RESEARCH ARTICLE

Recognising the shadow pandemic in the humanitarian sector: ending violence against women in the aftermath of COVID-19

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Abstract

In all domains of society, from health to the economy, security, and human rights, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are amplified for women and girls simply due to the issues associated with gender-based violence. This article will, therefore, explore international organisations and non-governmental organisations' commitment to ending violence against women in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. To analyse this phenomenon, this article will first focus on the current necessity to make more efforts towards implementing a gender perspective in the field of humanitarian action. This would allow for women's needs to be better targeted and could also enable them to be better included as actors in this process. Then, this article will highlight the involvement of different organisations in the fight against gender-based violence in parallel to the different programmes put forward in the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5. Consequently, after assessing the current actions made in the aftermath of the pandemic, this article will conclude by putting forth potential prospects for future progress.

Keywords Gender-based violence (GBV), Violence against women and girls (VAWG), Gender, Peace and Security Unit (GPS), Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, International organisations (IOs), Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), COVID-19, Pandemic, Gender inequality

Introduction

"There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures, and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable". Ban Ki-moon.

Violence against women and girls has received prominent attention as a global issue in this century, and this importance was further accentuated during the COVID-19 health crisis. Both the immediate and long-term consequences of the coronavirus pandemic disproportionately affect women and girls (Gavi the Vaccine Alliance 2020). Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in gender-based violence (GBV), which has been dubbed a "shadow pandemic". Violence against women and girls (hereafter VAWG) is considered a major public health crisis and is also a violation of women's human rights. It stems from gender inequity, power abuse, and negative norms (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (n.d.)

Many factors have contributed to this increase in violence, including increased pressure on existing essential services, restricted movement, and increased time spent in close proximity with domestic violence perpetrators as a result of lockdown measures (UN Women 2021, Sharma et al. 2021). These factors have been discussed in greater detail by Carraro in another article within this special collection. Furthermore, although 155 countries have passed laws on domestic violence, and 140 have legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace

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(World Bank Blogs 2020), challenges remain in enforcing these laws. Such challenges, in turn, limit women and girls' access to safety and justice. Not enough has been done to prevent violence, and when it does occur, it is frequently unpunished (UN Women (n.d.)). As a result, knowing that one-quarter of all nations still lack domestic abuse protection legislation, women and children may find themselves in severely precarious situations, unable to access critical assistance and shelters. In low-income nations, the social and economic support networks that we find in Europe and the USA are not always available. In nations where women already face uneven decision-making positions within homes, the mandated lockdown risks worsening certain men's dominance over women's bodies and health decisions (Gavi the Vaccine Alliance 2020). Additionally, the pandemic has put a significant strain on both national and international resources, making it more difficult to respond to the increase in violence against women and girls. Given this challenge, it is increasingly essential to employ a variety of gender-based violence prevention strategies.

Indeed, in their article "Addressing violence against women: A call to Action", García-Moreno et al. (2015) present Ellsberg et al.'s evidence of the efficacy of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls, demonstrating that prevention is indeed feasible (García-Moreno et al. 2015). When implemented within appropriate timeframes, well-designed and well-delivered interventions can yield significant positive effects. The most effective interventions employ a variety of approaches, work with a wide range of stakeholders over time, and aim to address the various risk factors that contribute to violence. While the world grapples with the far-reaching consequences of COVID-19, gender and public health experts have advocated for a more feminist, people-centred response. Against this backdrop, a dilemma emerges about how international organisations (IOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other forms of humanitarian assistance can end gender-based violence.

To answer this question, this article will first analyse how and why a gender perspective is essential to improve the efficacy of humanitarian assistance. In this section, it will uncover the main issue areas that need to be understood through the lens of a gender perspective in the humanitarian field, as well as the three different approaches to gender in humanitarian aid as conceptualized by Elizabeth Olivius (2014). Then, the article will focus on gender-based violence and clarify the commitment of different international organisations, such as UN Women, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the World Bank, to end GBV. Throughout this article, both the necessity of bringing a

gender perspective in humanitarian aid and ending GBV will be explained in light of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 of the United Nations (UN) that focuses on gender equality (UNDP (n.d.)).

Humanitarian aid through a gendered lens

One of the first steps to take in the fight against gender-based violence is recognising the need to implement a gender perspective and a gender-transformative approach in the field of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian action aims to "save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain the human dignity of all during and after man-made crises or natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for such situations" (ALNAP 2018). The following important values should govern humanitarian action: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence (ALNAP 2018). In 2022, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that 274 million people in 63 countries need humanitarian assistance and protection. In the aftermath of COVID-19, this number has increased significantly from 235 million compared to a year ago, which was already the highest figure recorded in decades; therefore, the need for humanitarian assistance has never been more urgent. On the cover of the OCHA's 2022 global humanitarian overview, a picture of young girls in Kandahar, Afghanistan, is presented. This picture, taken in 2019, depicts girls who were displaced by violence to the Tajikan's internally displaced people (IDP) site as they fled violence in Zabul (OCHA. (n.d.)). Already in 2018, the worldwide number of forcibly displaced people rose by 2.3 million, with women and girls bearing a disproportionate share of the burden from both natural catastrophes and violent conflicts (Lafrenière et al. 2019). As Lafrenière et al. (2019) explains, pre-existing gender inequality and discrimination create unique challenges for women and girls during and after crises. Indeed, during crises, many people face extreme hardships such as increased insecurity, limited mobility, sexual exploitation and abuse, and gender-based violence. Therefore, women's livelihoods are disproportionately affected during disasters (CARE International 2020), and girls are more likely than boys to drop out of school during these times (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (n.d.)). Similarly, in humanitarian circumstances, a lack of healthcare has a particularly harmful influence on women's sexual and reproductive health needs.

Why do we need a gender perspective in humanitarian work?

It is these failures of the humanitarian system to provide healthcare or to address the specific needs of women in

times of crisis, which demonstrate the need for a gender perspective within the humanitarian field. Having a gender perspective in the field of humanitarian aid would be useful for both the short and long term. According to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), a gender perspective refers to a manner of observing or assessing the influence of gender on people's possibilities, social roles, and interactions (ESCWA). This point of view is what allows one to do gender analysis and then mainstream a gender viewpoint into any suggested programme, policy, or organisation (ESCWA 2022). In the short term, it would help to ensure equal aid distribution while keeping in mind gender-specific needs, whereas, in the long term, it would be useful to act towards more equitable gender roles and relationships, to consider more inclusively participation, as well as negotiation and decision-making power (Van Dijkhorst and Vonhof 2005). Gender relations build notions of vulnerability and capability as uneven power relations; differing roles and duties dictate, among other things, how men and women would behave and be impacted in crises. These differences explain why women typically encounter greater difficulties in accessing humanitarian assistance. When considering the link between vulnerability and gender roles while simultaneously acknowledging that humanitarian assistance is designed to assist people in vulnerable situations — it is clear why a gender perspective matters in this field. If, indeed, gendered processes are not taken into account, humanitarian assistance runs the risk of not meeting the needs of women and could also lead to further deterioration of these already unequal relationships. In general, recognising the many components of gendered vulnerability is critical for effectively mitigating the consequences of conflict and catastrophes, as well as utilising coping techniques and skills (Van Dijkhorst and Vonhof 2005). Involving women more in the entire humanitarian programme process, from the development of leadership positions to the implementation of humanitarian aid on the ground, would increase their self-esteem, give them better access to health services, and reduce their exposure to risk. A gender perspective would emphasise women's capacities and identify where certain opportunities may be overlooked by humanitarian interventions, making it valuable to boost the efficacy of humanitarian aid while also supporting women's skills. Finally, creating equal participation in peacebuilding, especially at the local level, would substantially improve the conditions for creating a more sustainable and long-lasting peace (Van Dijkhorst and Vonhof 2005). Indeed, some of the factors that contribute to the complexity of humanitarian challenges are that they are very local, context-bound, time-bound, and path dependent. This implies that the value of a solution will depend on a complex pattern of, for instance, local and time-specific circumstances (Kruse et al. 2019).

As Kruse et al. explain, the knowledge that is required to successfully solve those complex problems is hard to find and to then transfer to humanitarian organizations. This is because the knowledge of local actors who are directly affected by the issues at hand is particularly important. This local knowledge is culturally and contextually different, and it is typically hidden and bound informally in small communities (Kruse et al. 2019).

Main areas in humanitarian assistance that need to be understood with a gendered perspective

According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the agency to which most of IO's, NGO's, and UN bodies adhere their policy, six main areas of gender concerns should be addressed in the humanitarian field. It is interesting to recall in which context the IASC was created, as it was established as a response to allegations of sexual abuse of aid recipients in West Africa (Willitts-King and Harvey 2005). UN peacekeeping forces and humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were accused of sexually exploiting women and children. In exchange for sexual favours, cash, goods, and relief were provided. Therefore, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee established a Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises, which developed a plan of action for humanitarian workers' behaviour and principles. Furthermore, the UNHCR implemented a new code of conduct, introducing guiding principles for its staff's behaviour. The six main areas where gender concerns should therefore be addressed are the prevention of violence and protection, targeting and relief distribution, health and reproductive health, nutrition and household food security, income generation and skills training, disaggregating data, information, and advocacy materials. In the third part of this article, I will further analyse IO's responses to solve gender-based violence and therefore will focus deeper on issue areas such as the prevention of violence and protection, as well as health and reproductive health more specifically (Van Dijkhorst and Vonhof 2005).

What does it mean to apply a gender-sensitive approach?

Especially in the aftermath of COVID-19, the question arises of how a gender-sensitive approach can help to cope with the challenges that emerged because of the pandemic. A gender-sensitive COVID-19 approach would recognise the pandemic's gendered consequences and implement strategies to address them. This includes efforts to minimize gender-based violence, lower the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, increase women's access to jobs and financial resources, and offer robust

and comprehensive social safeguards for all women and girls (UN Women 2022a). Importantly, women have been notably excluded from COVID-19 task forces; they account for only 24% of COVID-19 task force members globally (UN Women & UNDP 2022). Furthermore, most of the data on the impacts of the pandemic is not sex disaggregated, and there is a lack of data on gender-specific concerns such as gender-based violence, both of which are impediments to addressing the distinct needs of women and girls (UN Women 2022a, b). As feminist theories also fall mostly under the umbrella of critical theory, the integration of developmental and gender concerns would also require a more bottom-up approach and more participatory methods. Even though improvements have been developed lately especially since the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 adopted in 2000, the current relief practice in humanitarian actions seems to be still in favour of top-down, donor-dependent, and expatriate-run operations due mainly to time and budgetary concerns. According to Al-Abdeh and Patel (2019), a fundamental flaw in the present humanitarian system concerns the fact that funding is still directed to international organisations, which may then disperse/subcontract local "implementers", but standards are enforced differently at different stages of the process (Al-Abdeh & Patel 2019). Local and national humanitarian organisations receive a very modest proportion of total funds (just 2% in 2016) (Ibid). Despite the international community's support for the localization agenda and its dedication to participation and empowering bottom-up solutions, the matching measures to guarantee that financial resources and structural power are likewise transferred to the local have been far too late (Ibid).

Three different approaches to gender in humanitarian aid
According to Elizabeth Olivius (2014), three main approaches could be considered the most prevalent ways to approach gender in humanitarian aid. The three approaches are the basic needs, the instrumentalist, and the modernisation approaches (Olivius 2014). In this part of the article, I will present the three approaches as described in the work of Elizabeth Olivius.

Basic needs approach
The basic needs approach is motivated by the classic humanitarian aim to save lives and reduce suffering, as previously established. This approach, consequently, responds to the needs of the people affected by situations of emergency and displacement after a conflict or a disaster (Olivius 2014). This is "to ensure that they receive the basic necessities of life" (IASC 2006). Following this perspective, considering gender would mean ensuring that the basic needs of women and girls, as well as men

and boys, are met and provide equal assistance and protection for all the population. As for the practical aspect of humanitarian action, this would include a focus on the number of males and females included in the different programmes to ensure a gender equal access to resources and services. It would also secure that humanitarian organisations prioritise providing equal access through specific actions. Concepts of protection and vulnerability are central to this approach and especially concerning the case of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV). The clear advantage of this approach concerns its practical orientation towards more concrete effects of humanitarian programmes for both women and men (Olivius 2014).

Instrumentalist approach
The instrumentalist approach rests on an understanding of gender with differences between women and men. Therefore, men and women are thought to respond and be impacted differently in situations of emergency and displacement. These differences must be understood and considered to target aid properly and deliver effective humanitarian programmes. If not, it may lead to scarce resources being mismanaged (Olivius 2014). Contrary to the first approach, acknowledging gender differences should not just be considered in the design and implementation of humanitarian programmes, but they should also be used to advance the achievement of humanitarian goals in the most efficient way. This approach does not just understand the differences between men and women in their needs, but also in their way of functioning and reacting, and tries to use these differences to optimise humanitarian work.

Women are assumed to possess gender-specific qualities and capacities. Good examples of how these qualities are used to improve humanitarian work can be found, especially in the area of nutrition, household food security, hygiene, and sanitation. In these sectors, a gender analysis is often used to identify current gender roles and divisions of labour and target programming accordingly. In relation to food and nutrition, humanitarian workers frequently describe women as more family oriented, cooperative, reliable, and less corrupt than men. As Greet (1994) was already saying, "women are generally the chief provider of food and emotional security in most family situations. Our approach should highlight these strengths rather than undermining them, as would many 'quick response' programmes" (Greet 1994). Therefore, having women involved in the distribution of food and having women collect food rations are seen as an essential strategy to ensure that food resources are put to the best possible use. Gender analysis is frequently used in these sectors to determine present gender roles and divisions of labour to focus the programmes accordingly. When

it comes to food and nutrition, humanitarian workers typically view women as more family oriented, cooperative, dependable, and less corrupt than men (Olivius 2014). Therefore, including women is seen as essential to ensure that resources are utilised as effectively as possible (Olivius 2014).

The main advantage of this approach, according to the author E. Olivius, is that it shows a rather positive and active image of women as they are described as strategic and important humanitarian partners, actors, and key stakeholders. Their participation in the planning, design, and implementation of humanitarian programmes is not only encouraged but also seen as essential to aid effectiveness. This vision of women as strong and useful actors' contrasts with the more mainstream focus of them as victims and vulnerable individuals, an image that is mainly reinforced by the basic-need approach. However, contrary to the basic needs approach that puts a strong emphasis on the notions of equality and justice, this approach highlights more the contribution women can make towards a more effective achievement of humanitarian goals such as public health or food security. In that sense, concerns about women's inclusion in their lives is not seen as primordial as this approach tends to look more at them as strategic resources that humanitarian organisations could exploit to achieve their goals. This approach also has limit to reinforce and reaffirm the existing gender roles and norms and, therefore, would maybe be useful for humanitarian assistance effectiveness on the short-term but would rather make gender equality worse on the long term (Olivius 2014).

Modernisation approach
The last approach is the modernisation one, and it understands gender as structural relations of power that are deeply rooted in cultural, social, economic, and political systems of the different societies and communities assisted by humanitarian organisations. The term modernisation is linked to the vision this approach has on the societies and communities in need of humanitarian assistance. They are seen as "less developed, traditional, or backward"; thus, all kinds of gender inequality, discrimination, or violence are seen as symptoms of their underdevelopment. The modernisation approach, therefore, considers that this could be solved through a transformation of these "traditional" societies into democratic, modern, and liberal societies. In this approach, the improvement of gender equality is essential not only for the protection of women in different situations of emergencies but also for the achievement of long-lasting peace and security through a commitment to a societal transformation project. Humanitarian organisation would, therefore, not only have the responsibility to give

protection and assistance but it also should provide the tools to reconstruct societies into better ones after crises. The modernisation method is frequently used to guide programmes aimed at transforming refugees' attitudes and ideas about gender, with a special emphasis on sexual and gender-based violence (Olivius 2014).

The main advantage of the modernisation approach is that it sees gender as a relational, social, and cultural phenomenon, while the two other approaches describe gender differences as individual fixed characteristics. This approach allows us to understand that to change gender roles and gender inequality over the long term, changes in the structure and norms of societies are needed. Rather than attacking the results of gender inequality, this understanding would rather allow to address its root causes (Olivius 2014).

This approach also has its weaknesses. The main downfall is that it constructs a simplified binary relation between underdevelopment, gender inequality, and those in need of humanitarian assistance on one hand and the modernity, democracy, and gender equality humanitarian actors on the other hand. This division between one "good" side and one "bad" side constitutes a polarised image, not one representative of the more nuanced reality. Furthermore, it is rather obvious that depicting local actors as culturally underdeveloped does not provide good ground to establish a good relationship and, therefore, long-last peace process. This approach would rather reinforce forms of resistance to what will then be considered as external or, most of the time, "westernised" (Olivius 2014).

Eliminating gender-based violence in the aftermath of COVID-19
As already stated in the introduction, gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as harmful acts intended towards a person based on their gender (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees n.d.). It represents a significant violation of human rights, in addition to being serious health and safety hazard. Before COVID-19, one in every three women was said to be subjected to sexual or physical assault over their lives, according to estimates, but the hazard of GBV for women and girls increases considerably during relocation and times of crisis (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees n.d.). GBV can encompass both public and private sexual, physical, emotional, and economic harms. Threats of violence, coercion, and manipulation are also included. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including intimate relationship abuse, sexual assault, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and the so-called honour crimes. Gender-based abuse has catastrophic ramifications that can last a lifetime for survivors, and it can even result in

death (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees n.d.). Victims of gender-based violence are often affected by psychological and/or physical consequences that can last long after the aggression. Concerning the psychological consequences, research suggests that victims of rape or sexual assault are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, generalised anxiety disorder, substance use disorders, eating disorders, sleep disorders, or to attempt suicide, regardless of the victim's age at the time of the assault (Pemberton & Loeb 2020). Female victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), in particular, are at increased risk of numerous mental health symptoms and disorders (Ibid). As for the physical consequences, various studies have detailed the many deleterious effects on women's physical health associated with sexual violence. For example, victims may suffer injuries caused by the assault itself, such as genital mutilation and wounds (Pemberton & Loeb 2020), as well as abrasions and fractures (Pemberton & Loeb 2020; Basile & Smith 2011). After rape, gynaecological problems such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV transmission are also common (Pemberton & Loeb 2020; Basile & Smith 2011).

Why has GBV increased with the COVID-19 pandemic?

Gender-based violence, which was already a world-wide problem before the pandemic, has gotten worse with the onset of COVID-19. Furthermore, COVID-19 lockdowns, as well as pandemic-related economic and social pressures, have driven a spike in gender-based violence in both households and public settings (UN Women 2022b). Lockdowns and other limitations on movement have kept many women in close proximity to their abusers, isolating them from social contact and support networks. Because of increased economic uncertainty, many women have found it even more difficult to leave abusive marriages. Economic and social instability caused by COVID has also increased the likelihood of child marriage, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking. That is why, among its different areas of focus, the SDG 5 places a strong emphasis on the fight to "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation" (UN Women n.d. b). At the same time, the pandemic has exposed women leaders to a variety of responses, resulting in online and physical threats, abuse, and harassment. Violence against female leaders, regardless of rank, might make it difficult for them to carry out their responsibilities (UN Women 2022b).

According to the World Bank, GBV, or violence against women and girls (VAWG), is a global epidemic that impacts one in every three women in their lifetime. According to the World Bank statistics, 35% of women worldwide have suffered physical and/or sexual intimate relationship abuse or non-partner sexual violence, and 7% of women worldwide have been sexually attacked by someone other than a spouse. Furthermore, an intimate partner is responsible for up to 38% of femicide worldwide, and 200 million women have had female genital mutilation/cutting (World Bank Group 2021). Another one of the targets of the SDG 5 is indeed to "eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation" (UN Women n.d. b).

According to UN Women, these numbers have changed. At present, nearly 1 in 2 women reported that they or someone they know have experienced violence since the start of the pandemic, according to survey results from 13 countries (UN Women 2022b). This problem not only is traumatic for victims of violence and their families but it also has substantial societal and economic consequences. Violence against women is projected to cost some nations up to 3.7% of their GDP, which is more than double what most governments spend on education (World Bank Group 2021).

Failure to solve this issue will also come at a high cost in the future. Numerous studies have found that children who grow up in a violent environment are more likely to become survivors or perpetrators of violence themselves in the future. Gender-based violence is characterised by the fact that it respects no social or economic barriers and affects women and girls from all socioeconomic backgrounds; this issue, therefore, must be tackled in both developing and developed countries. Reduced violence against women and girls necessitates a multi-pronged community-based strategy, as well as persistent involvement with many stakeholders. The most effective efforts target underlying risk factors for violence, such as gender norms and the tolerance of violence (World Bank Group 2021).

International organisations' commitment to end GBV
UN Women

Emerging statistics and stories from individuals who have lived through violence themselves suggest that all sorts of violence against women and girls, notably domestic abuse, have increased since the onset of COVID-19. Hence, the "shadow pandemic", which has spread in tandem with the COVID-19 pandemic, requires global collaboration to effectively bring it to an end. Essential services, such as domestic abuse shelters and helplines, have reached capacity as COVID-19 has strained health resources. Consequently, there is still much work to be done to emphasise addressing violence against women in COVID-19 response and recovery operations (UN Women n.d.).

UN Women is very committed in this quest of ending GBV and developed several actions all around the word to achieve this goal. Specific initiatives that the organisation has undertaken will be examined below.

Data collection

To address the gender-specific impacts of the pandemic, it is important to know precisely what those impacts are. However, this knowledge has not yet fully been collected, as a lack of gender data has, in many cases, obscured the distinct experiences of women and girls. To bridge this gap, UN Women has been working with partners to collect comprehensive data on how women and girls have been affected by the pandemic, as well as by national pandemic responses. Joining their forces with the World Health Organization (WHO), UN Women is providing up-to-date data on COVID-19 cases by sex and age.

They also conducted RGA surveys with about 100,000 individuals in 58 countries, concentrating on five areas of concern: economic activity and resources, unpaid domestic and care labour, access to products and services, mental and physical well-being, and relief measures. They even did a 13-country research on the effects of COVID-19 on violence against women. They have also built a gender response tracker in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which analyses COVID-19 response actions adopted by governments throughout the world and highlights those that have incorporated a gender perspective (UN Women n.d.). Rapid gender assessment surveys (RGA) were conducted in 13 countries across all regions to give critical data on the effects of COVID-19 on gender-based violence: Albania, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Nigeria, Paraguay, Thailand, and Ukraine (UN Women 2022b). Their partnerships also expand to tech companies like Google and Facebook, providing life-saving information to survivors of domestic violence (UN Women 2022a).

Material support

UN Women encourages improving survivors' access to essential services such as shelters and women's organisations, justice and policing, social services, and helplines, including the following: providing funding and resources for shelters and support services in Kosovo, Bolivia, Serbia, Ethiopia, Albania, Columbia, and Vietnam, as well as across the Pacific, Europe, and Central Asia region; but also supporting and expanding helplines in Malawi, Uganda, and Kenya; and supporting emergency legal assistance services in Malawi, Uganda, and Kenya. Driving political efforts to prevent violence against women include the passing of 28 laws in 20 nations (UN Women 2022a).

Other initiatives

They have also partner with governments, UN agencies, civil society organisations, and other institutions to find ways to prevent violence against women and girls, focusing on early education, respectful relationships, and working with men and boys. Prevention is still the most cost-effective, long-term way to stop violence. For more than 10 years, UN Women's global initiative, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces, has worked to prevent and respond to sexual harassment against women and girls in public spaces, and since 2017, they have also been a key member of the EUR 500 million Spotlight Initiative that deploys targeted, large-scale investments in ending violence in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific (UN Women n.d. a).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

To end violence against women, UNHCR also provides several initiatives as "gender-based violence programming (i.e. prevention and response) and risk mitigation across all sectors are lifesaving and an institutional priority" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees n.d., Sharma et al. 2021). Just like UN Women, they collaborate with partners, governments, and communities to combat GBV and to deliver excellent prevention, mitigation, and response activities. Their principal goal is to protect the rights and well-being of refugees and other persons forced to escape. As a result, they encourage nations to respect their responsibilities to protect vulnerable individuals from GBV. They prioritise two mutually reinforcing GBV objectives throughout all of their operations: decreasing the risk of GBV for all individuals of concern and ensuring that all survivors of GBV have enough and timely access to excellent services that match their needs (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees n.d.). GBV disproportionately affects women and girls, and their vulnerability to GBV rises in times of migration. As a result, the UNHCR is committed to consistently improving coordination and programming to protect women and girls against GBV. They also urge for increased funding to increase the implementation of high-quality specialised programmes for women and girls. They also work with male survivors of sexual abuse and survivors with varied sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI) to meet their individual needs through specialised programming. These responses would fit the basic-need approach that we detailed earlier in this article as they recognise the necessity for specialised programmes to answer more effectively the different gendered needs of individuals (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees n.d.).

The World Bank

Since 2003, the World Bank has worked with states and partners to support GBV prevention and response programmes and information products. The bank supports about US $300 million in GBV-related development initiatives in World Bank Group (WBG)-financed operations, both as independent projects and as GBV components incorporated into sector-specific programmes in areas such as transportation, education, social protection, and forced displacement. Recognising the gravity of the problem, addressing GBV in operations has been identified as a World Bank priority, with key commitments articulated in both the International Development Association 17 and 18, as well as the World Bank Group Gender Strategy (World Bank Group 2021).

Knowledge sharing and learning

As we already mentioned with the work of UN Women, the collection of data and share of knowledge on GBV is crucial to prevent and to put an edit to it. Therefore, the "Violence Against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia" study including all available data and information on GBV has been made. The World Bank has also developed a thorough analysis of the worldwide evidence for successful interventions to prevent or decrease violence against women and girls in collaboration with research institutes and other development organisations. These lessons are now shaping the World Bank's work in a variety of industries, and they are documented in sector-specific resources in the VAWG Resource Guide (World Bank Group 2021). Furthermore, the World Bank's Global Platform for Addressing GBV in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings has promoted South-South Knowledge Exchange, gathered evidence on what works to prevent GBV, and delivered quality assistance to women, men, and child survivors through workshops and yearly learning tours. In addition, the platform featured a US $13 million cross-regional and cross-practice effort to create pilot programmes concentrating on GBV prevention and mitigation, as well as information and learning efforts, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Georgia (World Bank Group 2021).

Addressing GBV in World Bank Group-financed operations

The World Bank encourages both stand-alone GBV operations and the incorporation of GBV initiatives into development programmes in important sectors. In August 2018, the World Bank pledged US $100 million to aid in the prevention of GBV in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The World Bank approved US $107 million in financial grants to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda for the Great Lakes Emergency Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Women's Health Project to provide integrated health and counselling services, legal aid, and economic opportunities to survivors of, or those affected by, sexual and GBV. The World Bank is also experimenting with novel applications of social media to influence behaviour. In the South Asia area, for example, the pilot programme WEvolve employed social media to empower young women and men to confront and break through established conventions that support gender violence (World Bank Group 2021). The bank has also been adopting new standards in GBV risk identification, mitigation, and response to all new operations in the sustainable development and infrastructure sectors, guided by the GBV Good Practice Note, which was released in October 2018. These standards are also being implemented in current operations; GBV risk management methodologies are being applied to a subset of high-risk businesses in fiscal year 2019.

Strengthening institutional efforts to address GBV

In October 2016, the World Bank launched the Global Gender-Based Violence Task Force to strengthen the institution's efforts to avoid and respond to GBV risks, particularly sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), which may arise in World Bank-supported programmes. It builds on previous efforts by the World Bank and other actors to combat violence against women and girls by strengthening methods for identifying and analysing key risks, as well as establishing critical mitigation strategies to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and other forms of GBV (World Bank Group 2021). In addition to the Good Practice Note and GBV Risk Assessment Screening Tool, which allow for improved GBV risk identification and management, the bank has made significant changes in its operational processes, such as the incorporation of SEA/GBV provisions into its safeguard and procurement requirements as part of evolving Environmental, Social, Health, and Safety (ESHS) standards, and the development of GBV reporting and response measures in the Environmental and Social Reporting Framework (World Bank Group 2021).

COVID-19 specific measures

The World Bank Group's Women, Business, and the Law project is gathering new information on the policies that governments are putting in place to address the unique challenges that women face during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to preliminary findings, several countries have implemented a variety of measures to make it easier for survivors of violence to access protection orders, the court system, and services such as medical and psychological support, legal aid, hotlines, shelters and housing, and financial assistance (World Bank Blogs

2020). The World Bank has devised several strategies to combat the problem of GBV brought on by the unprecedented threats posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. The World Bank's response to the COVID-19 issue aims to prevent and respond to domestic violence by providing protection, support services, and reporting mechanisms, including hotlines and programmes addressing gender-based violence and mental health. To reduce the rise in intimate partner and intra-family violence, the method incorporates behaviour change and social care services. Countries should adopt emergency solutions such as supporting women's access to the digital world via mobile phones to enable them to contact gender-based violence reporting systems, as well as allocating financing and providing training for gender-based violence healthcare response professionals (UN Women n.d. c).

Potential perspectives for future prospects

According to empirical studies, the success of aid in terms of structural impact depends on the existence of functional and legitimate public institutions, so a functional political regime has a positive influence on aid, rather than the reverse (Schloms 2003). Humanitarian goals and peace agreements have a close relationship; out of the 1500 peace agreements included in the Peace Agreements Database, about 150 of them make reference to humanitarian goals such as respect for international humanitarian law or the protection of civilians (Haider 2022). Until the final decade of the previous millennium, that sexual violence in armed conflict received little political attention. Since then, international actors started taking steps to stop its emergence and lessen its effects in nations that are currently experiencing or have recently experienced armed conflict (Veit 2019). The UN and its affiliate organisations, as well as peace missions, organise actions to eliminate sexual violence as an essential component of wider strategies for establishing peace (Veit 2019). We saw in the previous section that various international organisations are setting up programmes at the international level to put an end to gender-based violence and violence against women. This violence is exacerbated not only in the context of pandemics but also in conflict situations. For instance, Capasso et al. (2022) reported that displaced women in Ukraine experienced the worst levels of violence in conflict areas, notably at the hands of armed men. Women encounter the greatest challenges in accessing social services, transportation, paid employment, and essential products in conflict zones. The findings of the study by Capasso et al. (2022) emphasise the necessity of extending and adapting violence prevention programmes to the special vulnerabilities of displaced women before, during, and after displacement. The contribution of a gender perspective must also affect

peacekeeping measures that will ensure the restoration of institutions and a functional political regime that will favourably influence humanitarian aid and the protection of women to ensure the long-term prevention of such violence. To better understand the unique needs of women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence and to better prevent it, this section will discuss the significance of a gender perspective as well as the intersection of the Women's Peace and Security and Youth Peace and Security agendas.

Advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda

The United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPPA) created a distinct Gender, Peace and Security Unit (GPS) in 2016 to oversee the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to encourage equal participation in peacebuilding. To ensure that gender-related issues and perspectives were taken into account in all Department actions, the UNDPPA's WPS Policy was amended in June 2019. Five objectives are outlined in this approach for carrying out the WPS agenda. The promotion of women's inclusion and meaningful participation in all peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts; raising women's participation in political and electoral processes; ensuring the application of gender mainstreaming in all projects through resource allocation, gender markers, and tracking; and finally preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence as a priority for all parties involved are among these priorities (United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs 2020).

In the study "From Words to Action: The Experience of UN Special Political Missions in Colombia on Women, Peace and Security" (2020) made by the UNDPPA, they explain how the Colombian peace process and especially the 2016 Final Peace Agreement were ground-breaking in incorporating women's participation in peace talks and strong women's rights and gender provisions. They are largely regarded as a worldwide model for gender equality and the incorporation of women's rights. The UN and others in the international community played an active role, first by encouraging and advising key actors to advance the WPS agenda during the peace talks (2012–2016) and then by establishing two consecutive special political missions (SPMs) in Colombia to verify specific provisions of the Agreement. Similarly, the experience of a series of UN Special Political Missions in assisting Colombia's parties and society in the verification and implementation of the Agreement has broken new ground and offers lessons for the UN and the larger international community on how to support the application of gender-inclusive peace agreements. The breadth and depth of Colombia's experience may be applied in other

situations to advance the WPS agenda, particularly when the UN is engaged (United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs 2020).

Some of these lessons include using mission strengths to advance the WPS agenda in the peace process, as well as gender-sensitive verification. This demonstrates that strong UN leadership, both political and technical, is certainly the most significant component in promoting the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, as are coherence at all levels of the UN and coordination on the WPS agenda in the peace process. When SPMs are incorporated as strategic resources for furthering the gender and women's rights contents of peace accords and the WPS agenda, they may also benefit from a large field presence, a well-coordinated network of gender focal points, and high-level access. To efficiently raise awareness and advance it, it is important to highlight progress and challenges in gender-sensitive implementation of peace agreements in the secretary-general's reports to the Security Council, together with a strong mission communications strategy. Extrabudgetary funding is important for advancing strategic gender work, and the Colombia experience may serve as a model for other missions in this area (United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs 2020).

Furthermore, some lessons and recommendations were provided on how to advance the WPS agenda within internal mission policies and practices. They show how mission-wide internal gender policies are critical and how they are backed by strong alignment within the UN and new accountability systems; the most difficulties are frequently focused in areas of internal culture. Furthermore, due to the ambitious gender content of a peace deal, an SPM must have matching resources and specialised ability to enable implementation. They explain that, in the future, more systematic internal training on gender can help mainstream a high level of gender-sensitive analysis, reporting, and verification. Indeed, they note that the monitoring and verification mechanism's experience during the first SPM demonstrated the numerous benefits of involving women in such operations, emphasising the importance of including gender criteria in the selection and posting of UN observers, particularly for leadership roles (United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs 2020).

Recommendations to consider the complementarity of the WPS and the Youth Peace and Security (YPS) agendas

As already stated, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda was formally established in 2000 when the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325. In addition, with the passage of Resolution 2250 (2015), the UN Security Council highlighted the importance of young people in promoting and preserving peace and security, identifying five action pillars: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration. While the initial impetus for the YPS agenda stemmed from concerns about rapidly changing demographics and potential peace and security concerns from "youth", largely synonymous with young men — resolution 2419 (2018) paid special attention to the meaningful inclusion of young women in formal and informal peace processes (Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) 2019).

The two agendas share some similarities which imply a certain form of complementarity between them. First and foremost, they are both backed by the untiring efforts of civil society and a varied set of member states. They also strive to broaden participation in what have historically been exclusive political and peace processes, as well as to encourage the international community to resolve disputes in more comprehensive ways. However, among other differences, WPS and YPS deal with different types of exclusion. While young men and women may all be anticipated to grow out of age-based discrimination, young women will continue to face various types of gender marginalisation. These specificities of the two agendas explain the need for recommendations to better understand if and how they can complement each other or not. As a result, it is critical to recognise that considering women and young people as identical categories ignores the specificity of the prejudice experienced by these demographic groups (United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs 2020).

It is necessary to avoid using language that lumps women and youth together ("women and youth"). They need to be considered as distinct categories, with differentiated needs and agency and, where possible, refer to them separately. In the future, it may be beneficial to address gendered experiences and problems in YPS work, as well as evaluate how certain treatments may affect young women, males, and gender-nonconfirming people differently. Similarly, it is important to consider age dynamics in WPS work and address the age-specific concerns of young women. To add to SDG 5's target of empowering women's leadership, it is needed to empower and support young women and their participation in peace and security initiatives and consider specific actions to support young women in leadership spaces. This is further developed in Bode's article, which outlines the importance of a gender balance in leadership positions in intergovernmental organizations (Bode 2023). Engaging young men in discussions around WPS and gender equality to raise awareness would help to challenge existing power structures and help towards

change in gender roles. Finally, partnerships with civil society led by women of all ages are important just as well as ensuring a safe environment for their peace work (United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs 2020).

Conclusion and recommendations for ending violence against women and girls in the context of COVID-19

As already stated previously, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic must be viewed with a gendered lens to protect women and girls and address the increase in violence against women and girls (VAWG) during this pandemic. In a policy brief made by UN Women about COVID-19 and ending VAWG in Ethiopia, some recommendations built upon measures that have been proven to be effective and that can be implemented are given. These recommendations include strengthening essential services for women and girls and ensuring they are available during the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Women Ethiopia/EVAW Team 2020). This means several things: First, it implies the recognition of the importance of keeping operational the provision of essential services for VAWG survivors. Essential services are provided by health, social services, police, and justice sectors, including both governmental and non-governmental organizations. But it also also means strengthening essential services for VAWG survivors, including shelters as well as the capacity of service providers to conduct risk and needs assessments, safety planning and case management to support VAWG survivors and their children during times of crisis, such as a global pandemic. Providing training to increase police awareness and understanding of increasing rates of VAWG during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide guidance on how police can and should respond to incidents of gender-based violence, protect survivors of violence, and where to refer VAWG survivors for protection and support is also a very important aspect (UN Women Ethiopia/EVAW Team 2020).

A second major recommendation concerns ensuring women's leadership and participation in COVID-19 response and recovery plans. This can be done by ensuring women's organisations, such as Setaweet, European Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), and the Network of Ethiopian Women Association (NEWA), participate in COVID-19 decision-making and planning processes to ensure that the needs and concerns of women and girls (including VAWG survivors) are incorporated into COVID-19 response and recovery plans. Considering the role of women's organisations in longer-term solutions to address the increase in VAWG during crises such as global pandemics is also fundamental, and finally, it is important to ensure support for grassroots women's

rights organizations, especially those providing essential services to hard-to-reach, vulnerable, and marginalized populations, including populations in rural and remote areas, slum areas, displacement sites and collective centres, and refugee camps (UN Women Ethiopia/EVAW Team 2020).

The last recommendations are to ensure that VAWG data is readily available to policymakers and practitioners for evidence-based planning and response. This implies conducting GBV rapid assessments to ensure the availability of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis to inform emergency interventions and longer-term response and recovery planning. Another measure going with this recommendation involves advocating for sex disaggregated data collection of COVID-19 cases and deaths (UN Women Ethiopia/EVAW Team 2020).

This article aimed to answer the following question: how can international organisations (IOs) and humanitarian assistance act towards putting an end to gender-based violence? First and foremost, it is necessary to review humanitarian aid from a gender perspective. The three different approaches demonstrated by E. Olivius (2014) all have their strengths and weaknesses, but together, they indicate that men and women have distinct needs, operate differently, and are built according to gender roles dictated by diverse cultural, political, and socioeconomic variables. Taking into account, a gender perspective would help humanitarian assistance assess more efficiently women's specific needs, but also enable them to become part of the process as actors and to develop their full potential, and finally to bring change at the root cause of gender discrimination and violence.

International organisations also need to be committed to ending GBV, and this commitment is shown through different measures. UN Women's measures include data collection, material support, but also partnership with governments UN agencies, civil society organisations, and other institutions to find ways to prevent violence against women and girls. As GBV disproportionately affects women and girls, and in situations of displacement, the UNHCR is committed to supporting states to uphold their responsibility to ensure that people of concern are protected against GBV. They seek to decrease the risk of GBV for all people of concern and to guarantee that all GBV survivors have enough and timely access to excellent services that match their requirements. They also advocate for appropriate funding to promote the implementation of high-quality specialised programmes for women and girls. The World Bank also put a strong emphasis on knowledge sharing and learning, on addressing GBV in its group-financed operations, but also on strengthening institutional efforts to address GBV through the

Global Gender-Based Violence Task Force for example. The World Bank also put in place specific measures to tackle the increase of GBV due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, this article gives some lessons and recommendations for prospects to better tackle the issue of gender-based violence in the future and especially in the aftermath of the pandemic. Some recommendations inspired by the special political missions (SPMs) established for the peace process in Colombia explain how further ameliorations can be done to improve the WPS agenda. Furthermore, recommendations on the complementarity between the YPS and the WPS agendas are made as it is fundamental to understand the similarities and the differences between the two agendas to make sure they can reinforce each other to better target women and young girls' needs. To conclude this article, the last recommendations of this article concern the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic. To better prevent and fight for an end to violence against women and girls in the context of pandemics and conflicts, it is argued that strengthening essential services for women and girls and ensuring they are available during the COVID-19 pandemic but also ensuring women's leadership and participation in COVID-19 response and recovery plans are needed just as well as ensuring that VAWG data is readily available to policymakers and practitioners for evidence-based planning and response.

Abbreviations

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
ESHS	Environmental, Social, Health, and Safety
EWLA	European Women Lawyers Association
GBV	Gender-based violence
GPS	Gender, Peace and Security Unit
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally displaced people
IOs	International organisations
IPV	Intimate partner violence
NEWA	Network of Ethiopian Women Association
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OHCA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RGA	Rapid gender assessment surveys
SGBV	Sexual gender-based violence
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
SOGI	Sexual orientations and gender identities
SPMs	Special political missions
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
UN	United Nations
UNDPPA	United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WBG	World Bank Group
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security
WHO	World Health Organization
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

Declarations

Competing interests
The author declares no competing interests.

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