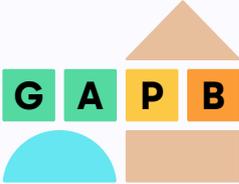
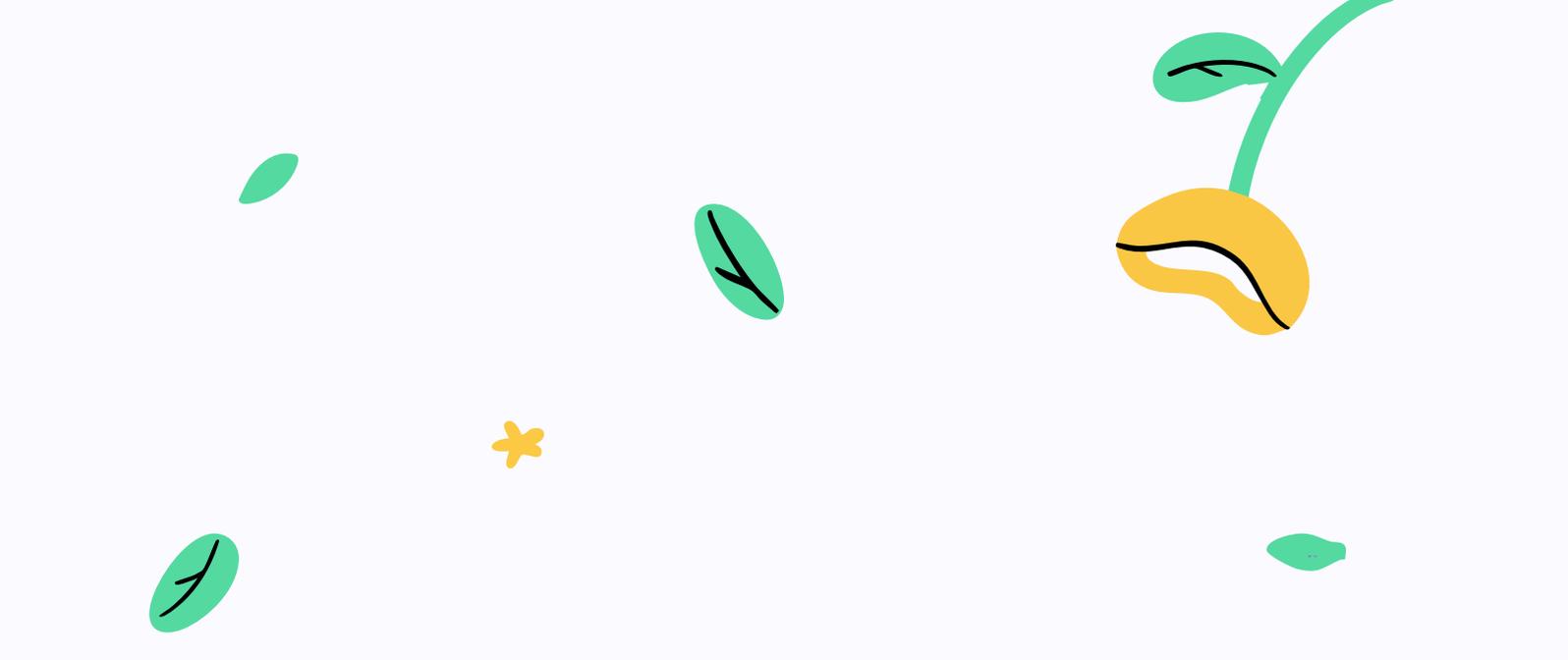


Technical Document of the Global Manifesto

2025





This technical document complements the Global Manifesto of the Global Alliance for the Protection of Boys from Sexual Violence by providing a detailed technical framework on issues related to sexual violence against boys.

While the Global Manifesto outlines principles, objectives, and key actions, this document expands on critical concepts, presents evidence, and explores the complexities of addressing sexual violence against boys in different contexts.



Introduction

Sexual violence can affect anyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics (SOGIESC), age, nationality, ethnicity, ability/disability, neurodiversity status, immigration status or socio-economic factors, with various intersecting factors defining individual experiences. *Sexual violence perpetrated against children is one of the most significant human rights crises of our time.*¹

In response, the **Global Alliance for the Protection of Boys from Sexual Violence (GAPB)** emerges as a beacon of collaborative action. Rooted in the principles of gender equality, human rights and international humanitarian law, we stand with the firm belief that gender equity is essential to achieving gender equality and to deliver a child's basic right to protection and dignity.

As we navigate through the complexities of this global crisis, the imperative for a united, focused response has never been more needed. The GAPB commits to filling this gap by shining a light on the experiences of boy² survivors³ of sexual violence in all their diversity and the challenges they face. Adopting an intersectional lens is crucial to understanding the multiple violations children can face due to a range of different issues, including the above-mentioned intersecting factors and numerous others. The GAPB is not only a coalition, but a movement towards transformative change, bringing together joint efforts to challenge gender hierarchies and patriarchal norms.

In recognition of the need to acknowledge that boys are victims of sexual violence, the GAPB recognises that violence against women and girls is rooted in patriarchal gender inequalities, hierarchies, power imbalances, and discrimination with unique and intersecting manifestations and implications for women and girls.⁴ The GAPB is committed to addressing sexual violence against boys as a human rights centred child protection issue, including addressing boys' specific risks, without reinforcing male⁵ privilege and by challenging rigid gender norms, ensuring accountability to girls and women who continue to be disproportionately affected by sexual violence. Furthermore, the GAPB is committed to fostering safer communities and reducing levels of gender-based violence against girls and women, and/including children with diverse SOGIESC. In this regard, the work of the GAPB will represent a complementary resource that supports, aligns, and amplifies the advocacy conducted by the gender-based violence, child protection sectors, as well as all relevant sectors responsible for upholding children's rights.

¹ For an up-to-date and comprehensive overview of the situation of sexual violence facing children, including the prevention landscape see: Together for Girls, The Equality Institute and Oak Foundation (2019). [What Works to Prevent Sexual Violence Against Children: Evidence Review](#).

² The term boys refers to children (under 18 years old) identifying themselves as boys, including gender non-conforming, intersex and non-binary children, or children who may identify with the term 'boy' in any other way.

³ The term "survivor" and "victim" are often used interchangeably in humanitarian and development programming. We acknowledge that every individual who has suffered sexual violence has the right to choose their preferred language. However, when applicable, we prefer to use the term "survivor" because it reinforces the person's resilience. At the same time, in psychological and social support settings, we recommend a survivor-centered approach whereby a service provider asks the person how they would like to be identified. See: [Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines \(2017\)](#).

⁴ Myrtilinen, H. and Schulz, P. (2022). [Broadening the scope but reasserting male privilege? Potential patriarchal pitfalls of inclusive approaches to gender-based violence](#). *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 25(3), 393–413.

⁵ The use of the term "male" in this context refers to individuals identifying as male. However, it is important to recognise that the term is rooted in a binary understanding of gender, which may not fully encompass the experiences of all individuals. The term can reinforce patriarchal norms and male privilege, often limiting emotional expression and perpetuating harmful stereotypes. These rigid norms not only limit both men and boys but also contribute to broader societal harm, particularly affecting individuals who do not conform to traditional gender expectations.



Magnitude of the problem

Most forms of violence against children have a gendered dimension, meaning the risks to violence, the experience of violence, and its consequences differ according to the child's gender. Gender roles and norms influence every child who experiences violence, and all violence occurs within community norms that have entrenched gender norms and gender dynamics that influence power imbalances across genders.

⁶ Myrntinen, H. and Schulz, P. (2022). [Broadening the scope but reasserting male privilege? Potential patriarchal pitfalls of inclusive approaches to gender-based violence](#). *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 25(3), 393–413.

In this sense, several manifestations of violence against boys have gendered elements, meaning the violence is connected to gender norms, dynamics, roles, and ideas of masculinities.

Society places expectations on boys to be invulnerable, to demonstrate strength, be self-sufficient, and when faced with adversity, to suppress their emotions and solve their problems by themselves. Deviating from these norms, for example, by seeking help, can be regarded as a form of weakness or “failing to be a ‘real man’”. Gender norms can even prevent boys from recognising they have endured abuse or affect the ways they show that they need help. Conversely, the very same norms also make it hard for others to recognise that boys are also likely to be vulnerable. For boys, there is a pervasive culture of silence in regard to sexual violence and help-seeking behaviour that is further reinforced by a combination of additional individual, relational, community, and institutional factors. Without access to an appropriate, psychologically and physically safe outlet to speak, to ask for help, or to recognise their unique needs, boys internalise these gender norms. They can reflect guilt, shame, and anger at themselves.

Patriarchal beliefs surrounding masculinity can make boys vulnerable to sexual violence, as their experiences can be less likely to be detected or acknowledged within society, including by service providers, whose actions might even reinforce harmful gender norms.⁶

We recognise that girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence. We also acknowledge that boys and/including those with diverse SOGIESC, are also affected. While there is no definitive data on prevalence, recent studies estimate that one in seven men report having been sexually abused as a child.⁷ The lack of data on prevalence is not the only obstacle we must overcome. The pervasive stigma, patriarchal norms and stereotypes are leading to delayed and concealed disclosure of abuse, also significantly shaping society's perception and response to the issue. Boys, like all children, can be vulnerable to sexual violence in different settings including in the context of deprivation of liberty, in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, along migration routes, at border crossings and checkpoints, in the context of their association with armed forces or armed groups, in institutional settings, in workplaces and in private homes.⁸ Physical and emotional violence by peers and caregivers, having lost or been separated from parents during childhood, and witnessing community violence and violence in the home are all factors that can impact the long-term cycle of violence.⁹

Definitions and Forms

Sexual violence perpetrated against children is defined as “any form of sexual activity with a child by an adult of any sex or by another child who has power over the child. Sexual violence includes both activities with and without bodily contact”.¹⁰ Sexual violence consists of a range of sexual acts against a child, including but not limited to child sexual abuse, incest, rape, sexual violence in the context of dating/intimate relationships, sexual exploitation, sexual humiliation, non-contact sexual abuse (e.g., online sexual abuse, forced witnessing of a sexual violence against others), and forced masturbation.¹¹ It also includes any deliberate, unwanted, and non-essential acts of sexual nature, either completed or attempted as well.¹²

Gender-based violence (GBV)

Often initially framed in relation to violence against women and girls (VAWG), which refers to any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.¹³ While VAWG highlights violence specifically directed at women and girls, gender-based violence is an umbrella term that refers to any act of violence and abuse that is directed against an individual based on their gender identity or perceived gender.¹⁴ It stems from power imbalances and social norms that reinforce inequality and can occur in both conflict and non-conflict settings. It can take many forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, and socio-economic violence, often involving threats, coercion, or deprivation of rights.

⁷ UNICEF (2024). [When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children](#), UNICEF, New York, p.14.

⁸ UNICEF and IRC (2023). [Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse Guidelines](#), p. 61; Chynoweth, S.K. et al. (2022). [Characteristics and Impacts of Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement: A Multicountry Exploratory Study](#), Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37(9-10), NP7470-NP7501.

⁹ Meinhart, M. et al. (2022). [Predicting adolescent boys' and young men's perpetration of youth violence in Colombia](#), International Journal of Injury Control and Safety Promotion, 29(1), 123-131.

¹⁰ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019). [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#), 2019 Edition, p.123.

¹¹ Together for Girls, The Equality Institute and Oak Foundation (2019). [What Works to Prevent Sexual Violence Against Children: Evidence Review](#).

¹² United Nations Children's Fund (2024). [International Classification of Violence against Children](#).

¹³ United Nations General Assembly (1993). [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#), (A/RES/48/104). Article 1.

¹⁴ Plan International (N.A.). [What is gender-based violence \(GBV\)?](#)

Child sexual abuse

A broad category that, at its core, defines the harm caused to children by forcing or coercing them to engage in sexual activity, whether they are aware of what is happening or not.¹⁵

¹⁵ Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children. (2025). [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#), Section C.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Sexual exploitation of children

A child is a victim of sexual exploitation when they are involved in a sexual activity in exchange for something (e.g. gain or benefit, or even the promise of such) from a third party and/or the perpetrator. A child may be coerced into a situation of sexual exploitation through physical force or threats. However, they 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.¹⁶





Challenges

Boys face impacts and consequences of this human rights violation. These barriers to prevention and responses are compounded by stigma and shame at the individual, family, and community levels.¹⁷

These social impediments not only hinder sexual violence disclosure and development of effective measures to address such violence but also perpetuate a cycle of silence and neglect. Recognising this current situation and its different complexities, the GAPB aims to change the narrative around stereotypes of boys and promote healthier behaviours, fostering understanding, and encouraging action.

Global research underscores the impact of socio-economic factors, familial violence patterns, and being part of marginalised communities on boys' risk to sexual violence.¹⁸ Despite evidence of sexual violence against boys in all their diversity across global contexts, the myth of the “perfect victim” persists. However, the myth of a “perfect victim” is unfounded and perpetuates harmful stereotypes and misconceptions.¹⁹ The “perfect victim” myth refers to a set of standards society establishes on who can be a “legitimate” victim deserving help, creating a hierarchy of empathy that discredits and dismisses the experiences of many individuals who do not fit this narrow stereotype, further contributing to the stigmatisation of all survivors and exposing children to harm.²⁰ The myth of the “perfect victim” narrows the scope of who is considered a “worthy” victim and thus shapes how survivors' experiences are understood, validated, or ignored. Recognising and challenging this myth is a critical part of creating a more equitable and supportive response to sexual violence for all.

Consequences of Sexual Violence on Boys

Sexual violence against children adversely affects their lives. It can trigger a range of other human rights violations, creating long-lasting obstacles to social integrations, prevent the attainment of healthy emotional well-being, and hinder a child's ability to reach their full potential. The repercussions of sexual violence can have a strong impact²¹ on children particularly in terms of mental health and physical health. Child survivors often deal with the impacts of trauma including negative emotions like hopelessness, loneliness, depression, anger, anxiety, shame, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts. For boys, these feelings are further exacerbated by distrust towards other people, tendencies to isolate, and the rigid gender

¹⁷ Family For Every Child (2018). [Caring for Boys Affected by Sexual Violence](#).

¹⁸ Reid, J.A. and Piquero A.R. (2014). [Age-Graded Risks for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Male and Female Youth](#). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(9),1747–1777; Adjei, J.K. and Saewyc, E.M. (2017). [Boys Are Not Exempt: Sexual exploitation of adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa](#). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 65, 14–23.

¹⁹ Thomas, J.C. and Kopel, J. (2023). [Male Victims of Sexual Assault: A Review of the Literature](#). *Behav. Sci.*, 13(4), 304.

²⁰ Lewis, C. (2014). Systemic Silencing: Addressing sexual violence against men and boys in armed conflict and its aftermath. In Heathcote, G. and Otto, D. (Eds.), [Rethinking Peacekeeping, Gender Equality and Collective Security. Thinking gender in transnational Times](#). Palgrave Macmillan, p.203–223.; Gambir, K. et al. (2024). [Addressing the needs of cisgender, heterosexual men and LGBTQ+ survivors of sexual violence: a scoping review of service delivery and funding priorities among humanitarian organisations](#). *Global Public Health*, 19(1).

²¹ ECPAT International. (2021). Global Boys Initiative: [A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys](#). ECPAT International.

norms that they face in society which may cause them to face stigma or feel shame or judgement as a survivor of sexual violence.²² As with girls, the physical consequences of sexual violence against boys may include physical injuries to the genitalia and other body parts, long-term impacts of injuries including physical disability and adverse sexual health outcomes, including contraction of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).²³ The physical and mental health impacts of sexual violence against boys may be compounded by barriers that survivors face in seeking medical attention due to internalised shame, fear of discrimination, lack of appropriate services tailored to men survivors, harmful attitudes by service providers (e.g. such as direct sexual harassment or belittling of the victims), and legal barriers such as the lack of inclusion of boys in the definition of rape in some countries, mandatory reporting requirements, and criminalisation of consensual same-sex relations. These barriers may delay or deter boy survivors from seeking care, potentially exacerbating injuries and their consequences. Additionally, sexual violence and trauma responses may increase the chances of risky behaviours such as substance abuse among boy survivors, often serving as a form of self-medication and coping mechanism in an extremely distressful situation.

²² Shiva Kumar, A.K. et al. (2017). [Ending violence in childhood: a global imperative](#). *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 22(sup1), 1-16.

²³ Moynihan, M. et al. (2018). [A systematic review of the state of the literature on sexually exploited boys internationally](#). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 76, 440-451.

Barriers to Accessing Services

A critical need exists to address sexual violence affecting children. However, challenges to pursuing cases of sexual violence against children in national, regional, and international justice and accountability spaces persist. Challenges include misconceptions around children's ability to provide credible evidence and engage in justice processes without experiencing further trauma, reluctance, or inability to seek help or pursue justice for fear of stigma or retaliation, and lack of access to resources. For child survivors who do report their cases of sexual violence, they may face stigmatisation and retaliation by family or community for coming forward or experience re-traumatisation from repeatedly recounting their experiences related to these crimes or from being obligated to face perpetrators directly in court.

Finally, cases of sexual violence against children regularly fail due to a lack of evidence. Forensic medical evidence is rarely collected, and both health professionals and law enforcement often miss opportunities to collect complete testimonies and other evidence that can strengthen cases. For child and adolescent survivors, health professionals may not thoroughly interview survivors due to a lack of information about how best to manage paediatric cases in a developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and rights-respecting way. Law enforcement professionals may also be reluctant to pursue evidence collection for similar reasons. Ensuring complete evidence collection is important to bolster accountability and also as an avenue for healing for survivors, as trauma-informed and survivor-centred documentation of sexual violence experiences can provide crucial avenues for healing for survivors.

Boy survivors also face additional challenges in terms of gender biases, that even when unconscious, affect society's understanding of issues affecting boys who are exposed to sexual violence. These biases impact every step of the process of help-seeking and the provision of care and support.

²⁴ Gambir, K., Aditi, B. Women's Refugee Commission, Inc., Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises , and Gender-Based Violence AoR Ukraine Protection Cluster (2023). [Service Barriers Faced by Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in Ukraine](#). Women's Refugee Commission, 2023, New York, New York.

²⁵ Ibid.

For example, in a recent survey among humanitarian practitioners in Ukraine, respondents indicated that the primary barriers boys faced in accessing health or psychosocial support services were fear of being identified as survivors, followed fear of being perceived as gay (e.g. fear of experiencing homophobia, including verbal or physical attacks, due to misconceptions that men survivors are gay), and fear of being blamed.²⁴ Boys themselves may internalise gender biases, which hinders their ability to recognise that they have suffered abuse, preventing them from seeking out help. Child protection services are rarely equipped in understanding how boys can be exposed to sexual violence, the consequences of sexual violence against boys, the specific challenges boys face in this regard, and how ensuring the protection of boys exposed to sexual violence has the potential to improve safety for all children.²⁵ National legal and policy frameworks and institutions, of which the child protection sector is part of, play a crucial role in reforming and addressing gender norms and biases which inhibit access to essential support services.

Challenges in Delivering Prevention, Mitigation, and Response Mechanisms

Effective prevention, mitigation, and response interventions within child protection systems play a pivotal role in deterring the long-term cycle of violence. Nevertheless, patriarchal norms that define masculinity perpetuate across all levels of society and adversely affect access and delivery of such interventions for boy survivors. Further, often the entire network of people surrounding boys is conditioned by biases, as families and communities may dismiss potential cases of sexual violence, unable to conceive or accept that boys are vulnerable to sexual violence. At the organisational level, misconceptions about the magnitude of sexual violence against boys impede the design of interventions and child protection systems that are tailored to boys' risks and experiences of sexual violence. Prevention services are also affected by biases as communities may view adolescent boys particularly older boys, as perpetrators of sexual violence, rather than victims or survivors, particularly in situations of sexual exploitation.

Additionally, widespread biases around sexuality and masculinity (e.g., men always want sex; women cannot coerce men into sex because men are the physically

stronger sex; if men become aroused during sexual assault, then they enjoyed it; therefore, it is not sexual violence) lead to the oversexualisation and subsequent objectification of boys, reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes and expectations. These factors, coupled with a pervasive culture of silence, make help-seeking behaviours among boys stigmatised and discouraged.

Compounding these biases, mitigation and response interventions are also adversely impacted. Service delivery organisations may lack the knowledge, commitment, and/or resources to identify the unique and intersecting risk factors of sexual violence faced by boys; and therefore, fail to implement mitigation approaches within their broader child protection and gender-based violence programming. Service providers and frontline workers often lack the necessary training to recognise the warning signs of sexual violence in boys, often mistaking them for stereotypical behaviours associated with harmful ideas of masculinities (e.g. anger), while referral pathways tailored to the needs and capacities of boy survivors are non-existent in most contexts. Trust-building approaches tailored to boys' needs and capacities are often underutilised, affecting the ability of frontline services and workers to respond using survivor-centred approaches that are in the child's best interest.

The GAPB recognises that boys are not a homogenous group and intersecting factors such as age, different abilities, and children with diverse SOGIESC should be considered in any learning process or intervention. The GAPB aims to enhance awareness and expertise in addressing sexual violence against boys worldwide. By strengthening relevant sectors for the protection of boys from sexual violence through the development of prevention, mitigation, and response strategies specific to the issues facing boys, the work of the GAPB aims to complement the vital efforts of the gender-based violence sector. In this respect, increased knowledge and capacity to address cases of sexual violence against boys within child protection services and by gender-based violence services, where appropriate, are expected to improve response efforts. This will also help reduce the workload on services that are specific to women and girls, as case management of instances of boys is particularly challenging and resource-consuming if not equipped to support them.





**BOYS ARE
NOT A
HOMOGENOUS
GROUP**

Intersecting Risk Factors

Risk factors for sexual violence can be context-specific and depend on a person's intersecting identities (e.g., age, SOGIESC, ethnicity, religion, disability status, asylum and displacement status, socio-economic status, education status, among others). Boys are a diverse group. Each child has unique interconnecting identities that influence their position in a context's power structure and may increase their risk of sexual violence, with age and development intersecting with vulnerabilities and risks. Boys with disabilities, boys from ethnic and religious minority groups, adolescent boys and male-identifying youth living with HIV, boys with diverse SOGIESC, boys who face sexual exploitation in exchange for money, goods, or other benefits, as well as boys affected by trafficking, are at particular risk. When several of these diversity factors and their resulting discrimination and marginalisation combine, this contributes to an increased risk of harm, including sexual exploitation.

In many contexts, legal frameworks affected by social norms create risk of self-incrimination for boys facing child sexual exploitation and abuse. This risk significantly impedes boys' ability to report incidents of violence or abuse, particularly in contexts where legal systems criminalise certain behaviours or identities. Examples include laws that criminalise same-sex sexual acts, affecting safe reporting mechanisms and casting a shadow over boy survivors of same-sex abuse, who may fear legal repercussions.

Boys and gender non-conforming children and youth with diverse SOGIESC (as well as those perceived to have diverse SOGIESC) are also exposed to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, due to homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.²⁶ Abuse for deviating from expected gender expression often underlies violence against boys with diverse SOGIESC.²⁷ Furthermore, as is the case for female survivors, men constitute most of the perpetrators of sexual violence against boys.²⁸ Boys who experience sexual violence perpetrated by men may face not only limited access to justice, but also risk legal punishment in countries where being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, or having other marginalised identities (LGBTQIA+) is criminalised. Victims of these crimes may fear disclosing the incident also due to the fear of being blamed or experiencing further physical, emotional, or financial harm, and for being perceived as someone with diverse SOGIESC.

Boys with disabilities, like all children with disabilities, face a higher risk of sexual violence compared to those not living with disabilities, due to intersecting layers of discrimination related to their age, gender, and disability.²⁹ Factors such as dependence on caregivers, communication barriers, isolation, stigmatisation, and a lack of accessible support services exacerbate their vulnerability. Reliance on caregivers can silence them from reporting abuse, while difficulties in communication may prevent them from seeking help. Social isolation can expose them to abusers and limit their access to protection networks, and society

²⁶ Chynoweth, S. (2018). [It's Happening to Our Men as Well: Sexual Violence Against Rohingya Men and Boys](#). Women's Refugee Commission, New York, New York; Chynoweth, S. (2019) [More Than One Million Pains: Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys on the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy](#). Women's Refugee Commission, 2019, New York, New York; Chynoweth, S. (2018). [We Have a Broken Heart: Sexual Violence against Refugees in Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya](#). Women's Refugee Commission, New York, New York.

²⁷ Blondeel, K. et al. (2018). [Violence motivated by perception of sexual orientation and gender identity: a systematic review](#). Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 96(1), 29–41L.

²⁸ Chynoweth, S. et al. (2022). [Characteristics and Impacts of Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement: A Multicountry Exploratory Study](#). Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37(9-10), NP7470-NP7501.

²⁹ Inter-agency Standing Committee (2015). [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery](#); Mitra, M. et al. (2016). [Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence Against Men with Disabilities](#). American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 50(3), 311-317.

stigma often leads to disbelief or dismissal of their experiences. Each type of disability has its own unique characteristics (e.g., physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioural, among others), which in interaction with one's environment and other individual factors may impede a child's equitable, full, and effective participation in society.³⁰ Myths, negative attitudes, and misconceptions about people with cognitive disabilities increase their risk of sexual violence.³¹ For example, children with cognitive disabilities are unlikely to access adequate sexuality education due to misconceptions about how much people with cognitive disabilities can comprehend³² and that people with disabilities are asexual or hypersexual.³³

Contexts of Heightened Vulnerability

Sexual Violence in Forced Displacement and Humanitarian Settings

As with all children, boys in displacement or humanitarian settings face heightened risk and exposure to sexual violence due to increased economic, legal, and social exclusion.³⁴ Children, including boys, and their caregivers who are displaced because of conflict or crisis often experience a loss of income, assets, and livelihoods, as well as interrupted or limited access to basic needs, education, and employment opportunities.³⁵ Due to host government restrictions on refugees' mobility and their right to work, as well as language barriers and discrimination, boys face numerous barriers to formal and informal employment and education. Many adolescent boys who are on the move are also under intense pressure to reach their intended destination, earn a living, and send money back home. The lack of access to timely family reunification procedures might lead to adolescent boys being forced to travel onwards. This heightens their vulnerability to sexual exploitation because they are often not legally allowed to work and may not have enough money to reach their destination country and/or support their relatives in their home country. Displaced adolescent boys and male-identifying youth may also engage in precarious informal employment or child labour in countries of asylum, putting them at risk of sexual exploitation in the work context.

The breakdown of boys' social networks during displacement or crisis also puts boys at risk for sexual violence. Displaced boys' social networks may have broken down because they have been separated during displacement, rejected from family, or excluded from their community for having experienced sexual violence. Many resort to seeking out illegal or informal pathways to reach safety in a new location, which puts them at high risk of exploitation, including sexual violence.³⁶ Unaccompanied boys may lack adult and community protection, notably when living in independent living arrangements or camp settings. Lastly, displaced boys are at risk of being trafficked within the country of asylum, at border crossings, or across borders, making them highly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. The multitude of risk factors are further exacerbated by a lack of adequate legal prosecution, arbitrary immigration detention,³⁷ as well as insufficient punishment for sexual exploitation at both national and international levels.

³⁰ World Health Organization (2011). [World report on disability 2011](#). World Health Organization.

³¹ Meer, T. and Combrinck, H. (2015). [Invisible Intersections: Understanding the complex stigmatisation of women with intellectual disabilities in their vulnerability to gender-based violence](#). *Agenda*, 29(2), 14–23; Phasha, T.N. and Myaka, L. D. (2014). [Sexuality and Sexual Abuse Involving Teenagers with Intellectual Disability: Community Conceptions in a Rural Village of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa](#). *Sexuality & Disability*, 32(2), 153–165.

³² Aderemi, T.J. and Pillay, B.J. (2013). [Sexual abstinence and HIV knowledge in school-going adolescents with intellectual disabilities and non-disabled adolescents in Nigeria](#). *Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health*, 25(2), 161–174.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ UNHCR and UNFPA (2021). [Operational Guidance Responding to the Health and Protection Needs of People Selling or Exchanging Sex in Humanitarian Settings](#).

³⁵ Save the Children International (2022). [Children migrating to Europe experience horrific rates of violence, abuse and trauma: Report](#).

³⁶ CARE and Promundo, [Men and boys in displacement: Assistance and protection challenges for unaccompanied boys and men in refugee context](#) (London: 2017).; Vasileia Digidiki and Jacqueline Bhabha, ["Emergency Within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Migrant Children in Greece,"](#) *FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University* (2017).; Women's Refugee Commission, ["More Than One Million Pains": Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys on the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy](#) (New York: 2019).

³⁷ Medecins Sans Frontieres (2023). ["You're going to die here": Abuse in Abu Salim and Ain Zara detention centers](#).

Displaced boys may also face limited access to justice due to their status as refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, or as stateless, meaning they have no recognised citizenship to any country. Host countries may not provide equal access to justice for non-citizens, which can impact boys' risk to sexual violence and sexual exploitation as well as their ability to seek justice for sexual violence they have experienced.³⁸ Funding constraints in the humanitarian context also pose a barrier to the protection of children, as gender-based funding accounted for only 0-12% of all humanitarian funding between 2016 and 2018, and between 2010 and 2018,³⁹ child protection funding comprised only 0.5% of the total humanitarian funding.⁴⁰ During the year 2023, child protection funding accounted for 2.5% of global humanitarian funding.

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Children are uniquely vulnerable to a range of violations in situations of armed conflict. Incidents of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) involving both girls and boys have been documented in conflicts across the globe. The risk for boys is heightened when they are deprived of liberty including for their actual or alleged association with opposing forces, where sexualised forms of torture have been used to punish, humiliate, and extract confessions from them.⁴¹ There are also documented cases of boys being subjected to CRSV in the context of their association with armed forces and armed groups.⁴² Although CRSV involving boys is increasingly recognised, it remains significantly underreported. As a result, their rights, needs, and wishes are often overlooked in prevention and protection strategies and in health and other responses, including in the context of reintegration programmes.⁴³ Boys who suffer sexual violence in conflict may also experience other violations of their rights, for example, losing access to education.⁴⁴

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse within the Tourism and Travel Industry

A child may be coerced into a situation of sexual exploitation through physical force or threats, but may also be persuaded to engage in sexual activity as a result of more complex and nuanced factors, such as indirect psychological pressure as a result of power imbalances. Sexual exploitation of boys in the context of travel and tourism takes various forms.

In tourist areas with numerous hotels, beach restaurants, or nightclubs located close to low socio-economic communities, children work in the tourism industry as it represents financial opportunities. Offenders seek out boys for the purpose of personal financial gain (and therein power) through sexual exploitation, proposing remuneration to children. Adolescent boys (up to 18 years old) may be perceived as adults due to their physical maturity, yet they are often considered legal adults without the necessary protections and safeguarding typically provided to children under 18 years. As a result, the sexual exploitation of boys tends not to be recognised as a crime, but instead normalised as an acceptable income-generating activity.⁴⁵

³⁸ IOM (2022). [Migrants' Access to Justice: International Standards and How the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration Helps Paving the Way](#). p.4.

³⁹ Martin, R. (2020) [Guidelines and Examples of Best Practice for GBViE Fundraising](#).

⁴⁰ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2024). [Unprotected: Analysis of funding for child protection in humanitarian action in 2023](#).

⁴¹ ICRC (2017). [Sexual Violence in Detention](#). p.7-8; OSRSG CAAC (2022). [Strengthening responses to conflict-related sexual violence against boys deprived of their liberty in situations of armed conflict](#).

⁴² ICRC (2021). [ICRC Special Appeal 2021 – Addressing Sexual Violence](#). p.16.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch (2020). ["They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways": Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, and Transgender Women in the Syrian Conflict](#); Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2024). [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed groups during the process of reintegration in Colombia](#); Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2022). [Responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes](#).

⁴⁴ International Rescue Committee (2012). [Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse: Guidelines for health and psychosocial service providers in humanitarian settings](#). p. 35.

⁴⁵ ECPAT International (2020). [Summary Paper on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International. p.2.



To exploit children, traveling sex offenders misuse the tourism infrastructure and services. Many destination countries lack regulation of businesses that may facilitate or organise such crimes, including through their supply chain. When the private sector in the travel and tourism industry is regulated, cases of sexual exploitation of boys may still be overlooked and not reported due to gender bias.

Specific challenges to child protection in the travel and tourism context relate to the unregulated forms of voluntourism⁴⁶ and other activities with direct child contact, through which offenders gain access to both girls and boys. Offenders or facilitators of child sexual exploitation often utilise social media to connect with children and organise meetings, which demonstrates the need to address the role of technology in the sexual exploitation of children in the travel and tourism context. The transport sector also needs to play a key part in preventing the sexual exploitation of children, who may be trafficked, or spend time unsupervised in airports, bus or train stations, or other transport hubs, where boys tend to be unaccompanied and at risk of sexual exploitation.⁴⁷

Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence

Technology Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV) increasingly impacts children, including boys across regions and contexts. It is a form of sexual exploitation associated with different risks, including blackmailing to engage in sexual activities, having sexual images shared without permission, being coerced to engage in sexual activities through promises of money or gifts, receiving unwanted requests to talk about sex, and requests for sexually related images.⁴⁸ Additionally, boys may face pressure from peers to share intimate images or engage in sexual activities online. This pressure can come from both other boys and girls and can lead to non-consensual experiences that constitute TFSV.⁴⁹ This happens through a wide range of online platforms, including online gaming environments. The lack of safe and gender-sensitive reporting mechanisms in the online world, particularly for digital platforms, is a key barrier to disclosure that is faced by boys who experience technology-facilitated violence in the context of online gaming.

Across technological platforms, children, including boys often lack access to education or guidance on safe online practices. Lack of information exacerbates the gaps in digital literacy and safety education, creating a separation between recognising online dangers and the decision to engage in risky online behaviours. This points to a potential underestimation of the consequences of sexual violence for boys, further exacerbated by a widespread understanding at social level that boys are invulnerable and resilient.⁵⁰ Additionally, boys often perceive self-sufficiency as a primary characteristic of masculinity, impacting help-seeking behaviours. Gender-related barriers might also prevent boys from recognising abuse and report it, eventually affecting their overall safety and healing process.

⁴⁶ According to The Code's Voluntourism Policy, voluntourism is defined as "organised and packaged tourist trips with a duration of a few hours to a year, in which the main purpose is to volunteer. The volunteer provides their 'work' within the destination free of charge. While the concept of 'voluntourism' generally includes an element of international travel, similar risks to children also apply in the context of domestic and local travel and tourism, when a person is allowed to volunteer with and for children in an organisation or an orphanage without previous background checks (also when such activities may not be organised by a company)."⁷ The Code and ECPAT International (2021). [The Code: Voluntourism Policy](#).

⁴⁷ ECPAT International (2022). [How voluntourism may facilitate the sexual exploitation of children](#). ECPAT International.

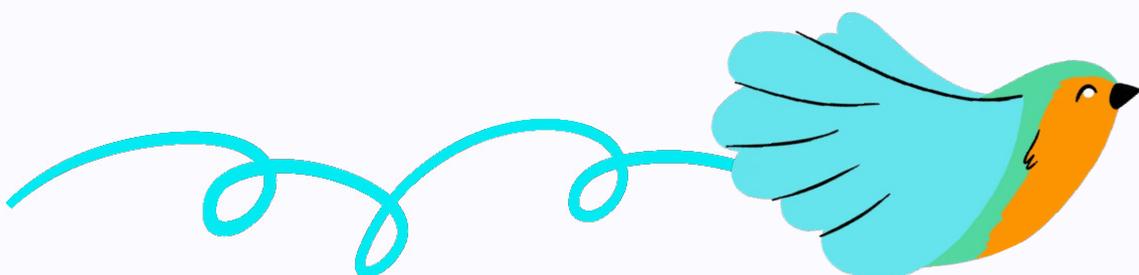
⁴⁸ UNFPA. (n.d.). [Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Growing Threat](#). United Nations Population Fund. Accessed on 11 March 2025.

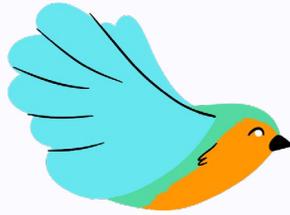
⁴⁹ Sparks, B., Stephens, S. and Trendell, S. (2023). [Image-based sexual abuse: Victim-perpetrator overlap and risk-related correlates of coerced sexting, non-consensual dissemination of intimate images, and cyberflashing](#). Computers in Human Behavior, 148(1), 107879.

⁵⁰ ECPAT International (2022). [Disrupting Harm – Conversations with Young Survivors about Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#). Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. p.12-13.

Moreover, lack of awareness on online dangers can prevent caregivers from recognising when children are exposed to harm online, hindering open discussions and age-appropriate information sharing. At the same time, many caregivers display biases towards digital media such as online gaming platforms, leading to underappreciation of online games' positive power and value for children. Especially for boys without trusted adults or safe, secure communities in their physical surroundings, online gaming communities may play a role in reducing isolation and loneliness. Digital communities are also spaces where children might seek advice and help from peers, and challenge rigid gender norms while exploring their sexuality, sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identities. Adults who perpetrate sexual violence against children are experts in exploiting and capitalising on these environments of connection, and technology-facilitated sexual violence can be particularly challenging to respond to as perpetrators can remain anonymous.⁵¹ The digital community provides an opportunity for perpetrators to groom children for different forms of violence, including sexual exploitation.

⁵¹ UNFPA (2021). [Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence: Making All Spaces Safe](#).





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TO

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ACTION

THAT

TRANSCENDS

BOUNDARIES

