A CALL FOR NUANCED, CONTEXTUALISED AND COORDINATED RESPONSES TO COMPLEX MANIFESTATIONS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

CASE STUDIES OF ETHIOPIA, KENYA AND THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

Artwork on cover by: We all fit by Hassan Killiku, Uweza Foundation
Designed by: Manida Naebklang
Edited by: Zahra Beg with support from Francesca Donelli

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For feedback or suggestions please contact researchteam@ecpat.org

Acronyms

CAAFAG	Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups
CP	Child Protection
CPMS	Child Protection Minimum Standards
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IASC	Interagency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced People
KI	Key Informant
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OPSC	Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, children suffer various forms of violence that can have long-term consequences. Data from 2016 estimated that one billion children aged 2-17 years had experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year.[1] The traumatic experience of childhood abuse, violence, neglect, and exploitation has a lasting negative impact on the physical, mental, and sexual health, wellbeing, and development of children and continues into adulthood.[2] Sexual violence affects children in all settings around the globe – no matter their gender, ethnicity, class, religion, educational level, or geographic location.[3] With the advent of information and communication technologies, opportunities to sexually exploit children have further increased. However, as seen over the years, the numerous global challenges of armed conflicts,[4] mass displacement and migration,[5] and climate change, and the insufficient measures to address their root causes and drivers, such as deepening economic inequalities, structural and systematic discrimination, and harmful social norms, and a general lack of

impunity for the perpetrators, continues to exacerbate the conditions that further expose children to sexual violence and exploitation.[6] Children in crisis contexts with overlapping marginalised identities, such as gender, disability, refugee status, and religious and ethnic minorities face heightened risks and barriers to accessing care.

Today, faced with multitudes of conflicts and crises, millions of children are in dire need of humanitarian assistance across every continent in the world; more than at any time since the Second World War.[7] According to UNICEF, *"more than 400 million children are living in areas under conflict; an estimated 1 billion children, nearly half the world's children, live in countries at extreme vulnerability to the impacts of climate change; [and] at least 36.5 million children are displaced from their homes, the highest number ever recorded."[8]* Yet, the situation of children is often ignored and underfunded.[9] While there is no official data on the number of children living in humanitarian settings who are exposed to increased risks of sexual

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1   Hillis et al. (2016, Mar). Global prevalence of past-year violence against children: a systematic review and minimum estimates. (This figure is an estimate and continues to be commonly featured in various publications to illustrate the scale of violence against children. For example, this figure is still referred to by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and INSPIRE Working.)

2   World Health Organization (WHO). (2016). INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children.

3   *Ibid.*

4   Defined by the International Committee of the Red Cross (2008): "Resort to armed force between two or more States, or protracted armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such organized groups arising in the territory of a State which reaches a minimum level of intensity." Cited in United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). Action to end child sexual abuse and exploitation: A review of the evidence. UNICEF, New York.; According to Global Conflict Tracker, there are 27 currents as of 15 December 2023.

5   Defined by IOM (2004): "A process of moving, either across an international border or within a State. It is a population movement encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition, and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants." Cited in United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). Action to end child sexual abuse and exploitation: A review of the evidence. UNICEF, New York.

6   United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). Action to end child sexual abuse and exploitation: A review of the evidence. UNICEF, New York.

7   EU-UNICEF. (2023, Feb). Children in Crisis: Spotlight on Underfunded Humanitarian Emergencies: A Discussion Series co-organized by the European Union and UNICEF.

8   *Ibid.*

9   *Ibid.*

exploitation, the evidence is clear that humanitarian settings further exacerbate the conditions and drivers that expose children to more risks of sexual exploitation and violence.[10]

To gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and manifestations of child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings, ECPAT International commissioned this global and multi-country research study. Three country contexts have been selected as case studies to further understand these dynamics: (1) Ethiopia and the internally displaced population from northern Ethiopia; (2) Kenya and the refugee communities in Nairobi and Kakuma Refugee Camp; and (3) the Kurdistan region of Iraq and the internally displaced people and refugee communities.

This global multi-country study explores the various definitions and manifestations of child sexual exploitation identified in the three case studies, the common perceptions, narratives, biases, norms and beliefs associated with child sexual exploitation in the context of a crisis; the current framings and understanding of sexual exploitation of children in the humanitarian sector; and the way that humanitarian aid systems, actors, and structures may impact the identification, response, access to services and prevention of child sexual exploitation.

Moreover, the study examines the current situation in the three humanitarian contexts, including the drivers leading to child sexual exploitation, the ways it is manifested in each crisis, and the ways that organisations, communities, and children respond to child sexual exploitation. By examining both the global landscape as well as three crisis affected regions in Ethiopia, Kenya, and the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the study adds to the growing body of knowledge and evidence related to child sexual exploitation, supporting practitioners and policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of what needs to be done to better respond to and prevent child sexual exploitation in communities affected by crisis.

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10   Various projects have been launched focusing on this topic: Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies; Project Soteria. For example, following the recent earthquake in Morocco, women's rights groups reported that girls were at risk of sexual assault and exploitation. Jamal, Urooba and Makhlouf, Kim (2023, September). Moroccan girls at risk of sexual assault, forced marriage after earthquake. Al Jazeera; Professor Zdravko Grebo Center for Interdisciplinary Studies and Save the Children. (2022). Wherever we go, Someone does us Harm: Violence against refugee and migrant children arriving in Europe through the Balkans. University of Sarajevo.

SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a literature review, from secondary data (published and grey literature review) and global key informant interviews from international non-governmental organisations and UN organisations, as well as collected primary data in three humanitarian settings to build a body of knowledge and practice. In addition, three ECPAT members conducted the country-level research in the three countries: Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (Kenya), Emmanuel Development Association (Ethiopia), and Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights (Kurdistan region of Iraq).

In total, 78 Key Informant (KI) interviews and four focus group discussions were conducted. The study was developed and implemented through a close collaboration between the consultant, ECPAT International and the ECPAT members, guided by a collaborative philosophy to finalise the methodology, semi-structured interview guides, and the sampling of key informants. In addition, an Advisory Group of global and regional-level practitioners, researchers, donors, and policymakers provided high-level input throughout the process.

This report acknowledges its limitations and does not claim to provide a complete picture, notably because most informants who participated in the interviews were from the child protection sector; limited governmental officials could be interviewed in the countries and no children or youth were consulted due to ethical and safeguarding issues. It attempts to provide a basis for reflections and critical considerations. Refer to Annex A for more detailed information regarding the methodology as well as the challenges and lessons learned.

RANGE OF DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGIES RELATED TO CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A review of the available literature and guiding frameworks as well as the global key informant interviews highlighted the challenge that among the range of different child protection, gender-based violence, and protection humanitarian actors, standardised definitions or typologies of child sexual exploitation do not seem to be widely recognised. Child protection or gender-based violence frameworks and reports typically focus on sexual abuse and violence of children,[11] (sexual and) gender-based violence, rather than explicitly focusing or defining the issues as sexual exploitation of children (see CPMS Standard 9 below).

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (AAP/PSEA) defines sexual exploitation as *"Any actual or attempted abuse of position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Comment: "Sexual exploitation" is a broad term, which includes a number of acts described below, including "transactional sex", "solicitation of transactional sex" and "exploitative relationship".*[12]

The Inter-Agency Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation further explains this notion, *"A child is a victim of sexual exploitation when she/he takes part in a sexual activity in exchange for something (e.g. gain or benefit, or even the promise of such) from a third party, the perpetrator, or by the child her/himself.' A child may be coerced into a situation of sexual exploitation through physical force or threats. However, she/he may also be persuaded to engage in such sexual activity as a result of more complex and nuanced factors, either human or situational, including a power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator. […] "Exploitation" in this context is thus a key term, the meaning of which marks its difference from sexual violence and sexual abuse of children. The main distinction lies in the notion of exchange involved in exploitation, which is lacking from the concepts of abuse and/or violence."*[13] While the Inter-Agency Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation[14] were developed to provide greater conceptual clarity on terminology on sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, only one key global informant referred to the document as a guiding framework and it does not appear to be used and referenced much within the larger body of literature in the humanitarian sector.[15]

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11   Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Sexual Violence against Children.; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Six Grave Violations.

12   Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2020). Understanding the difference between sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment and sexual and gender-based violence.

13   Interagency Working Group in Luxembourg. (2016, Jan). Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation.

14   *Ibid*.

15   Observation noted by Advisory Group member during one of the Advisory Group review sessions.

Child Protection Minimum Standards

Standard 9 – Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

'Sexual violence' is defined in this standard as any form of sexual activity with a child by an adult or by another child who has power over the child. Sexual violence includes both activities with and without bodily contact.

'Gender-based violence' (GBV) is a general 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. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.

In this standard, 'child survivors' refers to child survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including ***harmful practices.*** Harmful practices may include, for example, child marriage or female genital mutilation/cutting.

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (the main humanitarian child protection inter-agency network) and the 2019 Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS) which defines the main shared common principles for humanitarian workers seeking to effectively protect children effectively has adopted a standard on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). While it defines sexual violence in general terms, it lacks the fundamental notions of exchange characteristic of child sexual exploitation.[16]

Both the literature review and sixteen global key informant interviews indicated a general confusion regarding the 'child sexual exploitation' terminology. Each key informant had a different understanding and framing of sexual exploitation of children in humanitarian settings, which ranged from sexual violence and abuse, conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking, children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG), early or child marriage,[17] online sexual exploitation, child labour, transactional sex, and the sexual exploitation of a child in prostitution. These terms (particularly transactional sex, survival sex, and sexual exploitation in prostitution) were, at times, used interchangeably.[18] There is no harmony or unified understanding of what constitutes child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings.

> *"It's all part of gender-based violence, which is still under child protection. Because of the sexualised nature of the issues, we don't separate it out. We recognise that children may be engaging in these sexualised acts in times of crisis."*
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> *– Global, KI*

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16   The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2020, April). Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Edition 2019.

17   ECPAT International. (2020). Summary Paper on Child, Early and Forced Marriages as a Form of, or Pathway to Sexual Exploitation of Children. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

18   ECPAT recommends using definitions in line with the Luxembourg Terminology Guidelines to avoid confusion and/or to ensure that the term is not harmful towards the child.

> "Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual violence and child protection. We do not separate it out, as its own niche. We generally do not do that but look at the different issues as different types of risk factors."
>
> – Global, KI

> "Our approach is to look at prevalence and where the numbers are highest. And the numbers are highest when it comes to corporal punishment and sexual violence against girls."
>
> – Global, KI

The gender-based violence sector follows similar patterns of grouping sexual exploitation under the larger umbrella of gender-based violence. For example, the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Sub-Cluster in Ukraine, in their framework documents, defined survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, conflict-related sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and sex trafficking.

GBV Sub-Cluster, Generic GBViE Referral Pathway in Ukraine

It is evident that child rights violations of a sexual nature can never be addressed on their own and are connected to other violations. For instance, the prevention actions specified in the Standard 9 of the CPMS[19] are addressing drivers that would all contribute to preventing child sexual exploitation, such as transforming harmful social and gender norms or supporting parents. However, by framing it within these larger, all-encompassing frameworks of child protection or gender-based violence, the notion of exchange and profit that is central under sexual exploitation of children, tends to not be the focus of organisations, which can further dilute the understanding, nuances and complexities of the issue, and in turn the capacity of actors to adequately prevent, identify and respond to survivors taking into account the specificities and notions of 'commodification' present in the sexual exploitation of children and the types of interventions that are needed. The economic and exploitative aspects of child sexual exploitation require interventions to disrupt profits, intermediaries, individuals, and organisations benefiting from it, that cannot be fully and adequately addressed by measures aimed at preventing and addressing intra-familial sexual abuse or rape for instance.

One of the observations from the global key informant interviews was both the desire and challenge for stakeholders to categorise the sexual exploitation of children. This reflects a desired programmatic order and coherence, an effort to 'silo' specific forms of violence. In terms of protection outcomes for the child, these categorisations risk missing certain nuances and children and further exacerbate challenges of coordination that

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19   The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2020, April). Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Edition 2019. P124.

is critical to offer holistic and adapted responses.[20] These reflections are apparent in the country-level research and from frontline workers (refer to sections below and Annex C - Country Case Studies), who focused less on the categorisation and in some respects provided a more nuanced understanding of sexual exploitation compared to the more sectoral approaches that have implications for how interventions and related capacity development measures are developed and planned out for different practitioners.

Refer to Annex B – Key Terms and Definitions Table for a list of terms and definitions that were referenced in the global multi-country interviews and literature review.

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20   This divide between the "programmatic order" and the needs and desires of the children and community members is something that has been identified by the Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund, Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund, among other key actors.

MANIFESTATIONS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

This section presents a snapshot of the different manifestations of child sexual exploitation identified in the three countries of the research. For more details please see SEC in Humanitarian Contexts: Case study Ethiopia, SEC in Humanitarian Contexts: Case study Kenya, SEC in Humanitarian Contexts: Case study Kurdistan Region of Iraq

It also highlights specific manifestations that are often less explored, such as the sexual exploitation of children in prostitution, survival, and transactional sex; particular risks for children on the move and an emerging yet less documented issue of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation in humanitarian contexts.

Country-Level Research -- Kenya, Ethiopia, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq:
How is Child Sexual Exploitation Manifested in these Humanitarian Contexts?

Three ECPAT members conducted country-level research in the three countries and the specific crisis contexts: (1) Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (Kenya); (2) Emmanuel Development Association (Ethiopia); and (3) Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights (Kurdistan region of Iraq). In turn, each ECPAT country research team analysed what forms of child sexual exploitation are manifested in each of the humanitarian contexts. All three countries reflected on how the conflict, displacement, and resultant political, social, and economic insecurities are having a direct adverse impact on family and children's overall wellbeing and resulting in some children and young people engaging in dangerous, exploitative activities. All key informants reflected on the fact that the increased socio-economic and political vulnerabilities and breakdown of the social fabric of the communities have led to the rise of economic and sexual exploitation of children, particularly among internally displaced people and refugee children. While there was some sexual exploitation and violence of children prior to the conflicts and displacement; country key informants noted that it was not at this level and many of the different forms of exploitation (such as transactional sex, survival sex, exploitative labour practices, or exploitation of a child in prostitution) did not exist prior to the crisis. Throughout the paper all these issues will be unpacked further. For more information regarding each country situation refer to Country Case Studies.

Even though all three countries have legislation covering the sexual exploitation of children, the legal framework covering

these types of crimes differs considerably from one country to another. In **Kenya**, the Constitution guarantees every child the fundamental right to protection from various forms of abuse, including neglect, harmful cultural practices, violence, inhuman treatment, and exploitative labour.[21] Moreover, the Sexual Offences Act No. 3 of 2006 criminalises various forms of exploitation involving children, including promotion of sexual offences with a child, child trafficking, child sex tourism, child prostitution, and offences related to the distribution and possession of child sexual abuse material.[22] In **Ethiopia**, the Constitution[23] ensures the protection of children from exploitative practices, with specific laws implemented to uphold this right, such as Proclamation No. 1178/2020 on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons, that acknowledges the necessity for tailored rehabilitation and protection services for trafficked child victims of sexual exploitation.[24] In **Iraq**, the Iraqi Penal Code, endorsed by the Kurdish Parliament prohibits incitement of minors to sexual relations, and aiding minors in prostitution.[25] These provisions protect both boys and girls. However, a limitation of these laws is the absence of a clear definition of the exploitation of children in prostitution, despite the Law On Combating Prostitution No. 8 of 1988 in Iraq which defines prostitution as engaging in sexual activities with multiple individuals in exchange for payment, encompassing both heterosexual and homosexual acts.[26] However, while the law criminalises incitement and assistance to prostitution, there is no specific offence for engaging in prostitution with a minor, if not a vague reference to "every user [...] making use of persons engaged in prostitution for the purpose of exploiting them."[27]

In **Kenya**, key informants noted the different forms of child sexual exploitation: child labour (including domestic work and girls and boys being sexually exploited in their work); transactional or survival sex ('children engaged in their own sexual exploitation'); exploitation of a child in prostitution; sexual exploitation linked to drug abuse and trafficking; technology-facilitated economic and sexual exploitation (including TikTok and other social media platforms); temporary marriage by tourists and child marriage to facilitate resettlement (which leads to further exploitation and abandonment); and children travelling to Kenya for education but placed in exploitative work situations.

"Sexual exploitation permeates communities, perpetuates cycles of poverty, and erodes fabric of society."

– Kenya, KI

In **Ethiopia**, the following forms of child sexual exploitation were highlighted by the country key informants: child labour (including domestic work and girls and boys being sexually exploited in their work); transactional sex or survival sex (for money, food, protection, or promise of a job); exploitation of a child in prostitution (working in 'brothels'); migration and sexual exploitation (children, mostly girls, are travelling to the Middle East, including Gulf States, to earn money to support families but placed in exploitative domestic work situation and en route facing sexual exploitation and abuse); girls "*working in shops and forced to wear miniskirts*" can lead to sexual exploitation and violence, including sexual exploitation by "*security forces and controllers to receive protection*

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21   Republic of Kenya. (2010). The Constitution of Kenya 2010, Article 53(1)(d).
22   Republic of Kenya. (2006). Sexual Offences Act No. 3, Article 13-16.
23   Government of Ethiopia. (1995). Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Article 36.
24   Government of Ethiopia (2020). Proclamation No. 1178/2020 on Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons. Article 24 (1).
25   Republic of Iraq. (1969). Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 (Amended in March 2010). Article 399.
26   Republic of Iraq. (1969). Law On Combating Prostitution No. 8 of 1988, Article 1-3.
27   *Ibid*. Article 3(b).

and ensure the store is not demolished;" abduction and sexual exploitation and abuse of "thousands" of children (mostly girls but also boys) by rebel group and government forces and there are some instances of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.

"To support the family's income, children find themselves involved in sexual activities."

– Ethiopia, KI

In **the Kurdistan region of Iraq,** the key informants discussed the following forms of child sexual exploitation: exploitation of a child in prostitution; child labour and the subsequent risks of sexual exploitation *("harsh labour, child neglect – not treating them with respect and not giving them their rights adequately");* technology-facilitated economic and sexual exploitation; transactional or survival sex by service providers (including those in refugee/internally displaced people camps); sexual exploitation due to the camp infrastructure (e.g. shared toilets); sexual exploitation via trafficking *("lower rate since people are informed");* girls working in boutiques or coffee shops experiencing sexual or financial exploitation; and abduction and sexual exploitation of children by armed groups.

"Exploitation happens everywhere!"

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

Zoom in on Specific Manifestations of Child Sexual Exploitation in Humanitarian Contexts

This section brings particular attention to specific ways in which children affected by humanitarian crisis are sexually exploited, and the related complex drivers associated with sexual exploitation.

The Exploitation of Children in Prostitution, Transactional and Survival Sex in Humanitarian Contexts

Key informants from Kenya and Ethiopia reported on various forms of exploitation of children in prostitution but also transactional sex that can most of the time be associated with survival sex (please refer Annex B – Key Definitions and Definitions table for details on these terminologies). There are various reports of 'establishment-based' prostitution, in brothels (in Kenya) both within the refugee camps and outside alongside the adult sex industry; but children (mostly girls) are also reported to be sexually exploited in a range of establishments such as bars and hotels.

"One of the key informants (who is a sex worker) explained she worked in one of the brothels in the refugee community. The facility is owned by a lady from the host community and is located in the camps for security purposes as it is easy to carry out business without being noticed and disturbed by the police and other persons who have interest in security matters. She was concerned especially about a girl from the host community aged 15 whose parents died when she was eleven years of age. The child was left with five siblings to take care of with no resources to do so. The girl was not offered any assistance by the neighbours or any Government official for a period of at least three years. The girl, in the search for livelihood opportunities, ended up being introduced to the owner of the brothel who stated that she would help her."

- Kenya, KI

"The bar owners are also beneficiaries of their services since the young girls in the bars are used as a strategy to maximise their business."

- Ethiopia, KI

Various strategies are used to 'recruit' children, including many being abducted or trafficked, some finding themselves in extremely vulnerable situations after leaving their homes (sometimes to avoid bringing shame on their families after being a victim of sexual abuse as reported in Ethiopia) or faced with very limited alternatives to contribute to the family incomes. Children subjected to this type of 'survival sex' are often perceived by society as doing so by choice.

"The brokers can easily deceive children into going to prostitution with a false promise that they would earn a huge amount of money if they got recruited at the bars. There are also brokers who facilitate the young girls for commercial sex during school hours. Due to this, many young girls between 12 and 18 are sexually exploited by people who are over 30 and have money to pay for the brokers and the service."

– Ethiopia, KI

The perceptions of 'agency' of the child, making an active choice to engage in their own sexual exploitation has very serious implications. In particular, this impacts help-seeking behaviours of children, who may themselves internalise that they bear a responsibility in their own exploitation, limiting the likelihood that they would seek help and support and the fear of being prosecuted for prostitution offences in cases when laws fail to explicitly protect children from being prosecuted.[28] Considering the shame, stigma and societal attitudes blaming the children, even when they do report or seek help, they are often subject to *"the same dismissive attitude reserved for adults in prostitution."*[29]

"Survivors are being blamed by the community if they are found victims of sexual exploitation because many community members still believe that sexual exploitation happens with the consent of the affected person, and they are considered deceivers."

– Ethiopia, KI

"Instances of defilement often go unreported due to the misconception that children "consent" to the acts, given that they may have sexual partners."

– Kenya, KI

"For the male gender [cases are] few as many cases go unreported as the victim will be viewed as weak."

– Kenya, KI

28   Shields, R. T., & Letourneau, E. J. (2015). Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the Emergence of Safe Harbor Legislation: Implications for Policy and Practice.
29   ECPAT International. (2016, March). Power, Impunity and Anonymity - Understanding the Forces Driving the Demand for Sexual Exploitation of Children.

"Regarding how society views these children, it does not perceive women and girls as victims of sexual exploitation but rather as guilty. The community looks at these children in a very bad manner, looks down on them and views them as criminals. Additionally, the family shames the child. This could lead to the child being killed, if the society learned about what happened with him/her, especially if the thing that happened was between a boy and a girl. When this happens, culture, traditions and norms weigh in and play the main role in deciding what needs to be done, which is usually for the girl to be killed."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

Contexts of Vulnerability for Children 'On the Move'

Several reports have documented the prevalence of sexual exploitation of children who are travelling on their journeys, fleeing conflicts, trying to reach safer destinations where they are hoping to be able to work and generate incomes for themselves and their families. Key informants from Ethiopia in particular, highlighted the significant risks of sexual exploitation of children, often girls, during their journey to the Arab Gulf States or of sexual exploitation of children who were trying to escape conflict zones.

"Girls want to go to the Arab countries but prefer to choose the illegal way or route via Afar-Djibouti by crossing the Red Sea and hoping to reach Saudi Arabia. But due to the illegal brokers lobbying and the bureaucratic nature of the government related to passport issuance, the young girls prefer this illegal route. Hence, this route highly exposes young girls to being sexually abused and raped by the brokers and traffickers and even by their employers in Arab countries, as they are illegal."

– Ethiopia, KI

Similar cases have been documented about migrant boys from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Bangladesh in Greece and highlighted the prevalence and mechanisms leading boys to be subjected to survival sex to earn money for their onward journeys or just to survive. According to a report on migrant children in Greece, *"Living in limbo for periods longer than eight months and having drained all their financial resources, migrants start seeking alternative ways—whether legal or illegal— to earn money either to survive or to pay smugglers for their onward journeys. Given the very limited income generating options available to them, children gravitate towards dangerous and illegal activities to pay smugglers, including theft, drug dealing, and transactional sex."[30]*

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30   Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University. (2017). Emergency within an Emergency. The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece.

Throughout the literature review and the interviews in all three countries, the lack of access to financial resources was presented as one of the major contributing factors resulting in children having to secure incomes, for themselves or their families, at any cost, regardless of the exploitative nature in which they may find themselves. This is further exacerbated by the unanimous conclusions of all key informants, that due to the crisis, the social expectations of children are changing, and children must contribute to the family stability. Major structural and individual drivers to sexual exploitation of children in contexts affected by humanitarian crisis include the lack of economic opportunities, often aggravated by a critical lack of access to basic needs (including food scarcity which was repeatedly mentioned in Ethiopia), prolonged difficult living conditions, family expectations and traditional attitudes to work and gender roles.

"In our community, people under the age of 18 are considered children. There's a difference between boys and girls, for example the girls under 15 years of age and boys under 18, undergo physiological changes. However, due to crises, this changes. For example, in crisis periods, boys tend to hold the responsibility of the family and quit school. Girls quit school as well and get married."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Without a doubt, this role changes in crises, for example when a crisis like war hits, the family becomes displaced and moves to another location. During this phase, the family's economic situation worsens, and they end up with no option other than getting their daughters married away, so that they protect their daughters' wellbeing in the camp."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Due to the crisis, both girls and boys have additional responsibilities to support their families through income-generating activities, including some illegal work like robbery, theft, and beggar work, which is common for boys. While girls engage in sex trade for the exchange of money to support their families and themselves."

– Ethiopia, KI

Technology - Protective and Exploitative?

The digital world permeates the lives of children everywhere, including in humanitarian contexts. For children, the approach to information and communication technologies (ICT) is filtered through risk, harm and opportunity. Evidence shows that children affected by crisis often rely heavily on digital technologies to maintain connections with families and peers, obtain information to identify safe travel routes, access services,

follow the news and seek distraction from their situation. Recent studies have shown that, although the use of digital technologies may vary depending on the age, gender, ability or the movement along the migration route (while on the move, in camps or in temporary transit or destinations), digital leisure activities including one-to-one and group messaging, sharing of digital materials, photos, accessing social media, online gaming but also dating and romance are among the most prevalent uses of digital technology for refugees across the globe.[31] It has also shown to be critical for children to cope with stress and adolescents who *"take refuge in their mobile devices to participate in the youth microculture, both locally and globally".[32]*

As one of the global key informants noted, the democratisation of the Internet and ease in which all communities have access to technology have positive outcomes to access critical information, remain connected with families and access certain services, but there is still limited research exploring the complexities and impact of technologies for children in humanitarian settings.

"Perhaps we need to invest more on research and work with tech companies to increase safety so it can be an avenue to access services [in humanitarian settings]?... Now that we can provide gender-based violence information online in humanitarian settings, what has changed? What happens to girls once they get their information?"

– Global, KI

There is a major generational gap between caregivers and children in their use of digital technologies. The Disrupting Harm research conducted in 13 countries across Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia[33] showed that parents feel ill-equipped to guide and support their children online, with for instance, only 16% of caregivers using the Internet in Ethiopia. Often children are more tech-savvy than their caregivers, whose practical knowledge on digital safety is limited: 64% and 53% of caregivers in Kenya and Ethiopia respectively, know how to change privacy settings and 42% in Ethiopia and 45% in Kenya who do not know how to report harmful content on social media.[34] In general, this is concerning but particularly for humanitarian contexts where unsupervised access to some types of content may lead to various forms of harm including unwanted exposure to sexual content.

"In normal situations, we can benefit from technology, but during a crisis, its negative effects will surface. For example, you always hear the news of death, killings and exploitation."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

31   UNHCR. (2023). The Digital Leisure Divide and the Forcibly Displaced.
32   Mendoza Pérez, K. & Morgade Salgado, M. (2020). Mobility and the mobile: A study of adolescent migrants and their use of the mobile phone.
33   In Eastern and Southern Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda; and Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.
34   Disrupting Harm is a collaborative research initiative conducted by ECPAT International, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). For more information: Disrupting Harm: Evidence on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

While online child sexual exploitation and abuse is a concern in humanitarian settings, as several global key informants pointed out, it is not yet receiving the same level of focused attention by these same stakeholders in humanitarian settings, as it is in non-humanitarian contexts:

"I was just in a two-day meeting on online protection, and I tried to raise the issue of online exploitation in humanitarian settings, and it didn't go far. There is very little evidence on online exploitation in humanitarian settings and more work needs to be done on this... Has the increase of access to the Internet led to more grooming of children... increased harassment of women's rights defenders?"

– Global, KI

There is however clear evidence from around the world that children are exposed to various threats and risks of child sexual exploitation and abuse facilitated by technologies. A few reports have collected empirical evidence of child sexual exploitation, including facilitated through technologies in contexts affected by crisis or when children are on the move.

In the first months of the war in Ukraine, Thomson Reuters reported an alarming surge of Internet searches for sexual services by Ukrainian women, highlighting how some have taken advantage of the instability to recruit women in vulnerable situations. The Council of Europe and many others have documented how traffickers are using technology to recruit and sexually exploit persons in vulnerable situations, including through social media platforms and dating apps.[35]

In all three country humanitarian contexts, the impact of the Internet on children was perceived as bringing potential risks to sexual exploitation:

"In relation to technology, illegal sexual videos are released through websites so that children watch these videos through smartphones, and in return, they are motivated to try it practically."

– Ethiopia, KI

"Social media is one of the main reasons that children are affected because parents cannot control their children... monitor social media... leads children in the wrong direction."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

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35   Campana, P. (2022). Online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings. Council of Europe. Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

COMMON BELIEFS, NORMS, BIASES, AND PERCEPTIONS SHAPING THE NARRATIVES AND APPROACHES TO THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

Over the last few decades, there has been growing chorus of critique and critical conversations about the ways that racism, colonialism, patriarchy, adultism, and other systematic oppressions are not just theoretical concepts but real drivers of inequality, ineffectiveness, and harm to international child rights, child protection, and the violence prevention sectors. Humanitarian aid can cause harm and weaken the self-worth and autonomy of those it intends to support if delivered without addressing or even considering underlying issues.[36]

To date, global child protection, child rights, and violence prevention sector policies and strategies have been typically driven and led by Global North-based donors, governments, and international organisations; even when working in partnership with local actors. Within these sectors, despite some progress and acknowledgement of some of the problems raised, there has been a tendency to transport, replicate, and export Western, Anglo-Saxon and Eurocentric definitions and frameworks, potentially to increase the speed of responses during crisis. This also implies promoting conceptions of a universal model of childhood, family, community, marriage, education, and work, and in turn, violence prevention and response models across the globe, including humanitarian settings.[37] This one-size-fits-all narrative struggles to consider the different context-specific needs of families and children. One key informant in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, for example, reflected on the imposition of Western values by the humanitarian aid actors and structures and lack of contextualisation to fit the local norms and needs, *"Yes, sometimes there is that problem of not adapting the [humanitarian] responses because the Western context is very different from ours."*

Thus, the contradictions of these framings, models, programming, and policy interventions must be seriously analysed including the ways in which their application can potentially increase harm to children and families.[38]

The sectors responding to sexual exploitation of children, namely child protection and gender-based violence, do not stand outside of this critique, although progress to contextualise interventions has been

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36   Keshavarzian, Ghazal. (2022, May). Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights: A Report Summarizing the Key Learnings and Recommendations from the Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute. New York: Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network at Columbia University.

37   *Ibid;* Love, C. (2006). Maori Perspectives on Collaboration and Colonization in Contemporary Aotearoa / New Zealand Child and Family Welfare Policies and Practices. In Towards Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare: International Comparisons of Child Protection, Family Service, and Community Caring Systems. University of Toronto Press.; CPC Learning Network. (2021, May). Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute, Conversation #2: Confronting Colonialism, Racism, and Patriarchy in Child Welfare and Child Rights programming.; Veitch, H., Cody, C. (2021). Understanding Sexual Violence Against Children as a Rights Violation: Engaging with Challenges; Montgomery, Heather. (2001). Modern Babylon? Prostituting Children in Thailand. Fertility, Reproduction and Sexuality – Volume 2, Berghahn Books; Ansell, Nicola. (2005). Children, Youth, and Development. Oxon: Routledge.

38   *Ibid.*

noted. As a community, we need to be careful that our definitions and the framings that are applied to the development and implementation of prevention and support programs are not based on *"a universal concept but further unpacked and locally conceptualised"*[39] and *"nuanced whereby we find a way to engage around that nuance."*[40]

The importance of nuance, need for local contextualisation, and understanding of the limitations of these specific humanitarian realities is reflected by one of the key informant's thoughts on the *"many guidelines and frameworks."*

This following section will unpack the commonly held beliefs, norms, biases, and perceptions around child survivors of sexual exploitation held by different groups of stakeholders which serve as the organising principles and assumptions in designing programmes and services, and how that may align or contrast with country and community-level perceptions and understanding.

"We have so many guidelines and frameworks on [humanitarian] child protection, gender-based violence, sexual violence, etc. It's hard to keep up. But most of these guidelines frame the issues as black and white and lack nuance. Most guidance is talking about the perfect world where child protection is adequately funded and there is effective coordination and accountability. But that is not the reality in which we are working in. That I am working in. It is not the reality on the ground."

– Global, KI

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39   Global key informant interview.
40   Global key informant interview.

Perception of a Child as an Inherently "Vulnerable (would-be Victim)"[41] in Humanitarian Settings

Across all humanitarian settings, vulnerability is the central organising principle of international humanitarian aid, defining who is 'suffering' and in 'need of saving' and should be targeted and prioritised.

The static models of gender vulnerability and the binary, heteronormative, and paternalistic view of victimhood, rooted in the singular narrative of local communities' perceived traditions and inherent gender inequality and harmful norms, tends to shape humanitarian responses.[42]

Regardless of the humanitarian situation, within this paradigm, it is almost certain that a child is defined not as a social actor but as a vulnerable or potential victim, which denies them any form of agency or lived reality.[43]

While it is critical to acknowledge that children have the right to special consideration and protection particularly when living in exceptionally difficult conditions and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that *"the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care,"*[44] humanitarian settings[45] overlook the importance of analysing the children and young person's situation, individually or at an intersection, that embraces class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or gender, but also legal status.[46] This intersectionality should inform analysis on child sexual exploitation since the power dynamics and imbalances, which are additionally layered by inequality, racism, colonialism, patriarchy, structural violence, and adultism, can further lead to exploitative behaviours.[47]

41   Hart, Jason. (2023, March). The Child as Vulnerable Victim: Humanitarianism Constructs Its Object. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 20, no. 6: 5102.; The static notion of vulnerability is also discussed in Beta, A.R., Febrianto, R. (2020). Are Indonesian Girls Okay? An Examination of The Discourse of Child Marriage, Victimization, and Humanitarian Visuality of Global South Girls. Jurnal Studi Pemud. Volume 9, Nomor 2.

42   Hart, Jason. (2023, March). The Child as Vulnerable Victim: Humanitarianism Constructs Its Object. Cocking, J., Davies., Finney, N. et al. (2022, May). Independent review of the implementation of IASC Protection Policy. HPG Commissioned Report. London. ODI.; Children's Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF). (2023). Seeking Safety: Learning Brief Vol 2., No. 1; Engvall, M.A. (2019, May). Sex Work and Humanitarianism: Understanding Predominant Framings of Sex Work in Humanitarian Response.; Brun, Delphine. (2022, July). A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West. p23.; Bransky, R., Myrum, J., Sibanda., Z and Marriam., F. (2021). The static notion of vulnerability is also discussed in Beta, A.R., Febrianto, R. (2020). Are Indonesian Girls Okay? An Examination of The Discourse of Child Marriage, Victimization, and Humanitarian Visuality of Global South Girls. Jurnal Studi Pemud@, Volume 9, Nomor 2.; Horii, Hoko. (2020). Walking a thin line: Taking Children's Decision to Marry Seriously?. Childhood: a global journal of child research 27(2): 254-270.; Children's Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF). (2023). Seeking Safety: Learning Brief Vol 2., No. 1.; Bransky et al. (2021). Building Girls Power: Perspectives on Theory and Practice in Working with Adolescent Girls.

43   Hart, Jason. (2023, March). The Child as Vulnerable Victim: Humanitarianism Constructs Its Object.

44   United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989). Preamble.

45   At times this is also the case of development settings – but exacerbated in humanitarian settings by the need to respond rapidly with less time to understand contexts.

46   Hart, Jason. (2023, March). The Child as Vulnerable Victim: Humanitarianism Constructs Its Object. (as well as previous Hart studies, refer to Bibliography); Keshavarzian, Ghazal. (2022, May). Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights: A Report Summarizing the Key Learnings and Recommendations from the Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute. New York: Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network at Columbia University.

47   Bransky, R., Myrum, J., Sibanda, Z., and Marriam, F. (2021). Building Girls Power: Perspectives on Theory and Practice in Working with Adolescent Girls.

Jason Hart reflected on this continued *"dominance of the vulnerability paradigm"* in humanitarian settings:

"The choice to depict children in humanitarian settings as inherently vulnerable rather than as rendered vulnerable by circumstances is profoundly political in its implications, if not its intention. The ascription of vulnerability as an inherent property draws attention away from the specific dynamics of the setting, such as government or humanitarian agency policy. By contrast, a view of vulnerability as the product of interaction between discrimination, political and economic marginalisation, and the racist, gerontocratic and patriarchal exercise of power."[48]

Annisa Beta and Ryan Febrianto echo Jason Hart's analysis, in their examination of the discourse of early marriage, victimisation, and humanitarian visuality. Their analysis shows *"how international non-governmental organisations documents have tendencies to flatten the complex experiences and lives of Indonesian girls into forms of victimisation sourced from the girls' problematic communities."*[49]

The Children's Rights Violence Prevention Fund in its Seeking Safety grant-making portfolio is trying to counter the victimhood narrative and searching for ways the children and youth actively can seek, create, and cultivate safety:

"Facilitating access to safety may therefore involve challenging the paternalism inherent in the different structures and vehicles in these sectors that rely on victimhood narratives and the construction of young people as innocent, naive, and lacking capacity and expertise. This in turn may also involve challenging the use of 'risk' as a hermeneutic device. The term risk is used frequently – young people are at once 'at risk' (thereby warranting family policing, safeguarding, and protection) and a 'risk' themselves (there- by warranting the use of juvenile justice laws)."[50]

This simplistic and victimising portrayal of children (specifically girls), as well as the lack of reflection of ideologies and frameworks motivating humanitarian operations, can negatively impact the approaches and services that are used to address issues such as sexual exploitation of children and do not allow for further analysis of other root causes and drivers.[51] When children are deemed only vulnerable victims, their insights, views, and their own actions taken to protect themselves and to seek safety are more likely to go unrecognised.[52]

48   Hart, Jason. (2023, March). The Child as Vulnerable Victim: Humanitarianism Constructs Its Object.
49   Beta, A.R., Febrianto, R. (2020). Are Indonesian Girls Okay? An Examination of The Discourse of Child Marriage, Victimization, and Humanitarian Visuality of Global South Girls. Jurnal Studi Pemud. Volume 9, Nomor 2.
50   Children's Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF). (2023). Seeking Safety: Learning Brief Vol 2., No. 1.
51   For guidance on this, please see – The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Identifying and Ranking Risk and Protective Factors: A Brief Guide (2021).
52   Hart, Jason. (2023, March). The Child as Vulnerable Victim: Humanitarianism Constructs Its Object. (as well as previous Hart studies, refer to Bibliography); Keshavarzian, Ghazal. (2022, May). Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights: A Report Summarizing the Key Learnings and Recommendations from the Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute. New York: Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network at Columbia University.

As several global key informants discussed the *"heteronormative idea of victims"* is also problematic when it comes to the larger population of children, including LGBTQI+

"... in another tension within the LGBTQI+ community is the narrative around victimhood and only seeing children as victims... Youth LGBTQI+ organisations do not want to start with the victim perspective. With the gender-based violence community, their narrative is starting off from being a victim of violence and the way they see and understand and see themselves... Entry point needs to be different."

– Global, KI

Scholars have also unpacked the layering of empowerment within the vulnerability framing, which further disempowers and marginalises the perceived vulnerable populations (particularly women and girls).[53] The international child protection and gender-based violence sectors' understanding of womanhood, childhood, and culturally constituted gender roles can also reinforce stereotypes and biases; as such assumptions about girls' 'weak' roles in certain societies may in fact be rendering women and girls even more powerless and stripping them of their agency by conceiving them as inherently vulnerable and powerless.[54]

"In Afghan culture, women have very few public roles, but have agency and power in their own homes, private spaces where women can exercise their power... Experiences of childhood and child development are dependent on matriarchal structures, mothers and grandmothers which play a significant role in education, social emotional learning, and development of values... [in international child development programmes] women are rendered powerless in their own lives and miss the solidarity and bonds that women create in those societies to protect themselves and their children." [55]

– Zarlasht Halaimzai

"The word 'empowerment' was introduced to the development field by feminists from the Global South [in the 1980's]. Empowerment was an approach 'to begin transforming gender subordination and in the process to break down other oppressive structures as well. "Empowerment" has come a long way from its origins. What was once a revolutionary paradigm for challenging power relations has become instead a means of re-inscribing them. And although feminists in the Global South called on the development industry to create space for womens organisation and resistance, gender programming by Western organisations is a purportedly apolitical enterprise

53   Furman, K. C., Gowrinathan, N., and Zakaria, R. (2017, September). Emissaries of Power.; Beta, A.R., Febrianto, R. (2020). Are Indonesian Girls Okay? An Examination of The Discourse of Child Marriage, Victimization, and Humanitarian Visuality of Global South Girls.; Al Akash, R., Chalmiers, M.A., (2021). Early marriage among Syrian refugees in Jordan: exploring contested meanings through ethnography.; Bessa, Thais. (2019). Informed powerlessness: child marriage interventions and Third World girlhood discourses. Third World Quarterly, 40:11, p1941-1956.

54   Keshavarzian, Ghazal. (2022, May). Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights: A Report Summarizing the Key Learnings and Recommendations from the Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute. New York: Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network at Columbia University.; Furman, K.C., Gowrinathan, N., and Zakaria, R. (2017). Emissaries of Empowerment.; Bransky et al. (2021). Building Girls Power: Perspectives on Theory and Practice in Working with Adolescent Girls.

55   Keshavarzian, Ghazal. (2022, May). Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights: A Report Summarizing the Key Learnings and Recommendations from the Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute. New York: Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network at Columbia University. p37.

Empowerment interventions substitute marginal improvements to the material conditions of women's lives for the capacity to mobilise to shift the conditions of their repression." [56]

– Kate Cronin Furman, Nimmi Gowrinathan, and Rafia Zakaria

Delphine Brun in her analysis of vulnerability as the central organising principle in the humanitarian situation in Cameroon examines how this identification of women and girls as being most vulnerable to sexual violence, in turn negates them of any agency and power but also denies the recognition of male vulnerability which is *"often influenced by humanitarian actors' own rationale of how people are distinctly affected and able to cope."*[57] These perceptions can often leave boys relatively less protected, further exposed to risks of sexual exploitation, and faced with stigma and particular barriers to seeking help and accessing services that are adequately gender sensitive to respond to their specific needs.

"Attaching vulnerability to the person (the woman) rather than to the threats, hurdles or circumstances that create vulnerability, makes it a permanent characteristic of that person, and reinforces victimhood. This essentialist perception of vulnerability, denying women and girls any kind of agency, also prevents recognition of male marginalisation or vulnerability. The focus on "women's vulnerability", is frequently taken as a

fact, with particular attention to incidents of sexual abuse. It leaves little space, however, for analysing how women are disadvantaged or marginalised compared to men. Preconceived ideas of which people should be of concern deter organisations from conducting a comparative analysis of actual vulnerabilities."[58]

– Delphine Brun

In respect to sexual exploitation of children (and adults), there is a body of literature that unpacks the vulnerability framing and narrative. For example, Michelle Engvall's research focused on adults, discusses how the simplistic vulnerability framing limits and narrows the approaches related to sexual exploitation and that agency and sexual exploitation can go together:

"Simplistic and victimising portrayal of people engaging in sex work and of people living in contexts of humanitarian crisis, as well as the lacking reflection of ideologies and frameworks motivating humanitarian operations, can bind us to more nuanced and diverse needs that these people might have. It can also negatively impact the approaches that we use to address stigmatised issues such as sex work."[59]

– Engvall

It is important to take the learning from Engvall's research and reflect that children have specific rights to protection, and these can only be exercised effectively if children's agency and participation is also recognised, beyond their vulnerability.

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56   Furman, K.C., Gowrinathan, N., and Zakaria, R. (2017). Emissaries of Empowerment.
57   Brun, Delphine. (2022, July). A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West. p23.
58   *Ibid.*
59   Engvall, M. A. (2019, May). Sex Work and Humanitarianism: Understanding Predominant Framings of Sex Work in Humanitarian Response. Uppsala Universitet.

Global data shows that children in all settings around the world can be vulnerable to all forms of sexual violence and exploitation – irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, class, religion, educational level, or geographic location.[60] Thus, by taking a narrow view and lens of vulnerability and victimhood in humanitarian settings, this risks negating and overlooking large swaths of children, and interventions will not necessarily be effective to prevent and respond to children in need of services, limiting the possible impact to addressing the overall phenomenon of sexual exploitation of children. These issues will be unpacked further within the paper, in sections discussing how communities are coping with the rise of child sexual exploitation.

How is the Agency of Children Considered in Humanitarian Settings?

Agency, i.e. the ability of children to make individual choices, is exercised within the structural contexts that they live in. In this section, we're referring to choices that children may be making depending on their capabilities, which are directly defined, confined and influenced by the opportunity structures such as *"broader institutional, social, and political context of formal and informal rules and norms within which actors pursue their interests."[61]* Children can and do make some choices and have decision-making abilities that relate to the (perceived) control they have over life events and assets. Humanitarian contexts (but not only) can be very restrictive and debilitating due to uncertainties, threats and insecurities. They can also at times corner children into situations where they must make hard choices and consider the 'least bad option' for themselves.

There continues to be a dualistic paradigm of victimhood and agency and the humanitarian community has not fully relinquished the continued assumptions of vulnerability and the *"powerful hold that assumptions of vulnerability have had over the policy and practices of humanitarianism."[62]* Jason Hart unpacks this dualistic paradigm in his recent analysis:

"The proposition that children are agentive social actors seems to challenge the view of them as primarily vulnerable would-be victims. However, within the humanitarian field the acknowledgement of agency is intricately bound up with the continuation of victimhood as the dominant trope. In practice, the acknowledgement and encouragement of children's exercise of agency is conditioned by the perception of potential victimhood: if humanitarians perceive risk, then children's participation is suspended or, at least, managed in a manner that seeks to minimise harm. In the process, observers are reminded that children—all children—are, before any other consideration, inherently vulnerable."[63]

60   World Health Organization. (2016). INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children.
61   Samman, E., & Santos, M.E. (2009, May). Agency and Empowerment: A review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence. Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI). p3.
62   Hart, Jason. (2023, March). The Child as Vulnerable Victim: Humanitarianism Constructs Its Object.
63   *Ibid.*

Over the last few years, there is a growing push to engage in children's agency and participation, including during humanitarian crisis.[64] However, as several academics and activist groups have noted, within the child protection or violence prevention sectors, the tendency has also been to engage in child participation in specified moments, pre-designed spaces, and within the existing norms and structures of international agencies,[65] particularly during humanitarian situations.

Too often, humanitarian actors[66] are (when they do) focusing on the individual or collective participation of children but not sufficiently focus on addressing the structural opportunities and constraints in which children live. Organisations should not just 'uncritically advocate' for more children's participation but also invest, collectively, in understanding and challenging the harmful norms and the oppressive environments in which children live that prevent them from participating. Tessa Lewen and colleagues recently reflected on their recent publication on girl-led work:

"We also want to exercise caution in uncritically advocating for 'more' girls' participation in these projects. It is important to attend to how projects construct and position the girls they involve. This includes examining the degree to which girls are perceived, and engaged, as social and political actors. A high attribution of agency is not necessarily an uncontroversial good, as it can obscure significant structural constraints, or be based on a questionable

theory of change, and it may put unfair pressure on the girls involved... For instance, the assumption that projects can enable girls to make choices that reduce their vulnerability to sexual harm such as the Girl Empower (Özler et al. 2020; Hallman et al. 2018) programme in Liberia, which aims at 'equipping adolescent girls with the skills and experiences necessary to make healthy, strategic life choices and to stay safe from sexual violence' (Hallman et al. 2018: 4), and whose findings speak to 'reducing risky sexual behaviour' — implicitly positions girls as responsible both for their own vulnerability, and for overcoming it."[67]

This observation of girls empowerment programming was echoed by one of the global key informants and their reflection on how existing income generating programmes targeting children and families, may in fact be reinforcing gender stereotypes, by positioning them as responsible for their 'bad' actions or only framing the programmes within specific gendered activities (e.g. hairdressing or sewing courses), rather than situating the programmes in the actual perceived needs of the children who have been exploited, and where they situate their sense of self and power.

"Income-generating programmes historically reinforce stereotypes and feed into social norms."

– Global, KI

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64   The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. A Clarion Call – The Centrality of Children and their Protection within Humanitarian Action. 2021-2025 strategy; accountability towards children; Elevate Children Funders Group; others.

65   CRIF has analysed this in their work on participatory grant making practices. Jessica Taft has also examined this in her recent work; Hart, Jason. (2023, March). The Child as Vulnerable Victim: Humanitarianism Constructs Its Object.; Examples of how agency and participation is presented in child protection in humanitarian settings refer to Alliance for Child Protection and Humanitarian Action Strategy; World Vision. Empowering Children as Peacebuilders.

66   Humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors likewise.

67   Lewin, T., Cannon, M., Johnson, V., Philip, R. and Raghavan, P. (2023). Participation For, With, and By Girls: Evidencing Impact. REJUVENATE Working Paper 2, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

This is particularly salient and critical in relation to the exploitation of children in prostitution, transactional and survival sex where children are blamed and deemed responsible for the sexual abuse but barely engaged meaningfully in programme design. Support mechanisms and interventions offered to children can therefore be critically unaligned with their needs and constrained realities (such as offering medical or psychosocial support without considering the economic needs or the shame, blame and stigma children may face that have exposed them to exploitation in transactional or survival sex).

The Global-North constructed child protection/rights policies continue to have great influence on children's agency. This is highlighted in a discussion paper on sexual violence against children, by Helen Veitch and Claire Cody who argue that the predominant framing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines sexual violence as a *"child protection issue rather than a child rights issue."*[68] In addition, *"the sociology of childhood appears frustratingly absent from policy discussion on sexual violence against children"*[69] and in turn, outside of academia, issues such as adultism, children and youth activism, children's sexuality, and ultimately their power, remain ignored or avoided, resulting in programming and policies to be irrelevant and out of touch with the lived realities of children, youth, and their communities.[70]

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68   Veitch, H., & Cody, C. (2023). Understanding Sexual Violence Against Children as a Rights Violation: engaging with the challenges. Children Unite.

69   *Ibid.*

70   *Ibid.;* These points were also reflected in broader discussions around child protection in the Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute.

Concepts of Childhood and Adulthood in Crisis-Affected Communities in Ethiopia, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Kenya

One of the issues that was explored in all three country research studies is the social construction of childhood and adulthood; distinguishing it from the legal protection afforded to individuals under the age of 18 in these three countries. For actors working on issues related to sexual exploitation, it is important to recognise that childhood is socially constructed and shaped by historical, cultural and socio-political factors. Therefore, a thorough understanding of these factors is required in order to build local, contextual, relevant and appropriate responses. Understanding the 'meta-norms' including, legal, political, social and cultural ones that shape the lived realities of children is essential. And it will not be possible to end the sexual exploitation of children by engaging only at individual or family and community levels, without challenging the structural drivers of sexual exploitation, including economic exclusion, power and gender imbalances and the inability of children to exercise their rights.

In all three countries, key informants noted that while the national law states that adulthood starts at 18 years of age (in line with the international standards outlined in the UNCRC), at the community level and within the internally displaced people and refugee communities the conceptions of childhood versus adulthood varies and the social framings and conceptions of when adulthood begins is much earlier – ranging from 12-15 years. The key informants also reflected on the fact that crisis and displacement can also lead to earlier transitions to adulthood.

In the three country contexts, adulthood social and physical markers included: puberty (particularly girls); marriage and motherhood (girls); dropping out of school and working (earning an income and financial independence and no longer living with the parents); education level; and in Ethiopia and in the Kurdistan region of Iraq recruitment into armed forces and groups (particularly boys). Girls typically transition to adulthood earlier due to puberty, marriage, motherhood, and familial responsibilities.

"Some standards in society, such as physical and social markers, do play a role which influence when a child enters adulthood (below 18 years of age)."

— Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"A child is someone who is governed by his parents and doesn't make his own decision without his parent's involvement. Marriage and self-independence are social markers for a child's development as an adult, which is similar for both boys and girls. Physical growth and changes also contribute to becoming an adult at some points."

— Ethiopia KI

"In our society, based on the experience we have, children below 18 years of age can be considered adults by their community and for whatever reason, such as (early marriage) the death or illness of their parents, lacking a peaceful environment, continuous fights and conflicts, and living in extreme poverty."

—Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"They are called children, but even when they work too much, they are still not considered to be able to hold responsibility like an adult."

—Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

All three country contexts highlighted the fact that the crisis situations do result in children becoming adults faster, which is impacting their overall wellbeing, protection and role in their families and communities. Across all three country case studies, one of the key findings was that socio-economic insecurity, resulting from the crisis and displacement, has made children and families more vulnerable to poverty, poor physical and mental health, and violence. The crisis has drastically shifted the roles of children within their families and communities, and accordingly, they acquire the social markers and responsibilities of adulthood at a much younger age, including supporting their families to ensure their survival – which at times does include engaging in exploitative practices such as transactional sex. Key informants reflected on the importance of understanding these shifts in crisis settings in order to better understand and support the needs to children and families.

The dualistic paradigm of agency and would-be victims is something that has been examined within the context of sexual exploitation of children in humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings. It is particularly critical in relation to transactional or survival sex where children may be perceived as playing an active role in their own exploitation. The current child protection framings do not sufficiently recognise the *"dynamic, situated, and contextual"* nature of children's agency[71] and there is therefore a need to adopt more contextualised, nuanced approaches to move away from the *'perfect victim'* syndrome which prevents adequate identification and responses for the child victims. Taking children's agency into consideration, this also implies integrating more focus on the structural environments of harmful socio-gender and socio-economic norms or the lack of impunity for the ones in positions of power who facilitate, benefit from, contribute to or perpetrate child sexual exploitation. This would contribute to ensuring children are not blamed or made responsible for their exploitation or their own protection. For example, *"children can act as independent agents, and yet it must be recognised that practically children are constrained because of their age, physical size and also other people's reactions towards them."*[72]

It is critical that acts of child sexual exploitation, particularly in the context of transactional and survival sex, are not seen only through the prism of individual circumstances but consider that agency is exercised within existing oppressive structures of power imbalances, socio-economic deprivation and insecurities, political frameworks, and crisis.

One example is illustrative of the varied motivations and agency are children (including girls) associated with forces and armed groups. Nimmi Gowrinathan in her analysis of the political identities of Tamil women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Linka, demonstrates *"that even in cases of coercive recruitment, female participation cannot be predicted and may even evidence high levels of commitment to the insurgent cause."*[73] Key informants in Ethiopia, as well as one of the global key informant's echoed Gowrinathan's findings and discussed how girls may 'voluntarily' marry rebel and armed groups commanders and fighters – *"it's their decision and it's the way they see agency"*[74] and *"for the girls it's a way of getting protection from the armed groups."*[75] While it has been well documented that these girls and young women are victims of being kidnapped, forced marriage, and quite often sexually abused and exploited,[76] *"there is a lot of grey and nuance and oftentimes we do not unpack this as a sector."*[77]

71   Abede, T. (2019, March). Reconceptualising Children's Agency as Continuum and Interdependence. Social Sciences 8(3):81.
72   James, A., & Prout, A. (1995). Hierarchy, Boundary and Agency: Toward a Theoretical Perspective on Childhood. Sociological Studies of Children. 7, 77–99. Quoted in Montgomery, Heather. (2001). Modern Babylon? Prostituting Children in Thailand (Fertility, Reproduction and Sexuality) – Volume 2, Berghahn Books. p18.
73   Gowrinathan, Nimmi. (2017). The committed female fighter: the political identities of Tamil women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 19:3, p327-341.
74   Global key informant interview.
75   Ethiopia key informant interview.
76   Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2020, December). Technical Note | Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups: Lessons Learnt and Good Practices on Prevention of Recruitment and Use, Release and Reintegration. For example, the exploitation of Yezidi girls by ISIL fighters in Iraq and Syria is well documented and included in the Technical Note.
77   Global key informant interview.

For some of the girls, marrying the fighters is one of the few or only protective strategies available, particularly for those who do not have families. *"The man protects them as their wives, rather than risking them being exposed to sexual exploitation and abuse. And for those who have been sexually abused or exploited, prior to marriage, it's a way to escape stigmatisation."*[78] Thus, for these girls they may perceive themselves as feeling relatively safer, able to minimise harm, feel respected within the communities, and also able to access basic services and goods.[79]

Programmes should be framed by the conceptions of agency as rooted within the systemic barriers, constraints, and norms and how intrinsically tied they are. While children's experiences of sexual exploitation are influenced by their age, gender, development capacity, intelligence, life experience, and so forth, interventions must understand how the environment limits children's choices and integrates an analysis of why children make certain decisions and explore with them, in a respectful and safe manner, and what support they would need in their situations.

78   Global key informant interview.
79   Global key informant interview; Gowrinathan, Nimmi. (2017). The committed female fighter: the political identities of Tamil women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 19:3, p327-341.

Promising Practices: Building Power is an Avenue for the Prevention of Sexual Violence and Exploitation

Over the last few years, promising practice has emerged from East Africa which is effectively using a power building analysis and tackling the issue of agency and paternalism within their grantmaking portfolios and providing examples of how building girls (and children) power is a way to prevent violence and exploitation, in crisis affected as well as non-humanitarian contexts. While the learning is in the nascent period, initial review is providing promising results.

Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund (CRVPF), a regional grantmaking organisation based in East Africa, is committed to preventing violence against children and adolescents in the region. The CRVPF theory of change *"recognises that catalysing deep systemic change depends on girls acting on their own behalf; shifting norms and patterns of behaviour around gender, power, and violence, as well as, creating an enabling policy environment that facilitates girls' access to resources and services. In a sector where adolescent girls are often invisible or seen as helpless, but at the same time impacted by frameworks and ideologies, this was already transformational."*[80]

As part of their violence prevention strategy, the CRVPF works directly with community organisations mostly led by young women and men to prevent violence and sexual violence against children and young people in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda (some of the communities are affected by crisis and displacement). First, the CRVPF encourages 3-5 community organisations to work in cluster partnership with one grant in one project area. Once they have agreed, the CRVPF provides a Planning and Learning Grant for six months to the community organisations to give them space and time to share their strategies, to select one partner as a cluster lead, to open a joint bank account with the cluster partners directors as signatories and, most importantly, to have the time and space to listen to adolescent girls and understand their experiences, problems, and aspirations and jointly develop intervention programmes. The planning and learning grant process shifted how partners saw girls, not as only beneficiaries of their programming, but actual agents of their own lives.

Accordingly, girls steered both the development of the programme content as well as the implementation of the activities. Through this approach, the CRVPF transferred money directly to the community organisations to work with the girls in ways that catalyse transformational change. These pathways included centering all aspects of the work in a power-building approach; beginning with a learning and unlearning journey; and elevating the voices of the girls so they can change their own lives. Ultimately, this new way of funding and programming challenges the *"protectionist narrative that children, in particular girls, are vulnerable and need adult protection and instead 'empowers' the girl, through programming, by focusing on the girl's leadership and how girls think, feel, and want to be in their communities. Thus, by building their power, it is an avenue to prevent violence and exploitation."*[81]

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80   Bransky, R., Myrum, J., Sibanda, Z., and Marriam, F. (2021). Building Girls Power: Perspectives on Theory and Practice in Working with Adolescent Girls. p44.

81   *Ibid.*

Organisations should both attend to the needs of children but also listen to them. It would be important to hold children's agency and ensure there is efficacy in the support so that the services meet children's actual needs, and conceptions, even for sensitive issues such as the sexual exploitation of children. The listening must be done in a safe and ethical manner, recognising that it is a critical condition to adequately understand and respond to circumstances.

Several global key informants, as well as key informants in the Kurdistan region of Iraq echoed Hart, Montgomery, Veitch and Cody, and other scholars' reflections on a culture of fear within the child protection community to positively engage around children's agency, sex, sexuality, and power within a more political framing.[82] The key informants reflected on the importance of engaging more in sexuality and intimacy, not only in a negative but also in a positive light in particular as children are starting puberty younger and, via the Internet, are exposed to sex and sexual content at much younger ages.

"We need to acknowledge agency but also give them the information that they need."
– Global, KI

"Girls use their sexuality to access what they want from men, in a marriage or outside of marriage... The reciprocity around sex and goods is very widespread and not necessarily perceived as 'sinful.'"
– Global, KI

"Level of ignorance within child protection community regarding how much children know and have access about sex online and elsewhere... Children have access to technology and have access to knowledge but also exploitation. This has changed everything, and child protection is slow in understanding these shifts."
– Global, KI

Sometimes boys and girls have sex and yes, they have sex at a young age, and they don't have access to family planning/sexual reproductive health services, and yes, they need to get married. Whole bunch of people are closing their eyes to the sexual desire of young people. It's like we have forgotten what it's like to be 15 years old."
– Global, KI

"Kids are watching war, violence, and sexual acts on YouTube."
– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"We need to educate children earlier about sex education, as soon as they reach puberty."
– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Children need to be taught what intimate privacy is... providing and preparing a special curriculum for sexual education."
– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

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82   Global key informant interview; Also echoed in Veitch, H., & Cody, C. (2023). Understanding Sexual Violence Against Children as a Rights Violation: engaging with the challenges. Children Unite; Montgomery, Heather. (2001). Modern Babylon? Prostituting Children in Thailand (Fertility, Reproduction and Sexuality) – Volume 2, Berghahn Books.

> *"The conversation needs to be grounded more in analysis around power that gets lost when you talk about agency versus protection. Power analysis is what's lacking."*
>
> *– Global, KI*

Moving forward, as a community, actors working on prevention and responses to child sexual exploitation should rethink and reevaluate the predominant and existing framings and conceptions of 'victimhood' and 'protectionism' and begin to ask ourselves questions, raised by several global key informants as well as literature referenced above -- Does our response and programming continue to further disempower and infantilise children and families, rather than building on their agency and power? How does child protection programming which is often rooted in case management systems or parenting programmes fit within agency? Do we actually ask children what they want or assume an answer to that question? How can we shift narratives, social norms and perceptions on children as responsible for their own exploitation? And critically, how can measures to remove the perceived impunity of perpetrators and facilitators of child sexual exploitation be strengthened? How can systems of justice and accountability be critically strengthened in humanitarian contexts?

Nuance and Complexity of Child Marriage in Humanitarian Contexts

From both the global and country-level research, it is apparent that to understand child sexual exploitation in crisis contexts, one must take a much more nuanced and locally conceptualised approach, mindful of the different drivers (including the meta-norms on one hand, and the complexity of the children's decision-making processes on the other) and be sure that unintended assumptions and biases do not mould the narrative and in turn policies and programming. Children in different societies and cultural contexts have different experiences, and thus we must be mindful of generalised perceptions of how children, particularly girls, should be supported and how they must live.

Child marriage is one issue that emerged in the global and country-level research, which highlights these complexities and possible misconceptions related to womanhood, masculinity, fatherhood, motherhood, marriage, childhood, vulnerability, and agency. Over the last decade there has been a growing body of research, including longitudinal and ethnographic, that is examining these complexities in the Middle East and Asia regions, and particularly among the displaced population communities in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.[83]

83 Beta, A.R., and Febrianto, R. (2020). Are Indonesian Girls Okay? An Examination of The Discourse of Child Marriage, Victimization, and Humanitarian Visuality of Global South Girls. Jurnal Studi Pemud@, Volume 9, Nomor 2, tahun 2020; Baird, Sarah, et al. (2022). Intersecting Disadvantages for Married Adolescents: Life After Marriage Pre and Post-COVID 19 in Contexts of Displacement. Journal of Adolescent Health 70. p586-596; Bessa, Thais. (2019). Informed powerlessness: child marriage interventions and Third World girlhood discourses. Third World Quarterly, 40:11, 1941-1956; Al Akash, R., and Chalmiers, M.A. (2021). Early marriage among Syrian refugees in Jordan: exploring contested meanings through ethnography, Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters. 29:1, p287-302.

In conflict and humanitarian crisis, rates of child marriage increase,[84] particularly among the displaced populations.[85] This rise was confirmed by the key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Ethiopia and the Kurdistan region of Iraq.[86] In Ethiopia and the Kurdistan region of Iraq, key informants all reflected on the increase of child marriage in displaced communities, which is a reflection on how conflicts and humanitarian crises are having a direct impact on children and have drastically shifted their role in their families and the wider community. Key informants in both the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Ethiopia reflected on how before the crisis, children (boys and girls) were expected to go to school, study, get jobs, and get married after they graduated.[87] Now, in Ethiopia and the Kurdistan region of Iraq children are taking on more responsibilities to support their families by performing incoming-generating activities and families are re-thinking how they can protect and support their children. One of the ways that the role of children in families has shifted is the rise of child marriage.

"Any crisis will affect families and the way they view their children. For instance, they make them work, leave school, or marry them off at an early age."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

Studies and research have shown that child marriage may have harmful outcomes for the girls in crisis (and non-crisis) settings, including marriage limiting adolescent girls' decision-making capacities; putting girls more at risk to violence, exploitation, abuse, and discrimination; resulting in poor physical and mental health outcomes; limiting girls' access to education and future life prospects; and increasing their exposure to endemic poverty.[88] In a context where options are limited and when crisis puts additional stress on children and their families, social norms shift, and child marriage can be seen as 'acceptable' from the point of view of girls, families and communities.

Key informants (albeit they were not children or youth) in our country-level research in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Ethiopia also spoke about child marriage as an avenue to alleviate economic problems (dowry or economic transfer of money from the groom's family to bride's family which are common

84   The prevalence of child marriage increases during crises, with a 20% rise reported in Yemen and South Sudan as a result of conflicts. Child marriage and humanitarian contexts - Girls Not Brides

85   A Women's Refugee Committee study showed that IDPs had the highest rate of early marriage of early among the three groups, with 13% of those currently aged 20-24 having married as minors. In a representative study conducted by the Women's Refugee Commission, IDPs showed the highest rate of early marriage among the three groups, with 13% of those currently aged 20–24 having married as minors. For this same age group the rates of early marriage were 3.4% for Syrian refugees and 4% for the host community. However, for girls aged 10-19 at the time of the study, 1 in 8 IDPs were married and 1 in 10 host and refugee communities were married as quoted in Howe et al. (2022). The Cost of Being Female: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) of Displaced Female Youth in South Sudan and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.; UNICEF Jordan. (2014). A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan 2014.; Schlecht et al. (2013). Early Relationships and Marriage in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: Vulnerability of Youth in Uganda. Reproductive Health Matters 21, no. 41. p234–42.

86   Key informant interviews.

87   Key informant interviews.

88   UNFPA, UNICEF. (2021). Addressing Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings: Technical Guide for staff and partners of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

practices in both displaced communities in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Ethiopia) but also to 'protect' girls from the rising levels of sexual violence and exploitation within their communities.

> "Families now marry girls as a way to protect them from rape and exploitation and also due to economic problems."
>
> – Ethiopia, KI

Key informants similarly discussed how child marriage was increasingly used and being perceived as a way for displaced girls to be resettled and hopefully attain legal migration status in a third country (findings that were also echoed in Ethiopia and Kenya key informant interviews). Child marriage in these contexts can be understood as a coping mechanism for children and families that comes from the adaptation of a tradition and becomes plausible when children and their families are exposed to difficult circumstances and are faced with very limited options and alternatives.

While it is important to situate the issue of child marriage within the various harmful outcomes, in order to implement effective solutions rooted in the needs and lives of these children, it is also necessary to understand the context in which such arrangements become a reality, to contextualise actions. Several global key informants reflected on the limitations of the 'harmful practice' framing imposed by external actors, and noted that, while many girls are forced into child marriage and for some it can be exploitative and violent,[89] equating child marriage in humanitarian contexts as only within the sexual exploitation lens,[90] has proven to hamper the ability of local actors to engage on the issue and address push and pull factors that make child marriage a consequence of other misfunctioning rather than the starting point of exploitation discussion[91] (as discussed in the preceding sections).

> "Yes, a girl may be required to marry, and she may be raped, and the marriage may be exploitative in some instances and some places. But that isn't the entire picture of early marriage and its undermining of the local culture to group it as only violence and exploitation."
>
> – Global, KI

The Howe study on early marriage[92] found that female youths in the Kurdistan region of Iraq who had married under 18, saw their marriages along a continuum

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89   International Review of the Red Cross. (2020). *Child marriage in armed conflict*.; UNFPA, UNICEF. (2021), Addressing Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings: Technical Guide for staff and partners of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

90   Keshavarzian, Ghazal. (2022, May). Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights: A Report Summarizing the Key Learnings and Recommendations from the Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute. New York: Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network at Columbia University.

91   Howe et al. (2022), Early Marriage in Conflict and Displacement, Tufts University, Feinstein International Center.

92   This is a longitudinal study on early marriage in conflict and displacement in the Kurdistan region of Iraq followed a group of 68 girls between the ages of 14-24 over 2.5-year period and documented their complex experiences with early marriage (including motherhood, separation, divorce, and widowhood). Howe et al. (2022), Early Marriage in Conflict and Displacement, Tufts University, Feinstein International Center.

from being actively involved in the decision-making process to being completely forced into marriage. Some described their marriage which *"may include love but also was tied to new possibilities and potential life improvements"* to reach Europe or in hope of a better future.[93] Interventions should therefore recognise that focusing on individual empowerment of children without addressing the broader environment of patriarchy, gender inequality and conditions stemming from conflict and displacement are likely to be inefficient.[94]

"Before [in Syria], we were living in houses, attending school, seeing friends... Now everyone is a stranger. I don't have friends, I don't have school, we don't know anyone. We don't have a routine in our daily lives...We don't have a specific time when we wake up. We don't do anything all day; we just stay in the tent. Nothing to do, nowhere to go...For sure getting married young is not a good thing. But now we are living in an emergency situation, people don't know their future...All the girls my age, we need someone to trust and listen to us and support us, to not be against us. We need someone to share our feelings with." [95]

– Howe et al.

In some contexts where sexual violence is high and where gendered norms can lead to girls being blamed for 'bringing sexual harassment upon themselves', child marriage can be viewed as a way to protect against and prevent sexual harassment, a serious problem regularly faced by unmarried girls, as reported in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.[96]

Too little is known by the humanitarian community, about the different kinds of child marriage that exist and the most effective support to engage with adolescent girls, rooted in their agency, needs, context, and ultimately their desires.[97] While research on this area has been slowly increasing over the last decade, there is still a dearth of focus on humanitarian settings.

93   Howe et al. (2022). Perspectives on early marriage: the voices of female youth in Iraqi Kurdistan and South Sudan who married under the age of 18. p14. In all three country studies, key informants discussed how early marriage was a way for girls to be resettled and hopefully attain legal migration status in a third country.
94   *Ibid.*
95   *Ibid.*
96   *Ibid.*
97   *Ibid.*

Perspectives on Early Marriage: The Voices of Female Youth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and South Sudan who Married Under Age 18

A longitudinal qualitative study following female youth of various marital status in the Kurdistan region of Iraq found that a common theme across participants was that some girls had participated in the decision to marry early, and yet some reported that the ideal age for marriage is above 18 years of age, while some described early marriage and forced marriage as practices that should be eradicated. When criticising the practice of early marriage, a number of participants focused on the burdens of domestic duties and motherhood faced by girls. Others described that marriage and motherhood prevent a girl from reaching her full potential, by cutting off opportunities for education and work, even though participants in the research described partial or full participation in the decision to marry. Female youth in the Kurdistan region of Iraq described that their marriages occurred through force; because of family pressure; to improve their economic, educational, or resettlement opportunities; to have a sense of meaning; to decrease social isolation; to have protection against sexual harassment; for love. This demonstrates a range of experiences for the female youth on a continuum from feeling the union was consensual or partially consensual and pragmatic, to forced.[98]

Improved access to education, increased economic opportunities, proactive leadership, and the eradication of bridewealth were proposed as solutions.

Communities' Attitudes and Coping Mechanisms – Ethiopia, Kenya and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

In the contexts studied, it was observed that children, families, and communities are turning to a variety of coping mechanisms, including more traditional and community-level support networks to face issues of child sexual exploitation.

Limited Formal Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

While some children and families do turn to government or humanitarian agency running services, all three case studies found that children and families, in particular refugee and internally displaced people, typically do not report to or turn to these agencies for support services.

According to the country-level research, generally, children in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Ethiopia, and Kenya report to friends, peers, and families as this is "*someone who has already gained the child's trust*". This is consistent with other findings from survivors of child sexual exploitation in Ethiopia and Kenya, but also across most studies conducted by ECPAT International with young survivors of child sexual

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98   *Ibid.*

exploitation, who primarily disclose to trusted persons rather than services or reporting mechanisms.[99] Children rarely interact directly with existing government and non-governmental humanitarian child protection or gender-based violence services and feel safer disclosing to someone they know and trust, including from their close relatives, peers and friends or teachers, rather than governmental or non-governmental entities.

"There is no place for children to report when they have problems and parents have to play a role in children reporting or accessing services."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Children have no trust in the organisations, and they are afraid their anonymity and privacy will not be protected... Media publishes an image of a child and victims are not safe."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"When we ask girls what they do if they experience such difficulties, they tell us that they will share their stories with their friends (girls) first and then with someone they trust. If there are humanitarian workers, they will inform them if they know and trust them well."

– Ethiopia, KI

Locally-based Mechanisms and Associated Implications

Informants in the three countries reported that families primarily seek services or report via tribal, religious, community-based, and social reconciliation mechanisms and organisations; rather than formal legal services which have too many processes and are lengthy. Due to stigma, shame, and fear of potential consequences associated with child sexual exploitation as a lack of trust in the system, children and families are covering it up.

"In case of child abuse, the host community [...] are aware where they should report and follow up with cases. This is not the case for the refugee community who use the old way of conflict resolution because of a lack of formal documents and also the language barrier making it hard for them to talk to the authorities. The refugees also feel stigmatised and sometime feel helpless about everything."

– Kenya, KI

"They have absolute distrust in speaking about it with other parties [...] because these children are afraid that the first person to be convicted of the act would be the child him/ herself."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

99   ECPAT International & UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2022). Children's Disclosures of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Disrupting Harm Data Insight 2. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children; ECPAT International (2022). Disrupting Harm – Conversations with Young Survivors about Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.

"There is less reliance on the law, but it also settled some issues. However, relying on tribal or social reconciliation and agreements is another way to settle matters. The reason is that it is faster than the law."
– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

Communities also perceive that laws are rarely implemented due to difficulties to secure convictions, needs for various testimonies. Cases are also dropped by the victim's family as perpetrators are often either relatives or neighbours. There is also fear of retaliation or a lack of trust in the system particularly when the perpetrators are persons with power in the community.

"There are many cases closed down without fair judgment due to a lack of witnesses because the community is afraid to go as witnesses."
– Ethiopia, KI

"A child was sexually exploited by a relative and we offered psychosocial, medical support and legal support through legal counselling. The family then reported the case to the authorities, but the procedures were discontinued because the family withdrew the case due to fear for the family's reputation since the culprit was one of their relatives."
– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"[She has] received cases of parents who complain of their girls being involved in such cases, she enquired if they have made formal reports to the police but was informed that there is a lot of fear as the known perpetrators are influential people in the community and reporting would cause insecurity to those reporting."
– Kenya, KI

"While the Somali support system is beneficial for welfare cases, it faces challenges in handling criminal cases such as rape and defilement, where the rights of the children may not be fully exercised, and the perpetrators may not face charges."
– Kenya, KI

To either protect, prevent, or respond to the different risks and child rights violations, including sexual exploitation, families and children (particularly internally displaced people and refugees) in the three countries were reported to have to resort to various coping mechanisms. For example, in Kenya, Ethiopia, and the Kurdistan region of Iraq, key informants provided different examples of children who had been victims of sexual exploitation, being forced to immigrate abroad legally or illegally due to the stigma, marginalisation, and potential economic repercussions that the family may experience (and many experience even more exploitation and violence en route):

"Many girls and adult women were raped by armed groups during the conflict. Once they get exposed to sexual exploitation, there is a tendency to enter commercial sex work. Many girls want to change their place and migrate to the Middle East since they don't feel comfortable living within the community. In relation to this, girls faced more sexual exploitation during their journey and in the destination countries."

– Ethiopia, KI

"It is very common that mostly girls are recruited by illegal brokers to go to the Arab countries for work via Djibouti and Somalia to the Arab countries. During their journeys, most of the girls became victims of sexual and physical abuse, and some girls were also taken as hostages to get money from their families or to kill and rape them."

– Ethiopia, KI

Stigma and Shame

Various forms of stigma, shaming and blaming the victim, rather than perpetrators, have been reported in the three countries and acts that could be perceived as bringing shame on the family are often sanctioned, including by not reporting the case or distancing the victim from the community.

"The family's reputation is far more important to them, so they rather try to revenge on the perpetrators or use tribal law to deal with it."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"There was a story of a raped girl whom I know was raped and then moved to some other place as a coping mechanism because of fear of the community. Many young girls use fleeing from their home to some other place as a coping mechanism whenever they experience sexual exploitation or violence. If it is known by the community, they will consider her a bad girl and think that this was her fault. Others use brokers as coping mechanisms to take them to towns where they will finally end up in commercial sexual activities or illegal migration."

– Ethiopia, KI

"The community looks at these children in a very bad manner, looks down on them and views them as criminals. Additionally, the family shames the child. [...] When this happens, culture, traditions and norms weigh in and play the main role in deciding what needs to be done."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

[The interviewee] heard about cases in the LGBTQI+ community [...] but it is very secretive. This is because of the stigma and religious beliefs that forbid it."

— Kenya, KI

Gender Dimensions – Perceptions of Risks and Responses in the Community

The gender dimensions of child sexual exploitation could not be unpacked deeply within the frame of this research but showed that communities hold different beliefs and expectations on girls and boys which impact the children's exposure to risks.

"The education and awareness-raising of parents, community members, and leaders should be carefully tailored to community beliefs that boys and girls have socially segregated roles to cope with the threats."
– Ethiopia, KI

"In the Yezidi community if a boy joins the military or can work outside to provide for the family, then this boy is considered an adult."
– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Boys are expected to do things outside, like shepherding and other farm activities."
– Ethiopia, KI

The way communities perceive different gender roles impacts on the level of 'freedom' and possible protection mechanisms afforded to boys. The expectations for work and income-generation outside of the community may be higher on boys and potentially place them in risky situations.

"Due to the crisis, both girls and boys have additional responsibilities to support their families through income-generating activities, including some illegal work like robbery, theft, and beggar work, which is common for boys. While girls engage in sex trade for the exchange of money to support their families and themselves."
– Ethiopia, KI

"The rapid increase in residents has created an environment conducive to the formation of gangs, primarily of young Somali boys."
–Kenya, KI

The perception of risks for boys seems to be different, and therefore the family and communities do not put in place the same mechanisms to also protect boys, which can impact their exposure to various risks, including involvement in various illegal activities and being subjected to sexual exploitation. Social perceptions on boys also impact on their ability to seek help and disclose abuse.

"The presence of drugs in the community further exacerbates the challenges, as easy accessibility leads to increased cases of sexual exploitation among youths and children. He explained that children who consume drugs are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because they will do anything to get high."
– Kenya, KI

"Boys are vulnerable to these threats, especially when they are heavy built, have light complexion and are from deprived families, broken homes, or refugee families... due to constant crises, these cases have increased."
– Kurdistan region of Iraq

"Additionally, sodomy cases in boys are prevalent but seldom reported, and the perpetrators are often close friends or relatives of the victims, including uncles, neighbours, and teachers."

— Kenya, KI

"Those children at the age of 14 and beyond who are earning income could not be considered children [...] there are children from the age range of 9–14; most of them are displaced due to the conflict, and some of the children are working, and the community does not consider them children like those who are under family protection. They have been forced to go to the street to earn their daily bread and for family consumption. They come to daily labour, go to commercial sex, and do domestic servitude to earn family household consumption."

– Ethiopia, KI

Case study from Women's Refugee Commission – The Experiences of Congolese, Somali and South Soudanese Men, Boys and Trans Women

Research from the Women's Refugee Commission in Kenya among refugee populations reported particular exposure of boys, including boys with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) to sexual abuse and exploitation. *"Participants expressed concern about boys whom they considered particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, including unaccompanied boys, boys with diverse SOGIESC, boys with disabilities, very young boys, older adolescent boys and male youth, young men selling sex, boys in community-based foster care, boys recruited into gangs, and boys trafficked for labour purposes. A gender-based violence officer described the vulnerabilities of older adolescent boys and young men: "The unaccompanied minors who are boys, between 15 and 21 [years old], this is a very vulnerable age. Most families would not want to host a minor of that age. They fear for the daughters in their household, they don't have a room for a boy. So these boys lack community support, they lack shelter, they lack emotional support and love. They end up on the streets. They can then be sexually abused while on the streets. They are neglected, trying to make ends meet, and can be lured into survival sex."*

Women's Refugee Commission (2019). "We Have a Broken Heart": Sexual Violence against Refugees In Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya. The Experiences of Congolese, Somali and South Soudanese Men, Boys and Trans Women.

HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM - GLOBAL FRAMINGS AND VARYING CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

This section explores how child sexual exploitation is currently framed and conceptualised by different humanitarian actors at both global and regional levels and, accordingly, what impact these framings have on the effectiveness of the wider humanitarian sectors' responses to the needs of children facing sexual exploitation and violence.

Sectoral Silos: The Impact of the Fragmentation and the "Desire to Categorise"

The humanitarian community recognises that the way aid is delivered can put children at risk of harm, including through its own personnel. Protection mainstreaming is defined as a core component of the 'Do No Harm' principle guiding humanitarian action. The *centrality of children and their protection* is outlined as a strategic objective to *ensure the entire humanitarian system is actively and consciously engaged in realising broader child rights as well as children's rights to protection in each step of humanitarian action* and a specific 'Call To Action' is flagged to promote better mainstreaming and integration of child protection concerns within the humanitarian systems.[100]

CALL TO ACTION

[...] Through working together, including across sectors and across all levels of the humanitarian system, we can achieve better quality programming, improved outcomes, and greater accountability to affected children and their families. Effective leadership and collective coordination by all, including supporting Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams and actors across the humanitarian "architecture", is required if we are to design a humanitarian response that delivers on the rights of children and contributes to their wellbeing. [...]

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100   The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2023). The Centrality of Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Action – An Introduction.

However, the lack of harmonised typology, definitions, and framings can impact the effectiveness of the sector's understanding of the complexity of the issues and its response to the needs of children facing sexual exploitation, but the siloed and fragmented programming and sectoral grouping can also create barriers.

It is recognised within different organisations (including the various organisation representatives that were interviewed) that issues related to child sexual exploitation are housed within different sectoral teams ranging from child protection, gender-based violence, gender inclusion, safeguarding and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Thus, as one of the global informants asked, *"Where and with whom do we even start the conversation of child sexual exploitation?"*[101] Ultimately, this fragmentation provides further challenges for humanitarian actors to appropriately and effectively respond to and prevent sexual exploitation of children. One key respondent reflected on this challenge in respect to the child protection communities framing of sexual exploitation: *"Within child protection, sexual exploitation of children is under the worst forms of child labour or association of armed groups but there is a danger that it's being hidden and don't tailor activities around it. We don't understand sexual exploitation of children enough. What are the drivers, push and pull factors and what can really pull children out?"*[102]

Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection

In general, within humanitarian settings, including the three country studies, child sexual exploitation framing, programming, and response sit under the larger scope of child protection or gender-based violence sectors. Over the last decade, there have been promising practices of organisations reducing fragmentation and increasing collaboration between the child protection and gender-based violence sectors, including identifying sectoral leads, organisations hiring specialists that work on both child protection and gender-based violence; seconding a gender-based violence specialist within child protection teams and vice versa; reforming the cluster system; and developing joint policies and frameworks to guide the work.[103] A few key

informants noted that early marriage is an example of the two sectors collaborating effectively and working jointly together at the global and operational level.[104]

While all these efforts are commended, global and country-level key informants all flagged that despite these, the division between gender-based violence and child protection continues, and the fact that it either falls within gender-based violence or child protection leads to siloed, fragmented, and uncoordinated response that generate duplication of efforts and limit our impact on prevention, response and understanding of who is at risk in humanitarian settings.

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101 Global key informant interview.
102 Global key informant interview.
103 For example, in UNHCR, the child protection and gender-based violence specialist is one person rather than having multiple staff members covering the issues. In UNICEF HQ, a gender-based violence specialist sits within the child protection in emergency team; per key informant interviews.
104 There are also global initiatives such as Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, Joint Programme to End Child Marriage, Girls Not Brides, and Project Soteria, which bring together diverse group of agencies and communities.

Global and country-level key informants noted that this fragmentation and, at times, competition between the sectors impacts the ability of actors operating in contexts affected by crisis to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and to proactively identify, support, and protect children. Good coordination and collaboration between gender-based violence and child protection service providers is recognised as critical, and emerging practices are aiming to strengthen this, through coordination agreements and agreed upon mechanisms, but mutual trust and effective joint approaches supported by adequate capacities of the actors to work together still require attention and consolidation.[105]

"There is complete separation between the two... constantly being referred between the two."

– Global, KI

In certain circumstances, mandatory reporting, for instance, can limit the capacities of practitioners to build trust and provide adequate support to children and is not necessarily always in the best interests of the child concerned.

"Tension between the two: survivor-centred approach and mandatory reporting/protection."

– Global, KI

"If a girl has been sexually abused, the team that will support the girl depends on where it's disclosed the first time. If the child discloses to child protection staff, then child protection staff is in charge of case management. If gender-based violence, then they are in charge."

– Global, KI

"A health provider gets different information from gender-based violence or child protection. There is no harmonisation."

– Global, KI

Standalone Framing and Sector of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Child Sexual Exploitation within the Community

For many international agencies, bilateral donors, international non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations, (child) sexual exploitation in a humanitarian setting is automatically equated to and understood as exploitation perpetrated by (international) humanitarian aid workers with the scale of these atrocities that have come to light in the last twenty years.[106] In turn the response and prevention activities are grouped under the umbrella of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. During the global key informant interviews, while the discussions were not focused on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, several stakeholders automatically spoke about sexual exploitation in the context of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse or framed their organisations' response to sexual exploitation as part of its Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse programming.[107] This was also observed with key informants in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, many of whom referred to the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse when interviewed about sexual exploitation of children. A quick Internet search of 'sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings' automatically brings the user to a long list of resources and organisations working on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

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105   For more guidance on coordination, please refer to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and International Rescue Committee (IRC), "Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse Guidelines", Second Edition, UNICEF, New York, 2023
106   Refer to Keeping Children Safe for reports and other documents related to this.
107   This finding is consistent with the Women Refugee Committee's study in Spring 2022 consisting of KIIs with humanitarian practitioners in Lebanon, Colombia, and Cox's Bazar. Information shared during the Advisory Group review process.

In UNICEF's overview of programming to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by aid workers, UNICEF for example 'refers' to sexual exploitation as: *"any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, perpetrated by aid workers against the children and families they serve."*[108]

The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Interagency Standing Committee of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and other international institutions use similar definitions and recognise that the scarcity of resources and continued economic insecurity in humanitarian settings may create the conditions and risks of sexual exploitation and abuse.[109] The framing of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse is rooted in the principles of upholding 'Do No Harm' and the international communities' obligations to protect the credibility of humanitarian assistance programmes. In turn, agencies' Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policies and practices aim to reduce the risk of, prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel, non-governmental organisation partners, or other entities and persons involved in humanitarian assistance through trainings and guidelines. Several global and country-level key informants noted that Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse activities have primarily focused on international personnel and dire gaps remain in including government staff, contractors, drivers, and community volunteers and workers in the trainings and

other activities (which will be discussed in later sections of the report).

Several global key informants reflected on how all of this has led to an emergence of new Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse or safeguarding (for humanitarian aid workers) policies within their respective organisations and wider humanitarian system, often separate from the sectors working on child sexual exploitation or child protection. While Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse touches on some of the ingrained power imbalances as well as similar push and pull factors and drivers that lead to child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings, the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse initiatives and child sexual exploitation programming are often divorced from one another and not seen as issues that would benefit a more joint framework, approach, or at least a joint learning journey. The Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse programmes are often very compliance-driven, continue to lack accountability and do not always take a very contextualised approach to safeguarding, which would further garner trust among community members, particularly children, carers, and women.[110] These are all issues that are pertinent to child sexual exploitation efforts and a more streamlined approach would help communities (especially children) to be better supported and feel safe enough to speak about the abuse; create more effective local complaint mechanisms; garner stronger leadership in the international system; and increase investment in tackling the underlying root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse in communities.

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108   UNICEF. Protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse: UNICEF programming to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by aid workers.

109   Refer to FCDO. (2019). Safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment (SEAH) in the aid sector.; USAID. (2020). Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy.; PSEA IASC. Our Commitment to Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

110   Csaky, Corinna. (2008). No One to Turn To: The under-reporting of child sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers and peacekeepers. While this report is over 15 years old, the learning is pertinent today and echoed the global key informant stakeholders concerns as well as concerns expressed by the Funders Collaborative on Safeguarding.

"The individualisation of sexual exploitation and abuse and resultant focus on conduct and disciplinary responses reflects a broader trend related to gender issues, namely that technocratic 'fixes' have been prioritised over efforts that address the underlying causes of gendered inequality and violence... the gap in political will to ensure accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse runs in parallel to the lack of political will to realise the goals set out in the Women, Peace and Security framework around women's participation and protection more broadly, including in relation to conflict-related sexual violence, and aligning these three areas of policy work would ensure that gains made in one area benefit all three."[111]

Moreover, from a child, parent, or caregiver's perspective, the distinction between sexual exploitation perpetrated by a representative of the international humanitarian community versus a member of their own community would be far less important than the relevance given to that distinction by the international community itself.[112] In many ways, the international community has sought to create a rigid (and at times false) divide between the internal safeguarding and human resource policies, trainings, and procedures of organisations to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and that sexual exploitation is perpetrated locally. It is clearly necessary to recognise the responsibility and accountability that fall on international organisations to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse from their own staff and the additional complexities resulting from the often 'weakened' justice systems in the countries affected by crisis, combined with the difficulties linked with prosecuting cases internationally, as opposed to nationally.

While this commitment to accountability and these internal policies are needed and have come far too late, the humanitarian community should also come together to unpack this rigid divide and examine the conditions and drivers that lead to child sexual exploitation by international humanitarian aid workers as well as within the community itself. Indeed, prevention and response efforts are connected to the overall power dynamics and additional risks of child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings. Joint efforts and programming in this regard could only be beneficial to addressing the structural drivers of the sexual exploitation of children.

Challenges for an Effective Multi-Sectoral Approach

While the current framing of child sexual exploitation is rooted within a more siloed sectoral approach, all three country research studies found that the push and pull factors and drivers that may lead to child sexual exploitation of children are multi-faceted and multi-sectoral. The overlapping and interconnected drivers cut across the three countries while some are more country specific.

According to the three country research studies, due to the conflicts, migration and displacement, and ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Kurdistan region of Iraq,

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111   Westendorf, Jasmine-Kim. (2017). WPS, CRSV and sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations: Making sense of the missing links. LSE Blog.
112   Global key informant

Ethiopia, and Kenya, communities (in particular internally displaced people and refugees) are experiencing high levels of different types of insecurities, including: economic hardship; limited basic services (scarcity of food, harsh living conditions); poor physical health (partly due to poor hygiene and sanitation); mental health challenges (due to crisis, displacement, and violence); poor shelter; and social and familial breakdown (rise of separation and divorce; female and child-headed households, orphanhood, drug addition, father's imprisonment, and parental neglect). For the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Ethiopia, specifically, high levels of political insecurity and lack of peace, safety and continued violence were overarching concerns that impacted all community member's wellbeing. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Ethiopia, the crisis and displacement have resulted in the decline in the quality of education and overall insufficient number of schools, resulting in higher levels of school dropout. Internally displaced people and refugee children are even more vulnerable to poorer educational outcomes since they live far from the schools, are unable to afford the school fees, or they face language barriers. In all three countries the ascent of technology, the Internet, and social media platforms have also greatly impacted children and families in positive and negative ways. All these difficulties and challenges have had a negative impact on the wellbeing of children, shifted their role in the family and communities, and has exposed many children and youth to dangerous and exploitative practices. Refer to Case Studies for more detailed information. It is important to note that while there are parallels between humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings in terms of the push and pull factors, gaps, challenges, and overall impact of child sexual exploitation; these impacts are not unique to humanitarian settings, but the additional layers of challenges and potential vulnerabilities may be different.

Considering these multi-faceted drivers leading to child sexual exploitation, key informants in Ethiopia, Kenya, and the Kurdistan region of Iraq called for actions that are ecological, holistic, and cross-sectoral. Accordingly, to respond to the push and pull factors that were identified by the key stakeholders, country-level key informants recommended that programming should cover livelihoods and economic strengthening; social protection; economic inclusion; health; sexual health and reproductive services; community, parental, and government awareness raising activities; shelter; education; water and sanitation; and technology. In all three countries, the fact that child sexual exploitation is framed as either child protection or gender-based violence was viewed by the key informants as a potential barrier to better programming since it may not address the multitude of drivers and risk factors that lead to exploitation.

"There is poor coordination among the humanitarian organisations in the area in terms of children's sexual exploitation and abuse. The organisations work individually, and there is no coordination among the humanitarian organisations to respond to the sexual exploitation crisis collaboratively."
– Ethiopia, KI

The lack of cross-cutting response to child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings that tackled the overlapping and interconnected drivers was also highlighted as a key challenge by the global key informants. Hence, to combat child sexual exploitation one needs to address the underlying root causes of exploitation -- economic vulnerability, poverty, and a lack of access to basic needs. While there has been some work done on the intersections of economic strengthening/cash assistance and prevention of violence against children,[113] as several global key informants observed, much more work needs to be done:

> "From my experience working in humanitarian settings, I have found that agencies or actors focused on cash assistance or livelihood programming don't work with children but on the flipside child protection actors don't know how to do livelihoods."
>
> – Global, KI

Working across sectors – The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action[114]

"A holistic and multi-sectoral approach across the entire humanitarian response is required to achieve our collective responsibility – to uphold the centrality of protection including that of children – and build stronger, more effective programmes that improve outcomes for children." The urgent need to strengthen collaboration across sectors is increasingly recognised and integrated into the Child Protection Minimum Standards through its Pillar 4 which provides guidance and standards to foster and promote better cross-sectoral collaboration in humanitarian responses. However, the challenges of doing so and limitations are also acknowledged, and specific efforts to integrate child protection risks and responses within the other sectors is slowly gaining momentum and recognition as an essential pre-requisite to respond to the interconnected needs of children and ensure effective child protection. A series of standards, tools and guidance have been developed in an attempt to support this, but this will require a significant shift in humanitarian systems, attitudes and practices, and requires child protection actors to learn and speak the language of other sectors and tailor materials accordingly.

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113   Thompson, Hannah. (2012). Cash and Child Protection: How Cash Transfer Programming Can Protect Children from Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation and Violence. Save the Children: London.
114   The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Working Across Sectors for Children's Protection.

The current framing and conceptualisation of child sexual exploitation often prioritises population groups based on the perceived vulnerabilities and the related sectors that tend to oversee services and programming. This section unpacks this further and highlights the importance of taking a more expansive and nuanced approach to the framing and conceptualisations to ensure that we reach all child population groups that may be rendered vulnerable to situations of sexual exploitation and violence, regardless of their gender, status or other.

Focus on Girls (and Women) of Reproductive Age – and the Need to also Focus on Boys

Across the literature and national sexual violence prevalence studies,[115] and as illustrated by the three country studies, the highest prevalence of sexual violence (in humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings) tends to be among girls and women of reproductive age and, accordingly, women and girls are perceived to be the most vulnerable and at risk. In this context, the majority of global policies, programming, and services have tended to prioritise girls and women of reproductive age, leaving boys aside. As several global key informants noted, this prevalence data has resulted in sexual violence and exploitation typically sitting under the gender-based violence humanitarian coordination cluster systems and camp coordination

mechanisms are primarily centred around gender-based violence.[116]

For some global stakeholders interviewed, there is a perception that gender-based violence is a relatively better-resourced sector addressing sexual exploitation, and in turn has comparatively more power than other sectors, namely child protection.[117] It should, however, be noted that both sectors of gender-based violence and child protection are underfunded. Between 2016-2018, funding for gender-based violence accounted for only 0.12% of all humanitarian funding.[118] In addition, between 2010-2018, on average, child protection accounted for only 0.5% of all humanitarian funding.[119] This critical lack of resources tends to push sectors to focus on the cases of highest prevalence.

However, this dominant humanitarian framing risks overlooking the nuance and complexity of the drivers and manifestations of child sexual exploitation and misses other population groups that are at risk including – girls under the age of 12 years of age (particularly as girls are starting puberty at a much younger age),[120] girls with disabilities, boys, and LGBTQI+ children. Delphine Brun reflected on the static models of gender vulnerability in her analysis of humanitarian settings in Cameroon: *"The static models of gender vulnerability that shape the humanitarian response do not only mean that the specific vulnerabilities of men and boys have been largely rendered*

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115   World Health Organization (WHO). (2016). INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children.

116   Global key informant interviews; See also GBV Sub-Cluster; Generic GBViE Referral Pathway in Ukraine.

117   This perceived dominance was noted by several of the child protection global key informants that were interviewed.

118   Gender-Based Violence AoR. (2020, Nov). Research Query: Guidelines and Examples of Best Practice for GBViE Fundraising.

119   Save The Children. (2019). Unprotected: Crisis in humanitarian funding for child protection.

120   The growing number of children starting puberty and menstruation as young as six or seven was something that noted by both Ethiopia and Iraq country key informants, which can put them more at risk of sexual violence and exploitation. The decline in age for puberty for girls and boys is increasingly being documented by global literature, such as Ghorayshi, Azeen. (2023, June). Puberty Starts Earlier Than It Used To. No One Know Why. New York Times.

invisible. These models have also restricted our understanding of how the lives of men, women, girls, and boys interact and how their needs and realities affect each other."[121] One global key informant reflected on these restrictive framings: *"True, girls are the majority but there is no room to access services for boys and LGBTQI+ children."*[122] The static models of gender vulnerability and heteronormative view of victimhood that shapes humanitarian responses will be unpacked further in the next section.

Various analyses of humanitarian responses have also highlighted the international community's commonly held assumption that boys are better able to 'cope,' reflecting some common bias that boy survivors are stoic and strong, and girls are viewed as the more 'vulnerable ones.'[123] The failure to take a more nuanced analysis of humanitarian contexts and consider the full trajectory of boys has led to a gap in child protection services that are not tailored to their specific experience as well as the additional layers of shame and stigma they may face.[124]

The Global Boys Initiative - ECPAT, coordinated by ECPAT International, offers more specific evidence on the victimisation of boys in sexual exploitation across different contexts and promotes adapted child protection practices and services particularly integrating the specificities of the gender dimensions of child sexual exploitation. It also offers evidence of how working with boys can be an opportunity to challenge rigid ideas of masculinity, critically engage with patriarchal norms and prevent violence in communities, including gender-based violence against women and girls.

The failure to take into account the specific needs of boys is further compounded by the rise in the securitisation of the humanitarian space, increase in counterterrorism legislation, and increasingly punitive treatment of children (particularly boys) associated with armed forces and groups as well as children born of war in the last twenty years.[125] Research has found that under the counterterrorism framework, children associated with armed groups designated as 'terrorists' or involved in 'terrorist activities' are perceived as firstly and, often, solely as 'national security threats.' Accordingly, through this security prism, the children are primarily viewed as perceived threats and perpetrators of violence and terrorism.[126] Second, within this ongoing broadening of counterterrorism and perception of these children as current or future threats, national and international actors have failed to apply international children's rights and juvenile justice standards.[127] This has resulted in thousands of children being stranded in camps, detention centres, and orphanages, in dire humanitarian and human security conditions across the North Africa, Middle

121 Brun, Delphine. (2022, July). A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West. GENCAP, NORCAP, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. p31.

122 Global key informant.

123 See for instance, Family for Every Child. (2018). Caring for Boys Affected by Sexual Violence.

124 Brun, Delphine. (2022, July). A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West. GENCAP, NORCAP, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. p31; The Women's Refugee Commission. (2021, February). Addressing Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector.

125 Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University. Twenty Years On: Humanitarian Action & Legacy of the Iraq War. This four-part webinar series hosted by the Program on Forced Migration and Health, in collaboration with the Columbia Global Center in Amman, marks the 20th anniversary of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and reflects on its enduring impacts on the humanitarian landscape.

126 Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. (2020). Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism: The Erosion of Children's Rights in Armed Conflict.

127 *Ibid.*

East, and Central and West Africa regions.[128] For many actors this population group of boys are perceived as persona non grata or untouchable. For example, in a study from 2022 on the Cameroon crisis, several key informants explained that there is a fear among the humanitarian community that by assisting men and boys there are potential repercussions of humanitarian aid structures being branded as supportive of terrorist groups and armed elements.[129]

"Young men are at the bottom of the list. Humanitarian actors see them as healthy, strong, and capable. The most vulnerable, it is thought, are older people, women, and adolescent girls. But this is a protection crisis, where young men are in fact among the most exposed."[130]

– UN Child Protection specialist quoted in the Cameroon study

The above-mentioned population gaps were also flagged as a critical issue by the three country-level key informants, who specifically called for economic strengthening, accessible health, family planning, psychosocial support, and shelter services supported across all genders. For example, all three-country key informants provided examples of both girls and boys working in exploitative labour conditions who were sexually abused and exploited.

Girls, as well as boys and LGBTQI+ children (in Kenya) all experience transactional and survival sex, but these cases tend to go unreported due to the additional stigma and shame, highlighting the urgency to challenge harmful misconceptions and perceptions about sexual exploitation of children, ensure reporting mechanisms are adapted, and services are child-friendly and gender sensitive. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, examples were provided of boys performing sexual acts to the armed party (ISIL) in exchange for remuneration.

"When boys go to work outside the camp, they are sexually abused."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Some armed forces raped girls. These problems affect both boys and girls, but the degree of vulnerability is worst for the girls, who get pregnant and give birth to children at a young age without the help of anyone."

– Ethiopia, KI

"Boys are vulnerable to these threats, especially when they are heavy built, have light complexion and are from deprived families, broken homes, or refugee families... due to constant crises, these cases have increased."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

128   *Ibid*; For example, in Syria, "there are an estimated 28,000 children from more than 60 different countries – including almost 20,000 from Iraq – mostly in displacement camps. Many of these children are held in appalling and sometimes deadly conditions, denied access to legal or consular services, and are risk of statelessness, discrimination, and unable to access basic services such as housing, education, and health care." from UNICEF. (2019). Governments should repatriate foreign children stranded in Syria before it's too late.

129   Brun, Delphine. (2022, July). A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West. GENCAP, NORCAP, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. p24-25.

130   *Ibid*. p24.

"Child defilement is a very common issue in the Madrasa classes. The Madrasa teachers are known for sexual assault and many of them have been arrested for that. Boys also face sodomy from the same teachers but there is a lot of shame in reporting."

– Kenya, KI

"Additionally, sodomy cases in boys are prevalent but seldom reported, and the perpetrators are often close friends or relatives of the victims, including uncles, neighbours, and teachers. The presence of drugs in the community further exacerbates the challenges, as easy accessibility leads to increased cases of sexual exploitation among youths and children."

– Kenya, KI

All countries provided examples of how the advent of technology and its role in further facilitating sexual exploitation of all children (not just girls). Hence, the perceived vulnerabilities are even more complex and move away from the traditional lens. For example, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, boys are increasingly being targeted on social media.[131] Refer to Case Study: The Kurdistan Region of Iraq for more information about the impact of technology on all children.

Gender-Based Framing Focusing Mostly on Adults Rather than Children

While there have been efforts by members of the gender-based violence community in recognising the gap in programming targeting children, with an increased focus on services for adolescent girls, country-level and global key informants reflected on continued gaps. Several key informants expressed concern that due to the gender-based violence sector's dominant focus on adult women, children may be overlooked and specific needs and differences between children and adults are not sufficiently considered in programme design and response. ECPAT's internal review of global frameworks also showed this gap in ensuring services are targeted for the specific needs of children who experience violence and exploitation.[132] It is important to acknowledge, consider and reflect on the potentially differing agendas, programming and strategies to promote women's rights and children's rights, as various connections and collaborations can be made, while also recognising differences to ensure these can be considered to best influence the integration of proper prevention and response strategies against sexual exploitation of children in humanitarian settings.

"Medical services and legal framework are primarily designed for adult women. How do you examine a child? If a child is too scared for an examination and not consent to the medical exam? What about girls under the age of 10?"

– Global, KI

131   Hussein, H.S., and Saeed, K.M. (2022, March). The Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Online Sexual Exploitation of Children and the Impact of COVID-19 on Early Marriage and Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights.

132   Brun, Delphine. (2022, July). A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West. p31.

"Child sexual exploitation is hidden under gender-based violence."

- Global, KI

The Unaddressed Needs of LGBTQI+ Children

A growing body of literature has highlighted the fact that LGBTQI+ population, including children and youth, continue to be overlooked and not included in the humanitarian sector's response to the prevention and response efforts and if mentioned their specific and targeted needs and services are rarely discussed.[133] Due to the lack of livelihood opportunities, LGBTQI+ population may engage in prostitution or transactional sex for survival and are further challenged due to limited access to supportive familial and community protective structures.[134] The challenges of insecurity and gaps in services for the LGBTQI+ population in humanitarian settings will be further discussed in subsequent sections of the report.

Refugees and Internally Displaced People and Other Specific Population Groups

The literature review and country case studies also found that the status as a refugee, migrant, internally displaced people, stateless person, person seeking asylum, person displaced across borders, or person with irregular migration status; person without legal documentation to work – irrespective of gender – further exacerbates conditions further exposing children to sexual exploitation.

Very strong connections and links were also identified in the three countries between child labour including street-connection, particularly for boys, and exposure to sexual exploitation for children often constrained to contribute to their own or their family's incomes and survival. In Kenya, the contexts of drug abuse and drug trafficking were very much linked to the sexual exploitation of children, both girls and boys and respondents from the Kurdistan region of Iraq also raised specific concerns for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups. It is therefore critical to ensure mainstreaming and integration of sexual exploitation in the various population-targeted interventions while understanding and maintaining a specific focus on the specialised responses needed in cases of sexual exploitation.

133   Roth, D., Blackwell, A., Canavera, M., Falb, K. (2021). Cycles of displacement: Understanding violence, discrimination, and exclusion of LGBTQI people in humanitarian contexts. New York: International Rescue Committee.; Roth, D., Blackwell, A., Canavera, M., & Falb, K. (2021). When "We Know Nothing": Recommendations for ethical research and learning with and for LGBTQI people in humanitarian settings. New York: International Rescue Committee.; Women's Refugee Commission. (2021, February). Addressing Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector.

134   Roth, D., Blackwell, A., Canavera, M., Falb, K. (2021). Cycles of displacement: Understanding violence, discrimination, and exclusion of LGBTQI people in humanitarian contexts. p26.

THE ROLE OF AID ARCHITECTURE AND SYSTEMS INSTITUTIONS, POWER DYNAMICS, AND STRUCTURES

Working in and providing aid and services in a crisis-affected or humanitarian context is extremely challenging. Over the last few decades, there have been great efforts to reform the humanitarian aid structures and systems to ensure that the needed population groups receive the services, effectively and efficiently, but also to ensure the aid workers and beneficiaries of the aid sector are treated with respect and humanity.[135] As the world continues to face continuous and ongoing humanitarian crises, and as resources continue to shrink particularly for issues related to child protection,[136] organisations are struggling to provide services to address basic needs but also trying to respond to child sexual exploitation and violence. As the key informants noted it is a challenging and gruelling endeavour and often only a handful of local and international humanitarian actors are the ones providing limited services, which can make it challenging to provide services beyond those addressing basic needs such as food, health, and shelter:

"We are the only actors on the ground. We provide every service — shelter, food distribution, managing camps. In humanitarian settings the lack of visibility and funding, in places like Chad — not Ukraine -- it's challenging and not possible to tackle specific protection issues, such as the sale of sex. We try to build our work so its community-based and links to livelihoods and support people that are coerced but it's very challenging... We have to choose between providing food and protection. We are like families; they make that choice and we do too."

– Global, KI

"Since we are talking about a crisis and we are in a crisis, it is hard to provide 100% of the services. However, as much as the organisation's capacities allowed us, we helped the case until they could be reintegrated into society."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

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135 Examples include: The Grand Bargain (information available here) and PSEA Initiatives (refer to Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub which has a library of resources, including FCDO policies and CAPSEA Initiative, available here.)
136 Thierry, Margot. (2020). Still Unprotected: Crisis in Humanitarian Funding for Child Protection. Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, CP AOR Child Protection Area of Responsibility, Save the Children International.

As the literature review and global and country-level research illustrate, while we have seen some improvements in reforming and improving humanitarian aid structures; there is much work to be done. Specifically, as a community, we need to mitigate against the existing power dynamics and imbalances in humanitarian settings that can create conditions that may contribute to the sexual exploitation of children.[137]

This section will unpack the continued challenges that are inherent in the humanitarian aid structures and systems which can impact humanitarian actors' effectiveness in responding to child sexual exploitation as well as further exacerbate conditions leading to more child sexual exploitation.

Structural and Coordination Challenges

Global and country-level research key informants highlighted the continued coordination weaknesses and gaps in the humanitarian aid sector. As discussed earlier, considering the push and pull factors that create the conditions that may lead to child sexual exploitation, multi-sectoral, cross-sectoral and coordinated mechanisms are integral, critical and necessary to the effective prevention and response of child sexual exploitation. While a few global informants noted that the humanitarian coordination cluster system has improved service delivery and programming in humanitarian settings, several global key informants highlighted that the cluster system continues to pose coordination challenges which limit the ability to effectively roll-out protection policies, including the implementation of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and responding to sexual exploitation of children. Several global informants noted that the effectiveness of the model is reliant on strong leadership

and the stakeholders' ability to work across sectors, however various individual and organisational challenges make the implementation of policies and actions across sectors challenging. Besides, the humanitarian contexts are extremely challenging with high staff turnover, over-burdened staff, short-term cycles, restrictive, siloed funding requirements, inflexibility of the system, complex humanitarian architecture (which continues to be siloed and incoherent at times), top-down approach of humanitarian sector, and a plethora of cross-cutting compliance issues which makes this coordination work even more challenging but also ensuring sustained leadership for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse issues.

"Child protection as an outcome is also a complicated concept that is not necessarily well understood or accepted within the humanitarian sector."

– Global, KI

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137   Brun, Delphine. (2022, July). A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West. p13.

> "The way donors give funding, the way we monitor, it's all siloed, challenges coordination and integration and supporting issues like sexual exploitation of children."
>
> – Global, KI

> "[Humanitarian] system as a whole can be detrimental to progress — so rigid."
>
> – Global, KI

The recent Inter-Agency Standing Committee Protection Review echoes all the above-mentioned concerns expressed by the key informant interviews in that the *"current way protection actors are organised leads to fragmentation and competition and ultimately to ineffective implementation of protection mandates."*[138] The review also flagged other ways that the humanitarian actors have failed populations at risk, including lack of vision, commitment, culture and leadership for protection; lack of collective responsibility for protection within and beyond the humanitarian system; and lack of conceptual clarity and commitment to and prioritisation of protection.[139]

The country-level research in Kenya, Ethiopia, and the Kurdistan region of Iraq similarly flagged these coordination and other structural concerns. In all three countries, country-level informants noted the fragmentation of the system, which ultimately leads to a lack of clarity, duplication, and inadequate number of services, impacting the effectiveness, speed, and appropriateness of interventions. Considering the response to sexual exploitation requires a multi-faceted approach spanning education, health, shelter, and livelihoods, among others, the fragmentation is particularly detrimental to

effectively responding to and preventing to sexual exploitation of children.

> "Lots of actors but they do not coordinate."
>
> – Ethiopia, KI

> "The organisations work individually, and there is no coordination among the humanitarian organisations to respond to the sexual exploitation crisis collaboratively."
>
> – Ethiopia, KI

> "Each organisation provides its own service package."
>
> – Ethiopia, KI

> "The lack of coordinated support systems and inadequate support from agencies also contribute to the challenges in addressing child protection issues effectively."
>
> – Kenya, KI

> "Lack of coordination among humanitarian child protection agencies, view each other as competitors rather than partners."
>
> – Kenya, KI

> "There are frustrations with international organisation's handling of refugee cases and the lengthy process can further expose children to exploitation in refugee settings."
>
> – Kenya, KI

138   Cocking, J., Davies., Finney, N. et al. (2022). Independent review of the implementation of IASC Protection Policy. HPG Commissioned Report. London. ODI.
139   *Ibid.*

Service, Needs-Based and Supply-Driven Approaches

Several key informants discussed the continual challenges of humanitarian aid persistently being designed around service, needs-based, and supply-driven approaches, rooted in a set of activities. There is a lack of community-level, outcome-oriented approaches which start at the community. Analysing how the communities experience risk and tailoring to the local needs and demands[140] -- is integral to effectively responding to the sexual exploitation of children (as discussed earlier).

"Humanitarians go in and do needs assessment; rather than analysing risk, which sets you up to do service provision, rather than prevention."

– Global, KI

"Tendency is to focus on list of standardised activities, rather than on how to reduce risks of violence, coercion and deprivation that people face."

– Global, KI

"If you start at risk, you see where children, women and men are experiencing sexual exploitation, and you can analyse it better and address the needs of those experiencing."

– Global, KI

The challenge of coming in with pre-designed systems and standardised activities is illustrated by one of the global informants' experiences working with local civil society organisations in Ukraine during the last decade and are now seeing the rush of organisations coming in following the war:[141]

"Ukraine, which is so different from other humanitarian contexts, is a case in point. [In Ukraine], there are strong civil society organisations, government, robust and trained social worker workforce and psychologists that have been working on sexual violence for years. But international organisations are coming in with their humanitarian structures and systems and not adapting to this local context that is highly functioning... The system disempowers humanitarian populations rather than empowering them and their way of working."

– Global, KI

Key informants in Ethiopia also highlighted the lack of adaptation of the services to the needs:

"There is no collaboration among the organisations to work on the protection of sexual exploitation activities, which needs to be established. In order to prevent the risks

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140   *Ibid*; InterAction. (2021). Module 1: Risk Analysis.

141   Important to note that several global key informants mentioned Ukraine during the interview. The key informants noted that the last few years its proven challenging for the humanitarian sector in that *"all the organisations are rushing into certain 'a la mode' humanitarian setting such as Ukraine, while other dire humanitarian situations that may have serious exploitation issues are ignored or underfunded."*

of sexual exploitation and respond to the crisis, community awareness activities including government staff, the provision of recovery centres for the victims, strengthening different community structures, and strengthening country laws and policies are essential."

– Ethiopia, KI

"The humanitarian responses are highly focused on distribution of food and non-food items and some protection activities. But their interventions lack prevention activities to protect the children from sexual exploitation."

– Ethiopia, KI

Environment of Scarcity and Power Imbalances

Across both the global and country-level research, key informants reflected on how the camp infrastructure can further exacerbate the environment of scarcity and isolation as well as embedded power imbalances which further contribute to conditions and drivers that lead to the various forms of sexual exploitation of children and young people such as transactional and survival sex, exploitation in prostitution, trafficking, and exploitative child labour practices. The challenges include gaps in planning; delays with the camp set-up; implementation of minimum humanitarian standards of the camps; shortage of services and goods (health, food, water and sanitation, shelter, dignity kits); lack of services designed for boys and the LGBTQI+ population; poor monitoring of the internally displaced people and refugee camps; and isolation of the camps. These situations could even deteriorate, considering the funding shortfalls. It is reported the global hunger crisis already fuelled by climate change and conflict could push 24 million more people into acute food insecurity in the course of 2024, in contexts of "*significant reductions in the size and scope of life-saving food, cash and nutrition assistance programmes*".[142]

"The most critical moment is the onset of an emergency but there are so many delays in starting up. Delays in food distribution and safe shelter…We do not provide firewood and women/girls have to go outside of the camp to collect firewood and they are exposed to abuse and violence… It's the most critical time to mitigate against risk and if we don't start off well it will go on forever and difficult to get out of it."

– Global, KI

"There is a lack of food in the camps so children must go outside of the camps in search of food. This leads to children being trafficked, exploited, and abused."

– Ethiopia, KI

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142   The New Humanitarian. (13 December 2023). What WFP cuts mean for people in hunger crises around the world.

"Need to ensure that camps provide all basic services, so children do not resort to working on the street or other places where they are exploited."

— Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Most of us are displaced from the Oromia region where we had a stable life and businesses to support our families. We have been living there for many years, and our children attended school without any haste. But now we are working for survival, and the support from the camp is not sufficient and does not cover all our needs, so children are forced to work inside and outside the camp. Mainly boys are working outside of the camp by selling some goods, and washing cars, and girls are working as limited household staff. The crisis basically affected women and children and exposed them to different abuses. For instance, a year ago, there were girls in the camp, but we don't know where they are, and there are rumours that they are in Addis and other towns working as prostitutes for survival."

— Ethiopia, KI

"Another layer of isolation for populations that are already isolated. And for those that are isolated there is much higher risk of being exploited. We see this in the LGBTQI+ community."

— Global, KI

Key informants in Ethiopia and the Kurdistan region of Iraq discussed how the limited infrastructure and minimal security within camps have led to child sexual exploitation and violence. For example, in Ethiopia, one of the key informants discussed how poor lighting in the camps and damaged shelter infrastructure has made it easier for traffickers, smugglers, and perpetrators to enter the camps at night and take away the children (girls for sexual exploitation and boys for labour exploitation).

In general, the camp's environment of scarcity and embedded power structures, dictating how and to whom resources flow and how power is distributed, may be another factor that can lead to child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings. All three country case studies found that the intermediaries and perpetrators of child sexual exploitation also include individuals that work in the camps and 'hold power and resources' - drivers, guards, contractors, service providers (non-governmental and governmental), doctors, and teachers.

"Services providers exploit people. For example, a woman asks a male service provider for a ration card and he forces her to have sex before he gives it to her."

— Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"[Internally displaced people and refugee children] have no position of power and no identity card. There are cases of sex in exchange for services in camps. Because the children have no identity cards, they cannot leave camps for services."

— Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Another example of this happened not long ago, in the camp management, where a member of an organisation told a girl that if she would have sex with him, in return he would facilitate her access to some of the organisation's services and would arrange her a salary that would be delivered to her doorstep, without her having to do anything difficult, and the girl agreed."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

Recent analysis of humanitarian camp settings in Syria found instances of sexual exploitation for accessing services:

"Three per cent of households who received assistance indicated that they were asked for a favour in exchange of assistance, 14% reported being propositioned with a physical or emotional relationship to access aid. Female-headed households are five times more likely to be asked for physical and emotional relationships in exchange for aid. Local authorities (59%), private vendors (38%), community leaders (25%) are the ones asking for these "favours."[143]

As discussed earlier, due to the shortage of services and the shifting role of children in families and communities, including economic support for their families, children are often forced to work outside of the camps which makes them vulnerable to exploitation and violence:

"When boys go to work outside the camp, they are sexually abused. They are not paid for the work they do, work overtime and receive a small wage."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

While it was not discussed in the three country case studies, global key informants and a growing body of literature highlighted that the LGBTQI+ population is particularly vulnerable since the aid infrastructure continues to be governed by binary exclusive concepts of gender, which can lead to conditions that may increase child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings.[144] In addition, the frontline workers require more support and training on how to also care for LGBTQI+ children as well as boys.[145]

"With limited livelihood opportunities, LGBTQI+ people may be forced to engage in commercial sexual exploitation for survival, where they are often further abused, facing high levels of violence, with subsequent effects on their physical and mental health and limited access to protective structures such as supportive family or community members, or essential health."[146]

143   UN Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme, Whole of Syria Inter-Agency PSEA Network. (2020, October). Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Syra, SEA & Humanitarian Assistance: Household Perceptions of Favors in Exchange for AID: HNAP Household Survey (June 2020).

144   Roth, D., Blackwell, A., Canavera, M., Falb, K. (2021). Cycles of displacement: Understanding violence, discrimination, and exclusion of LGBTQI people in humanitarian contexts. New York: International Rescue Committee; Roth, D., Blackwell, A., Canavera, M., & Falb, K. (2021). When "we know nothing": Recommendations for ethical research and learning with and for LGBTQI people in humanitarian settings. New York: International Rescue Committee.

145   Women's Refugee Commission. (2021, February). Addressing Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector.

146   Roth, D., Blackwell, A., Canavera, M., Falb, K. (2021). Cycles of displacement: Understanding violence, discrimination, and exclusion of LGBTQI people in humanitarian contexts. New York: International Rescue Committee, p26.

Overarching Insecurity in Camp and Non-Camp Settings

One of the themes that emerged from both the global and country-level research is the continued lack of insecurity and vulnerability that 'beneficiaries' are confronted with in accessing services in camp and non-camp settings. While the key informants recognised the work that has gone in the last decade in strengthening the accountability and safeguarding mechanisms and policies, many reflected on the continued gaps and, in turn, the continued insecurity. Children, young people, women, and the LGBTQI+ population groups continue to be the groups within the affected populations considered most at risk – as several recent studies and reports have also highlighted.[147] Accountability mechanisms and approaches are rarely adapted to their specific needs, particularly to ensure their meaningful participation.

"LGBTQI+ community, we are not designing [services] for them. People come to gender-based violence and say you deal with LGBTQI+ since you work on 'gender.' But they have specific shelter needs, food needs, gender-based violence isn't able and qualified."
– Global, KI

"I would love a humanitarian response to be designed for all sectors. For example, if there is a disabled, unmarried school-girl response (shelter, food distribution) should be designed to meet the girls' needs and how it will look different and safer."
– Global, KI

"I don't think much has changed in terms of safety and vulnerability. How do we keep children safe? How do we keep women safe? They [humanitarian leaders] don't think of it."
– Global, KI

The Kurdistan region of Iraq and Ethiopia key informants also highlighted the challenge of services continuing to be designed more for adults, rather than children, which has resulted in children and young people not trusting humanitarian organisations:[148]

"The system is not child-friendly and inherently putting children at risk."
– Global, KI

"Gender-based violence case management services are not designed to support children or they are only focused on girls (while some victims are boys)."
– Ethiopia, KI

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147   Roth, D., Blackwell, A., Canavera, M., Falb, K. (2021). Cycles of displacement: Understanding violence, discrimination, and exclusion of LGBTQI people in humanitarian contexts. New York: International Rescue Committee; Roth, D., Blackwell, A., Canavera, M., & Falb, K. (2021). When "we know nothing": Recommendations for ethical research and learning with and for LGBTQI people in humanitarian settings. New York: International Rescue Committee.; The Women's Refugee Commission. (2021). Addressing Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector.

148   Children and youth's lack of trust of international institutions is something that has been discussed in other reports and studies, including the Youth, Peace, and Security report. Simpson, Graeme. (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security. UNFPA and PBSO.

"Children do not trust the humanitarian system."

— *Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI*

"I'm a woman working in the humanitarian sector and I don't always feel safe so, of course a female beneficiary would feel even more unsafe."

— *Global, KI*

There have been significant reform efforts to improve the safety of humanitarian aid workers and ensure the workforce is representative of all genders.[149] However several global key informants reflected on the continued insecurity they felt as female humanitarian practitioners, which made them concerned about female and other marginalised community beneficiaries:

"In the child protection sector, we are mostly women but the leaders are mostly male, white, and straight and how resources and time are designated is reflective of this gendered power dynamic. Sexual harassment is rampant in humanitarian aid and child protection. We don't focus enough on exploitation and every-day nature of sexual harassment."

— *Global, KI*

149   OCHA (2019). ON TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY, THE UN PAYS SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO WOMEN HUMANITARIANS.

CAPACITIES AND SKILLS TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Global and country key informants noted that there are medical, psychological, child protection (including via case management and alternative care), cash assistance, sexual and gender-based violence, and hotline counselling services provided by non-governmental and government entities for survivors of sexual exploitation. However, key informants highlighted that these available services are at times ineffective and stretched since they are unable to meet the growing needs and demands. The frontline workers and providers do not have the specific needed skills and capacities to respond to sexual exploitation and the evolving landscape and risks faced by children and families, which include specific health skills for treating girls, boys, and LGBTQI+ children; psychosocial and counselling; justice and legal training; economic strengthening expertise (including cash assistance); among others. There is no peer-to-peer support network to support the frontline workers working on these challenging issues.

"No capacity building training for humanitarian staff, volunteers, and the government staff on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. However, few humanitarian workers have some basic knowledge of sexual exploitation and response mechanisms since they get some training on the topic."

– Ethiopia, KI

"Lacking a support network and experts in the field. When we say, "child protection", that is a very complex topic, especially Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; it needs to be addressed with extra sensitivity."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

As discussed earlier, several key informants stressed that due to the dire circumstances of the humanitarian situations around the world, humanitarian actors' priorities is providing the basic services of food, shelter, water, and healthcare, and at times struggling to even provide those kinds of services, due to funding limitations and severity of the crisis and overwhelming needs that responding to exploitation and violence is not a priority, particularly at the onset of the crisis. This is evident, even for actors in which it is part of their mandate.

"Organisations cannot keep up with rising demand and provide all the needs and physical, psychological, social and economic services."

– Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"We [internally displaced people] don't have the capacity to address these problems, we are relying on the humanitarian support of different non-governmental organisations and some religious institutions, where they occasionally provide us with food, and there are some people who beg at the gates of the church for money to buy food and clothes. There are some non-governmental organisations that provide us some cash assistance, but compared with the problem, it's not sufficient. We want to integrate with the host communities if our livelihood is facilitated by the government or any other stakeholder."
— Ethiopia, KI

While host communities struggle to access adequate services, refugee and internally displaced people communities can face specific challenges to access services due to their marginalised and more vulnerable conditions and status.

In all three countries, there are limited to no specialised support, response, and prevention services and systems targeting child sexual exploitation, such as systems to identify victims; outreach services; awareness raising activities; and specialised mental and physical support services for sexual exploitation of underline all children. Refer to Annex C for more information regarding the gaps in each country.

"The primary focus of agencies is refugee documentation, not child protection."
— Kenya, KI

"There is no concerned body to seriously implement prevention of sexual exploitation of children. That is why there is sexual exploitation of children in many areas of the country. The government should provide the children with the necessary services like food, medical care, and others to prevent them from going to prostitution, where they will be sexually exploited. The families' support is also minimal to prevent their children from sexual exploitation, and the families should be supported economically so that they might not push the children into prostitution."
— Ethiopia KI

"As far as I know, and I have been working in this field for 22 years now, nothing has been done to respond to sexual exploitation at the beginning of the crisis."
— Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"The sexual exploitation cases are left for some humanitarian organisations and women's, children's, and social affairs organisations. Due to this, there is a lack of ownership by the community and the government to address the problem. There is a lack of awareness among the communities about the sexual exploitation of children, and they don't think that they are responsible for the victims."
— Ethiopia, KI

"Prostitution, yes it happens but most organisations don't work with these cases because they are going to affect the organisation's reputation or safety."
— Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"There is also a lack of prior awareness and posters that tell children how to protect themselves against sexual abuse."
— Kurdistan region of Iraq, KI

"Humanitarian organisations don't support much since they have their own planned project activities and that may not be focused on those (exploitation) risks."
— Ethiopia, KI

As discussed in earlier sections, key informants also reflected on the challenges of the existing services and mechanisms since they operate along a siloed approach; even though drivers fuelling exploitation span all sectors.

"Variety of perpetrators, intermediaries and community perceptions contribute to the complexity of the problem. Addressing the issue demands a multi-faceted approach that involves strengthening protection mechanisms within camps, raising awareness about the rights of children, providing safe reporting channels, and fostering cooperation between humanitarian organisations, local authorities, and community."
— Kenya, KI

"There is poor coordination among the humanitarian organisations in the area in terms of children's sexual exploitation and abuse. The organisations work individually, and there is no coordination among the humanitarian organisations to respond to the sexual exploitation crisis collaboratively."
— Ethiopia, KI

Stakeholders in Ethiopia, the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and Kenya all called for a multi-sectoral approach, rooted in strong collaborative mechanisms, and working across different stakeholders including government agencies, humanitarian agencies, technology companies, law enforcement agencies, advocacy groups, private sector and business communities, health providers, schools, community leaders, community organisations, transport and accommodation sectors as well as the entertainment sector like brothels and bars. The programming and services should traverse all sectors -- peacebuilding, livelihood and economic opportunities, health (physical, mental, and reproductive), shelter, water and sanitation, education, and law and justice. The programming should include gender-specific services (also for boys and LGBTQI+ children); safe, confidential reporting mechanisms; survivor-centred mental health support services; community engagement and awareness raising; mental health and psychosocial support; safer online environment for children; economic strengthening and livelihood initiatives for children and their families; and comprehensive sexual education. Refer to Annex C for more specific recommendations from the three countries.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Various and complex manifestations of sexual exploitation of children are exacerbated in humanitarian contexts by unstable environments, uncertainties and threats faced by populations, and the inability of communities and humanitarian sectors to provide for the complex needs of families and children affected. This places an additional burden on children to cope with their situations and place them in highly vulnerable situations where they need to contribute to family survival strategies, provide for themselves and cope with violence, stigma and exploitative systems that surround them.

It should be recognised that as powerful actors, as individuals and operations emanating from the international community, humanitarian actors are entering settings affected by crisis with their own concepts, biases, and programmatic typologies and frameworks and understanding of vulnerability, needs, risks, and agency, including how it relates to the many risks that children face (including sexual exploitation). There is a tendency to shift away from the dominant narratives that erase who and what is responsible for creating systematic harm that may lead to exploitation; taking us away from approaches that might address the oppressive systems at the root of children's marginalisation. Thus, the important reflection from this study is how existing framings often lack the nuances and in-depth understanding of the contexts and lived realities and, in turn, current

programming, strategies, policies, responses, and plans do not adequately address the different dynamics and needs of affected communities, particularly survivors of child sexual exploitation.

By acknowledging this set of operating parameters and reflections, it will hopefully encourage humanitarian actors, government entities and local actors to think more critically about their roles and assumptions and invite donors to adequately fund risk analyses and activities in parallel to service delivery that would allow to better understand and address the structural drivers. It is critical to reflect about one's own positions and their relationships to others, rather than presuming that they are arriving to operate as neutral or impartial actors whose 'best practices' and 'guidelines' are value-free and applicable in every setting. To effectively respond to and protect children from sexual exploitation and other risks, humanitarian actors need to shift their mindset towards actual outcomes rather than activity-based results (or a set of activities). By reflecting on this and rethinking the way the different systems are engaged and set up, as a community of actors (not only child protection or gender-based violence) we can more effectively prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation of children in humanitarian settings around the world.

Following are a series of overarching recommendations for practitioners, policymakers, and donors working in humanitarian settings.

Re-evaluating Frameworks and Definitions

» Shift away from the desired programmatic order and coherence by creating joint taxonomies, categories, and programmatic guidance and frameworks, and shift away from the 'siloed' forms of violence.

» Ensure that the minimum humanitarian standards include joint understanding and a focus on child sexual exploitation in any upcoming revision and promote joint efforts of the child protection and gender-based violence actors to promote adherence and coordinated implementation of these.

» Focus on the nuanced understanding of child sexual exploitation at country and community levels to develop trainings and services to address it.

Collective Responsibility for Prevention and Response to Child Sexual Exploitation (including Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) in Humanitarian Settings, Within and Beyond the Humanitarian System

» Start with the understanding that the drivers that may lead to child sexual exploitation of children are multifaceted and multisectoral and humanitarian actors should create collective, holistic strategies that cover a range of issues and measures (awareness-raising, legal measures, training, education, health, economic livelihoods, shelter, etc.)

» Advocate for adequate funding, increased multi-sector working and upskilling of frontline workers to allow for in-depth analysis of contexts and ensure integrated programming.

» Build mutual understanding and collective responsibility with actors that work within and alongside the humanitarian system to reduce risks

such as sexual exploitation, as child sexual exploitation is rooted in gender and power dynamics and structural issues that cannot be addressed by humanitarian actors alone. National and local governments as well as local and national non-governmental actors must be included in all service, policy, and programming implementation, including in efforts to address sexual exploitation in crisis-prone contexts and in emergency preparedness efforts. Development, peace, and human rights actors need to be mobilised as well in these contexts, in addition to humanitarian actors.

» Develop and implement solutions in ways that enable cross-institutional and cross-sectoral collaboration, reducing risks identified through thorough analysis, and not only conceiving response and prevention of child sexual exploitation as solely a technical sector responsibility.

» Fund, resource, and support ways of working that enable humanitarian actors to shift their mindset towards actual outcomes rather than activity-based results (or a set of activities) to effectively protect children against sexual exploitation and other risks.

» Engage, beyond the humanitarian system, with actors from the private sector that may be used as intermediaries and potential perpetrators of the sexual exploitation of children including private businesses and companies in the communities in the tourism and entertainment sector such as hotels, bars, brothels, among others; transport companies including taxi drivers and other informal actors.[150] Considering this may require specialised knowledge and experiences, develop guidance to support humanitarian actors to engage on these sensitive issues.

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150   Like the 'boda boda' (motorcycle taxis)

Streamline Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation

» Streamline Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policies and child sexual exploitation sectors, frameworks, approaches, learning journeys, trainings, and services to improve accountability and ensure a more contextualised and effective approach to safeguarding, which garners trust among community members (particularly children, carers, and women). While maintaining the accountability on the organisations for their personnel it should extend beyond this. Removing the divide between the sectors would contribute to ensure communities (especially children) feel better supported and hopefully safe enough to speak about the abuse. This would imply also creating more effective local complaint mechanisms and services that are equipped to support all child victims/survivors through gender-sensitive approaches.

» Increase investment and garner stronger leadership in tackling the underlying root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse in communities to embrace the drivers and conditions that facilitate sexual exploitation of children in communities. By joining forces with the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse sector, more sustained and effective action can be expected.

» Work together to unpack the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policy and child sexual exploitation programming divide and examine the conditions and drivers that lead to child sexual exploitation by the international humanitarian aid workers as well as within the community.

» Research how prevention and response efforts are connected to the overall power dynamics and imbalances and additional insecurities and risks heightened in humanitarian settings.

Be Mindful of the Role that the Humanitarian Aid Architecture and Systems May Play in Further Fueling Conditions that May Lead to the Sexual Exploitation of Children

» Critically review and reflect on how the humanitarian infrastructure and the overarching environment of scarcity and power imbalances can create unsafe and insecure conditions for children that may lead to more violence; the identification and analysis of these risks need to be incorporated in all overarching frameworks and policies, not only protection.

» Draw on existing research and field guidance to ensure that humanitarian institutions and structures are able to adequately explore and assess the structural contexts that make children vulnerable to sexual exploitation

» Invest in equipping humanitarian systems to respond to the needs of all children, including boys, LGBTQI+ children, children with disabilities, orphans, child-headed households, children on the move etc; in order to mitigate against any risks of violence and sexual exploitation.

Gender-Sensitive Programming for All Children:

» Engage with the community and based on children's perspectives as a starting point, and in turn analyse the risks, rather than pre-determined vulnerability and potential gender bias.

» Appropriately fund, resource and invest to understand and address the systemic environments that perpetuate, facilitate or drive sexual exploitation of children, often intensified by the crisis, for affected populations and host communities.

» Challenge the static models of gender vulnerability and the binary, heteronormative, and paternalistic view of victimhood, rooted in the singular narrative of local communities' perceived traditions and inherent gender inequality and harmful norms, which tend to shape humanitarian responses in the way that programming and services are designed and implemented.

» Take a more expansive and nuanced approach to the framing and conceptualisations of vulnerabilities and risks, to ensure that all child population groups are reached including girls under the age of 12 years of age (particularly as girls are starting puberty at a much younger age), children with disabilities (particularly girls), boys, and LGBTQI+ children and young people.

» Introduce more effective gender-sensitive programming for all children and develop training tools to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches in order to equip all services in challenging unconscious bias and recognising how to plan and provide services adapted to the various intersectional challenges that children face.

Child-Centred Programming and Services:

» Introduce more effective child-centred programming that will allow to better trust the humanitarian aid actors and systems. This includes creating services that are mindful of the various ages and development stages of children and informed by their views and experiences; training staff to be able to effectively communicate with children especially around issues of child sexual exploitation; among others.

» Mainstream the understanding and specific considerations on child sexual exploitation across all sectors, including Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, food security, education, nutrition, livelihood, nutrition, shelter, health, WASH and camp management; recognising that child sexual exploitation cannot be properly addressed as a separate issue and is intertwined with all the other rights of the child and linked to other forms of violence and in particular sexual violence against children.

» Contextualise programming rooted in the actual needs and lived experience of children, caregivers, and communities – done with children and community members, and not for them.

» Identify opportunities and equip families to access livelihood and alternatives for income in collaboration with government, humanitarian actors, communities and children themselves particularly in priority locations in contexts where humanitarian funding is even more limited and ensure associated safety nets are put in place to prevent risks of child sexual exploitation and close monitoring of the situations.

» Adapt the services and responses to the contexts and evolving threats including facilitation through technology or online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and ensure a strong gender-sensitive approach, considering the distinct needs of girls, boys, children of different gender identities or sexual orientations.

Centring Children's Agency, While Taking into Account Contexts of Vulnerabilities

» Consider and approach the concepts of agency of children in nuanced ways rooted within the systemic barriers, constraints, and norms in their environments.

» Engage with children more systematically to analyse and address their lived realities while also taking a more structural approach to challenging the drivers that perpetuate the sexual exploitation of children.

» Develop ways to actively engage with children to understand not only the risks they perceive depending on various elements, including their gender, ethnicity, economic class, status, religion etc but also the ways children actively seek, create, and cultivate safety, through ensuring the participation of children in research, monitoring, evaluation and learning activities within humanitarian contexts.

» Engage more around the sexuality of children and the changing ways that children are being exposed to and aware of sexuality, sex, and sexual content by beginning sexual education (which includes positive sexuality not just the harmful impact of sex) early enough. This should be done through culturally and socially sensitive and adapted approaches.

» Pilot and evaluate possible interventions in humanitarian contexts to challenge oppressive power structures using power building analysis models to tackle structural issues, including racism, agency, adultism and patriarchy, as ways to prevent sexual violence and exploitation of children.

Accountability to Children

» Create a demand for accountability and stop impunity by acting against perpetrators and intermediaries rather than blaming the victims. Working with justice actors while also engaging with communities is critical in this regard.

» Engage with children, including with survivors of child sexual exploitation, safely, ethically and meaningfully across the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes, offering technical support as required and needed.

» Ensure adequate resourcing and technical capacities to prioritise mechanisms of accountability towards children, including through leadership and drive from management and donors

» Support or put in place and promote effective reporting mechanisms that are adequate and trusted by children, families and communities; responsive to age, gender and other intersectionality, and supported by services to provide care and protection to victims/survivors who disclose cases.

» Put in place a system wide effort to integrate Safe Programming for the prevention and response to child sexual exploitation and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by humanitarian workers; ensuring clear accountability lines for each with coordinated technical support and resourcing, inter-referral systems, and context analysis to inform broader joint prevention programming.

» Implement interventions and services that are proactive rather than reactive or waiting for a child to seek help or disclose sexual abuse and exploitation, develop preventative and outreach programmes including in places and establishments known for where child sexual exploitation happens.

Areas for Further Exploration and Research:

» Further research and exploration is needed to better understand the profiles of perpetrators, their pathways to offending, and evaluate existing practices of diverse sectors to prevent the sexual exploitation of children for instance through viable alternatives for children and families, or practices in collaboration with the private sector such as the entertainment sector, both formal and informal, that can play a role in disrupting child sexual exploitation.

» Research the role of digital technologies in facilitating both harm and protection in situations of conflict and crisis, through for instance, help-seeking opportunities for children experiencing sexual abuse and exploitation or exposure to risks of sexual exploitation and abuse enabled by technologies.

» Contribute to and align with a shared research agenda to maximise opportunities for building critical evidence, filling knowledge gaps and use existing data collection systems to inform programming and prevention of child sexual exploitation in humanitarian contexts.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY

Annex A provides a more detailed overview of the paper's methodology. It is important to note that this paper is not an academic research paper and in turn the methodology should not be viewed within that lens.

Firstly, the consultant reviewed published and grey literature related to sexual exploitation of children, child protection, gender-based violence, and sexual violence and abuse against girls, boys, and children in humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings. The consultant also reviewed literature specific to protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) in humanitarian settings; broader protection reviews; as well as critiques and analysis of current international children's rights and violence prevention framing. The literature review includes ECPAT reports and studies; sector-wide assessments and strategy papers; broader sector mappings, analysis, and research studies. The consultant drew on available literature on various organisations and network websites, academic journals, as well as recommendations from stakeholder interviews and an advisory group. Refer to the Reference list for a full list of resources.

Secondly, a total of 16 online semi-structured interviews with key global stakeholders were completed between April-September 2023. The key global informants were a mix of child protection, gender-based violence, and broader protection and humanitarian aid practitioners, researchers, donors, and policymakers from a range of UN agencies, international non-governmental organisations, inter-agency networks, bilateral agencies, philanthropic donors,

intermediary funds, consultancy groups, and research organisations. The informants were either based at the headquarter level in North America or Europe or in regional offices in Africa and Middle East regions. The consultant received informed consent and each key informant was told at the start that notes will be taken but all information will be anonymised and at any point during the interview they could let the consultant know that they do not feel comfortable that certain things are noted. The interviews were conducted via Teams, Google Meet, or Zoom and were not recorded but the notes were transcribed during the interview.

The goal was to interview up to 20 global key informants. However, the consultant faced challenges in receiving responses from them. Since most of these key informants focused on humanitarian settings, it was challenging to schedule interviews due to their hectic schedules and continued humanitarian crises that took place during the research study period.

Third, three ECPAT members were identified to undertake the country-level research in three countries: Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (Kenya), Emmanuel Development Association (Ethiopia), and Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights (Kurdistan region of Iraq). ECPAT International worked closely with the research teams to prepare research protocols and deliver in-person and online training for the in-country research teams. Each of the country teams conducted one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with a range of frontline workers and other local actors in humanitarian settings, such as international non-governmental organisations, national

non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, UN agencies, local government actors, community members, and faith-based organisations. The research teams also spoke with sex workers to gauge a deeper understanding of the issues directly from those who are involved in different forms of exploitation. Lastly, they spoke with transport company representatives and other private sector actors to gain a deeper understanding of the sectors and agencies that are involved in exploitation as potential intermediaries. In total, 62 key informant interviews and four focus group discussions were conducted in the three countries.

The researchers unpacked what the different actors know about child sexual exploitation in contexts affected by crisis, what forms of child sexual exploitation are manifested in their contexts, how are children at risk or victims of sexual exploitation perceived, and what are the common norms and beliefs associated with child victims of sexual exploitation. The researchers explored existing knowledge and capacities of respondents, both professionals and paraprofessionals including informal actors, to identify and respond to various forms of child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings. In-country data collection was done by ECPAT members research leads and translated transcripts and interview summaries were shared with ECPAT International for the consultant to review and analyse. Refer to Annex C: Country Case Studies for more detailed information regarding the research process and findings for each country.

The consultant triangulated the global level research and three country case studies data to analyse and write the paper which was reviewed by ECPAT International, three country research teams, and Advisory Group members.

Research Study Methodology Challenges, Reflections and Lessons Learned

Several lessons learned emerged from the study which will be important for ECPAT and partners to keep in mind for future research. First, while there was much effort to try and include a range of stakeholders in both the global and country-level analysis; it proved to be challenging particularly at the global level. The goal was to interview specialists from key agencies intervening in humanitarian contexts working in the child protection and gender-based violence sectors as well as the other multitude of other sectors (livelihood, shelter, education, health, transport, telecommunications, etc.). However, the consultant was only able to interview child protection, gender-based violence, and broader protection specialists, despite efforts and requests for contacts of key stakeholders in the other sectors. This was due to multiple factors reflecting both the shortcoming of the researcher but also the siloed nature of the field: (1) the consultant's experience and past work rooted in broader international children's rights and had limited access to contacts working in a range of sectors; (2) Advisory Group members only represented the child protection and gender-based violence with limited outreach conducted in other sectors; and (3) overarching siloed nature of international humanitarian programming and key informants were reflective of the silos with limited reach across different sectors. In addition, the global-level interviews were missing key voices including sex workers and LGBTQI+ advocates, communities that were identified as missing in research related to child sexual exploitation: *"some voices are heard over others and considered to be neutral and descriptive because of whom they belong to, allowing some people to speak on the behalf of others whilst essentially silencing the voiceless."*[151]

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151   Engvall, M. A. (2019, May). Sex Work and Humanitarianism: Understanding Predominant Framings of Sex Work in Humanitarian Response. Uppsala Universitet.

The country-level research teams were more successful in incorporating a wider range of voices, including sex workers, community filmmakers, and transport company representatives.

Additionally, another limitation is that neither the global-level nor country-level teams conducted interviews with children and young people. There was concern due to the timeline and nature of the research that the children and young people would not be safeguarded and protected. Future follow-up research studies may want to investigate the children's perspective further since this perspective is missing from this analysis. Thus, the research team does acknowledge the limitations of incorporating all voices in the research study. One way the team tried to address this shortcoming was to root the literature reviewed and referenced in longitudinal, ethnographic studies in which children and young people were interviewed and engaged with throughout the process. Examples include research from Howe et al., Montgomery, and Hart.

Second, the research study was a positive example of conducting a multi-country study by using in-country research teams (rather than international consultants). While it extended the research and analysis timeline, it was an important shift in how research tends to be done and an important reflection for the importance of continuing to ground country-level research by researchers from their countries as well as refugee and displaced communities. It is important for ECPAT to reflect upon this experience and create mechanisms and processes to support these shifts in research and analysis practice.

ANNEX B: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS TABLE

TABLE A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS	
TERM (SOURCE)	**DEFINITION**
Child associated with an armed force or armed group (CAAFAG) (The Paris Principles, Article 2.1) (Article 3 of ILO Convention 182)	Refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purpose. Article 3 of ILO C182 defines worst forms of child labour as follows: *"(a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict."*
Child labour (ILO Conventions 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor) (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.76)	It includes employment below the minimum age as established in national legislation, hazardous unpaid household services, and the worst forms of child labour: all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale or trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, or forced or compulsory labour; the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic purposes; the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities; and work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. The term "child labour" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that: » is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or » interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. Whether or not particular forms of "work" can be called "child labour" depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed, and the objectives pursued by individual countries. The answer varies from country to country, as well as among sectors within countries.

TABLE A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS	
TERM (SOURCE)	**DEFINITION**
Child maltreatment (Krug et al. 2002)	All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.
Child protection (UNICEF Child Protection Strategy, 2021-2023)	Child protection is the prevention of, and response to, exploitation, abuse, neglect, harmful practices and violence against children.
Child protection system (United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Save the Children and World Vision, 'A better way to protect all children: The theory and practice of child protection systems, conference report', 2013, p.3)	Certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children. A child protection system is generally agreed to be comprised of the following components: human resources, finance, laws and policies, governance, monitoring and data collection as well as protection and response services and care management. It also includes different actors – children, families, communities, those working at sub-national or national level and those working internationally. Most important are the relationships and interactions between and among these components and these actors within the system. It is the outcomes of these interactions that comprise the system.
Child sexual abuse (Article 18, Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) (2007a)	(a) Engaging in sexual activities with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities (this does not apply to consensual sexual activities between minors), and (b) engaging in sexual activities with a child where use is made of coercion, force or threats; or abuse is made of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence.

TABLE A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS	
TERM (SOURCE)	**DEFINITION**
(Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.19)	Child sexual abuse is characterised by acts committed for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator without the need for exchange or explicit force. Elements like authority and manipulation can be determining factors, and even without the child reaching the age of consent, the mere occurrence of sexual activity constitutes abuse. This form of abuse encompasses both contact and non-contact forms, constituting harm by coercing children into sexual activities. The terms "child sexual abuse" and "sexual abuse of children" are linguistically interchangeable, both emphasising the mistreatment inflicted upon the child.
Child sexual exploitation (Lanzarote Convention, 2007) (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.25)	Child sexual abuse becomes sexual exploitation when a second party benefits monetarily, through sexual activity involving a child. It includes harmful acts such as sexual solicitation and prostitution of a child or adolescent and, in the Council of Europe Convention, covers situations where a child or other person is given or promised money or other form of remuneration, payment or consideration in return for the child engaging in sexual activity, even if the payment/remuneration is not made. Child sexual exploitation is distinguished from other forms of abuse by the underlying presence of exchange. While the distinction is essential, there is substantial overlap, with cases of sexual abuse often involving some form of benefit or exchange to the child. Exploitation, seen as exploiting a child's vulnerability, can be applicable to all abuse victims.
Child trafficking (Article 3, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol), United Nations (2000a))	(a) the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (b)Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (c) the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purposes of exploitation shall be considered trafficking in persons even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) Under the terms of this Protocol, children under 18 cannot give valid consent and the 'means' of trafficking is therefore not relevant.

TABLE A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

TERM (SOURCE)	**DEFINITION**
(Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.61)	Child trafficking, defined internationally, involves diverse purposes, including sexual exploitation. While "sex trafficking" is often mixed with "sexual exploitation of children," it's crucial to note that trafficking affects adults and has distinct elements. Child sexual exploitation, though connected to trafficking, also occurs independently in various forms.
Child marriage/ Early marriage (also referred to as forced marriage) (UNICEF) (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.64)	Refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. Note that the terms "child marriage" and "early marriage" are often used interchangeably, but that the latter can take on a somewhat broader definition, since it can also include persons having attained the age of 18 years but who, for other reasons, may be unable to give their free, full, and informed consent to marry. Both terms should be used with care bearing in mind the abovementioned nuances.
Exploitation of a child in pornography/ child sexual abuse materials (Article 2(c), Optional Protocol to the CRC of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC); Lanzarote Convention), United Nations (2000b)	Any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or representation of the sexual parts of a child, the dominant characteristic of which is depiction for a sexual purpose Intentionally causing, for sexual purposes, a child who has not reached the legal age for sexual activities, to witness sexual abuse or sexual activities, even without having to participate in child sexual abuse materials, the term most commonly used, can be created virtually, self-generated by the child or perpetrator generated.
Exploitation of a child in prostitution (Article 2(b) OPSC, 2000) (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.29-30)	The use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration. The exploitation of children in prostitution has previously been commonly referred to as 'child prostitution' in both international legal instruments (see for example Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse 'the Lanzarote Convention'), national laws, policies

TABLE A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS	
TERM (SOURCE)	**DEFINITION**
	and programmes as well as in mass media. Over time, it has been recognised that the use of this older term can lead to misinterpretation, as it implies that this form of sexual exploitation of children is merely a sub-type of prostitution and fails to recognise that the child or adolescent is a victim of sexual exploitation by suggesting that they could conceivably provide consent.
Sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (ECPAT) (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.56)	Acts of sexual exploitation of children, which are embedded within the context of travel, tourism or both. While other terms, such as "child sex tourism" are sometimes used to refer to this phenomenon, the term "sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism" arguably represents the most adequate manner of referring to this practice, and ought to be the preferred term in the field of child protection.
Exposure to pornography and corruption of a child for sexual purposes (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.45)	Exposure to harmful content refers to children accessing or being exposed to, intentionally or incidentally, age-inappropriate sexual or violent content, or content otherwise considered harmful to their development. The term "corruption of children for sexual purposes" refers to acts causing the child to witness sexual abuse or sexual activities, and can be found, for instance, in Article 22 of the Lanzarote Convention.
Gender-based violence (GBV) (IASC 2005)	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. While men and boys can be survivors of some types of gender-based (particularly sexual) violence, around the world, gender-based violence has a greater impact on women and girls.
Harmful Sexual Behaviour (Hackett,S. 2014)	Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person, or adult.
Online child sexual abuse and online child sexual exploitation (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.23 and 28)	Online child sexual abuse and online child sexual exploitation involve the use of information and communication technology as a means to sexually abuse and/or sexually exploit children.

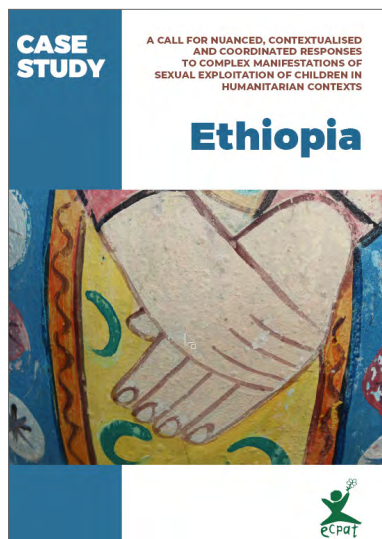| TABLE A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS	
TERM (SOURCE)	**DEFINITION**
On demand online child sexual abuse/ child sexual abuse to order (Greiger & Doek, 2016)	Where a perpetrator/purchaser of online abuse requests or details beforehand where the abuse should take place and the type of actions involved.
Online grooming, solicitation, or enticement of children for sexual purposes (Greiger & Doek, 2016)	The process of establishing or building a relationship with a child through the internet or other digital technologies to facilitate child sexual abuse or exploitation. Enticement of children is sometimes used as a synonym of the "solicitation of children for sexual purposes" or "grooming".
Sexting (Greiger & Doek, 2016) (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.44)	Sexting applies to adults and children but in this report, it refers to children and young people sending user generated sexual images or sexual texts via cell phone and other electronic devices. Sexting may be consensual or unwanted and a form of sexual bullying/abuse. Sexting" is a commonly used term, and a frequent practice among young persons. It is often a consensual activity between peers, although research has shown that girls feel pressured or coerced into it more often than boys. When sexting leads to abuse or exploitation, it is crucial that the fact that the material is self-generated does not result in blaming the child for what happens or in holding the child criminally liable for the production of child sexual abuse material.
Sexual extortion of children (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.52-53)	Sexual extortion, also called "sextortion", is the blackmailing of a person with the help of self-generated images of that person in order to extort sexual favours, money, or other benefits from her/him under the threat of sharing the material beyond the consent of the depicted person (e.g. posting images on social media). Often, the influence and manipulation typical of groomers over longer periods of time (sometimes several months) turns into a rapid escalation of threats, intimidation, and coercion once the person has been persuaded to send the first sexual images of her/himself. The recommended term is "sexual extortion of children", which emphasises that this is a form of extortion that is sexual in nature and that the act is carried out against a child. The colloquial, often-used term "sextortion" remains more debated in the field of child protection, as it does not show clearly that it is a matter of sexual exploitation against a child and risks trivialising a practice that can produce extremely serious consequences.

TABLE A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS	
TERM (SOURCE)	**DEFINITION**
Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (UNHCR)	Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It includes physical, emotional, or psychological and sexual violence, and denial of resources or access to services. Violence includes threats of violence and coercion. SGBV inflicts harm on women, girls, men, and boys and is a severe violation of several human rights.
Sexual violence (Based on definition in Krug et al. 2002)	An umbrella term used here to refer to all forms of sexual victimisation of adults and children: child sexual abuse and exploitation, rape and other sexual assaults, sexual harassment, abuse in pornography, prostitution, trafficking, early and forced marriage. Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed at a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.
Sexual violence against children (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.16)	Sexual violence against children encompasses both sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children and can be used as an umbrella term to refer jointly to these phenomena, both with regard to acts of commission and omission and associated to physical and psychological violence. At the same time, within this broader framework it is important also to maintain a more narrow focus on different specific manifestations of sexual violence against children in order to develop precise protection and prevention strategies as well as case-specific responses to child victims. From a child rights perspective, what matters is that the protection granted or sought through both legislation and policies be as broad and effective as possible, leaving no room for loopholes and securing all children's protection and freedom from harm.
Solicitation of child for sexual purposes (Article 23, Lanzarote Convention)	Intentional proposal, through information and communication technologies, of an adult to meet a child who has not reached the legal age for sexual activities, for the purpose of engaging in sexual activities or the production of child pornography (child sexual abuse materials).

TABLE A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

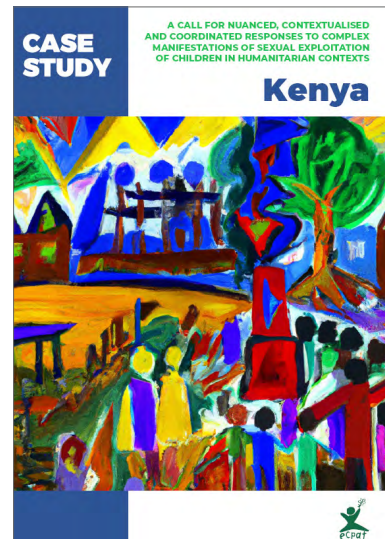| TERM (SOURCE)	DEFINITION
Survivor (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p.80)	The term "survivor" is increasingly used in the child protection sector, either interchangeably or in combination with the term "victim", to refer to persons who have suffered harm and victimisation. Just as people (including children) may reject the term "victim" and see it as a label they do not identify with, the same could happen with the term "survivor". Outside of the legal context, it is important never to label a person who does not want to be called "victim" or "survivor".
Survival sex (Thorburn and De Haan, 2014)	'Transactional sex' may in fact be 'survival sex', where sexual services are exchanged for basic necessities such as food, clothing, or shelter. In instances of survival sex, one party is exploiting another's need for basic necessities, and is taking advantage of the power they have to provide these necessities in return for sexual acts.
Transactional sex (Interagency Working on Sexual Exploitation of Children, 2016 and ECPAT 2021)	Term refers to commodified relationships in which sexual acts are exchanged for cash, goods, or benefits, often linked to survival, but also for other benefits like educational achievement or elevated social status. It is argued that 'transactional sex' differs somewhat from sexual exploitation of children in prostitution as it may involve *"agreement or predetermined payment, form part of a broader set of social obligations, is often embedded in an emotional relationship, and is generally not perceived by communities as a form of prostitution or sexual exploitation."* There are a range of complex nuances at play and ECPAT International holds the concepts of sexual exploitation of children in prostitution and transactional sex are not mutually exclusive. Please note that applying a child protection legal framework, children engaged in transactional sex should be viewed as victims of sexual exploitation on the basis that children cannot consent to engaging in sexual activities in exchange for material benefits or any other form of consideration. Instead, if using "transactional sex" or "survival sex", the preference is to use the term "sexual exploitation" specifically in the context of commercial sex.
Violence against children (Article 19, UNCRC)	All forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

ANNEX C - COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

SEC in Humanitarian Contexts: Case study Ethiopia

SEC in Humanitarian Contexts: Case study Kenya

SEC in Humanitarian Contexts: Case study Kurdistan Region of Iraq

CASE STUDY

A CALL FOR NUANCED, CONTEXTUALISED AND COORDINATED RESPONSES TO COMPLEX MANIFESTATIONS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

Ethiopia

CASE STUDY

A CALL FOR NUANCED, CONTEXTUALISED AND COORDINATED RESPONSES TO COMPLEX MANIFESTATIONS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

CASE STUDY

A CALL FOR NUANCED, CONTEXTUALISED AND COORDINATED RESPONSES TO COMPLEX MANIFESTATIONS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

Kenya

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ecpat

328/1 Phaya Thai Road,
Ratchathewi, Bangkok,
10400, Thailand

Telephone: +662 215 3388
Email: info@ecpat.org
Website: www.ecpat.org

For more information :