

**Summary Report: Responding to conflict-related
sexual violence against boys associated with armed
forces and armed groups in the Central African
Republic**

Workshops to disseminate findings from research
undertaken in partnership with All Survivors Project
October 2024

Acronyms

AoR – Area of Responsibility

ASP – All Survivors Project

CAAC – Children and Armed Conflict

CAAFAG – Children associated with armed forces and armed groups

CAR – Central African Republic

CP – Child Protection

CP AoR – Child Protection Area of Responsibility

CRSV – Conflict-related sexual violence

FGD – Focus group discussion

GBV – Gender-based violence

GBV AoR – Gender-based violence Area of Responsibility

IMS – Information Management System

IRC – International Rescue Committee

MPGPFFE – Ministère de la Promotion du Genre, de la Protection de la Femme, de la Famille et de l'Enfant / Ministry of Gender Promotion, Protection of Women, Family and Children

MINUSCA – United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic

NGO/INGO – Non-Governmental Organisation/International Non-Governmental Organisation

OSRSG CAAC – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

RECOPE – Child Protection Community Networks

SV – Sexual violence

UMIRR - Unité Mixte d'Intervention Rapide et de Répression des violences sexuelles faites aux femmes et aux enfants / Mixed Unit for Rapid Intervention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

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Introduction

In December 2022, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG CAAC) published a research report entitled “*Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes*”. This report focused on the situation of boys in the context of the armed conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR).

In a follow-up to this report, two restitution workshops were held in the Central African Republic: in the capital, Bangui, on 2 November 2023, and in the capital of Haute-Kotto prefecture, Bria, on 8 November 2023. The workshops were led by All Survivors Project (ASP) as an implementing partner of the OSRSG CAAC and were delivered in partnership with the Central African Republic Child Protection Area of Responsibility (CP AoR) in Bangui and the international NGO Plan International in Bria. The workshops brought together staff from local, national, and international NGOs, state services, community network members, and community representatives involved in both the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) and in the provision of services for victims of sexual violence (SV).

The restitution workshops had three main objectives:

- To be accountable to those who contributed to the research and ensure that findings and recommendations were shared with them;
- To disseminate the research results to and inform the work of key actors involved in reintegration activities for CAAFAG; and
- To discuss with relevant stakeholders recommendations for implementation and ways forward.

At the end of September 2024, ASP held a workshop with members of the child protection community, of the gender-based violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) and of the CP AoR in Bangui. This workshop was to discuss the implementation of recommendations from the above-mentioned research report including the finalisation of a *Note d’orientation pour la prévention et la réponse aux violences sexuelles faites aux garçons en RCA*, which was one of the key recommendations from the research report.

This summary report compiles the discussions from these three workshops: the two restitution workshops in November 2023 and the September 2024 workshop to discuss implementation.

Research context

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against children continues to be vastly underreported, including in the Central African Republic. Available information indicates that boys associated with armed forces and armed groups, while not affected in the same numbers as girls, are at high risk of CRSV and need gender-sensitive, specialised, long-term care and support for their recovery and reintegration.

This research and paper recognise that CRSV disproportionately affects women and girls and that CRSV is severely underreported for all age and gender groups. The research intended to shed light on the under-discussed issue of how CRSV affects boys, focusing on one of the situations on the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda, namely that of the Central African Republic. It aimed to contribute to

building a better understanding of the potential risks and vulnerabilities faced by boys regarding CRSV when associated with armed forces or armed groups in the Central African Republic. It also aimed to explore how existing medical care and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), as well as legal/judicial and reintegration responses, can better consider the possibility of such abuse. The analysis and recommendations that emerged do not claim to be exclusively relevant to boys in the Central African Republic but instead intend to provide greater visibility to a phenomenon that exists in many conflict situations. Based on information gathered between March and July 2022 through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with actors involved in efforts to secure the release and reintegration of CAAFAG and respond to CRSV and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) in the Central African Republic, a range of knowledge gaps and other challenges were identified.

Research questions

With a view to mapping whether/how reintegration programmes for CAAFAG respond to the rights, needs, and wishes of boy survivors of CRSV, and to contribute to ensuring that boys who have experienced CRSV in the context of their association with armed forces and armed groups receive gender-appropriate, age-appropriate, timely, and quality care and support, the research addressed two main questions:

1. What are the challenges, gaps, and good practices in how CP programmes and associated services support boy and girl victims/survivors of CRSV in the Central African Republic?
2. How can reintegration programmes and associated services be improved for boy victims/survivors of CRSV in the context of their association with armed forces and armed groups in the Central African Republic?

Research methodology

The research was participatory, forward-thinking, and action-oriented, and took into account the extreme sensitivity of the research topic. Given this sensitivity and concerns about security, safety, and wellbeing, the study did not involve the participation of children.

Field research involved three missions to the Central African Republic by the principal investigators. An initial short scoping mission in March 2022 was followed by two data-gathering visits: the first to Bangui from 16-27 May 2022 and the second to Bangui, Bria, and Zemio (a subprefecture town of Haut-Mbomou prefecture in south-east Central African Republic) from 17 June-9 July 2022.

Research findings presented at the restitution workshops

At the two restitution workshops held in November 2023, ASP presented a summary of the research methodology and results. Recommendations from the report were presented with examples of potential concrete actionable steps. In Bangui, national-level actions (e.g. data management and coordination) were highlighted, while in Bria, greater emphasis was put on field-level activities (e.g. sensitisation of children in child-friendly spaces). A summary of the presentations is provided below.

Legal and programmatic framework addressing CRSV against former CAAFAG in the Central African Republic

At the national level, services responding to CRSV against former CAAFAG are framed by two key national strategies:

1. The National Strategy for the Community-Based Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces (2016), and
2. The National Strategy to Combat Gender-based Violence, Harmful Practices and Child Marriage (2019).

Both strategies were established and are led by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Family and Child Protection (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme, de la Famille et de la protection de l'enfant), which oversees their implementation. As such, the Ministry coordinates closely with the CP AoR all actions relating to CAAFAG reintegration and services towards child survivors of GBV.

The national justice system based in Bambari, Bangui, and Bouar and working through three Courts of Appeal, faces enormous challenges in bringing to trial those charged with crimes committed in the conflict. In addition, the Central African Republic has:

- A Mixed Unit for Rapid Intervention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children (*UMIRR - L'Unité Mixte d'Intervention Rapide et de Répression des violences sexuelles faites aux femmes et aux enfants*), established by ministerial decree in 2015 and supported by UN entities;
- A Special Criminal Court (CPS), created in 2015 to investigate and prosecute “grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed on the territory of the Central African Republic since January 1st, 2003, [...] notably the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes”¹; and
- A Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission (*CVJRR – Commission Vérité, Justice, Réparation et Réconciliation*), created to investigate and establish the truth about serious national events from 1959 to 31 December 2019, and to promote justice and restore the dignity of victims, thereby achieving national reconciliation.

In terms of coordination, all programmes and activities regarding CRSV against children are coordinated through referral systems and GBV and CP Areas of Responsibility.

CAAFAG reintegration approach

After CAAFAGs are identified and released from armed forces or armed groups, their situation is verified. If they are “certified”² as former CAAFAG, an individual response plan is designed for each. Each plan outlines a set of services delivered through a referral system with a community-based approach involving Child Protection Community Networks (*RECOPE – Réseaux Communautaires de Protection de l'Enfant*). It includes medical attention, temporary care, family reunification/family mediation, psychosocial support, and education and socioeconomic reintegration support.

In addition, sensitisation activities geared towards children, families, and communities are organised through child-friendly spaces, media campaigns, and door-to-door visits.

¹ International Federation for Human Rights, What is the Special Criminal Court? 30 August 2017, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/59b7ea424.html>

² A child is “certified” as former CAAFAG when the verification process (held by MINUSCA and UNICEF focal point staffs) has shown that they are a minor of age and have been associated with an armed force or an armed group.

CRSV/GBV-related approach

Services provided to victims/survivors of GBV (including CRSV) are survivor-centred and offer multiple services accessed through referral systems. They follow guiding principles for interaction with child survivors of sexual violence: confidentiality, security, respect and non-discrimination.

There is no gender-specific response to CRSV against boys. Instead, CRSV against boys is embedded in the response provided to all victims of sexual violence.

Challenges and good practices

There are major challenges faced by programmes aimed at supporting child victims of CRSV committed by armed forces and armed groups during the child's time of association. Within their communities, child victims of CRSV face rejection and stigmatisation based on gender stereotyping. In general, girls are considered "weak" and "submissive", while boys are encouraged to be "strong". Boys are, therefore, discouraged from expressing their feelings, an act perceived as a sign of weakness. Girl victims of sexual violence are often perceived as "impure" and unfit for marriage. Boy victims are often perceived as "dirty" and dishonoured because they have been "used as a girl". Participants mentioned that parents of boy victims sometimes feared that the boys might become homosexual as a result of CRSV. In addition, any lack of consent by the victim was not taken into account, meaning victims are perceived as complicit in the act of CRSV, and "aligned [themselves] with the enemy".

Stigmatisation is so strong that it extends to the victim's/survivor's whole family. As a consequence, victims are blamed, rejected, stigmatised, and ostracised, resulting in many not seeking help. Individuals rarely seek justice because of the risks of stigmatisation and reprisals, lack of protection, high costs associated with prosecutions, slowness of procedures, and a general lack of confidence in the justice system.

A significant number of CAAFAG victims of CRSV lack access to protection programmes and services. Issues identified include identification processes that exclude the most vulnerable,³ a lack of awareness about existing programmes within communities, and victim/survivor fears of being identified and stigmatised.

Further, persistent insecurity across the country prevents children from accessing protection actors and vice versa. An atmosphere of insecurity also markedly slows the restoration of state services (e.g. social affairs, health, and justice).

Short-term programming due to funding constraints does not provide enough time to address complex situations and establish consistent support for victims/survivors. Community involvement is rarely sustainable. Finally, a lack of funding for training and resources results in unequal medical attention based on the area and organisation(s).

³ Identification of CAAFAG is a process whereby individuals who are minor in age are identified within the armed group/force (sometimes by the armed group's commanders who produce lists) before being released. As mentioned in UNICEF's 2022 evaluation of CAAFAG reintegration programmes, "the identification approach passing through commanders only made it possible to reach CAAFAG recognised as "worthy" of appearing on their lists. The testimonies collected (in particular with children) suggest that the lists excluded part of the children present within the groups, either because they were considered still "useful" (in the case of combatants and girls considered as spouses), or because they did not appear to them as "rights holders" in their own right (such as gatekeepers, and carriers). This potentially also includes children they have abused."

Challenges specific to boy victims of CRSV

Existing data collection and coordination systems do not provide a clear picture of the extent of CRSV against boys in the Central African Republic. Even if CP actors are encouraged to mention GBV cases to the GBV Information Management System (GBV IMS), there is no correlation between GBV IMS and CP data. In addition, CP data collected by the CP AoR refers to services delivered to children based on age and gender, however it does not indicate other vulnerabilities these children have and may be receiving support for. As a result, there is no way to know the number of children suffering multiple vulnerabilities, for example how many among the reported cases of CAAFAG have also been reported as victims of sexual violence. Therefore, there is a limited possibility of learning about boys' vulnerabilities to and experiences of sexual violence in the conflict in the Central African Republic. This results in an invisibility of their needs in programme design and implementation.

This invisibility, along with the fact that programmes and services are already limited in both geographic outreach and numbers covered, contributes to a situation where many boys have no access to specialised GBV services. As women and girls are disproportionately affected, and because of stigma and lack of specific consideration relating to boys, activities and services related to CRSV are designed primarily for girls. This results in a further perception of services as only dedicated to girls and women. Additionally, knowledge and expertise on specific responses to sexual violence against boys remains limited.

Recommendations

Recommendations fall into two categories: (1) retain existing approaches and reinforce them with greater resources and better conditions, and (2) introduce new approaches and practices.

1. Strengthen CAAFAG reintegration support programmes to improve responses to victims/survivors of CRSV.

- Improve the identification of minors of age within armed forces and armed groups and the identification of self-demobilised children. Improve access to services for these individuals.
- Secure flexible and long-term funding for GBV and CP Services through increased advocacy towards donors about the necessity for children to receive the support they need for as long as required.
- Strengthen field human resources (including CP practitioners and health, justice, and education actors) through capacity-building on how to identify and respond to victims/survivors of sexual violence and regular supervision by SV specialists to discuss cases and approaches.
- Involve appropriate state services in reintegration programmes (e.g. health, education, justice).
- Increase psychosocial and economic support to families to help them support their children.

2. Improve coordination, knowledge, and documentation.

- Fill gaps in knowledge and understanding of the problem through the exchange of ideas, reflection on practices, and lessons learned to strengthen responses including responses of the existing GBV and CP AoRs.
- Map and analyse services available for boys and girls.

3. Improve access by service providers to boys.

- Inform children and youth, through child-friendly and trauma-sensitive messaging, about CRSV against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups, existing services, and ways to access them.
 - Ensure the inclusion of SV against boys in situation analysis.
 - Ensure confidentiality, respect, security and non-discrimination when interacting with child victims who wish to request support.
4. Address the root causes of stigma and ensure greater visibility of the issue of boy victims of SV.
- Raise awareness around this stigma among children and young people through talks, youth clubs, etc.
 - Raise awareness around this stigma among families and communities through various channels with messages about girls *and* boys.
5. Develop specific responses to girl and boy victims/survivors of CRSV in CAAFAG reintegration programmes.
- Consider specific responses for boys and girls (e.g., identifying specific staff responsible for monitoring boys and girls, adapting dignity kits, etc.).
 - Train all protection staff in specificities related to boys and girls.
6. Provide children with appropriate medical attention.
- Ensure free medical screening for all CAAFAG is provided by state health services and NGOs, including for sexually transmitted diseases.
 - Design specific medical attention (vigilance and response) to boy and girl victims of sexual violence.
7. Strengthen the provision of family support in CP actors.
- Family support can be particularly beneficial for boy and girl victims/survivors of sexual violence to reduce the stigma suffered. However, families should not be made aware of their child's experience of sexual violence without the child's consent. Therefore, CP actors and social workers should help children to reflect on the balance between the benefits and risks of disclosing to their family. If the child decides to disclose their situation, they should receive support to do so.
 - In that case, individual support and advice should be provided to families on how to accompany and support their child's reintegration. This may include sensitisation on adolescent social and emotional components, strengthening of positive parenting practices, and mental health and psychosocial support.

Restitution workshop in Bangui

Context

The first restitution workshop was hosted by the CP AoR on 2 November 2023.

Participants

In total, 21 persons attended (see list of participants in Annex 1), among them 11 men and 10 women from two UN agencies, seven international NGOs, and nine national NGOs. None of these individuals were personally involved in the research, but two of the organisations represented were.

After the presentation, several participants asked questions and made comments.

Feedback

In general, participants appreciated the presentation of research results and validated the general understanding of the issue's existence, the surrounding taboo(s), the poor visibility of boys in the programmes, the absence of a specific response for boys, and the lack of resources for long-term support. They agreed with the recommendations, in particular the need to draw attention to the topic, build knowledge on it, and invest more in responding to the needs of boy victims.

Participants agreed on the importance of addressing the issue, some testifying that they had already identified cases of SV against boys without knowing the individuals' specific needs or support required.

In terms of recommendations, they highlighted the need to learn more about the issue and the need for support to be able to identify victims and provide specific responses. For example, additional support in the form of safe and confidential reporting channels that offer a room for survivors to come forward and seek support while protecting their identity.

The example of dignity kits adapted solely to girls' needs caught the attention of several who intervened. They stressed the need for kits to also be tailored to boy victims' needs. Reacting to these remarks on the inadaptability of dignity kits for boys, the coordinator of CP AoR insisted that this was not the sole problem but rather another indication of the lack of awareness about and invisibility of boy victims/survivors of CRSV.

Other participants maintained that the topic of boy victims/survivors of CRSV should be integrated into case management procedures, all CAAFAG and CP programming, and that all staff (and partners) should be sensitised and trained to have the issue in mind throughout processes involving children. To achieve this goal, they identified the need for holistic training on the topic.

Throughout the discussion after the presentation, the CP AoR coordinator was very supportive. She mentioned that some of the recommendations included in the report have already influenced the CP AoR's practice. For example, they now recommend that CP NGOs provide all data related to GBV responses to the GBV IMS. She also encouraged NGOs to include families in the case management procedure, following the guidance programme of The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *'Growing strong together: A parenting program to support the reintegration of children and prevent their recruitment'*, that was the topic of a training session held by CP AoR in May 2023 in partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

Restitution workshop in Bria

Context

The restitution workshop in Bria took place on 8 November 2023, organised in partnership with Plan International who supported the organisation of FGDs during the data collection phase of the research. The workshop was part of ASP's commitment to accountability after the research was finalised. The workshop was also aimed at disseminating research results to key actors of CAAFAG reintegration in Bria, for use in both policymaking and implementation, and to capture feedback and recommendations on ways forward.

Due to a scheduling conflict with an event involving CP actors from the area, the restitution workshop was held in a smaller room than planned. Thus, instead of proposing group reflections after the presentation, feedback was provided in plenary. Research results were presented in French

(translated into Sango) for approximately 50 minutes. After a short break, comments, questions, and recommendations were articulated and discussed (with translation between French and Sango) for approximately 90 minutes.

Participants

Invitations were sent to the 36 participants of the FGDs held in Bria in June 2022 during the data collection phase (or their replacement in cases where original participants had left) and to 14 key CP actors and state services in the area. The most senior NGO staff (in charge of supervision, management, and coordination) and the state services were occupied with a different workshop, meaning the audience for the restitution workshop mainly comprised field staff, local NGO staff, and community representatives.

In total 26 men and 15 women attended: 14 international NGO staff, 8 national NGO staff, 4 local NGO staff, 1 state service (a trainee magistrate of the Bria High Court), 7 community representatives (neighbourhood leaders, block leaders, group leaders, notables, and community focal points), 5 members of Child Protection Community Networks (RECOPE), and 2 community partners. Among them, 11 had participated in FGDs in June 2022: 5 international NGO staff (3 of whom had changed NGOs), 2 national NGO staff, 1 local NGO staff, 1 community representative, and two RECOPE members.

Feedback

As the Bria audience was mainly made up of field staff and community representatives, their feedback focused less on programmatic recommendations and more on the challenges of working with CAAFAG (identifying and advising them and supporting their reintegration) and the importance of becoming better equipped to identify and respond to CRSV against boys.

While the majority of speakers recognised the existence of sexual violence against boys within armed forces and armed groups and the challenges in responding to it (in particular those who had participated in the FGDs), a member of a local NGO (who had not participated in the FGDs in 2022) questioned the sources of the information. This individual cast doubt on the possibility that the armed forces and armed groups could commit such acts, suggesting that it may have been a case of violence during attacks ("in my opinion, these things cannot happen among the fighters"). While this opinion could have generated doubts among audience members, other participants continued to comment on the challenges of responding to CRSV against CAAFAG of all genders and discussed potential ways forward.

Comments and suggestions included the following:

- Given that CP and medical staff are bound by confidentiality commitments, a member of the audience working in the medical sector expressed that some knowledge on the situation of boys might not have been shared during the data collection phase. He suggested that further research involving children should be undertaken to learn more directly from them about their situation.
- Several workshop participants involved in CAAFAG reintegration programmes (NGO staff and community members) commented on challenges they face in identifying and supporting child reintegration. They mentioned difficult or non-existent communication with armed forces and armed groups; lack of knowledge about programmes in certain parts of the communities; involvement of parents in the recruitment of children or the marriage of their daughters to commanders, preventing their demobilisation or safe return; and violence exerted by some

demobilised children who refuse any guidance. These participants therefore wondered how they could help children disclose CRSV.

Their recommendations included:

- To improve existing CAFAAG reintegration programmes, develop new ways to identify CAAFAG and involve community members, and support members of CP community networks so that they become sustainable and can ensure follow-up with children when NGO projects end.
- To integrate the issue of CRSV against boys into CP programmes, set up training on how to identify and support boy victims of sexual violence for all staff involved in CP (including actors who are part of the referral system); organise sensitisation in the communities as participants argued that the taboo could be reduced if made more visible; and improve access to justice and protection of victims and witnesses by training community network members on the existing system.

Additional recommendations

Workshops with the Director of Social Affairs, the Child Protection Officer of Plan International in Bria, and the Coordinator of *Espérance*, a national NGO that developed CAAFAG reintegration programmes in the Bria area in recent years, could not take place due to scheduling conflicts. However, these individuals sent to ASP recommendations for improvements to existing CAAFAG reintegration approaches and recommendations for methods to address CRSV against boys in CP responses:

- During CAAFAG verification procedures, CP officers should ask children to talk about their daily lives within the armed forces or armed groups. This could allow CP actors to identify signs of sexual abuse or violence against them or their peers.
- Education and economic reintegration specifically should be provided to children. Vocational training centres should be set up to facilitate such processes.
- All actors involved in providing services to CAAFAG and child victims of SV should be trained on CRSV against all genders to address their specific/differing needs. These include CP actors (in particular case managers and psychosocial agents), actors from other sectors who are part of the referral system (education, nutrition, health justice, health, etc.), CP community network members, child-friendly spaces and youth club organisers, and facilitators of daily life talking sessions. This would facilitate the better assessment of children's situations when interviewing them during case management procedures in order to identify cases, refer them to appropriate services, and document cases that could feed into CP AoR data collection and GBV IMS. This would deepen knowledge of the issue and sensitise children and adolescents on the topic.

Final workshop in Bangui (September 2024)

On 25 September 2024, ASP co-convened with the GBV AoR and the CP AoR a workshop and final presentation on ASP's research findings. ASP was invited by the CP AoR and GBV AoR to present to members of both sub-clusters and the wider humanitarian community the research's key findings and methodology, and outcomes of previous validation exercises. The workshop was therefore held in response to CP actors' demands to help think through the implementation of key recommendations highlighted in the report. This included the need to sensitise communities, develop context-specific information material and guidance for CP actors, and inform the development and adoption of gender-inclusive policies. One key recommendation which emerged in previous workshops was for ASP to

develop a guidance note to improve prevention and responses for boy survivors of sexual violence.⁴ While the guidance note was not an output funded under the partnership with OSRSG CAAC, it was delivered by ASP as it was requested by the CP community in the Central African Republic and was a key recommendation in the research implemented by ASP as a partner of OSRSG CAAC.

Participants

Invitations were sent to 37 participants identified by ASP, GBV-AoR, and CP-AoR to represent the governments and national and international NGOs involved in addressing sexual violence in CAR.

Among them, 23 participants (including 5 co-facilitators from ASP, GBV-AoR, and CP-AoR) attended the workshop: 2 from the government (one from the Mixed Unit for Rapid Intervention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children (UMIRR) and the other from the *Ministry of Ministry of Gender Promotion, Protection of Women, Family* (MPGPFFE)), 9 from international NGOs (programme coordinators and protection officers), 3 from UN entities, 1 from the ICC Trust Fund, 1 from a National survivors association, and 2 donors (the French embassy and ECHO).

Conclusion

Lessons learned from the workshops.

The restitution workshops (along with various stakeholders' meetings in Bangui) informed ASP about the evolution of CRSV against boys in the Central African Republic context and provided some lessons learned.

All interlocutors recognised the importance of the issue and the need to break the silence and adopt a gender-inclusive approach in responding to CRSV in the Central African Republic through the improvement of policies and programmatic approaches and practices. However, in the absence of organisations integrating a specific focus on the topic of sexual violence against boys in the country, and because of the high turnover of humanitarian staff as well as the volatility of the context, other priorities occupy CP agendas and gradually erode progress made in raising awareness among decision-makers. Thus, for the issue to become more visible and to help create a strong agenda on CRSV against boys in the country, organisations already present in the Central African Republic need to put more focus on the issue, or specialised organisations need to be more present in the Central African Republic, potentially through partnerships with government and humanitarian actors. In addition to the improvement of services to support boy victims of CRSV, organisations should lead discussions and reflection on how to “break the silence” around the topic to reduce associated stigma and discrimination.

⁴ The need for developing proactive guidance for responses to boy victims of sexual violence emerged during a previous restitution workshop organised by ASP in Bangui in 2023. At this workshop, participants “highlighted the need to learn more about the issue, and to receive support in order to be able to identify victims and provide specific responses”. Upon this request, ASP, CAR GBV-AoR and CAR CP-AoR co-drafted a *Guidance note for the prevention and response to sexual violence against boys in CAR*.

Potential ways forward

From conversations generated by the restitution workshops, some suggestions emerged on activities that could be set up as a first step to implementing the recommendations.

At the national level

As part of a general effort to make the topic of sexual violence against boys more explicit and visible in strategies, programmes, and procedures, the review of the 2019-2023 National Strategy to Combat Gender-based Violence, Harmful Practices and Child Marriage in the Central African Republic *should ensure that* boys and men are explicitly referenced as potential victims and appropriate measures are designed for them. This could be supported by organisations having specific expertise in this area.

With the objective of making CP actors more gender-inclusive, technical support should be provided for the review of case management procedures, including the adaptation of approaches to improve the response.

For this, as advised during the September 2024 workshop in Bangui, once finalised, the *Guidance note for the prevention and response to sexual violence against boys in CAR* that has been elaborated with the Central African Republic CP and GBV AoRs should be disseminated among a variety of actors.

In addition, the government in close collaboration with the humanitarian and child protection sector should ensure that:

- Existing services for boy survivors of sexual violence should be mapped and realised at provincial and national levels.
- Training should be provided to all actors involved (at national and local levels) on specific and appropriate gender-inclusive practices in addressing sexual violence.
- Approaches that have proved effective in other contexts (such as One-stop Centre) should be raised if relevant and new approaches should be adopted for the CAR-specific context.
- Sensitisation should be designed and implemented to “break the silence” and improve the acceptance and integration of survivors within families and communities.

At the local level

To ensure new procedures are adapted to the realities in the field, CP field staff, local state services, community representatives, and other sectors of the referral systems should be involved in their review.

Training schemes should be designed along with new procedures to ensure field staff and actors across sectors involved in response to CRSV against children improve their practices.

Annex I – List of participants at workshops

Bangui (November 2023)

21 participants: 11 men, 10 women

- 2 UN Agencies (2 participants)
- 7 International NGOs (9 participants)
- 9 National NGOs (10 participants)

Bria (November 2023)

41 participants: 26 men, 15 women (including 11 participants from FGDs in 2022)

- 5 INGOS (14 participants)
- 5 National NGOs (8 participants)
- 2 Local NGOs (4 participants),
- 1 State Representative
- 7 Community Representatives
- 5 Participants from 2 Child Protection Community Networks (RECOPE)
- 2 Community Partners

Bangui (September 2024)

26 participants

- 9 International NGOS
- 8 National NGOs
- 2 Participants from Government institutions
- 1 ICC
- 1 Survivors association
- 3 Participants from UN agencies
- 2 Donors

Annex II – Agenda of final workshop

Atelier de présentation de la note d'orientation pour la prévention et la réponse aux violences sexuelles faites aux garçons en RCA

Mercredi 25 septembre 2024

- Durée: 1 jour
- Dates: Mercredi 25 Septembre
- Horaire: 8:30 - 16:30
- Lieu: Bangui, AGETIP-CAF

Programme du mercredi 25 septembre 2024		
Heure	Activité	Intervenant
8h30	Ouverture de l'atelier	CP-AoR / GBV-AoR / ASP
9h00	Présentation de la situation des violences sexuelles faites aux garçons en RCA	Jean-Baptiste Rafiki (GBV AoR)
09h30	Éléments de contexte d'élaboration de cette note	Marjana Badas (CP AoR)
10h00	Présentation de la note d'orientation	Sylvie Bodineau (ASP)
10h30	Questions et réponses sur la note d'orientation	Sylvie Bodineau (ASP) + part.
10h45	<i>Pause-café</i>	
11h15	Travaux de groupes sur les différents chapitres de la note	Participants
12h30	Restitution des travaux de groupe	Marjana Badas (CP-AoR) + part.
13h15	<i>Pause-repas</i>	
14h00	Présentation des réflexions sur les recommandations pour la mise en œuvre d'actions liées à la note d'orientation	Marjana Badas (CP AoR)
14h15	Travaux de groupe sur les recommandations/next steps	Participants
15h15	Restitution des travaux de groupe et échanges	Salimatou Traoré (CP AoR) + part.
16h	<i>Clôture de la journée</i>	CP-AoR / GBV-AoR / ASP
16h10	<i>Pause-café</i>	