Chapter 2. Terms & Definitions

The following are the terms and definitions used in these guidelines and are provided here to clarify meaning of the terms used in this document. The terms and definitions used here are not necessarily legal definitions and are not intended as such.

**Actor(s)** refers to individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions involved in preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Actors may be refugees/Internally displaced persons, local populations, employees, or volunteers of UN agencies, NGOs, host government institutions, donors, and other members of the international community.

**Child or Minor** Person under the age of 18, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Minors are considered unable to evaluate and understand the consequences of their choices and give informed consent, especially for sexual acts.

**Community** is the term used in these guidelines to refer to the population affected by the emergency. In individual settings, the “community” may be referred to as refugees, internally displaced persons, disaster-affected, or another term.

**Coordinating agencies** The organisations (usually two working in a co-chairing arrangement) that take the lead in chairing GBV working groups and ensuring that the minimum prevention and response interventions are put in place. The coordinating agencies are selected by the GBV working group and endorsed by the leading United Nations entity in the country (i.e. Humanitarian Coordinator, SRSG).

**Focal point/Sexual violence focal point** refers to the part-time or full-time role of designated staff who represent their organisation and/or their sector and participate in GBV working groups.

**GBV working group** A group of multisectoral and inter-organisational actors that meets regularly to design, establish, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate action to prevent and respond to sexual violence. There should be one working group at the national level and other working groups at local levels.

Working groups should include multisectoral actors from the community, government, UN, international and national NGOs/community-based organisations (CBOs), donors, and others. At a minimum, working groups must comprise the sectoral focal points described in the Action Sheets.

**Gender** refers to the social differences between males and females that are learned, and though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures. “Gender” determines the roles, responsibilities, opportunities, privileges, expectations, and limitations for males and for females in any culture.

**Gender-based Violence** is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females.

Acts of GBV violate a number of universal human rights protected by international instruments and conventions. Many — but not all — forms of GBV are illegal and criminal acts in national laws and policies.

Around the world, GBV has a greater impact on women and girls than on men and boys. The term “gender-based violence” is often used interchangeably with the term “violence against women.” The term “gender-based violence” highlights the gender dimension of these types of acts; in other words, the relationship between females’ subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability to violence. It is important to note, however, that men and boys may also be victims of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence.

The nature and extent of specific types of GBV vary across cultures, countries, and regions. Examples include:
- Sexual violence, including sexual exploitation/abuse and forced prostitution
- Domestic violence
- Trafficking
- Forced/early marriage
• Harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, honour killings, widow inheritance, and others

**Humanitarian workers** include all workers engaged by humanitarian agencies, whether internationally or nationally recruited, or formally or informally retained from the beneficiary community, to conduct the activities of that agency.

**Perpetrator** Person, group, or institution that directly inflicts or otherwise supports violence or other abuse inflicted on another against her/his will.

**Rape/Attempted Rape** is an act of non-consensual sexual intercourse. This can include the invasion of any part of the body with a sexual organ and/or the invasion of the genital or anal opening with any object or body part. Rape and attempted rape involve the use of force, threat of force, and/or coercion. Any penetration is considered rape. Efforts to rape someone which do not result in penetration are considered attempted rape.

Rape of women and of men is often used as a weapon of war, as a form of attack on the enemy, typifying the conquest and degradation of its women or captured male fighters. It may also be used to punish women for transgressing social or moral codes, for instance, those prohibiting adultery or drunkenness in public. Women and men may also be raped when in police custody or in prison.

**Rape/attempted rape may include:**
- Rape of an adult female
- Rape of a minor (male or female), including incest
- Gang rape, if there is more than one assailant
- Marital rape, between husband and wife
- Male rape, sometimes known as sodomy

**Sexual abuse** is the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. (See also “sexual exploitation.”)

**Sexual exploitation** is any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. (See also “sexual abuse.”)

**Sexual Violence** For the purposes of these guidelines, sexual violence includes, at least, rape/attempted rape, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation. Sexual violence is “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person’s sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” Sexual violence takes many forms, including rape, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and/or abuse, and forced abortion.

**Survivor/victim** Person who has experienced gender-based violence. The terms “victim” and “survivor” can be used interchangeably. “Victim” is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. “Survivor” is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resiliency.

**Vulnerable group** In any emergency, there are groups of individuals more vulnerable to sexual violence than other members of the population. These are generally females who are less able to protect themselves from harm, more dependent on others for survival, less powerful, and less visible. Groups of individuals that are often more vulnerable to sexual violence include, but are not limited to, single females, female-headed households, separated/unaccompanied children, orphans, disabled and/or elderly females.

**Notes**


3. “Rape/attempted rape” adapted from Tanzania interagency GBV protocols and *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, Guidelines for Prevention and Response.* UNHCR, May 2003.


5. “Sexual abuse,” “sexual exploitation” from Secretary-General’s Bulletin *Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.* October 2003.

6. Ibid.