Why life-saving sexual and reproductive health and rights promotion and GBV/HIV prevention services are critical

Humanitarian crises heighten women and girls’ vulnerability to gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancy, HIV infection, maternal death and disability especially because of delivering without the help of a doctor or midwife. Women and young girls also become vulnerable to gender-based violence including early and forced marriage, rape, trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse. Humanitarian response must therefore never neglect the special needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls. Young people living in humanitarian-development nexus situations may also face many challenges related to their sexual and reproductive health (SRH) caused by high rates of child marriages and teenage pregnancies, and high maternal morbidity and mortality rates.

Since 2013, UNFPA has been working closely with the Government of Uganda, sister United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and other partners to ensure that sexual and reproductive health is integrated into emergency programming. UNFPA’s programme interventions are based on an integrated approach to gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, as well as socio-economic empowerment.

Our mission in the humanitarian response:

• To ensure that women of reproductive age affected by the conflict and other emergencies have access to quality reproductive and sexual health services, including essential maternal and emergency obstetric and neonatal care as well as HIV prevention information and services.
• To ensure that systems are established to protect women and girls affected by the conflict from gender-based violence and provide care for survivors.
• To ensure that young people access age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health Information and services to empower them make healthy life choices and achieve their full potential.

The situation in numbers

507 women and adolescent girls die every day from pregnancy and child birth-related causes in conflict-affected contexts around the world.
1,276,208 refugees in Uganda (as of May 2019)
82% of Uganda’s refugee population are women and children under 15 years.
61% of population are under 15 years.

In every emergency situation, 1 in 5 women are likely to be pregnant (UNFPA, SWOP, 2019).

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FROM HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO RESILIENCE
Maternal health

Pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death and illness among women of childbearing age. When a crisis occurs, critical birth and emergency obstetric care often becomes unavailable, exacerbating the vulnerability of pregnant women. Basic needs for family planning and reproductive health care and safe childbirth are also at risk. To ensure that every pregnancy is wanted and every childbirth is safe, UNFPA’s goals include:

- Supports health facilities in humanitarian settings to provide high-quality sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services including family planning, antenatal, delivery, and postpartum care, usually transmitted infection/violence prevention and clinical management of rape that are responsive to the needs of refugees and host communities.
- Supports community-based pregnancy mapping and referral care to ensure increased attendance of antenatal care and skilled birth care.
- Supports the recruitment of volunteers to boost human resource for health in health facilities serving refugees and host communities.
- Provides and distributes dignity kits to new mothers to increase facility-based and client-delivered dignity kits. These kits contain medical supplies, soap, undergarments, diapers, a baby shawl & other supplies required based on particular circumstances or cultural context.
- Provides of medical tools to support national health services like armaments and postpartum care.
- Strengthening of the referral/continuity system to increase access to emergency obstetric and newborn care at referral health facilities in a timely manner.

Adolescents and Young people

Young girls and boys are particularly vulnerable as conflict breaks down protective social and cultural norms. UNFPA ensures that young people are empowered to demand their sexual reproductive health and rights, gender rights, and to increase their access to socioeconomic building opportunities for:

- Establishing and equipping of youth spaces in settlements and among host communities to ensure that young people have access to adolescent sexual and reproductive health information and services.
- Supporting youth champions work on accountability of UNHCR and GBV service delivery, identifying and shifting peer educators and community volunteers to carry out community outreach and mobilization for sexual and reproductive health services.
- Supporting health and sanitation drive in primary and secondary schools in refugee settings and among host communities through games, drama and songs as a way of engaging them proactively while disseminating sexual and reproductive health information and services.
- Supporting the development of innovative solutions in skill-building, business training, mentorship, and health services and information, training, financing, and accessing resources to develop strategies among groups most vulnerable to GBV and out of school from refugee and host communities.
- Encouraging youth participation, leadership and innovation in sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence by supporting young people to develop and implement social change ideas through partnerships with regional centres of social change entrepreneurship.

Prevention and response to GBV

Women and girls in conflict areas face themselves more at risk of gender-based violence triggered by loss of displacement of the family heads and the economic challenges in the settlements. To prevent and manage sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarain settings:

- UNFPA has established safe spaces to provide adolescent girls and women in humanitarian settings through integration of gender and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and child protection interventions through Regional Development Initiative’s (RDI) comprehensive programs and Youth Sanitation and Loan Association (YSLA) Adolescent groups.
- Establishment of safe spaces for psychosocial counseling for gender-based violence access to sexual reproductive health and rights information and referral to services.
- Establishment of such spaces is increasingly recognized as a good practice for emergency response and recovery, and a key strategy for the protection and empowerment of women and girls.
- Supports the identification of survivors of gender-based violence and ensures they access psychosocial and medical services including referrals to legal aid.
- Uses the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISSP) guidelines to support the training of health workers in clinical management of rape.
- Provides post-rape kits to health centres serving refugees and host communities.
- Supports social and behavior change communication (SBCC) programming for community-wide social norms change through humanitarian-development nexus through Multi Action Groups, women movement, SAA Girls’ Activates and Integrated Community dialogues for highly vulnerable out-of-school adolescent girls under the Women, Adolescents and Youth Rights and Empowerment (WAY) programming.
- Integrating UNFPA’s ‘Let’s Talk’ scheme to disseminate knowledge in incorporating gender programs to inspire action towards a better life for young people and women and promote their well-being through community dialogues.

Coordination

To ensure a coherent response to emergencies, UNFPA seeks to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnerships.

- UNFPA is working closely with UNHCR, the Gender Based Violence (GBV) working group under refugee response.
- Health sector: UNFPA is focal agency in sexual and reproductive health and rights sub-sector.
- Protection cluster: UNFPA participates in meetings as co-lead of the GBV Working Group.

Refugee hosting districts with UNFPA presence:

- Adjumani
- Arua
- Lira
- Gulu
- Lamwo
- Karamoja
- Kyinga
- Nebbi
- Kotul
- Kaabong
- Moroto
- Rwe MORAN and
- Yumbe districts.