

Key Actions for Gender-Based Violence and Shelter

Note: This is an excerpt from the IASC GBV Handbook.

The following actions apply to the shelter cluster. The cluster identifies a focal point who participates regularly in the gender-based violence (GBV) working group and reports on the cluster's achievements of key actions.

- 1. Establish information-sharing and coordination systems among organisations that register new arrivals and shelter/site planning organisations.**
 - Participate in coordinated situation analysis and use this information for safe shelter and site planning programmes.
 - During registration, identify individuals in need of shelter assistance (i.e. those most vulnerable to sexual violence, such as single female-headed households) and ensure they receive assistance from the organization(s) responsible for shelter allocation and construction.
- 2. Select sites that allow sufficient shelter space for the population and that do not pose additional security and protection risks.** Consider the following factors in site selection:
 - Proximity to borders (to reduce risk of cross-border attacks) or other specific high-risk areas, including the local environment; and
 - Proximity to fuel collection and other activities that involve movement outside the designated site.
- 3. Establish shelter committees with equal female and male participation; monitor to ensure that women participate in the decisions and that their needs are met.**
 - Facilitate the participation of both women and men by reviewing their other roles (e.g. child care) and support community mechanisms to address concerns or impediments to women's equal participation.
 - Provide both women and men with the same benefits for their input and their work in construction: e.g. if work is paid, ensure that women and men receive equal pay.
- 4. Plan the physical layout of the site in collaboration with the community shelter committee, incorporating prevention and response to sexual violence.**
 - Plan location of shelter areas to promote a sense of community and reinforce community-based protection, while also preserving the privacy of the family unit.
 - Provide a common area for children to play where family members can watch them from the shelter to avoid children playing in remote areas.
 - Carefully plan water and sanitation facilities.
 - Make arrangements for lighting in communal areas and lighting for individual use. For example, latrines may be designated areas for lighting; torches for families are an option for individual use. Involve women, men, boys and girls in planning and maintaining a lighting system.
- 5. Design communal shelters to maximise safety and prevent sexual violence.** If communal shelters are to be used, even as temporary measures at the onset of the emergency:
 - Provide adequate material for partitions between families.
 - Accommodate single women and single men in separate communal booths.
 - Seek ongoing input from women to ensure their needs and security concerns are addressed.
 - Inspect communal shelters regularly to monitor security and protection.
- 6. Design and allocate shelters/plots to maximise safety and prevent sexual violence.**

- Ensure that individual plot/shelter allocation does not compromise protection. For example, a separate location for single female shelters may in some cases provide protection while in other cases it may expose women and girls to harm. Assess the risks depending on the context.
- Establish clear, consistent and transparent systems for shelter allocation, distribution of any shelter materials, and criteria for qualifying for shelter assistance.
- Provide materials that are necessary for shelter construction but are not easily available in the environment.
- Do not make women and girls dependent on men for shelter construction or shelter allocation because this often results in sexual exploitation, with women forced to trade sex for shelter.
- Conduct regular consultations with women, girls, and groups with special needs on shelter issues to ensure any protection concerns are highlighted early and solved.

7. Designate space for community centres, safe spaces for women/girls, child-friendly spaces, confidential access to sexual violence care at health centres, and other services and facilities related to prevention and response to sexual violence that allow for physical access, privacy and confidentiality/anonymity.

- Consult with women and girls in the community to design a women's centre or other facility for meetings, counselling services, skills training, and other activities targeting women and girls with the aim of reducing vulnerability to sexual violence and/or providing psychosocial support for survivors. In most sites, the women's centre will be the space for recreation, reproductive health, and sexual violence awareness and counselling services.
- Establish child-friendly spaces where children meet and can share their experiences and concerns with staff and each other.
- Mobilize women and girls to participate in managing the spaces and activities.

8. Consider immediate threats to individual survivors' safety and ensure that he/she has a realistic safety plan. *If the survivor fears for his/her security and has no realistic plan to ensure his/her safety, he/she should be referred — with his/her consent — to the system for safe shelter. 'Safe shelters' should be considered as a last resort because they are difficult to manage, especially in the early stages of a humanitarian emergency.*

- Work with women in the community to form action groups and/or consult with leaders, men's groups, and women's groups to establish a system where survivors can access safe shelter. This may involve staying with a family member or community leader or the allocation of a new (pre-built and empty) shelter.
- Plan for the safety and security for the family/individual/staff providing or managing the safe shelter.
- Develop clear guidelines and rules for managing safe shelters to prevent misuse and security problems. As soon as a survivor is referred, plans for a longer-term arrangement should be developed. Guidelines for limits to the stay in a safe shelter help avoid situations where survivors live in such shelters indefinitely. As much as possible, keep the safe shelter locations confidential to avoid stigma and maximize security.
- Coordinate with all key sexual violence response actors, especially psychosocial services and security/protection staff.
- Liaise with camp management and/or shelter organizations at the site to incorporate shelter allocation as a longer-term security solution. In cases where the perpetrator is a family member, the survivor may not be safe in his/her family home and if the survivor is an adult, he/she will probably need to be allocated an independent shelter.
- Know any national legislation on establishing and administering safe shelters.
- If available, using shelters for battered women in the national system may provide an option in a resource-constrained environment, and may in some cases provide more confidentiality than a refugee-only shelter.
- Ensure that survivors have access to their food and non-food rations while they live in the safe shelter.

- Ensure that survivors can be accommodated with their children in the shelter if they so wish.
- Child survivors should remain in their family shelters when possible, removing the perpetrator from the environment. When this is not possible, ensure that child survivor receive extra attention and care at safe shelters.