

Joint Statement on Gender-Based Violence and Gender Equality Pushback: Protecting the Space for Women and Girls



To all humanitarian actors and decision makers, governments, donors, and partners:

We, the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR), members and partners, including local and women-led organizations, express our deep concern about the escalating pushback against women's rights, gender equality, and the prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) across the world.

This backlash is unfolding amid escalating humanitarian needs and an unprecedented humanitarian funding crisis. However, this is not merely a financial challenge; it is a fundamental protection crisis. According to the Global Protection Update published in October 2025 by the Global Protection Cluster, 395 million people across 23 countries are exposed to protection risks, and GBV is among the main protection risks reported in these contexts.

Despite the immense protection needs faced by women and girls living in crisis affected areas, there has been a disproportionate impact on the life-saving services that they require as a result of the funding shortages.

Across regions, we are witnessing the defunding and closure of Women and Girls Safe Spaces and other GBV and sexual and reproductive health services, with a higher impact on Women-Led and Women's Rights Organizations (WLOs and WROs). At the same time, we are experiencing a rollback of policies that once safeguarded access to life-saving service.

Cumulatively this is undermining the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, reversing progress on gender equality, and signalling an unacceptable retreat from our collective commitments to principled, survivor-centred, and accountable response.

What we are witnessing today is not only a backlash against women's rights; it is the shrinking of civic space and sidelining feminist movements. This threatens to undo decades of hard-won progress built since the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD 1994) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995).

We collectively affirm that humanitarian assistance must continue to prioritise meeting the needs of women and girls, through pragmatic survivor-centered approaches and safeguards.

We therefore call for urgent and united action to:

1. Reaffirm global and national commitments to gender equality, GBV prevention and response, and SRHR as non-negotiable priorities in humanitarian planning.
2. Protect and sustain dedicated services for women and girls, including safe spaces, at community and national levels, as a core component of humanitarian architecture.
3. Safeguard and expand dedicated funding for GBV specialized services, and the realignment of funding based on the priorities and standards identified by GBV actors.
4. Support women's leadership and ensuring local and women-led organizations receive direct, predictable, and flexible support;
5. Stand in solidarity with women and girls, ensuring that their voices, especially those of local responders and feminist movements, remain central to decision-making processes.

We reaffirm our shared commitment to a humanitarian and development system that upholds life, dignity, and rights; one that refuses to turn away while the space for women and girls narrows.

At this critical juncture, we urge governments, donors, and humanitarian leadership to protect what works, strengthen women-led partnerships, and ensure that gender equality and the protection of women and girls remain at the heart of global response and prevention efforts.

This is not the time to dismantle what saves lives.

This is the time to stand firm, to push forward against the pushback.