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During a crisis, the provision of sexual and reproductive health care for women and girls is life-saving, empowering, and cost-effective. Despite this, it remains one of the most neglected and underfunded components of humanitarian response.

Access to sexual and reproductive health care, free from stigma and persecution, is a basic human right. When this right is upheld, individuals and communities can thrive. Australia's commitment to championing global gender equality supports this aim.

Despite impressive gains, gender inequality is pervasive around the world. When a crisis hits, women and girls are disproportionately affected and all forms of gender-based violence increase during disasters and displacement.

Humanitarian assistance is more effective, fair and transformative when it includes women and girls and those most excluded, and protects their human rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights and right to safety. Beyond saving lives, this approach is essential to restoring trust and cohesion among people traumatised by loss and violence, and empowering communities impacted by crises to rebuild their lives.

Australia must continue to be at the forefront of this agenda by globally championing women's and girls' empowerment across our humanitarian and development programs. This must include investments to scale up access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care and protection from sexual and gender-based violence.



60%

of preventable maternal deaths occur in times of conflict, displacement, and natural disasters.(1)



20%

women of childbearing age are likely to be pregnant in a crisis or refugee situation.(2)



>70%

of women have experienced gender-based violence in some crisis settings.(3)



Up to 75%

of women affected by some conflicts wanted to delay pregnancy, have no additional children, or did not want to be pregnant.(4)

1) OECD (2015). States of fragility 2015: meeting post-2015 ambitions.

2) UNFPA. Women are the Fabric: reproductive health for communities in crisis.

3) ActionAid (2016). On the Frontline: catalyzing women's leadership in humanitarian action.

4) Therese McGinn et al., (2011) "Family planning in conflict: results of cross-sectional baseline surveys in three African countries", Conflict and Health 5(11); Benage et al., (2015); "An assessment of antenatal care among Syrian refugees in Lebanon," Conflict and Health 9(8)

Maternal Morbidity & Mortality

Maternal mortality spikes in times of crises. Without adequate healthcare, preventable and treatable complications can become life threatening. Higher rates of sexual violence, limited access to contraception and limited decision-making power regarding sexual intercourse mean many women and girls can experience unwanted pregnancies and may resort to unsafe abortions, leading to further health risks.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Crises exacerbate sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, forced pregnancy, 'honour' violence, trafficking, and exploitation. In addition to the violence perpetrated by armed groups and criminals, family violence also spikes - aggravated by displacement and trauma.

Gender Inequality

Crises exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities. This means women and girls are often sidelined from decision-making forums; are unable to participate equally in education, work or leadership roles.

Marginalised and vulnerable groups face additional risks and are often excluded from disaster preparedness and response programs. These groups include adolescent girls, unaccompanied minors, ethnic and religious minorities groups, people of diverse sexual orientation or gender identity, people living with disabilities, people living with HIV, and people engaged in sex work.

Australia's efforts to address these challenges have already reached millions of people across the world. To continue to lead on this agenda, the Australian Government must invest more in humanitarian action that promotes gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. This means:

- 1) Increasing the humanitarian budget to more than \$500 million a year, as advised in the Foreign Policy White Paper. Within this budget, Australia must ensure dedicated investments for sexual and reproductive health and rights in emergency preparedness and response programs, including sexual and gender-based violence.
- 2) Ensuring Australia's humanitarian assistance meets the Government's 80 per cent gender equality target so that Australian aid effectively and meaningfully promotes gender equality in its implementation.
- 3) Recognising that the needs of women and girls and other vulnerable and marginalised groups are often ignored in humanitarian responses. Multi-sectoral approaches that place gender equality and inclusion at the centre of investment, design and delivery are therefore essential.