated data (SADD) and a gender analysis is a cornerstone for well-targeted and appropriate humanitarian responses. Boys and girls should also be encouraged to contribute, in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

In rural Bangladesh, a disaster preparedness project managed to break gender stereotypes according to which women should stay at home. Women beneficiaries thus participated in the project, contributing to build community resilience in a floods-affected area.

Examples of gender perspectives integrated in ECHO's projects

In **Haiti**, during the 2011 cholera outbreak, mortality rates data revealed that more men than women were dying of the disease. Indeed, fewer men were going to the Cholera treatment centers. Humanitarian agencies investigated and consulted with affected communities and discovered that men did not have accurate information about the symptoms of cholera, mistaking its symptoms with those of HIV. Due to the social stigma surrounding HIV, men did not want to seek medical care and were dying as a result. In response to these findings, humanitarian workers developed targeted health messages for men that led to a decrease in their mortality rate.



Another example in **Haiti** is the distribution of tools and seeds for crops that are traditionally considered male activities. This distribution was accompanied by developing parallel activities like poultry and vegetable gardens, addressed specifically to women to make them more autonomous from men for their own and their children subsistence. © EU

In **Pakistan**, ever since the response to the 2005 earthquake, partners have been paying significant attention to the needs of women and have been increasing access to health services for them, encouraging the setting up of women's groups, training women in areas such as hygiene education, as well as employing women and targeting assistance to widows.

Understanding the traditional practice of purdah (concealment of women from men) and the restrictions it entails for women is a necessary step to develop effective and culturally appropriate responses. For example, Oxfam consulted all beneficiaries and gender and culturally sensitive toilets and bathing blocks for women and men were designed with additional screening to ensure privacy. © EU





Nearly 10 years after the end of a 14-year war in **Liberia**, women's lives have been transformed. Starting with a prominent role as peacemakers, today many find themselves in positions where they work tirelessly to undo the damage of the devastating civil war.

Many women and girls, however, are amongst the most vulnerable. Issues such as high unemployment and therefore dire livelihood conditions, teen pregnancy and related health issues, lower education attendance for girls remain unsolved. Simple actions such as health education, savings and loans groups, or sanitation improvement can change their lives.

In the picture, the woman on the right is the proud caretaker of a public sanitation facility with separated toilets and showers for men and women. In a country where up to 77 % of women say they have been the victim of sexual violence, it is important to minimise the risk of assault. © EU

In **Latin America**, women play an essential role in disaster preparedness and post-crisis situations. Despite being among the most vulnerable groups due to social inequalities and discrimination, women are often well positioned to manage risk because of their roles and responsibilities within the community.

They are in charge of managing resources and securing food and water. They also play a vital role as economic providers, caregivers, and community workers. Through women's efforts, communities have improved their capacities to respond to disasters and prepare for future crises.

This photo shows a Civil Protection volunteer in Somotillo, Nicaragua, carrying a child during an emergency simulation organised in the framework of an ECHO funded project run by our partner German Agro Action. © 2007- AAA/Florian Kopp.



With the unceasing armed conflict violating their homes, the lives of thousands of **Syrian women** are shattering. Physical and sexual violence against women and girls is alarmingly increasing.

As many surviving men remain behind in Syria to fight, these women become the only care-givers for children and the elderly as they flee to safety in neighbouring countries. A recent UN report states that women, along with their children, make up 80% of over 400,000 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan. In addition to ensuring that Syrian refugees are provided with basic items –such as food, water and shelter—, ECHO also funds partners like Save the Children, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) for psychosocial counseling activities, as well as partners like Handicap International (HI), for physiotherapy and prosthetics.



In the picture, a workshop organised by Save the Children where the children come from both Syria and Jordan. Mixing refugee children with children from the host community is important for increasing reciprocal understanding. © 2013- Save the Children / Hedinn Halldorsson