

Complementary ways of working between GBV and Protection sectors to support GBV survivors

Clare Hollowell · 17 November 2025



Complementary ways of working to support survivors

As part of the 2025 changes to humanitarian architecture a decision was taken that the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) should be consolidated into the overall Global Protection Cluster (GPC). Although GBV in emergencies programming will not lose its distinct technical approach with this merger, it will provide more opportunities for GBV and Protection actors to work together to support survivors. Collaboration between GBV and Protection actors at the community level can generate many positive outcomes, including maximizing financial resources at a time of global funding shortfalls to humanitarian action generally and to GBV programming specifically. Nevertheless, facilitating a collaborative approach to assisting survivors requires careful attention to safety and ethics.

KEY GBV RESOURCES

These resources provide information and guidance on how to approach GBV programming, including GBV risk mitigation, in humanitarian programming.

- [Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Actions](#)
- [The GBV Pocket Guide](#)
- [Interagency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming](#)
- [GBV Case Management Guidelines](#)
- [Library of GBViE Helpdesk resources](#)
- [Community of Practice for GBV Risk Mitigation](#)

It is important that both GBV and Protection actors understand when collaboration is appropriate, what should be in place to enable it, and when to advocate for separate programming. This tipsheet provides guidance to actors from both sectors on effective ways of working together that promote evidence-based good practices for survivor support.

KEY PROTECTION RESOURCES

These resources are helpful to understand both the underlying principles of the Protection sector, and the guidance for key activities including protection monitoring, risk assessment and protection case management.

- [Introduction to the Protection Analytical Framework \(PAF\)](#)
- [Protection Risks Explanatory Note](#)
- [Guide to Protection Case Management](#)
- [Community-Based Paralegal Programming Toolkit](#)



How the GBV and Protection sectors relate to each other

All sectors within the humanitarian sphere share responsibility for integrating GBV risk mitigation in their operations, with technical support available from the GBV sector. This includes the Protection sector, whose core GBV risk mitigation responsibilities are detailed in the IASC *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action*.¹ In addition to these risk mitigation responsibilities, GBV survivors may need to access specialized services provided by Protection actors. For example, women with disabilities who have experienced GBV may seek support from Protection actors to access enabling equipment.² GBV survivors who have land taken away from them will require legal and other support from Protection actors.³ Internally displaced people at ongoing risk of GBV may need displacement-related assistance from Protection actors that can reduce their GBV exposure.⁴

Complementary ways of working ensure that GBV case managers are empowered to refer survivors to specialized Protection services. In some cases, GBV survivors may seek out assistance from Protection actors even before they access GBV case management. In these instances, Protection actors can offer referrals to survivors for specialized GBV services. These and other potentially beneficial linkages between GBV and Protection are explored further in the next section.

¹ GBV AoR (2015). *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action*. See Chapter on Protection. <https://gbvguidelines.org/en/>

² Prevention Collaborative (2023) GBV and Disability Inclusion Fact Sheet. https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GBV-and-Disability-Inclusion-Fact-Sheet_Nov23_FINAL.pdf

³ Women for Women (2022). 'Rising Up Against Gender-Based Violence Through Women Owning Land' <https://www.womenforwomen.org/blogs/rising-against-gender-based-violence-through-women-owning-land>

⁴ Tan, S.E. & Kuschminder, K. (2022) 'Migrant experiences of sexual and gender-based violence: a critical interpretative synthesis'. In *Global Health* 18(86). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-022-00860-2>



Potential areas for collaboration

There are a number of opportunities for collaboration between GBV specialists and Protection actors when supporting survivors. There are also specific areas where engagement with communities and survivors should be separate.

Community outreach

Both GBV and Protection programming commonly incorporate community outreach. This is an area where a unified approach can have powerful benefits. GBV and Protection actors can develop shared advocacy messages for local communities that deepen community members' understanding and engagement around both broad protection concerns and GBV issues. However, any efforts towards joint community outreach and messaging that include attention to GBV must draw from good practices in GBV programming. This means ensuring community outreach promotes women's and girls' engagement and leadership, and that community messaging specifically articulates women's and girls' rights and needs (as distinct from men and boys), to support gender-specific and gender-transformative interventions.

As needed, Protection and GBV community outreach approaches can shift between collaborative and sector-specific methods. Initial outreach can involve cross-cutting teams, aimed at building relationships with communities to understand their issues and concerns. Following initial engagement, dedicated GBV and Protection teams can support activities where a more specialized approach is needed.

Survivor-centered knowledge and skills are key throughout. All community outreach actors, whether specialized or not, should understand how to receive GBV disclosures, provide psychological first aid (PFA) and refer survivors for services according to survivor-centered principles and approaches. GBV and Protection colleagues should have a good understanding of each other's programs and be able to explain them clearly to communities.

Referrals

Providing information and referrals about services requires coordination between different sectors and services. Where safe to do so, respective GBV and Protection referral pathways should be shared between sectors so that survivors can be assisted to reach all the services they need.⁵ Some Protection programs have Help Desks or similar methods for community members to access information and report incidents. This may be a useful entry point for facilitating GBV referrals. Community-based protection teams with long-term relationships with communities may also be well-positioned to help survivors feel safe to access GBV services, including marginalized women and girls who might otherwise be missed in community outreach.

Referral pathways must be regularly updated and new services properly explained. This includes understanding the reach and limitations of services so that GBV survivors are not disappointed – or

⁵ In some contexts information about services may not be able to be shared openly for the safety and protection of staff and service users.

retraumatized – when something they were led to expect is not available. Referrals should always be led by survivors’ needs and wishes. Regular reinforcement of confidentiality, safety and consent standards is key to the success of referrals and to any other information sharing about GBV. Where there are mandatory reporting requirements for service providers, these should be fully explained to colleagues so they can help survivors understand the potential risks of accessing support.⁶

Case management

While both GBV and Protection actors provide case management, these are distinct processes and ways of working and should not be integrated. GBV case management requires specific training for service providers in standards, approaches, attitudes and behaviors for engaging with survivors.

Some GBV survivors may need support from GBV case management as well as Protection case management. Survivors’ choices about whether to engage with Protection and GBV case management are paramount and should be respected. Protection case management staff may need technical support to be able to support survivors who are not yet ready or do not wish to access GBV specialized services, and vice versa for GBV case managers, who should be able to provide basic protection information.

Where both specialisms of case management are operational, standard operating procedures (SOPs) should be developed to support case managers and supervisors to share information about respective sector services, and to facilitate cross-sectoral referrals (with informed consent) in a safe and timely manner for holistic survivor support. Joint training and guidance on case conferencing may be helpful, including involving other actors such as Health, Child Protection and Justice. Standards and limitations around data sharing should be made clear to all parties. Where the GBVIMS is operational, the lead organization should spearhead this.⁷

Prevention

Evidence shows that effective GBV prevention must go beyond awareness raising to address root causes of GBV through sustained community engagement that enables social and behavioral change. Protection actors can be invaluable allies in this work. Several core elements of Protection sector work, such as promoting human rights and access to justice, intersect with GBV prevention priorities. This may present opportunities for cross-sector collaboration on prevention outreach, and for sharing learning across relevant GBV and Protection programs.

⁶ Mandatory reporting is when some service providers are legally mandated to report GBV (or other crimes), sometimes against survivors’ wishes. More information can be found in British Red Cross (2019) Forced to report: The humanitarian impact of mandatory reporting on access to health care for victims/survivors of sexual violence in armed conflict and other emergencies. <https://assets.redcross.org.uk/82b1e254-5524-0172-0612-9ce813c7824c/87ba9b1e-056f-42ed-8e86-639e87dcaa6d/Forced%20to%20report%20-%20the%20humanitarian%20impact%20of%20mandatory%20reporting%20on%20access%20to%20health%20care%202020.pdf>

⁷ The GBVIMS is the GBV Information Management System. It gathers non-identifiable data on GBV incidents to enable service providers and coordinators to better understand and respond to GBV trends <https://www.gbvim.com/>

However, GBV-specific prevention initiatives should be led by GBV actors. Although GBV prevention programming does not involve working directly with individual survivors, it is still specialized. Effectively engaging with communities and individuals to prevent GBV necessitates a thoughtful attitude, ongoing self-reflection, comprehensive knowledge and expertise, as well as the capacity to adapt interventions to context without disregarding or diminishing the significance of GBV. If GBV prevention programming is not done thoughtfully, it has the potential to increase violence and other harms for women and girls and their communities. Any prevention programming must actively mitigate this risk, and should also only be implemented where a minimum level of GBV response services is available.

Access to justice

GBV survivors may want support to access justice. Some Protection programs include legal support, or may be able to facilitate access to justice in other ways. In addition to criminal cases relating to GBV exposure, some survivors will have civil cases for which they need support, such as child custody, divorce or land rights.

GBV actors can liaise with Protection colleagues for information about safe legal services available through Protection programs or in the wider community, and any criteria for access. GBV and Protection actors can also work together to map out gaps in legal/justice services for survivors and advocate together for addressing these gaps. As noted previously, in contexts where there is mandatory reporting, any referrals to legal services should be defined by robust SOPs that protect and respect survivors' rights, needs and safety.

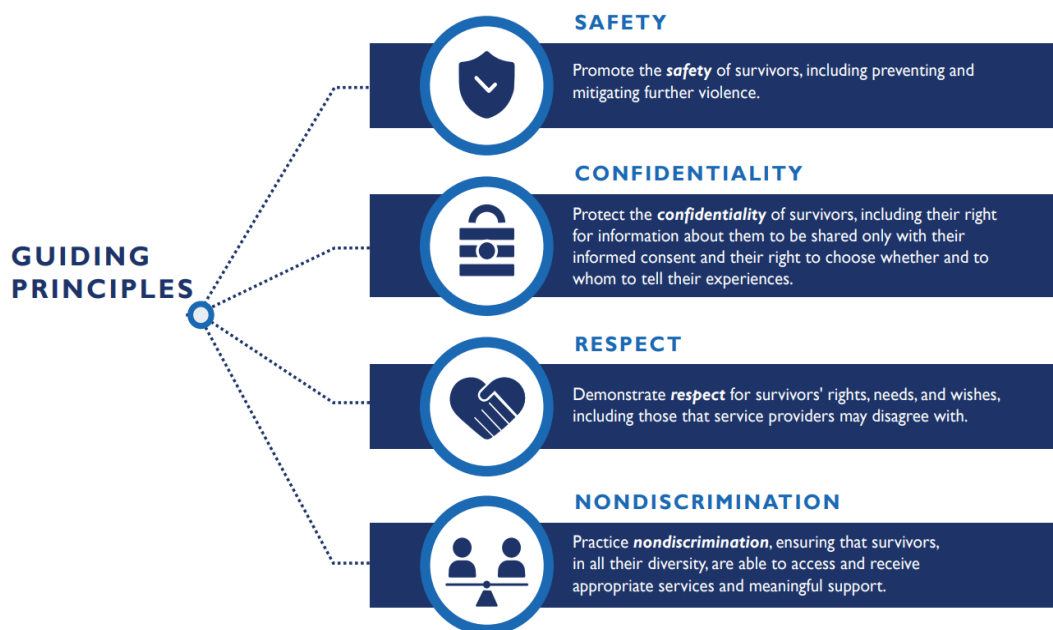


Figure 1: The GBV Guiding Principles, taken from CARE-GBV guide to survivor-centered programming⁸

⁸ CARE-GBV (n.d.) Survivor-Centered Gender-Based Violence Programming. <https://makingcents.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Survivor-centered-infographic-v10-508c.pdf>

Tips on working together successfully

Evidence from humanitarian settings around the world suggests that strong working relationships between individuals and organizations are critical for inter-sectoral collaboration between GBV and Protection that best supports GBV survivors. Building a culture of transparency, information-sharing and collective problem solving can support this collaboration.

Ideally, relationships between GBV and Protection actors will be prioritized and facilitated by organizations. Where there are institutional bottlenecks, reaching across sectors to relevant counterparts may also help. Managers in both sectors can support working relationships that are grounded in mutually beneficial good practices. Managers can also be important models—not only for collaboration, but for raising the importance of and ensuring adherence to GBV guiding principles in work with survivors.

Especially in the current climate of global pushback on women's rights, it is critical that workers at all levels understand and hold “red lines” linked to these principles, including not sharing survivor information without informed consent, prioritizing safety and not compromising on women's rights. To facilitate this, GBV actors can support trainings and other information sharing to Protection actors on how to apply the GBV guiding principles in practice.

Collaborating successfully requires understanding where the GBV and Protection sectors may diverge not only in terms of programming priorities, but even in terms of theoretical foundations. In particular, the GBV sector is informed by feminist and survivor-centered principles. These link with gender equality and human rights principles that often inform Protection sector guidance, but they are not the same. Understanding and respecting theoretical foundations to each sectors' work is critical to supporting complementarity.

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