



Disaster-Ready Guide 1

Why are women and girls more vulnerable to the impacts of disasters?

“It is a plain and simple truth that disasters reinforce, perpetuate and increase gender inequality, making bad situations worse.”

*Margareta Wahlström,
the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative
for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR, 2012](#))*

Why are women and girls more vulnerable to the impact of disasters?

Women and girls may have:

- **less access to information**, education, and early warning systems that can help them prepare for and avoid disasters.
- **more responsibility for caring** for the home and the people in it, including children, older people, and people with disabilities that prevent them from evacuating, accessing relief services, or finding alternative livelihoods after a disaster.
- **less mobility and autonomy** to evacuate or relocate to safer places due to cultural norms, caregiving responsibilities, or lack of resources.
- **lower socioeconomic status, fewer assets**, and less access to land, credit, and insurance that can help them mitigate the losses and damages caused by disasters.
- **higher rates of malnutrition, illiteracy**, and chronic diseases that can increase their susceptibility to harm and reduce their resilience.

- **less participation and representation** in decision-making processes, leadership roles, and community engagement activities related to disaster risk management.
- **less access to skills, training**, and livelihood opportunities that can help them cope and recover from disasters.

These factors can result in higher mortality and morbidity rates, lower well-being and dignity, and increased risks of gender-based violence for women and girls in disaster situations.

Therefore, it is important to address gender inequality in disaster risk reduction and resilience building. This is why, in the *Statement on Climate Change*:

Zonta International calls on governments to include women in the formation of disaster preparedness and response plans. These should address the unique needs of women and girls, prioritize their health and safety and include responses to gender-based violence.

What are the unique needs of women and girls in disasters?

Women and girls have unique needs in disasters because of their gender roles, social norms, and biological differences. Some of these needs are:

- **Protection from gender-based violence:** Women and girls are more likely to face domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other forms of abuse during and after disasters. They need safe shelters,

legal support, psychosocial counseling, and access to health services.

- **Reproductive health care:** Women and girls may face challenges in accessing reproductive health care, such as family planning, maternal health, menstrual hygiene, and sexual health. They need adequate supplies, information, and services to meet their reproductive needs during and after disasters.
- **Mental health and psychosocial support:** Women and girls may experience trauma, stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues due to disasters. They need access to mental health and psychosocial support services that are sensitive to their needs and preferences.
- **Livelihood and education opportunities:** Women and girls may lose their sources of income, assets, and education due to disasters. They need opportunities to restore their livelihoods, access financial assistance, and continue their education.
- **Participation and leadership:** Women and girls are often excluded from decision-making and leadership roles in disaster management. They need to be involved and empowered to voice their concerns, needs, and solutions.
- **Food security and nutrition:** Women and girls may face food insecurity and malnutrition due to limited access to food, water, and cooking facilities. They may also prioritize feeding their families over themselves, or face discrimination in food distribution. They need adequate and nutritious food, safe water, and hygiene supplies.
- **Shelter and housing:** Women and girls may lose their homes or face displacement due to disasters. They may also face challenges in

finding safe, dignified, and accessible shelter and housing. They need protection from the elements, privacy, security, and accessibility in their shelter and housing options.

- **Education and information:** Women and girls may miss out on education or information due to disasters. They may face barriers in accessing schools, learning materials, or communication channels. They need opportunities to continue their education, access information, and communicate their needs and feedback.

By recognizing and addressing these needs, we can support the well-being and empowerment of women and girls.

The Zonta Says NOW [Disaster-Ready Guides](#) support *Action Guide 02: Disaster Preparedness and Response*.



Photo: Pexels

Further Information

- [Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction](#)
- [UN Women's Resilience to Disasters Knowledge Hub](#)
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- [World Bank's Gender Dynamics of Disaster Risk and Resilience](#)
- [Women and Girls in Disasters](#)
- [Women are hit hardest in disasters, so why are responses too often gender-blind?](#)
- [Women's Resilience to Disasters](#)
- [Understanding the experiences of women in disasters: lessons for emergency management planning](#)
- [Why we must engage women and children in disaster risk management](#)
- [Women and Girls in Emergencies](#)