

IN BRIEF

GENDER INTEGRATION IN UN HUMAN RIGHTS INVESTIGATIONS: EXPERTS MEETING SUMMARY

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, 27 - 28 SEPTEMBER 2018

Event Summary

Since 2010, UN Women and Justice Rapid Response (JRR) have partnered with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to deploy gender experts to document sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Dozens of experts have been deployed from the JRR-UN Women SGBV Justice Experts Roster to UN commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and investigations led by OHCHR Secretariats, to support the integration of a gender perspective.

In September 2018, OHCHR, UN Women and JRR gathered leading gender experts in Geneva for a two-day workshop to take stock of achievements, identify common challenges and consolidate lessons learned from deployments to UN human rights investigations.

The meeting affirmed the international community's increasing recognition of the need for a strong gender analysis in the work and findings of human rights investigative bodies. The inclusion of such an analysis lends further credibility to these bodies and substantially bolsters their findings. Meeting participants emphasized that comprehensive gender integration ensures that investigations accurately document SGBV against women, girls, men and boys, and violence targeting LGBTI and gender non-conforming individuals. It also enables analysis of the gendered nature and consequences of all violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

Participants also discussed common challenges in integrating gender in investigations and in documenting SGBV, and their innovative strategies to overcome these obstacles. From remote interviewing to inclusive strategies aimed at capturing the experiences of diverse survivors of SGBV, experts shared experiences and recommendations to strengthen SGBV investigations.



SGBV Experts play an important role in integrating and advocating for gender perspectives in investigation teams and inclusion in final reports of human rights investigations.

SGBV Experts at the event "Investigating Conflict-Related SGBV: The Case of Syria and Iraq" held in April 2018 in Geneva. (JRR, 2018)

DEEPENING GENDER ANALYSIS IN INVESTIGATIONS

A gender analysis makes visible the gender dynamics in a conflict or human rights crisis. It contributes to understanding how to address root causes of violence and tailor responses to meet the needs of the entire community. It also involves looking at the gendered nature of all human rights violations and their differential impact on women, men, girls and boys, and others.

Gender-sensitive methodologies and the integration of a gender perspective into human rights investigations contribute to strengthening a victim-centred approach, by acknowledging the experiences of women and girls and other individuals in situations of vulnerability, including LGBTI persons. Investigation strategies that make a conscious effort to reach out to all members of a community break down narratives which make marginalized populations invisible or reduce them to passive victims or bystanders. Inclusive methodologies contribute to reinforcing victims' agency and promotes their participation in sustaining peace and democracy.

Cover Photo: A Rohingya woman stands outside the Women's Centre in Balukhali camp in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, March 6, 2018. UN Women/Allison Joyce.

Key Takeaways

SURVIVOR-CENTERED APPROACHES: A survivor-centered approach is at the heart of a gender-sensitive investigation. Experts discussed strategies to avoid multiple interviews of SGBV survivors, including ensuring interviews with the direct victims are conducted only if necessary, interviewing witnesses or reliable secondary sources, ensuring coordination with other actors at field level and enquiring whether survivors have already provided statements before conducting an interview. Experts also discussed the role of referral pathways for survivors to access psychological support, physical medical care, legal services and socioeconomic assistance as critical to ensuring that benefits for survivors and their communities outweigh potential risks of engaging with an investigation.

FOCUSED MANDATE: When gender and SGBV are expressly incorporated into an investigation's mandate, gender integration overall is more successful. Commissioners and independent experts play a critical role in prioritizing a gender analysis in the investigations. Gender integration also relies on effective coordination among all members of the investigation team, building upon common understanding of applicable legal standards and gender-sensitive methodology and analysis.

PROACTIVE INCLUSION OF EXPERTISE: The early engagement of gender experts and training for the entire investigation team are critical for successful gender integration. Gender integration applies to all stages of the investigation, from preparation, interviews and analysis, to drafting of reports. Gender experts play a critical role in providing advice to Commissioners and investigation teams during each phase, and in drafting gender and SGBV analysis, suggesting tailored and action-oriented gender-sensitive recommendations.

Moving Forward

The experts meeting enabled a timely exchange of information and a peer-to-peer forum on lessons learned, further enriching the expertise of those on the JRR-UN Women Roster. Participants described how the cumulative knowledge accrued by experts could be better capitalized upon if experts were connected and able to cross-pollinate best practices in a long-term community of practice.

The meeting also deepened the partnership between OHCHR, UN Women and JRR, and clarified the vision and commitment shared by the three organizations for more effective and efficient deployments of gender experts.

As a result of the experts meeting, OHCHR, UN Women and JRR are working to implement a roadmap based on participants' recommendations, including by creating a community of practice which could regularly convene to support documenting best practices and sharing knowledge and experiences.

STRATEGIES FOR REMOTE INVESTIGATION

In-person interviews—as opposed to distance interviews—are more conducive to building trust with SGBV survivors so that they feel confident and comfortable disclosing traumatic events. They also allow the interviewer to see and respond to signs of anxiety, mitigate risks of re-traumatization and refer survivors to medical or psychosocial services when needed. Yet many UN human rights investigations are not able to access the territory under investigation, either because governments do not allow it or due to insecurity. In such cases, investigators must develop alternative strategies to secure credible evidence of SGBV which meets the applicable standard of proof.

In some cases, investigators may deem it appropriate and safe to conduct interviews remotely using secure, encrypted communication technologies or by gathering information from a wide variety of reliable sources, beyond direct victim testimonies, by interviewing witnesses or medical practitioners. In many instances, investigators travel to neighboring countries to conduct interviews with refugees, carefully assessing the protection risks to potential witnesses before conducting interviews.

More guidance is available in OHCHR's [*Integrating a Gender Perspective into Human Rights Investigations: Guidance and Practice*](#).

ABOUT US

OHCHR is the leading UN entity on human rights and advances gender equality in all areas of its mandate. OHCHR focuses on human rights standard-setting; human rights monitoring and investigations; and supporting human rights implementation at the country level.

UN WOMEN works to ensure that transitional justice processes include women as leaders and participants, and that they have the expertise needed to address women's rights violations and sexual and gender-based violence, to transform gender inequality as a root cause of conflict.

JUSTICE RAPID RESPONSE is an intergovernmental initiative that has recruited, certified and rapidly deployed criminal justice, human rights and related professionals from around the world for ten years. It is mandated to provide the expertise to ensure that mass atrocities and human rights violations are investigated professionally, impartially and promptly.

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