

REGA REVIEW

ABRIDGED REPORT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AoR	Area of Responsibility
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
GBV	Gender-based violence
GBViE	Gender-based violence in Emergencies
GBVIMS	Gender-based violence Information Management System
GHA	Global Humanitarian Assistance
IM	Information Management
IMO	Information Management Officer
IMS	Information Management System
JIAF	Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (or: queer), Intersex
NORCAP	Norwegian capacity to international operations
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
REGA	Regional Emergency GBV Advisors
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
SH	Samuel Hall
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

INTRODUCTION

Background and context

Since the establishment of the Regional Emergency GBV Advisors (REGA) structure as an emergency mechanism in 2014, it has been challenging to ensure the systematic collection and analysis of evidence to assess its impact and relevance - beyond the number of deployments or the size and composition of the teams. A lack of qualitative evidence for the sustainability of the deployments measured in the extent to which their work has been capitalised on, replicated and sustainably absorbed by country offices, field GBV sub-clusters and UNFPA Regional Offices has also been noted. In addition, the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) expertise gap in operations seems to have grown between 2014 and 2019, which was reflected by the commitment in the 2019 REGA Letter of Intent to expand the composition of the REGA teams by adding new areas of GBV expertise (Regional Coordination and Information Management) to provide wider support to country operations. Nonetheless, there has been little joint analysis of the mechanism’s relevance in the context of more recent changes in the humanitarian landscape and the global commitments on GBV, protection and gender since 2014, nor has the mechanism’s ability to build sustainable capacity at a country level been sufficiently analysed to ensure that in the mid to longer-term operations are not dependant on an emergency mechanism.

Objectives and Methodology

In light of the aforementioned context, NORCAP contracted Samuel Hall to conduct a review of the REGA mechanism's work, with the purpose of assessing its performance, continued relevance and whether it delivers in line with its mandate, responding to relevant GBV needs in line with the GBV AoR, and NORCAP’s strategies and UNFPAs Strategic Plan 2021-2025. The review looked at the mechanism in light of the increasingly complex and changing humanitarian landscape and the growing number of global commitments focusing on those most at risk, and efforts aimed at bridging the humanitarian-development gap and the increasing locally led humanitarian response.

To achieve the goals of the review, Samuel Hall utilised the OECD-DAC evaluation framework (see Table 1), and developed a total of 13 research questions which guided the evaluation exercise throughout. The research team adopted a five-phased approach during the period November 2022-January 2023, consisting of a desk review, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), a two-day in-person workshop in Oslo, an online survey, and empirical observations through two rapid field missions in Nairobi and Cairo respectively.

Table 1 OECD-DAC Evaluation criteria explained

Criteria	Description ¹
Relevance	The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries, global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.
Coherence	The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution.
Effectiveness	The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.
Efficiency	The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.
Impact	The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.
Sustainability	The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue.

The research questions, the tools, as well as the presentation of the findings in this report, are structured around these criteria.

¹ OECD, Evaluation Criteria. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

KEY FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

Meeting an urgent need for technical GBV expertise

The review found that the REGA mechanism meets a critical need for high-level technical expertise on gender-based violence in emergency settings. There was a strong consensus among actors who took part in the review, including donors, partners and INGOs, regarding the high relevance of the REGA mechanism's objectives, within the wider ecosystem and environment within which it operates. By deploying P5 level experts to all main regions experiencing humanitarian emergencies, the REGAs and their teams are among the few senior level experts available on matters of GBV, as such roles have been largely under-funded and limited to-date. There is a strong recognition of the technical capacity of the REGA teams, while the GBV AoR also evidently has a very strong recognition in itself. Various actors, including but not limited to donors, turn to the REGA teams to get updates on the GBV situation in the regions and/or countries.

The relevance of the REGA mechanism is thus widely acknowledged, not least within the context of ongoing changes in the humanitarian landscape, global commitments, and current needs. There is an increased need for GBV interventions due to external factors including COVID-19 exacerbating gender inequalities and fanning violence, as well as protracted conflicts, climate change, displacement, poverty, food insecurity, urbanisation, and digitalisation. The REGA mechanism's position as a 'go-to' actor on GBV in emergencies has been well-evidenced precisely in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which a broad range of stakeholders have been relying on the REGA teams to access information and coordination support, which reflects a recognition of the unique work that the REGA teams are doing.

High relevance of the REGA mechanism's objectives and results

The REGA teams have achieved a large number of results against the GBV AoR Results Framework and the strategic priorities of the GBV AoR, including in the areas of strategic advocacy, coordination and inter-agency collaboration, to activities aimed at ensuring that GBV is integrated into all humanitarian interventions, and efforts aimed to foster exchanges between GBV actors for them to share best practices and success stories. The REGAs have also contributed to efforts aimed at supporting a strong, diverse and inclusive GBV community - which is the case in some regions.

The relevance of the REGA mechanism is also seen in case management and Information Management System (IMS), and in the work on delivering training on minimum standards, channelling information, and so forth. The REGA teams have collaborated, on an ad-hoc basis, with the GBVIMS Inter-agency Global Initiative to support the strengthening of GBV case management capacity and the deployment of GBVIMS/GBVIMS+.² Furthermore, the Information Management Officer's work has in some regions laid the foundation for programming for all sectors, signalling a clear relevance of the REGA teams' mandate. In addition, the fact that the REGAs are oftentimes invited to work on emerging issues such as food security and nutrition, signals continued - and arguably increased - relevance. The ever-increasing demands on REGA regional teams, seen in the volume of requests received for support and assistance, are testament to the continued need

RELEVANCE

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Strong relevance and consensus regarding the high relevance of the REGA mechanism's objectives and results
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Technical expertise: clear recognition of the technical capacity of the REGA teams
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Continued relevance and potential within current context in the context of the increased attention given to GBV and the magnitude of the needs,

for, and strong relevance of, its work.

COHERENCE

With regard to the core activities which form part of 2021 'REGA & Coordination Team Theory of Change', the most notable contributions appear to be seen in the inter-agency coordination, on which the support provided by the REGA teams was clearly identified as a success by the country-level actors consulted for this review. The activities carried out by the REGA teams also contribute significantly to the monitoring of targeted regions/countries, capacity building, technical support and guidance creation and support to inter and intra cluster relationships. Meanwhile, the contributions pertaining to partnerships for sustainable GBV interventions (ensuring the centrality of protection, preparedness, development, academia, localisation, etc.), advocacy and resource mobilisation have varied substantially from one region to another.

² Coordinated GBV field responses require support to inter-agency GBV case management and the safe and ethical management of related data.

Major variations across regions: a key feature of the REGA mechanism

The work carried out by REGAs varies substantially from one region to another, suggesting it is highly dependent on the operational context and on the personalities of those occupying the positions within the AoR as well as within UNFPA. In addition to the personalities and specific set of skills of the individuals composing the REGA teams, several factors shape the approach and the direction the work is taking. One of them is the characteristics of the region covered by the team, including the number of countries to cover but most importantly the number of emergency contexts and the presence of activated clusters. In addition, the size of the REGA team is also a decisive factor, some regions having only one expert. The REGAs emphasised that the appetite of the GBV community at the country level is a decisive element. Insufficient staffing at UNFPA – and what respondents attributed to a lack of consideration for coordination roles – were repeatedly mentioned as a major challenge faced by the REGAs, who are often expected to compensate for the lack of GBV coordinators and Information Managers in countries affected by emergencies. Double and triple hatting is often used as a mitigation, affecting both UNFPA’s coordination and programming mandates, and having undoubted effects on the ability of the REGAs to focus on their own mission. Therefore, variations across regions appear to be a key feature of the REGA mechanism. While maintaining a certain level of agility is certainly a strong asset in the context of emergency response and was indeed described as one of the strengths of the REGAs, a lack of harmonisation can also affect not only the coherence of the mechanism but also its efficiency. This can create confusion about the nature of the role and can mean that REGAs face difficulties navigating an environment where the scope of work of the REGAs is unclear to some actors – including within UNFPA – which requires allocating time to sensitisation and negotiation.

Coherence of the mandate and regional position

Another element affecting the coherence of the REGA mechanism is the limitations to the mandate in terms of targeted populations. While most of the organisations engaging in GBViE also work in refugee contexts, the mandate of the GBV AoR only includes internally displaced persons which at times create confusion and prevent REGA teams from providing the support needed by actors, in particular in contexts where cross-border migration and displacement issues are a strong focus.

While the fact that the teams are positioned at the regional level allows the teams to provide support to the GBV community in several countries and facilitates deployments, country-level actors stressed that REGAs have limited time to dedicate to individual countries, being responsible for an entire region. In addition, some of the humanitarian actors consulted for this review highlighted that the establishment of a regional coordination structure that is foreign to the existing coordination structures - at the country and global levels - means that some of the organisations are not included in these meetings. While the contribution to the improvement of the coordination at the national level was underlined, the addition of another layer was not considered relevant because humanitarian organisations do not always have a presence in the cities where REGA teams are based, which means they cannot attend meetings unless they are also held online. Finally, respondents also stressed that the composition of a region varies from one organisation to another, affecting the coherence of a regional coordination structure.

An inter-agency function unevenly pronounced across regions

An important feature of the REGA mechanism’s positioning within the wider operational environment is the inter-agency nature, which the GBV AoR teams described as an asset as it guarantees their independence and their ability to take initiative. However, maintaining their independence can come at a cost as this can affect the relationship REGAs have with UNFPA counterparts, as REGAs are to some extent dependent on UNFPA, especially when it comes to accessing funding for specific activities. In practice, nonetheless, the inter-agency feature is unevenly pronounced in the different regions. In some cases, REGAs felt that UNFPA had a stronger influence on the work of the REGAs. The lack of staff dedicated to GBViE, as mentioned earlier, means REGAs receive requests from UNFPA which they cannot easily decline.

At the senior management level, the main concern regarding the inter-agency feature was the lack of accountability, which raises the question of the reporting line. While the GBV AoR thought that UNFPA’s ownership towards the REGA mechanism could be enhanced, several UNFPA representatives considered the REGA teams as part of their team and admitted that the agency could not fulfil its cluster responsibilities without REGAs. While recognising the inter-agency function, some of the UNFPA representatives believed that the lines are sometimes blurred. It should be noted however that the inter-agency nature of the REGA was underlined as a success by non-UNFPA actors.

Coherence of the mandate in view of UNFPA staff dedicated to GBV

The confusion expressed by some respondents with regard to the position of the REGA teams in relation to UNFPA can be explained by UNFPA’s dual mandate when it comes to GBV (programming and coordination) and by the overlap between the missions of the REGA teams and the responsibilities of UNFPA as the lead agency for coordinating GBViE.

In some regions, UNFPA employs regional GBViE advisors as well as GBV specialists, whose responsibilities can seem to overlap in part with those of the REGAs, although these positions are meant to focus on GBV programming. While this

evolution demonstrates UNFPA’s willingness to dedicate more resources to GBV and could present an opportunity to lighten the workload of some of the REGAs by removing the activities which should fall under UNFPA, it is key to ensure that the distinction between the roles and responsibilities of the new GBVIE specialists and those of the REGA teams are clear internally and among partners, so as not to create confusion.

COHERENCE		A much-valued contribution and positive achievements against the theory of change
		Significant variations across regions based on the local contexts, profiles of REGAs and relationships with UNFPA representatives
		Opportunities and risks related to regional positions
		Ambiguities around the inter-agency function , considered a strong asset but unevenly pronounced across regions

EFFECTIVENESS

Positive results in terms of improved coordination and strengthened capacity

The REGA teams are performing well against the objectives of the 2021-2025 GBV AoR Strategy, in particular in view of the first strategic priority towards “support strong and effective coordination of GBV action in humanitarian contexts”. During the previous strategic period (2018-2021), the contribution to strategic advocacy, coordination and inter-agency collaboration was already highlighted as a key achievement and remains the core of the work carried out by REGA teams. This area is also the one newly appointed REGA teams focus on primarily when they are deployed to a new region for the first time.

The second strategic priority is also one where the contributions of the REGA teams have been substantial. It includes the activities aimed at ensuring that GBV is integrated into all humanitarian interventions, which requires engaging with other sectors.

Strategic priority 3, “Promote learning, set standards and communicate good practice and inclusive approaches for GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response services”, comprises all efforts aimed at fostering exchanges between GBV actors for the sharing of best practices and success stories. While a few initiatives exist at the global level, most of the meetings serving this purpose are held at the regional level. If the format and frequency of these regional exchanges vary, structures seem to be in place in some regions to allow general sharing, thematic discussion, with the aim to create a community of support, promote peer to peer learning, and share best practices. This area of work could be further strengthened with the objective to document and share information on the situation of individual countries, in particular about challenges faced in the response and results achieved.

The strategic priority 4, “Support a strong, diverse and inclusive GBV community that continues to innovate and work in partnership across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus,” differs across regions. It can include efforts towards a “localisation” of the approach, innovations such as stronger engagement with men and boys, the creation of a pillar dedicated to intersectionality within the regional GBV Working Group or collaborations with development actors. The contribution of the REGAs to the operationalisation of the humanitarian-peace- development nexus remains timid, which is recognised by REGA teams themselves, as the notion remains difficult to grasp for the entire sector. While all the approaches used by REGA teams are promising and valuable, it is clear that the activities carried out are based on opportunities provided by the context rather than the result of a proactive approach.

Factors affecting the ability to meet the objectives

As mentioned earlier, the priorities as well as the work carried out by the REGAs are different from one region to another, which explains that some regions fare better against a specific objective than others.

Globally, a tier system is used for the prioritisation, but in practice, priorities are not clear, forcing REGAs to adopt ad hoc systems in their regions. The work is guided to a large extent by the requests coming from the countries - which can be either overwhelming or very limited - and the ability of individual REGAs to handle those depending on the resources available in the region. The ability of REGA teams to fulfil their mission is also dependent on whether UNFPA counterparts are aware and supportive of the REGA role and understand its inter-agency function. A key factor affecting the ability of the REGAs to carry out their work is the lack of consideration by UNFPA for the importance of coordination positions, resulting in a lack of staffing. The lack of funding for coordination positions at the country level, as well as the high level of turnover, affects the ability of the REGAs to improve coordination and build capacity. Similarly, the lack of funding to secure IM positions in countries that require them constitutes a challenge. In some cases, the limited capacity of the staff recruited to

take on GBViE roles and the lack of orientation they receive is also a major challenge, as they are not equipped to perform their roles.

Moreover, some stakeholders both at the country and regional levels expressed that despite the REGAs’ significant help in areas beyond coordination such as their contributions with regards to technical expertise in different countries, there is a lack of clarity regarding the REGAs’ specific TORs which hinders these stakeholders from making the best use of their expertise. Respondents added that information should be communicated to GBV practitioners about the role of the REGA so that they can reach out for assistance. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected activities between 2020 and 2022 as REGA teams were unable to travel to countries during that period.

Opportunities to clarify and narrow down the objectives of the REGA teams

The review of the work carried out against the strategic priorities of the GBV AoR suggests that, while there is evidence of positive achievements against the strategic priorities of the GBV AoR, the work of the regional teams is not strongly structured and guided by those, but rather by the operational environment and the strengths of the teams. The priorities as set by the GBV AoR strategy are broad enough to encompass different types of approaches and prioritisation and reflect the relative lack of coherence/harmonisation of the REGA mechanism.

EFFECTIVE-
NESS

 **Positive results the strategic objectives of the 2021-2025 GBV AoR Strategy**, in particular in coordination, capacity and advocacy

 **Several factors affect the ability of the teams to meet the objectives**, such as requests coming from the countries, the capacity of the REGA team in the region, and relationships to UNFPA counterparts

 **Opportunities to clarify and prioritise the objectives of the REGAs**

EFFICIENCY

Relationship between NORCAP and GBV AoR

In terms of ‘efficiency’, the review set out to primarily explore whether the partnership between NORCAP and the GBV AoR is set up and managed well, and if the UNFPA hosting arrangement as well as REGA management structure, resources, set-up and division of roles and responsibility, as well as contract modalities, cater to effectiveness and impact. It was found that the relationship with NORCAP is perceived as largely positive from the perspective of the GBV AoR leadership in Geneva, with NORCAP’s agility being highlighted as a much appreciated aspect. However, the relationships between NORCAP and the REGAs have been affected by the high turnover rate within NORCAP, which has affected the continuity of the discussions related to administrative issues. Perhaps most importantly, the GBV AoR raised doubts regarding NORCAP’s awareness and appreciation of the REGAs’ value and vision for what the mechanism should be doing.

Meanwhile, on the side of NORCAP, there are some fundamental concerns that NORCAP is not recognised as a GBV expert and worthy of a ‘seat at the table’ where decisions are made about the mandate and strategic direction of the REGA mechanism. By extension, NORCAP holds certain concerns about the risks it is exposed to by virtue of being accountable to funders for the work of REGA, but neither having a say on its work, nor having sufficient access to data on the results and impact of the REGAs.

As regards the connection between NORCAP and the REGA teams, there appears to be a noteworthy gap in communication between the two. This might be due to the fact that the GBV AoR in Geneva acts as an interlocutor between NORCAP and the REGAs, NORCAP is therefore primarily seen as a contracting agency contacted in relation to contractual and HR matters. While the REGA teams and the GBV AoR were aware that NORCAP might want to be more engaged, they expressed concerns that there might be too many actors involved with the GBV AoR, UNFPA and NORCAP, but would like to receive more high-level support from NORCAP in terms of advocacy and visibility generation in the field at the regional or country levels.

UNFPA hosting arrangement

The REGA teams and the GBV AoR highlighted a number of positive aspects of having the REGA mechanism hosted by UNFPA, the lead agency on GBV. Benefits include reduced confusion at field level about the REGA’s mandate, and the facilitation of communication between REGA and GBV cluster coordinators. There is also potential to create stronger relationships between actors working on GBV and those active in Sexual and Reproductive Health (also UNFPA’s mandate), and it allows the REGAs to influence the UNFPA management. UNFPA’s access to government partners is another important advantage, and being hosted within UNFPA helps with certain logistics, the relations to embassies, and so forth.

However, certain aspects of the UNFPA hosting arrangement and integration of the REGAs could be improved, such as a greater inclusion of REGAs in the decision-making processes of UNFPA and increased ownership within UNFPA of the REGA mechanism and its GBV coordination role.

In terms of contractual modalities, the REGAs and the GBV AoR teams emphasised that the MoU between NORCAP, UNFPA and the GBV AoR is firstly lacking in detail on operational aspects (tax exemptions, diplomatic cars, travel, Department of Safety and Security processes, signing of relevant documentation, operational issues). Secondly, it was highlighted that it is insufficiently clear on decision-making and priority setting responsibilities. Some review participants emphasised that the REGA teams, as a result of being hosted by UNFPA, have inadvertently come to mainly ‘serve the agenda’ of UNFPA - although this appears to be the case only in certain regions and not others.

REGA management structure, resources, set-up and division of roles and responsibility

The current set-up, with all of the aforementioned complexities, appears to stand in the way of ensuring the best possible preconditions for the REGA teams to operate as effectively and impactfully as possible. Several of the REGA team members appear stretched to their limits, and are faced with a consistently unmanageable workload, which could be partially attributed to the confusion around the ownership of the REGA mechanism and whose strategic direction should guide the REGAs lead, which leads to difficulties in priority setting. On the one hand they are working relentlessly to respond to the endless needs within the GBV community, seeking a balance between regional overarching priorities and short term country level urgencies. At the same time, several of the REGA teams are pulled in to fill capacity gaps within UNFPA’s regional teams, to support the latter in fulfilling their mandate as the global lead agency on GBV.

The length of deployment seems to be a noteworthy factor in enhancing the effectiveness and impact of the REGA teams. Having the experts deployed for at least one year as a minimum is recommended, as there had been less success in the past with REGAs deployed for only short periods of time. Meanwhile, NORCAP raised the question of whether a more efficient use of resources would be if the REGA mechanism it took the shape of more targeted and time-bound deployment of experts with the specific mandate of carrying out a capacity assessment, recommending and building sustainable policies and procedures, and then withdrawing - leaving behind an enhanced GBV readiness and capacity to respond among actors permanently on the ground.

EFFICIENCY



Lack of clarity among partners in terms of strategic direction and how to find a balance between regional and country level priorities



Tendency to use REGA team to serve UNFPA agenda, and help fill critical gaps, which can prevent REGA teams from implementing their own mission and filling an inter-agency role



Urgency in identifying future arrangement as the current set-up appears to stand in the way of ensuring the best possible preconditions for the REGA teams



All parties want enhanced clarity and collaboration to ensure maximised impact and efficiency

IMPACT

Concrete results of the mechanism

The REGA mechanism has brought about a vast number of examples of concrete results over the years. With highly active teams across all regions, the REGA’s work has yielded relevant and important results within their operating environment. As part of their work, teams have sometimes been deployed to different locations to support different forms of work, including but not limited to the formation of sub-clusters on GBV. The concrete results of the REGA mechanism have been particularly pronounced at country-level, but also at the regional level. During COVID-19, the REGA teams were able to successfully carry out several missions remotely.

Several areas of key results have been identified, substantial variations between regions due to the limited institutionalisation of the mechanism:

- **Capacity building.** Capacity building of different relevant stakeholders has taken place on an ongoing basis in most regions, with a large number of examples available from the REGA teams in East Africa and West and Central Africa. During the period when there was a REGA in Asia-Pacific, there were noteworthy capacity building efforts carried out there too. A significant contribution has been the development of an East Africa University Diploma course and a GBViE course at the American University of Nigeria, as well as various in-person and online training sessions for regional sub-clusters and at country-level.
- **Coordination.** Coordination happens first and foremost at the country level in locations affected by emergencies, but also at regional level in East Africa, the inter-agency and regional coordination aspect of REGA is particularly strong, with several key working groups being initiated and/or run by the REGA team. In West and Central Africa,

where there is no sub-cluster system, there is a GBV regional working group which is managed by the team. In Asia-Pacific, the former REGA established a regional level coordination mechanism, creating a system for advocacy and a platform for inter-agency collaboration.

- **Provision of timely and accurate information, and IM tools.** Several of the REGA teams - in particular in regions where an IMO is part of the team - have been able to provide quick responses to requests for data and analysis, in relation to service mapping, indicators, severity and targets.
- **Strategy development.** The REGA teams have also successfully aided the development of strategies and action plans in various regions. This includes, but is not limited to, one noteworthy example: the first national GBV in Emergencies Strategy for the Philippines by the Asia-Pacific REGA at the time.
- **Advocacy and donor briefings.** REGA teams also support actors with advocacy notes and donor briefings. Specific requests for support range from briefing notes and high-level missions in the country, to raising specific issues with donors.
- **Technical support on COVID-19 response.** To cite one example, this included a one-month virtual mission to Afghanistan, through which technical support to the COVID-19 response was provided, and the onboarding of the new civil society GBV co-leads.

Uptake of activities by UNFPA, at field levels, and by other partners

As regards uptake of activities by UNFPA, at field levels and by other partners, the REGA mechanism's work has indeed brought about tangible change. Notable examples include the following ways in which there has been uptake of the REGA mechanism's work by other actors:

- **East Africa University Diploma course.** Evolved from a small two-week course to a fully-fledged diploma course, has been taken up both by the university and UNFPA.
- **University course in Nigeria.** Initiated through calls to action by the REGA and taken over by UNFPA.
- **Capacity building of IMs.** Whilst cited as a success, sustainability is challenged when the IMs leave.
- **Strengthening of civil society's work on GBV in emergencies.** There are several noteworthy examples of how the REGA teams have collaborated with, and helped to strengthen the work of, different NGOs.
- **Impact at government level.** Examples of impact at government level include, but are not limited to, the Training of Trainer pocket guide, case management policies incorporated into government level, minimum standards being adopted.

Contributions to strengthening UN systems and policy environments

The REGA teams' work has contributed in certain ways to the strengthening of UN systems and to more sustainable change in policy environments. While it is not always clear which contributions can be attributed to the REGA teams specifically, as opposed to the GBV AoR more broadly, examples of key reported contributions are summarised below:

- Strengthening UNFPA's understanding of GBV in emergencies.
- Capacity building of other actors, such as OCHA as well as HTC members, cluster coordinators, governments and other agencies. Work has also been done with gender actors of the Global Humanitarian Assistance (GHA), with Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) actors, work on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), as well as providing guidance on Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF), defining 'life saving criteria', and supporting strategy development.
- Enhanced centrality of protection within the wider UN system, reflected for example in the pilot Call to Action Road Maps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and northeast Nigeria and the HCT GBV accountability framework in Burkina Faso.
- Strengthened risk mitigation and streamlining of GBV within the UN system. This includes, but it is not limited to, successfully influencing OCHA at global and country levels to ensure GBV inclusion and financial tracking systems, and advocating for the inclusion of GBV in areas of food security and nutrition and emphasising early warning triggers.
- Championing localisation and survivor-centred, inclusive and feminist approach. It appears as though the REGA mechanism's achievements in this domain have been relatively limited to-date, but with important successes being achieved by the East Africa team in particular.
- Setting up new regional platforms and engaging in existing ones.

Unintended consequences

Few unintended consequences of the REGA mechanism have been identified. One consists in the fact that regional structure of REGA risks leading to missed-out information in meetings as the REGAs do not always have the most up-to-date or comprehensive information from country level. Another one is that the REGA teams, by filling capacity gaps for UNFPA teams in some regions, might inadvertently lessen the urgency in UNFPA to recruit their own GBV experts.

IMPACT



Large number of concrete results, signaling high level of activity across all regions, with relevant and important results within their operating environment



Uptake of activities by UNFPA and tangible change through e.g., University partnerships, capacity building of IMs, strengthening of civil society's work on GBV in emergencies, impact at government level



Certain contributions to strengthening of UN systems and policy environments



Difficulty of attribution between the contributions of REGA teams Vs those of the GBV AoR more broadly

SUSTAINABILITY

Different understandings of sustainability

The discussions around the sustainability of the work carried out by the REGA teams reflected the misalignment of the visions of the REGA project between the different partners. One of these perspectives sees the REGA teams as a mechanism, deployed to achieve certain results, preferably lasting ones. The sustainability of the mechanism is therefore understood as the extent to which the work carried out yields lasting effects. This approach is associated with expectations in favour of structural changes, and suggests a focus on system strengthening, including but not limited to uptake by other actors such as the UNFPA Country Offices as well as local and national actors - which has been taking place but to a relatively limited degree (refer also to the Impact section above). Perceived as such, such type of need justifies the temporary deployment of experts and requires an exit strategy.

Another perspective sees REGAs as individual positions, whose contributions are direly needed in a context where country-level actors require continuous support as a result of insufficient capacity and funding. This vision suggests that the quality of the response is dependent on the presence of such positions, and that the sustainability should be understood as the capacity to maintain them in their role, which requires securing funding. This justifies permanent positions, which raises the question of the identification of the employer.

As of now, the current system borrows from these two visions, creating confusion and - in some respects - frustration. In particular, uncertainties regarding the duration of the deployments have affected the experts. In addition to the problems it causes to the individuals concerned, it also poses a risk to the continuity of the work, as there is no plan in place should the position be removed.

A mandate that does not create favourable conditions for the REGA teams to ensure sustainable results

A significant share of the activities conducted by the REGA teams contributes to long term results that are key to improving the GBV response, in particular the coordination structures put in place and the capacity building of GBV professionals. The sensitisation and advocacy activities contribute to a better understanding and recognition of the GBV needs, which foster positive changes through increased funding, but also greater attention. However, in regions heavily affected by emergencies, the work of the REGA teams is often dominated by urgent requests coming from the clusters. As emphasised by the regional teams themselves, the lack of staffing and the practice of double-hatting often force the REGAs to act as gap filler and therefore prevent them from engaging in longer-term initiatives, although this has been done in some regions.

However, as contributions to life saving activities also takes priority, an informant stressed that there would need to be political support for the REGA teams to effectively be able to focus on policy work and system strengthening. In addition to this, the REGA teams face challenges to follow up with country teams on the support provided and get feedback on the implementation, for instance on the GBV minimum standards. A respondent also highlighted that efforts towards building the capacity of the GBV professionals were undermined by the high level of turnover in the humanitarian sector. Others had a different view of this regard, stressing that the characteristics of the sector are precisely what justifies the need for such positions as well as the need for them to remain.

Risks threatening the sustainability of the REGA mechanism

From an internal perspective, the primary risk identified by respondents was the uncertainties regarding funding as well as the type of contracts offered to experts and the ability to attract and retain senior experts with the desired level of expertise. One of the options being discussed is the full integration of the REGA teams within UNFPA, which raises the question - in addition to funding and delays in recruitment processes - of the independence and the inter-agency nature of the positions, which GBV AoR teams consider a key asset. There were concerns that transitioning to UNFPA positions would force the experts to focus on activities benefiting UNFPA offices, with limited ability to respond to the needs of other actors from the GBV community.

From an external perspective, key factors highlighted as risks threatening the sustainability of the REGA mechanism included the current lack of clarification of the mandate, leading to firefighting and gap filling ; the limited ability to engage with local actors, in particular community members and local organisations; the lack of inclusion of GBV in government plans, calling for more efforts on government capacity, preparedness, and public sector strengthening more broadly; and the siloed effect that can emerge from working with the GBV community only while GBV is cross-cutting. Finally, with regards to the issue of high turnover among staff, It was recommended to have a stronger focus on institutional capacity strengthening within UNFPA rather than individual capacity building.

<p>SUSTAINABILITY</p>	 <p>Different understandings of the sustainability of the REGA mechanism, reflecting different visions</p>
	 <p>Limited space for sustainable results as the work of the REGA teams can be dominated by urgent requests and gap filling.</p>
	 <p>Several factors threaten the sustainability of the REGA mechanism, both internal (funding and HR) and external</p>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An overarching recommendation emerged from the conclusions of the review, calling on the three partners (NORCAP, UNFPA, GBV AoR) to come together for an in-depth, strategic discussion which should emanate in a future plan for the REGA mechanism. The parties are faced with a complex scenario to address, as they move to articulate the most ideal set-up for the REGA mechanism. In doing so, the roles and responsibilities of each of the three partners need to be transparently and explicitly articulated and agreed in order to move forward in an effective and sustainable manner.

Three scenarios

Three potential ways forward emerged from the review. In the first scenario, the partners could choose the continuation of the REGA mandate as it currently stands, albeit with necessary improvements in terms of clarity on strategic direction, prioritisation and institutional ownership, as well as enhanced clarity of roles, and a strengthened management structure. This, by extension would help systematise and clarify the strategic direction and by extension the day-to-day priority setting of the REGA teams. Alternatively, the partners could opt for more transformational changes, where the REGA mechanism is institutionalised and embedded more deeply within UNFPA. A third way forward could be for the partners to run two parallel components; one of which is designed to allow for the swift deployment of experts for a limited time period in response to emerging crises, and other being an institutionalised coordination function within UNFPA.

Scenario 1: 'Enhanced status-quo'

Partners maintain their overall respective roles and responsibilities and continue running the REGA mechanism as it currently stands, while clarifying and strengthening certain aspects, according to the findings of the review. These include:

- A clarification of the strategic direction, decision-making, priority setting and reporting lines.
- A stronger role for NORCAP to play as a strategic partner.
- The clarification of the management structure and operational modalities.
- The championing of the REGA mechanism by high level leadership in order to increase the visibility of the work carried out by the teams.

Scenario 2: 'Deepened embedment in UNFPA, distancing of NORCAP'

A deepened embedment of the REGA mechanism within UNFPA (as lead-agency on GBV), leading to a stronger institutionalisation. Key aspects to note include:

- The REGA mechanism would not cease to operate as an inter-agency; it could be stipulated that it operates under the umbrella of the GBV AoR, but resourced, supported and officially embedded in UNFPA under its Humanitarian Response Division.
- GBV AoR's leadership could report to the Humanitarian Response Division, but continue to manage the REGA.
- Important to clarify the scope of each of new GBV advisors and specialists recruited by UNFPA, and how they relate to REGA roles - ensure effective alignment to avoid duplication.
- GBV AoR to work closely with UNFPA regional offices to reaffirm the inter-agency nature of REGA.
- This scenario could lead to the gradual distancing of NORCAP from REGA.

Scenario 3: 'Two complementary components for holistic GBV response'

Ensure the existence and resourcing of two complementary components - which would run in parallel and in close collaboration - consisting of:

- An institutionalised, permanent REGA team function, embedded within UNFPA and dedicated to long-term presence and coordination, advocacy and long-term policy work at both regional and country levels.
- A parallel mechanism run by NORCAP which urgently deploys GBV experts to emerging emergency situations, to conduct a rapid assessment, baseline and set up required processes, policies and protocols which are handed to local and national actors (systems-strengthening) and subsequently exit.

Opportunities, risks and the way forward

Each of the three scenarios comes with both advantages and drawbacks. It is recommended that NORCAP, UNFPA and GBV AoR meet at the highest possible levels to carefully examine and discuss the scenarios, in order to build a joint and collaborative way forward which satisfies all parties. In doing so, it is highly probable that certain compromises will need to be struck but given the partners' strong and relentless commitment to realising their joint vision of preventing, addressing and eliminating GBV in emergencies - which has emerged very clearly from this review - the partners have strong potential for achieving an agreement for the sake of the joint mission.

A non-exhaustive list of opportunities and risks associated with each of the three scenarios is presented below.

Scenario	Opportunities	Risks
Scenario 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Least complex option to opt for (maintain current set-up). Provides both NORCAP and UNFPA with strengthened insights into the work and strategic direction of the GBV AoR and the REGA teams (aligned expectations). Helps REGA teams prioritise, sharpen their strategic orientation, and get more recognition. Allows partners to maintain an agile mechanism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners could find it challenging to reach a shared vision for the REGA mechanism. This would hinder the adoption and/or implementation of strategic priorities, leading to persisting inconsistencies, which in turn could be a source of frustration for all parties involved, whilst also leading to difficulties in securing funding with donors who are unclear about what the mechanism is supposed to achieve.
Scenario 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could give more structure and sustainability to REGA roles. Decision-making, priority setting and reporting lines would be clarified. UN passports would add value to the position by facilitating country missions. UNFPA employment contracts could help attract and retain senior profiles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The inter-agency nature might be further reduced. REGA teams might experience less agility, currently seen as an important characteristic. Risk of overlap with existing regional-level GBV positions, and if these roles were to be merged, the coordination function could be neglected in favour of programming. Risk of funding gaps if NORCAP is no longer a key partner.
Scenario 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides the most all-encompassing GBVIE response. The model could allow for very well coordinated efforts. Potential for a strong, concerted and complementary approach to tackling and eliminating GBV. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A costly set-up, meaning that its sustainability is at risk unless long term funding commitments are secured. If the model is not carefully designed, with strong coordination between the different components, there is a risk of overlap, confusion and competition between actors.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Glossary

Term	Definition
GBV AoR	The Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) is based on the membership of 24 organisations in addition to the global protection cluster and the child protection AoR as observers. The GBV AoR is the global-level forum for coordination and collaboration on GBV prevention and response and advancing risk mitigation in humanitarian settings under the Cluster System. The GBV AoR constitutes a focus area within the Global Protection Cluster. The GBV AoR works to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian crises, bringing together non-governmental organisations, United Nations agencies, academics and others under the shared objective of ensuring life-saving, predictable, accountable and effective action on GBV. In 2017, UNFPA took on the role as sole lead agency and provider of last-resort of the GBV AoR.
Gender	The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth. (IOM SOGIESC glossary)
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females (IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions into Humanitarian Action)
Gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE)	During emergencies, the risk of violence, exploitation and abuse is heightened. At the same time, national systems, including health and legal systems, and community and social support networks weaken. This breakdown of systems can reduce access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, and legal services, leading to an environment of impunity in which perpetrators are not held to account. When systems and services are disrupted or destroyed, women and girls face even higher risk of human rights violations such as sexual violence, intimate partner violence, exploitation and abuse, child marriage, denial of resources and harmful traditional practices. (UNFPA/GBV AoR)
Response	Refers to immediate interventions that address GBV survivors' physical safety, health concerns, psychosocial needs, and access to justice, in line with the survivor-centred approach. The provision of multi-sectoral services and assistance to all survivors of GBV contributes to ensuring people's safety, improving physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health, and facilitating access to justice. All survivors of GBV, including survivors of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) perpetrated by humanitarian workers, have the right to immediate life-saving protection and GBV services. (UNHCR GBV toolkit)
Prevention	Refers to actions that prevent GBV from occurring by addressing its root causes, namely gender inequality, systemic discrimination and unequal power relations between women and men, as well as people with diverse SOGI. GBV is preventable. (UNHCR GBV toolkit)
Risk mitigation	Refers to a process and specific interventions in all phases of humanitarian programming. It includes actions that are taken in each humanitarian sector and area of work to reduce risks and exposure to GBV and improve safety as part of an agency-wide mainstreaming approach. Cross-sectoral coordination is essential to ensure a comprehensive approach. Risk mitigation measures also contribute to reducing the risk of SEA. (UNHCR GBV toolkit)
GBV specialist programming	Refers to the core GBV programme areas of prevention and response – aspects of which must be mainstreamed but which are undertaken by a GBV specialist. A GBV specialist 'is someone who has received GBV-specific professional training and/or has considerable experience working on GBV programming (UNHCR GBV toolkit)

Annex 2: Review Questions

Research Questions	Desk review	KIIs	Works hop	Rapid field missions	Survey
RELEVANCE					
1. To what extent are the objectives and results of the mechanism relevant to the changes in the humanitarian landscape and global commitments and current needs?		X	X	X	X
COHERENCE					
2. What is the REGA structure's added value in light of the operational environment?		X	X	X	X
3. Is the REGA mechanism currently fit-for-purpose to deliver on the 2021 REGA Theory of Change?		X	X	X	X
EFFECTIVENESS					
4. To what extent were the objectives and goals of the mechanism against the 2021-2025 GBV AoR Strategy achieved, and in line with the UNFPA cluster lead responsibilities?	X	X	X	X	X
5. What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?	X	X	X	X	X
EFFICIENCY					
6. Is the partnership between NORCAP and the GBV AoR set up and managed well?		X	X		X
7. Is the UNFPA hosting arrangement as well as REGA management structure, resources, set-up and division of roles and responsibility, as well as contract modalities, catering to effectiveness and impact?		X	X		X
IMPACT					
8. What concrete results have REGA brought about, and what difference have the project mechanism's activities made to the response and the receiving agency?	X	X	X	X	X
9. What contribution has the mechanism made in strengthening UN systems? Has the mechanism had an impact on institutional and policy environments?	X	X	X	X	X
10. Were there any unintended consequences, positive or negative, of the mechanism/missions?	X	X	X	X	X
SUSTAINABILITY					
11. To what extent are the deliverables of the missions - such as strategies, implementation plans, and capacity-building initiatives - sustainable in the long term?	X	X	X	X	X

12. Has there been uptake of the activities by UNFPA Country Offices, GBV subclusters at the field level, and other partners engaged in GBV work?		X	X		X
13. Have any REGA teams been able to hand over their responsibilities to UNFPA RO/COs upon achieving the desired results? To what extent did the work initiated during the deployments continue after the expert left?	X	X	X		X

Annex 3: Research tools, target groups and sample size

Research Tool	Target Group	Total
Desk and document Review	Documents were collected and organised in accordance with the research questions.	N/A
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and consultations	Inception phase KIIs with REGA staff at global and regional levels, NORCAP staff, REGA-hosting UNFPA staff. Later KIIs with additional key stakeholders, including REGA staff, UNFPA, NORCAP, GBV AoR, Donors, cluster members, and other partners. Some of the interviews took the form of group discussions in order to include a larger number of individuals and organisations consulted.	37 individual and group interviews held, representing a total of 58 individuals
Workshop sessions	Two half-days of workshops were carried out with NORCAP and REGA staff in Oslo in November 2022.	2
Online survey	The online survey was deployed for 2 weeks to gather input on the key research questions from a wider group of REGA-related stakeholders (additional REGA staff, UNFPA, NORCAP, GBV AoR).	20
Observations (Rapid Field Missions)	Field missions to two REGA locations where SH has a presence of personnel.	2

ABOUT SAMUEL HALL

Samuel Hall is a social enterprise that conducts research in countries affected by issues of migration and displacement. Our mandate is to produce research that delivers a contribution to knowledge with an impact on policies, programmes and people. With a rigorous approach and the inclusion of academic experts, field practitioners, and a vast network of national researchers, we access complex settings and gather accurate data.

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