



# Haiti Earthquake Response

## Protecting Women and Girls

In a disaster like the recent earthquake in Haiti, women and girls are disproportionately and uniquely affected. The mass destruction of infrastructure, incomprehensible loss of family and community support networks, and alarming conditions of displacement either in overcrowded spontaneous settlements or simply outside in open air all increase women's and girls' vulnerability to violence. Furthermore, with a majority of social services disrupted, women are cut off from lifesaving care, including medical treatment for sexual assault.

### Issues Facing Women and Girls in Haiti

- Sexual and physical violence against women and girls in Haiti was already a significant problem before the earthquake. Women and girls are now more vulnerable to violence as they are separated from family and community, and are seeking shelter in overcrowded, makeshift settlements.
- Women often bear much of the responsibility for the survival and well-being of the family in Haiti. However, due to pre-existing gender inequalities and the failure of humanitarian response to address their specific needs, women are often unable to access food distributions, emergency shelter and other assistance. This inability to access basic necessities leaves women more susceptible to exploitation and violence.
- Women and girls lack access to bathing facilities, hygiene materials, food and shelter. Poor lighting and security also raise risks of violence. Women and girls speak of being afraid to sleep in congested settlements, where they are often surrounded by strangers.
- Survivors of sexual assault faced numerous obstacles to accessing quality medical services prior to the earthquake. Today, as many health structures have been destroyed or are dealing with an influx of patients, it is even more difficult for survivors to access critical care, including drugs to prevent the transmission of HIV and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.
- Haitian women's organizations that traditionally provide support and protection to women and girls have been severely affected by the earthquake. Many lives were lost, including those of several prominent women's leaders, and the physical structures of these organizations are either damaged or destroyed. Reconnecting with former cases is as critical as being able to respond to new ones.

*While violence against women and girls was a significant problem in Haiti prior to the earthquake, Haiti did and continues to have a strong women's movement. We are supporting these women to ensure their voices and the voices of those they represent are heard and included in the rebuilding of Haiti.*

**-Robyn Yaker**  
IRC GBV Emergency  
Coordinator, Haiti



Melissa Winkler/IRC

## Building a better future for Haiti: IRC's response

IRC is putting women and girls at the center of relief efforts in Haiti. Following the earthquake, IRC was the first agency to deploy a staff member to Haiti focused exclusively on the protection of women and girls and is still one of few international organizations to have a staff member devoted to this issue on the ground. IRC's violence against women and girls program focuses on ensuring the safety and well-being of women and girls affected by the earthquake while laying the foundation for them to actively participate in and benefit from reconstruction. Using its 14 years of experience with violence against women and girls programs in more than 20 countries, IRC focuses on five critical areas of intervention:

### Reducing vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse

- Providing access to information about available humanitarian services to ensure that women understand how to access food and other essential materials and services safely, without exploitation.
- Distributing hygiene kits, radios, tents and solar lights both directly and through support to local women's organizations.
- Working directly and with local partners to ensure that there is adequate lighting in areas that women and girls have identified as insecure.
- Seeking women's input into the design of latrines and showers to maximize safety, privacy, and dignity.

### Strengthening community-based prevention of violence against women and girls

- Raising awareness about violence against women and girls and supporting leaders in the community and in settlements to take action to prevent it.
- Working with local partners to engage men and boys in changing the social norms that underpin violence.
- Visiting settlements and speaking with women and local leaders to identify immediate risks facing women and girls and taking steps to reduce these risks in partnership with communities.

### Increasing access to services for survivors

- Providing women and girls information on available services for survivors.
- Training health care staff on clinical care for survivors of sexual assault.
- Providing support to service providers, including those who work with child survivors.
- Working with UN agencies and NGOs to establish referral networks so that survivors are able to access needed health, safety, psychological, legal and economic support.

### Improving coordination

- Working with UN agencies and local and international NGOs to coordinate and strengthen efforts to address violence against women and girls.

### Listening to women's voices

- Working in partnership with local civil society and the Haitian women's movement to advocate on behalf of women and girls during the rebuilding process. IRC is providing training and assistance to partner organizations to ensure women's and girls' needs are met throughout this process.

To learn more visit [www.theIRC.org](http://www.theIRC.org) or contact:

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