

Safety Audits: A How-To Guide

Query: ‘I want to do a safety audit, but I am not a GBV specialist. How do I do that?’

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1. What is a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Safety Audit?

Safety audits are typically carried out in **camp**s or **settlements** during displacement but can be used to assess safety and security concerns for women and girls **in any geographic location with specific boundaries**. The safety audit tool is based on visual observation as a means of assessing GBV risks related to the physical structure and layout, resource availability, and provision of humanitarian services and assistance.¹ It collects information related to shelter **structure and layout**, safety and security, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, availability and safe access to other services. It compares conditions against a set of standards including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) GBV Guidelines² that include minimum actions humanitarian actors should take within their areas of operation to prevent and mitigate GBV risks.

Safety audits enable humanitarian actors to identify observable risks and assess specific vulnerabilities of women, girls, boys and men to those identified risks. The analysis of findings from safety audits can be used to **inform** actions including putting in place risk mitigation measures **and advocating** for the humanitarian community and service providers to improve the physical safety of living conditions, the distribution of and access to services, or security. Safety audits can also **facilitate collaboration between the community and humanitarian actors** to carry out safety audits, address risks and follow-up on recommendations. They can be used regularly to monitor the **effectiveness of any mitigation measures** and identify new risks that can need to be addressed.

2. When should safety audits be used?

All humanitarian actors, especially camp management and service providers in Shelter, WASH, Food/Non-Food Item (NFI) distributions, Education and Protection have a responsibility to regularly monitor potential GBV-related risks. **Safety audits can be carried out by humanitarian actors that are trained to conduct them.** GBV specialists can train non-specialists to conduct safety audits and identify actions that can be undertaken to address concerns identified. Participatory GBV safety audits and action planning can also be done with communities in UNICEF’s areas of operation.³

¹Adapted from IRC (2011:33) GBV Emergency Response & Preparedness: Participant Handbook, http://cpwg.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/08/IRC-2011-GBV_ERP_Participant_Handbook_-_REVISED.pdf

²2015 IASC Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action, https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-IASC-Gender-based-Violence-Guidelines_lo-res.pdf

³ Before conducting a participatory safety audit, it is essential to determine whether the activity itself poses a risk to the community.

Safety audits can be used on their own or as part of a rapid or comprehensive GBV assessment or multi-sectoral assessment to collect and analyse **basic information about the GBV situation to inform UNICEF's and partners' immediate humanitarian response**, in line with the [UNICEFs Minimum GBViE Response Package](#). Safety audits provide a structured method to collect data and **examine the community, humanitarian and external factors that contribute to GBV** in a camp, community or other setting. The safety audit tool can be used in all phases of an emergency: during preparedness, immediately following a crisis⁴ onset, and at any time during ongoing response and recovery. It can be most useful during the acute stages where time is limited, and/or quantitative data collection methods are not appropriate. Safety audits can be carried out in addition to focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII) with women and girls. These allow them to provide information on key safety concerns they face in certain locations and in accessing services as well as learning from them about strategies for improving their safety and protection.⁵

3. How do I conduct a safety audit?

The safety audit is an observation tool, and if deemed safe, it can be completed while walking around. In insecure areas where there is a presence of armed actors or where being seen collecting information may put staff or community members at risk, it is advisable to take mental notes of questions and observations only and complete safety audit forms after leaving the camp or community rather than during the site visit.

Safety audits should initially focus on collecting information⁶ about:

- Overall layout (lighting/overcrowding/walkways; firebreaks);
- Unsafe locations in and around displaced settings;
- Risks associated with
 - **Shelter** and site layout;
 - WASH facilities including distance, physical segregation, locks, privacy etc.;
 - **Access to and use of facilities** and services including schools, markets, safe spaces, health clinics;
 - Access to **basic resources**, such as food and fuel;
- Presence of **armed actors** (state military or others, checkpoints);
- Relationship with host community;
- **Other risk factors** can be included as observed during safety audits, including those related to movements and activities of women and girls outside camps for water, firewood, market access, employment, livelihoods, etc.
- **Potential solutions for reducing risks** and improving safety.

Good practice

- Anyone conducting a safety audit should be adequately trained.
- Prior to carrying out a safety audit, it is essential to identify and mitigate any potential risks that conducting a safety audit, and visibility associated with it, would create for those participating in it.
- Ensure a mechanism is in place to monitor, report and respond to any negative consequences for community members or staff.
- It is necessary, before initiating the safety audit, to identify a protocol for safe data storage and sharing, as well for the dissemination of results to minimize any risks to communities at large, individual community members and GBV specialised or non-specialised service providers.

Adapted from [USAID \(2015\) Building Safer World: Toolkit for Integrating GBV Prevention and Response into USAID Energy and Infrastructure Projects](#)

⁴ Acute emergency response is generally from crisis onset to 12 weeks.

⁵ UNICEF (forthcoming), *UNICEF Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programme Resource Pack: Rapid Assessment Tool 10 - GBV Risk and Safety Observation Guide*

⁶ Adapted from IRC (2013) *GBV Safety Audit Tool*, <https://gbvresponders.org/emergency-response-preparedness/emergency-response-assessment/>, and UNICEF (forthcoming), *UNICEF Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programme Resource Pack: Rapid Assessment Tool 10*

Follow-up safety audits can be done during ongoing response in stabilised and protracted situations and may focus on collecting information about:

- Effectiveness of risk-reduction or safety strategies put in place;
- New risks or safety problems that have arisen; and/or
- Safety problems facing at-risk populations in the community, such as girls and women with disabilities, girls attending school, etc.

On the day of the site visit, staff should be punctual, dressed appropriately with agency identification and phones with credit in case of an emergency. Clear lines of communication in case of security concerns and for general reporting should be agreed in advance. Approvals from relevant authorities for the site visit should be sought in advance. Staff should be aware of referral options for survivors according to services available and procedures in the area. Once the safety audit has been completed and staff have returned their office, a full debrief should take place and all staff should discuss the issues and concerns observed and fill in the safety audit tool as a group to ensure all information is recorded. When information is consolidated, and safety audit tool is completed, a follow up meeting should be held to discuss follow up and dissemination of GBV risks documented.

4. What do I do with the information from the safety audit?

Significant progress has been made in defining responsibilities, guidance and actions for every sector to mitigate GBV-related risks as set out in the **IASC GBV Guidelines**. Priority issues from safety audit analysis can be passed onto relevant actors, camp management and coordinating bodies identified in service mappings to address GBV-related risks in their work. Responses can be compiled and tracked. In some contexts, findings from safety audits can also be used **to bring community stakeholders together to analyse, discuss gaps in safety and develop safety action plans to address risks**. To support communities to identify GBV-related protection concerns and reduce risks, UNICEF and partners can assist communities to conduct safety audits; provide support for data collection and analysis; facilitate collaborative safety action planning; support implementation of safety plans; monitor effectiveness of actions and emerging safety problems.⁷

A meeting to disseminate information on the findings can be held with relevant actors including GBV actors to **agree sector specific, inter-agency and/or community based responses**, priority actions and strategies for addressing them. Plans should clearly **outline the duties, responsibilities, timelines and resources required for each action and who has responsibility for each action**.

5. References

- Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2015), *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*
- International Rescue Committee (2013), *GBV Assessment Tools: Part 1 Safety Audit*
- International Rescue Committee (2011), *GBV Emergency Response and Preparedness: Participant handbook*
- UNICEF (forthcoming), *Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programme Resource Pack: Assessment*
- USAID (2015), *Building Safer World: Toolkit for Integrating GBV Prevention and Response into USAID Energy and Infrastructure Projects*

⁷ UNICEF (forthcoming), *UNICEF Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programme Resource Pack: Rapid Assessment Tool 10*