

Irish Consortium
on Gender Based Violence

Strategic Plan 2021 - 2026:

Amplifying women's voices



Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence



Cover: Members of a Village Savings and Loans Group (VSL) conduct their weekly meeting under a tree to count and record their savings, in Chagunda Village, Traditional Authority (TA) Kambwiri, Salima District, Malawi.

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Top: Catherine Alukunio (26) from Trócaire partner Caritas Wamba, in the village of Bahaha in Ituri province, DRC.

© Garry Walsh, Trócaire

Middle: 19-year-old Tanzila and her grandmother (Bangladesh). Tanzila was subjected to child marriage and endured a lot of violence at the hands of her husband. She was, however, able to finish her education and now works as a teacher in an accelerated learning school. Drawing on her own experience, she now supports girls who are at risk of child marriage.

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Bottom: Sergeant Valerie Cole, Car Commander on exercise during Mission Readiness Exercise in Glen of Imall, Wicklow, prior to deploying overseas with UNDOF.

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Foreword

This Strategy is being released at a challenging time globally with the combination of conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic intensifying and exacerbating pre-existing inequalities. Due to the increasingly protracted nature of conflicts, more people are displaced. Continued violent conflict across the globe and new conflicts which have emerged where civilians are both directly and indirectly targeted, means that women and girls are at increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV).

2020 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and it was intended to be ground-breaking for gender equality. Instead, with the spread of COVID-19 and associated public health restrictions, the limited gains from previous decades are being rolled back. Global poverty levels are rising due in large part to the effects of the pandemic and climate change, and we have witnessed a surge in gender-based violence, including child marriage.

Although the current environment is fuelling GBV, it is deeply rooted in broader gender inequalities and patriarchal norms within society. The 'normalization' of GBV is the context in which the ICGBV and our partners are operating. Our new Strategy sets out a road map for the ICGBV's work with its member organisations for the next five years. It identifies specific areas of work where collective action will be crucial for progress towards our shared vision of a world free of gender-based violence.

Since its establishment in 2005, the ICGBV has: provided space for shared learning to ensure high quality programming; ensured a policy response across the humanitarian and development contexts in which we work; and supported and developed Ireland's leadership on GBV globally.

This Strategy provides a timely, updated vision of how we can contribute to the struggle for a world free of GBV. The ICGBV aims to elevate and amplify the voices of those affected by GBV. Increased efforts will be made to engage women-centred and women-led grassroots organizations, giving them more opportunities to influence policy, practice and shifting power towards them. The ICGBV aims to have increased engagement in policy and advocacy, focusing on key international opportunities for Ireland to use its influencing and convening power. We commit to upholding and promoting the highest standards of practice. We will increase our emphasis on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda.

This Strategy renews the ICGBV's commitment to learn, innovate and improve its programmes to combat GBV in humanitarian and development contexts. It refocuses us on the influencing opportunities that will yield greatest results. It reiterates our members' commitment to eradicating GBV and creating a more equal world.

I thank all our members and supporters for their tremendous dedication to the work of eradicating GBV. I thank all the courageous women, and the men who support them, from organisations in countries facing extreme conflict, inequality and injustice, for allowing us to support you in your work, and for ensuring we understand your needs and concerns.



Caoimhe de Barra

Caoimhe de Barra
Chair, Irish Consortium
on Gender Based
Violence (ICGBV)

Adimo Sarah, Acamanaros Women Farmers' Group, Atiira Parish, Uganda, 2020.

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Introduction

Gender-Based Violence Continues to be a Global Problem

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a global scourge despite progress in the struggle to advance gender equality and human rights more broadly. More recently, **the incidence and prevalence of GBV has increased worldwide because of the COVID-19 pandemic**. UN Women has referred to GBV as a shadow pandemic in a context in which women and girls were simply unable to access services or seek safety as a result of the restrictions imposed to combat the spread of COVID-19. Similarly, **conflict and the climate crisis have also served to fuel an increase in the incidence and prevalence of GBV**. Ongoing and new conflicts limit access to functioning services and expose individuals to increased risk of GBV within families and communities, as well as by armed actors, whether state or non-state, and other opportunists. The continued acceleration of the climate crisis is disrupting livelihoods and displacing people and thus multiplying risk factors for GBV. Yet, COVID-19, conflict, and the climate crisis are not the root causes of GBV.

GBV is rooted in deep societal norms of gender inequality that are underpinned by patriarchal socio-cultural attitudes and unequal power relations. Patriarchal attitudes and beliefs are justified by traditional and religious norms and reinforced by anti-democratic and conservative political agendas. These social and behavioural phenomena are exacerbated by push factors such as poverty and insecurity as well as health crises like the pandemic, along with conflict and the climate crisis.

This means that while GBV in humanitarian settings is often more prevalent and intense, **GBV remains widespread during 'peaceful times'**, especially at the hands of intimate partners or family members. Violence against women, the most common form of GBV, is a violation of human rights and is considered by the UN to be one of the most significant violations of women's rights across the world.¹ **GBV is a barrier to advancing human rights and gender equality.**

The political, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural contexts of GBV are specific and varied. These **context-specific factors**, underpinned by gender inequality and violations of human rights, **play a role in the extent to which survivors have access to services, including safety and justice**. Moreover, the prevailing **culture of silence, stigma and shame** that surrounds GBV serves as a barrier to survivors seeking help. Altogether these conditions enable perpetrators of GBV to operate in a context of **impunity** – and for intergenerational cycles of GBV to continue and even thrive.

The **acceptance**, if not 'normalization' of GBV, in combination with an absence of adequate prevention programming, risk mitigation measures and response mechanisms in humanitarian and development contexts, is the operating environment in which the ICGBV works. Ending GBV and advancing gender equality will require **holistic, thoughtful and localised actions**. The members of the ICGBV are committed to **collective action to identify and strengthen minimum standards and best practices on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response**.

¹ See ILO Part A, Module 4, Section 2, "Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights." Available [here](#).

Who We Are²

The Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence (ICGBV) was established in 2005 in response to the horrific sexual violence and abuse that was occurring in the Darfur region of Sudan at that time. Bringing together thirteen diverse organisations including humanitarian, human rights and development NGOs, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Irish Defence Forces, the Consortium is a unique entity with a broad spectrum of experience and perspectives. The value of the ICGBV is clear with member organisations directly engaged in **peacekeeping missions and programming in over forty countries** (including Ireland), and active in **networks and alliances globally**. The global presence and reach of the ICGBV, including a vast network of partnerships with grass roots and women's rights organisations, enables it to **leverage local voices, bring to bear extensive subject matter expertise and access high-level political fora in a collective effort to address GBV and advance gender equality**. While the ICGBV focuses on addressing GBV in the context of international humanitarian and development work, we also recognise that Ireland has a great deal of work to do domestically to advance gender equality and minimum standards and best practices in GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response.

Guiding Principles

GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response efforts across the world have historically been shaped and driven by voices from the Global North and applied to the Global South. Increasing recognition of discriminatory practices and attention to localisation in our sector has highlighted the need to **amplify the role, participation and contributions of local practitioners and grass roots and women's rights organisations**. These voices are critical to shaping the global, regional, country-wide and local agendas to address GBV and advance gender equality. The ICGBV believes it is critical to **increase the space for conversations** around decolonising aid and to **listen to and elevate the voices of grass roots, women-centred and women-led organisations**. By shifting power, a better understanding of the nature of GBV and the changing needs of women and girls around the world can be gained. Learnings can be used to inform funding and policy priorities, programming approaches and the design and implementation of resources and learning models.

Definition of Gender Based Violence:

The ICGBV understands the term Gender Based Violence to mean: Any act of violence that arises from or is driven by inequalities, discrimination, roles, disparities or expectations based on gender. It includes any act that results in, or is likely to cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering for an individual or group of people, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Root causes of GBV:

GBV derives from unequal gender power relations in society, particularly in situations where the subordinate status of women and girls can leave them vulnerable to violence and discrimination.

What GBV includes:

GBV is a fundamental violation of human rights. GBV includes sexual violence (including sex trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment); physical violence; emotional and psychological violence; socio-economic violence; harmful traditional practices (including female genital mutilation/cutting, forced or early marriage, honour killings) and intimate partner violence. GBV should be addressed at all levels from individual to institutional.

Who is affected by GBV:

All sections of society can be affected by GBV but certain groups can be more vulnerable; particularly women and girls. LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people) populations and other sexual and gender minorities also experience and can be the targets of GBV precisely because they do not conform to and/or challenge prevailing gender norms and expectations. GBV against men and boys is often hidden and can be particularly prevalent in conflict settings. We believe that every person, regardless of their gender or sexuality, has the right to live free from violence.

² The previous ICGBV Strategic Plan focused on four areas of work: 1) Learning, 2) Advocacy, 3) Programming and 4) Leadership and Accountability. An internal evaluation found that learning and programming represented the greatest areas of achievement, while advocacy, and leadership and accountability were less realized. As a result, the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan undertakes a renewed vision of collaborative work, one that is directly shaped by an overall GBV framework (prevention, risk mitigation and response) and tangibly informed by relevant and timely guiding principles (most notably a prioritized feedback loop with grass roots and women's rights organisations).

The ICGBV also recognizes that it is necessary to look at all the circumstances of an individual's life, including their identities and context, in order to truly apply best practice. This translates into actively using an intersectional approach – one that considers how gender intersects with other inequalities and forms of oppression to increase the risk of exposure to GBV.

The ICGBV aims to champion a shift in the global North-South paradigm, elevate grass roots women's voices and promote an intersectional and localised approach at the global, regional, and local levels using its high-level political access and extensive networks. This approach framework is identified as integral to applying the 'do no harm' principle.

The ICGBV commits to integrating the following guiding principles into every aspect of its work:

- applying an **intersectional approach** that recognises how the different and intersecting factors of identity can and do impact risk, levels of violence experienced, and access to services and safety;
- **elevating the voices of grass roots and women's rights organizations** and leveraging their knowledge and expertise to shape and inform the identification of needs, priorities and actions;
- actively working to **transform traditional power relationships between the Global North and South** based on meaningful partnerships, common purpose and locally led/informed efforts; and
- **promoting and adhering to minimum standards and best practice** in the sector and the established international principle of '**do no harm**' (or mitigating against exposing people to additional risks through our work/actions).

Aligned to a Global Vision

The prevalence of GBV globally has led to it being accepted, indeed normalised, in many contexts. Yet, global recognition of how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated GBV provides a **strategic opportunity to scale up efforts to combat the scourge**. This includes elevating grass roots and women's rights voices to advance awareness and increase commitment to ending GBV. As well, there are several international

frameworks and fora that represent strategic opportunities for the ICGBV to mobilise around in order to **leverage expertise, bring to bear influence, and convene power**. These include but are not limited to the:

- *United Nations Generation Equality Agenda*.
- *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*.
- *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*. and
- *Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda*.
- *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.

In recent years, Ireland has demonstrated its commitment and leadership on efforts to eradicate GBV through diverse global frameworks and fora including: in its policy for international development, *A Better World*; its third *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*; its chairing of the *Commission on the Status of Women*; in its promotion of gender equality in *Agenda 2030* as co-facilitator of the Sustainable Development Goals; and most recently taking a seat at the *United Nations Security Council*, where it co-chairs the *Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security*. The ICGBV will continue to leverage the political and leadership capital of Ireland in order to **address GBV and advance gender equality at the international level**.

A Road Map for Action

Building on our collective commitments and with the support of our patron, President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins, the ICGBV will continue to **strive towards the eradication of GBV**. Together we are committed to **learn from, innovate with, and amplify the voices of those affected by GBV**. We will contribute to ensuring a **survivor-centred approach**, where survivors' voices are heard and their needs and rights are reflected in the design of humanitarian and development programmes on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response. The ICGBV will engage with those who share our mission and purpose in both the international and domestic³ context in order to **promote shared learning, increase solidarity and foster meaningful collective action to end GBV**.

³ The ICGBV is a member of the National Observatory on Violence Against Women hosted by National Women's Council of Ireland and The National Steering Committee on FGM hosted by Akidwa.

This strategy represents a road map for the ICGBV's work with its member organisations over the course of the next five years (2021–2026). It does not seek to reflect all the work being done by member organisations in addressing GBV, rather it aims to **identify specific areas of work where the collective action of the ICGBV is identified as crucial to addressing GBV and advancing gender equality.** The strategic plan is situated in a context of greater global need to strengthen GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response efforts while increasing coordination and solidarity amongst ICGBV members and their networks. This strategy will serve to **provide a timely updated vision of how the ICGBV can help to create a world free of GBV.**

Vision – Mission – Purpose

The ICGBV believes that GBV is a manifestation of gender inequality and a violation of human rights. As a diverse network of Irish-based organisations, we work collectively and with others in striving to **eliminate GBV in international humanitarian crisis and development contexts.** Through shared learning based on varied experience, and by undertaking research and evidence collection, leveraging political access to influence for change and acting as convenor and facilitator to elevate needs and priorities, we seek to **prevent GBV, to mitigate against its risks and effects, and to ensure that survivors of GBV have access to appropriate services and rights.**

The ICGBV also seeks to **share and communicate our experience and knowledge** of working on GBV to Irish and international audiences in order to support **best practice** and the **prioritisation of GBV** within the wider development/humanitarian agenda.



In Nepal, the Red Cross is empowering women in rural communities with skills that enable them to improve their family income.

© Carlo Heathcode, Red Cross

Strategic Priorities

The following ambitious and forward-looking strategic priorities will be translated into specific and tangible actions. The strategic priorities are outlined using GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response as a framework. This framework is importantly underpinned by the **understanding that gender inequality** (in combination with intersecting inequalities), **represents a root cause of GBV**, and, as such, **serves as a primary analytical lens for identifying best practice approaches to prevention, risk mitigation and response**. The ICGBV guiding principles will be integrated throughout the strategic priority framework in order to shape and inform how the work is undertaken, approached and prioritized. This is reflected in greater detail in the section entitled, '*ICGBV Working Methods and Approaches*'.

Strategic Priority 1: Promote GBV Prevention Programming and Gender Equality as a Fundamental Component of Ending GBV

GBV prevention principally involves addressing and advancing gender equality. This requires **addressing both the power imbalances between women/girls and men/boys, as well as the social and gender norms that justify gender inequality**. Gender norms are reflected in the attitudes and values of individuals, and within the family, community and society at large – this is referred to as the socio-ecological model. The ICGBV identifies the work of addressing power imbalances and gender norms as gender-transformative work. The ICGBV is committed to **strengthening the thematic links between GBV prevention and gender equality**, and **advancing awareness, understanding and learning on gender-transformative approaches among humanitarian and development actors**. This work demands a long-term approach to programming and funding – a strategic message the ICGBV is committed to promoting.

The ICGBV intends to prioritise the following sub-priorities on GBV prevention and gender equality over the next five-year period:

-  **Contribute to strengthening GBV prevention capacities among member organisations and the broader ICGBV network including partners, donors, collaborators, and other contacts.**
-  **Contribute to identifying and strengthening the links between GBV prevention and gender equality work in order to support gender-transformative approaches that tackle power inequalities, social and gender norms, and men and masculinities using a socio-ecological intervention model.**
-  **Contribute to advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda pillars on prevention and participation, Generation Equality, and SDG 5 goals at a local, national and international level.**
-  **Contribute to strengthening the capacity among member organisations to monitor and evaluate programming approaches on GBV prevention and gender equality in order to show immediate and intermediate outcomes as well as long-term impact.**

Strategic Priority 2: Advance GBV Risk Mitigation within Humanitarian and Development Work

“GBV risk mitigation comprises a range of activities in the context of humanitarian response and development work that aim to first identify GBV risks and then take specific actions to reduce those risks. GBV risk can exist in the general environment, within families and communities and in the provision of humanitarian service provision and development programming.”⁴

There is a need to **increase awareness** of and commitment to using GBV risk mitigation measures among development, humanitarian and other sectoral actors in all of the work they undertake. This will require **compiling and distributing standards for risk mitigation, building/strengthening technical capacity among actors, and advancing learning among and between global and local contexts** (including the ICGBV itself).

⁴. Background document for UNICEF/CARE/Oxfam Operational Partnerships on GBV Risk Mitigation. Available [here](#).

The ICGBV intends to prioritise the following sub-priorities on GBV risk mitigation over the next five-year period:

-  **Contribute to strengthening GBV risk mitigation awareness, tools and capacities among member organisations and the broader ICGBV network including partners, donors, collaborators, and other contacts.**
-  **Contribute to strengthening the capacity among member organisations to monitor and evaluate GBV risk mitigation programming approaches in order to show immediate and intermediate outcomes as well as long-term impact.**



*Akello Shaming, Atiira Youth Farmers' Group,
Atiira Parish, Uganda, 2020.*

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Strategic Priority 3: Strengthen the Response to GBV in Humanitarian and Development Contexts

GBV response is the provision of survivor-centred services aimed at promoting and preserving confidentiality, safety, non-discrimination and respect for the choices, rights and dignity of GBV survivors.⁵ This includes a **broad range of services and programming** like access to security and justice, psychosocial support, safety and risk

mitigation, and health care whether in the context of a humanitarian crisis or development work. The ICGBV recognizes the ongoing need to strengthen survivor-centred responses and promote the use of minimum standards and best practice while also adhering to and advancing a “do no harm” approach. Strengthening the response to GBV will require **increased funds** at the local level, as well as **improved capacities** among international, regional and local providers to ensure that minimum standards and best practice response services are available and accessible.

5. The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards. Available [here](#).

The ICGBV intends to prioritise the following sub-priorities on GBV response over the next five-year period:

-  **Contribute to strengthening GBV response capacities and promote the use of minimum standards and best practice in emergency contexts among member organisations and the broader ICGBV network including partners, donors, collaborators, and other contacts.**
-  **Contribute to strengthening the capacities of long-term and sustained system response services to GBV (healthcare, emergency housing, economic support, legal aid, etc.) in the development sector.**
-  **Contribute to advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda pillar on protection and SDGs 5/16 at a local, national and international level.**
-  **Contribute to elevating the need for more funding for response services and programming in the context of humanitarian and development work.**



ICGBV Working Methods and Approaches

The ICGBV is committed to **drawing on and elevating the voices**, input and priorities of grass roots and women's right organizations that are women-centred and women-led. This will involve seeking the input, guidance and collaboration of grass roots and women's rights organizations in the design and implementation of the integrated workplan. The goal is to **define the specific actions and methods** the ICGBV will undertake that are both priorities for grass roots and women's rights organizations as well as areas where the ICGBV is uniquely positioned to add value and make a meaningful contribution.

Thoughtful effort will be made to identify the best way to create opportunities to **elevate and expand the voice and influence of grass roots and women's rights organisations** while intentionally avoiding over-burdening or extractive demands.

Measuring Our Contributions

The ICGBV also recognizes that one of its primary strengths is the value of a **robust, expansive, accessible and responsive network of member organisations** in Ireland that cascades throughout their respective networks of partner organisations, donors, collaborators and contacts. The success of this network is based on **confidence, trust and rapport** between and among the ICGBV member organisations – relationships that are developed over time, with intention and purpose. This importantly includes the opportunity to **learn from each other** which inherently involves both challenging and supporting one another.

The ICGBV believes in **accountability and transparency**. We are committed to ongoing monitoring of our work in order to be able to adapt and improve this work through learning and support from our global network of partners and alliances. The ICGBV will implement an **integrated monitoring and evaluation system** that links the five-year strategic plan to an annual work plan and corresponding logical framework with indicators.



Nangeya Magi (40) member of the Butiaba protection committee, that supports survivors of sexual and gender based violence, in the East of DR Congo

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With thanks to:

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Concern Worldwide
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IFRAH Foundation
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Irish Defence Forces
Irish Red Cross
Oxfam Ireland
Plan International
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