INTRODUCTION

Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, flooding and landslides caused by heavy rains, tropical storms, hurricanes, forest fires, and drought, regularly affect countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Climate-related disasters are on the rise. Approximately three quarters of the population in the region are estimated to live in disaster-prone areas. In just the past 10 years, more than 800 disasters hit the region affecting roughly 64 million people.

Why GBV matters in disaster situations?

In emergency situations women and girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence and coercion as well as to other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) such as sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence, physical violence, trafficking and femicide. Although obtaining accurate data on this issue is difficult, according to estimates, almost 65,000 women would have been raped in the contexts shown on this map. The gender-based inequalities and discrimination that cause and perpetuate GBV in ‘normal’ times persist and even escalate in times of crisis.

DOCUMENTING THE LINKAGES: GBV AND NATURAL DISASTERS

To strengthen regional capacity to prevent and respond to GBV in acute emergencies caused by natural disasters, UNFPA commissioned a study to identify and systematize relevant information on the linkages between GBV and natural disasters.

Key Findings: General

- GBV that occurs in the context of natural disasters is largely a neglected area of concern by both disaster management and GBV actors;
- In the region, GBV, particularly domestic and intimate partner violence, is considered pervasive in women and girls’ lives prior, during and after disasters;
- Collecting data to demonstrate the prevalence or incidence of GBV before, during and after a disaster is challenging due to underreporting, difficulties in capturing and recording incidents, and discrepancies between different data collection and analysis methodologies;
- Only in the aftermath of recent major disasters has GBV received more attention as an area of particular concern.

Key Findings: GBV across the disaster risk management (DRM) cycle

Preparedness

- In most countries GBV is neither mentioned nor prioritized in contingency planning frameworks and activities;
- GBV is rarely included in early warning and information management systems.

Acute emergency and response

- Although GBV is recognized as life-saving, it is not yet sufficiently prioritized in disaster response in the region;
- The attitudes, knowledge and skills of actors working in disasters are limited to effectively prevent and respond to GBV;
- The lack of linkages between development and humanitarian organizations and actors results in lack of consideration of GBV in disasters in both GBV policies and programming and in disaster risk management;
- The existence of prevention and response mechanisms, services and skills on GBV prior to a disaster is critical to determine how much attention will be paid to it when a disaster hits.

Recovery

- GBV risks are reflected in recovery guidance and tools;
- In the recovery phase, forced migration, loss of economic resources and dependency on others can lead to negative coping mechanisms such as sex in exchange for basic goods or services, or abuses such as trafficking;
- Intra-household tension may also result from women’s increased responsibilities and participation in reconstruction processes.

Why UNFPA?

UNFPA and UNICEF, under the framework of the Protection Cluster, are leading the efforts for the prevention and response to GBV in emergency contexts under the auspices of the Protection Cluster’s GBV Area of Responsibility. UNFPA is also one of the leading UN operational agencies with a strong mandate in the area of gender equality, with recognized contributions on key gender issues such as reproductive health and rights, women’s rights and the elimination of discrimination and violence against women, particularly sexual violence.

FINDINGS: THE WAY FORWARD
The study identified three main areas of work:

1. Generate and share knowledge on GBV in natural disasters through systematic and comprehensive research, data collection and analysis
   A. Harmonize GBV data collection and analysis also through the roll-out of the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS); ²
   B. Undertake further research on GBV work in disaster-prone areas.
2. Build capacity at all levels and across sectors of intervention to effectively address GBV
   A. Promote efforts to integrate GBV in disaster legislation, policies and plans to prevent, mitigate and respond to it in emergencies;
   B. Build the capacity of disaster and GBV actors to integrate GBV issues in disaster preparedness, response and recovery.
3. Enhance coordination and cross-fertilization between local and international, disaster-focused and gender/GBV actors on the ground
   A. Promote a coordinated approach to disasters and GBV through the Protection Working Group, REDLAC and GTSP-LAC;
   B. Ensure the deployment of expertise on GBV to disaster-affected countries.