

Building service capacity in crisis settings to support diverse adolescent boys and male youth survivors of sexual violence

This phase of the Women's Refugee Commission's (WRC's) sexual violence project focuses on addressing the needs of diverse adolescent boys (ages 10-19) and male youth (ages 10-24) affected by crises. It aims to build the capacity of humanitarian practitioners to design, implement, and evaluate prevention strategies and response services on sexual violence and exploitation for these groups. It pays particular attention to male-identified and non-binary young people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

The project is led by WRC and partners Bandhu Social Welfare Society, MOSAIC, UN Women, and the Humanitarian Gender-Based Violence Coordination Mechanism in Colombia.

Background

Sexual violence is a risk faced by all refugees—women, girls, men, boys, and gender-diverse people. It manifests in numerous ways and to varying degrees depending on the individual intersections of discrimination and marginalization that they may face.

In humanitarian settings, services sensitive to the unique needs of all sexual violence survivors are limited. Without appropriate response, survivors may suffer harmful effects, including physical and psychological trauma.

Despite this understanding, humanitarian practitioners often lack the knowledge and capacity needed to support all people at risk of, and surviving, sexual violence in crisis settings.



An adolescent Rohingya male in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. ©Dale Buscher/WRC

Project Background

Phase 1

WRC launched the project to document the diverse characteristics, scope, and consequences of sexual violence in humanitarian crises for people who identified as male or were assigned male at birth, including persons with diverse SOGIESC. WRC's work with men and boys is grounded in intersectional [feminist principles](#) that prioritize accountability to women and girls and recognize evolving notions of gender diversity.

In Phase 1 (2018–2021), WRC conducted exploratory research in [three refugee settings](#) (among the refugee community in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh; among refugees and migrants traveling the Central Mediterranean route through Libya to Italy; and among urban refugees in Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya), piloted community-based projects to facilitate service uptake, established the [first inter-agency working group on male survivors](#), and developed [tools and guidance](#) to support frontline workers.

Phase 2

Phase 2 (2021–2024) seeks to leverage Phase 1 learnings to build the capacity of humanitarian practitioners, catalyze tool uptake, raise awareness, and expand service provision for crisis-affected adolescent boy and male youth (ABMY) survivors, including young people with diverse SOGIESC.

Key findings for Phase 2

Project findings from a systematic literature review and qualitative research with humanitarian service providers, global human rights experts, and LGBTQI+ service providers found that issues affecting male survivors, including survivors with diverse SOGIESC, reflect those facing female survivors.

- There are high unmet needs for health and mental health services for male survivors, including survivors with diverse SOGIESC. Despite this understanding, many practitioners lack the capacities, tools, and resources to effectively promote such survivors' health and well-being.
- A dearth of evidence exists on programming to address sexual violence among ABMY, and especially young people with diverse SOGIESC. The limited evidence available suggests that a multi-layered strategy combining awareness raising, situational prevention, and empowerment may be the most promising.

Implications for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers

The project aims to build the capacity of key humanitarian actors through the development and implementation of:

- **a toolkit to help frontline humanitarian staff provide support** to sexually exploited ABMY, including young people with diverse SOGIESC; and
- **a training package for non-specialist mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) providers in humanitarian settings** to conduct peer support groups for ABMY survivors, plus a training compendium for urban providers working with LGBTQI+ youth, which includes a focus on those who identify as female youth and/or girls.

Expected outcomes

Through resource development and capacity building of humanitarian practitioners, such as UN agencies, national LGBTQI+ civil society organizations, and national and international service delivery organizations, the project will contribute to:

- **increased support and access to services** for sexually exploited and displaced ABMY;
- **increased good quality, appropriate mental health services** for ABMY survivors, including LGBTQI+ youth; and
- **inclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC in sexual violence prevention and response** through trainings, briefings, inter-agency working groups, guidance, and advocacy.

Project team

[Women's Refugee Commission](#), lead, United States

[Bandhu Social Welfare Society](#), partner, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh
Humanitarian Gender-Based Violence Coordination Mechanism, partner, Colombia

[MOSAIC](#), partner, Lebanon

[UN Women](#), global and local partner in Colombia, Bangladesh, and Lebanon



Selected further reading

Project webpage

womensrefugeecommission.org/focusareas/sexual-gender-based-violence/sexualviolence-against-men-and-boys/

Resources from Project Phase 1

- **Guidance note:** *Addressing Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, And LGBTQI+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector* (2021).
- **Report:** *Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTQI+ Refugees: Learnings from Pilot Projects in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Italy/Bulgaria* (2021).
- **Training curriculum:** *Supporting Survivors of Violence: The Role of Linguistic and Cultural Mediators, with a Focus on Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Violence against Men and Boys* (2021).
- **Article:** "Ethics and Accountability in Researching Sexual Violence against Men and Boys" (2019).
- **Article:** "Characteristics and Impacts of Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement: A Multi-country Exploratory Study" (2020).

Keywords

Adolescents; boys; male youth; SOGIESC; LGBTQI+; sexual violence; sexual exploitation; gender-based violence (GBV); child protection; violence prevention; displacement; MHPSS; refugees; humanitarian response

Connect with us!

For more information about the project, contact Katherine Gambir, project lead and senior research advisor, WRC

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To join the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises and the Task Team on Male Survivors of Sexual Violence: iawg.net/about/sub-working-groups/gender-basedviolence/task-team-on-male-survivors-of-sexualviolence

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The Women's Refugee Commission improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice. We are a critical resource and leader on refugee protection at both national and international levels with a holistic understanding that encompasses human and refugee rights broadly.