

**ADVOCACY BY PERSONS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE
OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD
SCOPING REPORT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A number of parameters must be taken into account when designing strategies to support advocacy by persons with lived experience of sexual violence in childhood. These parameters include: the specific dynamics of sexual violence in childhood and its links to connected and broader agendas; the obstacles and risks associated to disclosure, reporting and advocacy (in particular by children); survivors' aspirations needs and constrains, as well as the various ways in which survivors engage.

Deepening the knowledge about these parameters should be a strategic objective, acknowledging the fact that they are constantly evolving and very much context-determined.

Taking into account the mentioned parameters, **a number of interventions are recommended** to support survivors' advocacy. They can be clustered in three groups:

1. **Zooming-out:** Adopting a broader approach to sexual violence in childhood, including gender-based violence, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity and children born out of rape. Actively seek to build bridges between specific agendas (such as supporting survivors of sexual violence in sport), connected topics (such as gender-based violence or discrimination against LGBTBI persons) and broader agendas (ending violence against children, promoting children's rights, in particular child participation).
2. **Promoting empowering strategies**, including through the definition of safe and meaningful engagement; the creation and promotion of enabling environments for survivors to engage; understanding and promoting awareness on the risks and possible mitigating measures; building survivors' capacity to advocate safely and effectively; promoting knowledge transfer, access to resources and networking across settings, within countries and internationally; documenting survivors' experiences of advocacy.
3. **Changing working methods and approaches**, in particular to introduce context and flexibility in grant making, to involve survivors in the work (possibly adopting a step-by-step approach) and to improve outcomes through enhanced cooperation with other donors and key stakeholders.

A commitment to support activism by persons with lived experience necessarily calls for an **introspective assessment of the risks** that donors are ready to accept, including by revisiting the requirements of their due diligence processes and by sharing power with survivors, children, young people and more generally with grantees (for instance through participatory grant making), as well as with other donors and key stakeholders. This effort would be particularly welcome in countries affected by conflict and humanitarian emergencies, poverty, extreme violence, discrimination, poor rule of law and human rights backlashes, and where stigma makes it extremely difficult for survivors to come forward and for grassroots organisations to sustain their efforts.

INTRODUCTION

More and more people with lived experience of sexual violence during their childhood are speaking up and engaging in advocacy to seek justice and/or to prompt the legislative and other changes needed to effectively prevent and respond to sexual violence. They engage in various ways, including by activating their social media, founding their own NGOs, joining movements, networks and existing organisations and advisory committees, participating in research or becoming public speakers at events or training sessions addressing the issue.

An increasing number of organisations, institutions and event organisers are also engaging with survivors/victims¹ of sexual violence. Survivors-led organisations and survivors advisory councils are particularly interesting when they use a trauma-informed approach to seek and relay survivors' collective voice.

These trends have resulted in quantum leaps in the prevention and response to sexual violence against children, but too many survivors/victims have paid (and are still paying) a high toll for their public exposure. Other people with lived experience willing to engage struggle to do so in a meaningful way because of lack of support, advice and opportunities, of enabling environments that are trauma informed. In some regions of the world, the stigma attached to sexual violence remains an obstacle for both adults and children to publicly identify themselves as survivors/victims.

This report seeks to identify needs, risks and opportunities to consider when supporting advocacy by persons with lived experience of sexual violence in childhood. It also seeks to leverage existing knowledge, learnings, and good practice from other intersecting fields, to harness that learning for more equitable processes and meaningful change. To come to her findings and conclusions, the consultant has conducted desk research (links to key documents and websites consulted are listed in Appendix I) and interviewed eighteen persons, most of them heading civil society organisations that are either led by survivors or support survivors' advocacy.

I. UNDERSTANDING ADVOCACY BY SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD

A. The need for a broader approach to sexual violence against children

Children may be victims of many forms of sexual violence, *including but not limited to child sexual abuse, incest, rape, sexual violence in the context of dating/intimate relationships, sexual exploitation, online sexual abuse, and non-contact sexual abuse*².

Sexual violence rarely happens in a vacuum. Legal and social norms that nurture discrimination (in particular on the grounds of gender, gender identity and sexual orientation), unchecked power

¹ This report indistinctively uses the terms "victim" and "survivor" to refer to those having a lived experience of sexual violence.

² Throughout the report, the text that appears in italics has been extracted from a document or website, a link is to the source is always provided.

dynamics and the vulnerability created by social exclusion, poverty, and poor governance and rule of law create a fertile ground for sexual violence to happen.

1! A holistic approach to ending sexual violence in childhood would therefore call for including:

- The consequences for [children born out of rape](#), who often grow up socially excluded because of the stigma, in particular when rape happens in the context of armed conflicts, in the family or when the baby is HIV-infected. These children are not always recognised as victims of sexual violence and hence left out of the scope of some protection and support measures.
- Gender-based violence: According to [OHCHR](#), Gender-based violence *is considered to be any harmful act directed against individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender. It may include sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking, forced/early marriage and harmful traditional practices. Violence against LGBTI people in conflict settings has been recognised by the United Nations as a form of gender-based violence that is often motivated by homophobic and transphobic attitudes and directed at those perceived as defying hegemonic gender norms*³
- Children victims of discrimination on the ground of their sexual identity or orientation.

B. Reporting and disclosing sexual violence in childhood: why we only see the peak of the iceberg

1. Most **children** neither report nor disclose sexual violence. Amongst the reasons for underreporting are the lack of awareness and access to child friendly reporting and counselling mechanisms, feelings of guilt, shame, and fear of reprisals and other negative outcomes for themselves or their families. These obstacles may feel as unsurmountable in [societies where corruption and violence thrive](#), and where sexual violence-related [stigma](#) and [discrimination on the grounds of gender identity and sexual orientation are prevalent](#). Some children are unable to understand and process what is happening to them, due to their young age, a disability or the manipulation they have been subjected to.

When children report or disclose sexual violence, their support and protection (including from harm and any risk of revictimization) should be the priority. Although some child victims (in particular adolescents) may decide to engage in advocacy (for instance, [against child marriage](#), [sexual abuse](#) [LGTBI discrimination](#) , [child slavery](#) , [sexual harassment/assault in the street](#)), it seems that most decide to focus on healing and avoid public exposure, probably following adults' advice. There are, however, amazing child human rights champions such as [Malala Yousafzai](#), [Greta Thunberg](#), [Thandiwe Abdullah](#), [Bana Alabed](#) , [Rena Kawasaki](#), [Craig Kielburg](#) and [Iqbal Masih](#).

2. More and more **adults** are disclosing the sexual violence that they experienced during their childhood. Many decide to do so triggered by scandals surrounding the person(s) who harmed them or the institution/industry that should have protected them (a church, a sport organisation, a school, a childcare facility, the entertainment industry). Very often, they disclose after decades of silence. Important movements have emerged bringing together survivors of sexual violence in all contexts (such as the #metoo movement) or in specific contexts (examples include fight against

³ United Nations General Assembly HRC. Discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015 4 May 2015. Report No.: Contract No.: A/HRC/29/23.

sexual violence in [sport in the USA](#) and in the [Church and other institutions in Peru](#), [Torture in the UK](#), as well as [Conflict-related Sexual violence worldwide](#))

3. The specific challenges surrounding reporting of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict or humanitarian crisis must be addressed. Unfortunately, sexual violence is part of the extreme violence/hardship that adults and children have been exposed to in those contexts. Very often, when victims escape immediate danger, they start a life of deprivation in camps, destroyed homes and families in countries with devastated economies and poor rule of law or in foreign countries where they pain to integrate in. In many of the countries affected, stigma attached to sexual violence makes it very hard for victims to report it, even when financial help is offered to those who do so.

Stigmatisation is a social process that leads to the marginalisation of individuals or groups. CRSV⁴-associated stigma is socially and culturally constructed around dominance and inequality, especially gender inequality, and is associated with emphasising and embedding social 'difference' and subordination. Stigma and stigmatisation occur within the context of violence and social inequality – leading to the creation, condoning or compounding of social exclusion for those that are (or are perceived to be) victims/survivors of CRSV. Stigma involves penalising or placing blame on individuals, groups or communities for bringing shame or 'transgressing' from the standards of their community or society. CRSV-associated stigma is not only the expression of individual values, beliefs or attitudes; it is the forceful expression of social norms that are cultivated within a given society through the behaviours and actions of groups of people and institutions. It is an extension of the stigma that is present pre-conflict.

Preventing and addressing stigma associated with conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)
[PSVI Principles for Global Action.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

When stigma attached to rape or sexual exploitation is high, it is critical to avoid imposing disclosure/reporting of these forms of violence for victims to access support or compensation. This is why the Yazidi Female Survivors Law adopted in 2021 in Iraq defines "[survivor or sexual violence](#)" in a broad way, including separation from family, physical and psychological harm.

4. Underreporting in the Global South is particularly worrying, taking into account the high prevalence of sexual violence showed by [research studies](#).
5. Lack of survivor-centred and trauma-informed investigations and support often results in secondary victimization with victims losing trust in the state and the organisations approaching them. In the context of [conflicts and humanitarian crisis](#), this is amplified by the lack of coordination between humanitarian agencies, donors and local authorities.

2! Understanding the barriers to reporting must be part of any strategy to support advocacy by persons with lived experience.

C. Engaging in advocacy: drivers, positive and negative outcomes

1. Most victims/survivors who engage in advocacy to end sexual violence against children seem to be motivated by a quest of justice, reparation or apology, and by a wish "to prevent that thing to happen to other kids". While many publicly speak about their traumatic experience, many other

⁴ Conflict-related sexual violence

decide not to do so for several reasons, including fear of being stigmatised, of harming their families or because of the potential legal and other negative consequences of coming forward.

2. Some survivors join existing movements, networks and organisations, some decide to create their own organisation/movement whereas other survivors use their social media and other public spaces to engage. These organisations, networks and individuals raise awareness, offer support to other victims, train professionals and engage in advocacy for changes in policies, legislation and practices. Many survivors also become researchers and practitioners in sexual violence-related fields.
3. Amplified by the media and broader movements, some survivors' voices are at the origin of major strides in the fight against sexual violence. Thanks to their advocacy, serial abusers/rapists have been named and prosecuted, thousands of victims identified and supported, and systems' accountability improved. Many "untouchable" institutions and bodies have been challenged to take serious measures to prevent and respond to sexual violence. This is the case of the Catholic Church, several international and national sports federations, national child protection institutions and international non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations. Survivors are also behind some landmark high court judgements, legislation and policies having considerably improved child protection from sexual violence (Gloria Viseras and James Rhodes in Spain, Vinka Jackson in Chile, Olivia Jasriel in South Africa, S. Caroline Taylor AM in Australia or Nadia Murad and Daniela Ligiero at global level). We shall never know, however, how the survivors who decided not to disclose have contributed to this agenda.
4. Survivors are engaging with large and small organisations/institutions as well, using their lived experience to illustrate and document the failures in the systems and to propose/participate in the implementation of measures to improve those systems. This engagement takes six main forms:
 - i. **Survivors' councils/boards/networks:** they are part of organisations/institutions and represent a collective voice that influence their strategies and programmes of activities. Examples: [Sport England Survivors Advisory Panel](#), [the Wangu Kanja Foundation in Kenya](#), [Jan Sahas in India](#), the [Survivors' Council of the Coalition for Just reparations in Iraq](#) and [the Survivors' board in the German Commissioner for child sexual abuse cases](#).
 - ii. **Survivors engaging in specific projects or processes:** these are individuals participating in the design, implementation and/or evaluation of projects and consulted during processes. Example: the [Global Survivors' Fund](#), [the Council of Europe](#), [ECPAT](#), [WePROTECT](#), [CRIN](#), and the Advisory group of survivors engaged in the design of the [Global Safe Sport Independent Entity](#) promoted by FIFA (engagement facilitated by [the Army of Survivors](#)).
 - iii. **As service providers:** some survivors also propose awareness raising, training sessions and other support to organisations willing to review their safeguarding policies, for instance. Many are contracted or financially supported by public authorities or private entities to provide those services. Example: [Colosse aux pieds d'argile](#) in France, [Vicky Bernadet Foundation](#) in Spain, [In Good Faith Foundation](#) in Australia, the [Survivors Network](#) in Sussex, UK
 - iv. **Participation in research and enquiries:** survivors are also helping [researchers](#) and [Enquiry Commissions](#) to establish facts, understand root causes of sexual violence, trauma, resilience factors and systems' failures. Although many researchers avoid engaging with children

because of legal and/or [ethical concerns](#), there are more and more [studies](#) interviewing children and capturing their experiences, including emerging research specifically [focusing on boys](#), as well as an interest in promoting [participatory research](#) (defined as *A range of methodological approaches and techniques, all with the objective of handing power from the researcher to research participants... Participatory research involves inquiry, but also action*).

- v. **Documenting sexual violence:** survivors have also engaged with audio-visual and printed media to document sexual violence, thus allowing for massive public exposure of the issue ([abuse in the catholic church in Ireland](#), [Athlete A on abuse in USA gymnastics](#), [No tengas miedo](#) on incest in Spain).
 - vi. **Participation at events:** survivors are invited to share their lived experience and their views at public events.
5. Survivors engaging in advocacy report having **both positive and negative experiences**. Amongst the positive outcomes, they highlight having contributed to prevent violence and protect other children, having met other survivors and received the support and gratitude of highly qualified experts, thoughtful leaders and the general public. They often [describe these positive outcomes as contributing to their healing process](#).

Unfortunately, survivors also face many negative outcomes, not always duly documented. These include:

- i. [Threats, hate speech, stigmatisation and exclusion](#). These other forms of violence may be devastating for a person already fragilized by trauma. Many survivors have difficulties in coping with a negative (and sometimes hateful) response by family members, colleagues, the community and the general public. Some fear for their lives and report having suicidal thoughts. Some children have been attacked and even murdered because of their activism.
- ii. [Unexpected triggers](#). Survivors who volunteer to support other survivors or to tell their story in public sometimes underestimate the toll that they may pay if triggered.

[Triggers](#) cause survivors of sexual violence to feel or behave in the same way they did during or immediately after the traumatic event because the brain does not differentiate what happened then from what is going on around them now. It is not uncommon for survivors to offer support to other victims/survivors.

- iii. [Frustration because of unmet expectations](#). When they engage, survivors expect institutions, organisations and individuals to act upon their recommendations/demands. Frustration because of inaction or slow progress can also have a negative impact in their mental health/act as a trigger that some find difficult to handle.
- iv. [Disappointment due to lack of respect for their investment, privacy and safety](#). Many survivors invest a considerable amount of energy and time engaging with organisations and processes without any financial or other form of compensation. Some survivors feel that they have been “exploited” to extract information, sell news or make an organisation/event look good, in particular when they do not see any positive outcomes. Some feel betrayed when the media and the organisations they engaged with do not protect them when need be.

The negative outcomes of survivors’ advocacy are often overlooked or only considered during an event or project timeline. This could be prevented with risk assessment and risk management measures.

3! Donors should embrace the various forms in which survivors engage. Documenting survivors' experiences (both positive and negative) should be part of any evaluation process, with the result used to learn lessons and to identify risks and opportunities.

II. SUPPORTING ADVOCACY BY PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

In the context of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, a victim-centred approach is a way of engaging with victim(s) that prioritizes listening to the victim(s), avoids re-traumatization, and systematically focuses on their safety, rights, well-being, expressed needs and choices, thereby giving back as much control to victim(s) as feasible, and ensuring the empathetic and sensitive delivery of services and accompaniment in a non-judgmental manner. [UNCHR](#)

The increased support to survivors and their advocacy efforts must be celebrated. This support must however embrace a number of values and principles, including protection, confidentiality and informed consent, transparency, inclusion, accountability, safety, non-discrimination, do no harm, the child's best interest, and participation.

A. Understanding and respecting survivors' aspirations, needs and constrains

Organisations, institutions and events' organisers must understand survivors' aspirations, needs, constrains and expectations before engaging. These vary highly depending on the context and the individual's personal experience and situation.

1. Managing expectations includes being honest about:
 - ✓ how the survivors' experience/contribution may (or not) influence the process or decision they are invited to participate in;
 - ✓ anticipated risks, and the mitigating and protection measures in place.
2. Culture and context have an impact on how survivors engage. Developing culturally sensitive survivors advocacy emerges as a promising practice that genuinely connects with survivors' traditions, healing processes and aspirations.
3. Respecting survivors' aspirations/motivations includes accepting their decision to not publicly disclose their traumatic experience. This is a critical issue in countries/situations where victims may face stigmatisation or threats to their safety or status. Interestingly, in many other countries, some of the oldest NGOs fighting sexual violence (such as the Rape Crisis Centres in the UK) were founded by survivors and are led and mostly staffed by survivors without this being explicit in their communication. This is something that some are now considering changing to "better position their organisation" following the increased interest in survivors' advocacy (expressed by the authorities, donors and the public). Children creating or joining movements may prefer not to disclose that they have a lived experience. Promoting safe and meaningful child participation in general (regardless of the child's lived experience) can indeed lead to better protection.

Children who are silenced and passive can be abused by adults with relative impunity. Providing them with information, encouraging them to articulate their concerns and introducing safe and accessible mechanisms for challenging violence and abuse are key strategies for providing effective protection. Children who have access to information about health and sexuality are better able to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases, and HIV. Child workers who form and join associations may be able to protect themselves better against exploitation and abuse. Opportunities to participate have been found to be of particular importance in situations of conflict and emergencies. ([Gerison Lansdown](#))

4. Supporting child survivors' advocacy presents a number of challenges, but it is important and feasible. In this respect, the work of the Bedfordshire University through its project "[Our Voices](#)" presents a particular interest, as it promotes the involvement of children and young people affected by sexual violence in research, policy and practice, creating opportunities for young survivors to engage in advocacy in a trauma-informed environment.
5. Lived experience does not equal expertise. While each individual story sheds light on failures in the systems, the traumatic experience doesn't make a person an expert in fixing systems, developing policies, reforming laws, training people or supporting other survivors. Asking survivors to advice on complex issues without taking into account this, may also put an unfair burden on them and result in flawed processes and other negative outcomes. One of the NGOs interviewed by the consultant referred, for instance, to the negative impact of the profile gained by a survivor, who suddenly became involved in a complex law reform without the knowledge and skills needed, inadvertently putting at risk the long-term investment of an important coalition of NGOs in the country. A number of survivors-led NGOs started providing "peer to peer support" until they realised they were not equipped to do so and turned to professional therapists to offer that service.
6. Survivors are of course more than their lived experience of violence. They have skillsets that they can use in advocacy (they are lawyers, social workers, teachers, journalists, researchers...), and they can also develop new skills if given the opportunity. There are, for instance, many examples of survivors of violence in sport having become experts in child safeguarding through studies, training and work in sport organisations.

If survivors' aspirations, wishes, needs and constrains are clear, empowering strategies may be promoted to minimize risks and create enabling environments for them to safely and meaningfully engage in advocacy.

B. Activism by survivors: promoting empowering strategies

An increased awareness on the importance of understanding survivors' needs, constrains and expectations has led some organisations engaging with them to develop [research](#), [conceptual frameworks](#), [standards](#), [guidelines](#), [codes of conducts](#), [mechanisms](#), [training](#) sessions and [other resources](#) aiming to reduce risks and empowering survivors. This approach should be actively promoted, and lessons learned shared. CRIN's project "[Justice for survivors of child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church in Latin America](#)" is an interesting example of an empowering strategy, which includes context-research, facilitating access to information on support services, provision of training (including risk management), lessons shared through case studies, and bridge building amongst organisations. The

benefits and positive impact of well-crafted engagement with survivors also emerges in the outcome of the external evaluation of the [project implemented by the Mukwege Foundation](#) “Strengthening participation and advocacy for reparations and other forms of redress by survivors of CRSV in four conflict-affected countries”

- 4!** To further support activism by survivors of sexual violence in childhood, the donor community could consider promoting empowering strategies including the six following objectives:
1. The definition of safe and meaningful engagement;
 2. the creation and promotion of enabling environments for survivors to engage;
 3. awareness on the risks and possible mitigating measures;
 4. building survivors’ capacity to advocate safely and effectively;
 5. promoting research, knowledge transfer, access to resources and networking across settings, within countries and internationally;
 6. documenting survivors’ experiences of advocacy.

These six objectives may translate in different actions, depending on the context and the targeted organisation/project.

For individual survivors wishing to engage in advocacy:

- i. Promote access to advice about risks and opportunities, other survivors’ advocacy experiences, case studies, existing networks and funds, etc.
- ii. Promote survivors-led projects in organisations which could act as “hosts” for the survivor’s advocacy.
- iii. Promote access to education and training, explore the possibility to offer fellowships and grants for PHD research in partnership with universities and research institutions.
- iv. Promote formal and informal networks of survivors across settings, within countries and internationally.

For survivors-led organisations and survivors’ networks:

- i. Promote the adoption of a specific policy/code of conduct.
- ii. Promote access to advice for survivors about risks and opportunities, other survivors’ experiences, case studies, existing networks and funds, etc.
- iii. Secure access to training and expertise on trauma, leadership, risk management, communication and any other needs expressed by the organisations/networks.
- iv. Foresee resources to care for the wellbeing of the staff working with survivors.
- v. Include in the grants resources to pay dedicated and duly trained staff in these organisations/networks to engage with survivors.
- vi. Explore ways to obtain and document survivors’ feedback about their experiences as activists.
- vii. Promote cooperation with other survivors-led organisations (across settings and continents).

For organisations and institutions engaging with activists with lived experience⁵:

- i. Promote/request/support the adoption of a policy/code of conduct defining safe and meaningful engagement with survivors, including:
 - a. Commitment to understand the context, survivors' motivations, needs, wishes and expectations;
 - b. Agreement on the terms of the engagement (non-exploitative, voluntary, informed);
 - c. Risk assessment and management;
 - d. A trauma-informed environment (people engaging with survivors should have training/knowledge on trauma and how to act if a person is triggered).
- ii. Foresee resources to pay dedicated staff to engage with survivors whenever this is an important dimension of the organisations' work (for instance, those having survivors' councils or networks) or of a specific project.
- iii. Foresee resources to care for the wellbeing of the staff working with survivors.
- iv. Explore ways to obtain and document survivors' feedback about their advocacy experiences.

Other organisations to include in the strategy:

- i. Organisations providing support to survivors. Even if not publicly presented as survivors-led, these organisations may actually be led/staffed by survivors and, in any event, play a key role in empowering survivors through the critical services that they provide. An organisation working with gay men survivors in Central Africa Republic observed for instance, that for men to engage, they had go first through a cycle of healing, with the safe space created allowing survivors to take the next step.
- ii. Children and youth-led organisations, in particular those focusing on ending violence and in fighting discrimination.
- iii. Research institutions willing to invest in participatory research and in collecting evidence on child/young survivors' engagement.

C. Introducing context and flexibility in grant making

The documentation consulted and the interviews conducted by the consultant often highlighted the need for donors to engage with organisations in the field and become as familiar as possible with the context and the potential grantees' needs and constrains.

1. Understand and monitor context

Admittedly, most donors base their decisions on some level of context analysis, including an assessment of the potential grantee's capacity to achieve impact and even sustain action once the donor stops financing. Very often, the context analysis is provided through a painful application process, which, in addition to put a heavy burden in medium size/small organisations, does not necessarily provide the kind of information needed. It would be therefore interesting to find ways to satisfy a certain level of due diligence without creating unnecessary burdens/obstacles for the applicants to make their case. This implies responding to two main questions:

⁵ There are many organisations engaging with survivors as recipients of support/services. This section focuses on those engaging with survivors as activists

➤ What kind of information is needed?

Ending sexual violence in childhood is a journey that starts in denial and ignorance and must aim at efficient collective action. Understanding where each country is in the journey is important to support progress in the right direction. This includes understanding and monitoring the evolution of:

- Violence root causes, intersectionality⁶, the role of stigma, taboos, the power dynamics and possible backlashes⁷;
- the key organisations/movements working on ending sexual violence and fighting discrimination on the grounds of gender identity and sexual orientation, and how they support/engage with survivors;
- the potential grantee's needs and constraints;
- the donors' landscape: who else is financing/supporting this agenda in a given country and how?.

Much more research needs to be led and undertaken by researchers and practitioners in and from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs); where the burden of VAW and VAC is highest. However, the reality is that investment in responses to VAW and VAC do not match their severity or impact and even less money goes into research. [SVRI, Decolonising funding](#)

➤ How can the information be obtained?

- Ideally, donors should join forces or at least to share data/exchange information on their programmes directed towards countries/issues. "Country profiles" with the information needed could be established and shared.
- By acknowledging and valuing the [various ways in which knowledge is created and what constitutes evidence and expertise](#), including practice-based knowledge.
- Small country teams in priority regions could be financed by a consortium of donors. The staff could help update the country profiles and engage with both big and grassroots organisations led by/offering support to survivors, to assess needs and opportunities, build bridges and propose measures that respond to the needs identified (for instance through training, coaching, expertise, etc). This would be in particular advisable in low-income countries and in regions affected by conflicts/extreme violence.

⁶ Understood as "the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, age, ethnic group, poverty level, sex and gender identity as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. An intersectional perspective recognises the unique experiences of different people within their environments and explains how multiple forces interact to reinforce conditions of inequality and social exclusion – the roots of violence and stigma." [Principles for Global action. Preventing and addressing stigma associated with conflict-related sexual violence.](#)

⁷ "The push by some American LGBTQ organizations to make same-sex marriage the priority for LGBT people in Asia is undermining their other priorities (listed above); and also endangering people because it whips up hostility from anti-LGBT political leaders and groups. Making same-sex marriage an all-encompassing focus means other critical rights get overshadowed and resources get diverted. Rather than same sex marriage, perhaps the focus is on the freedom to create rainbow families" https://api-gbv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/REPORT_LGBTQ-Roundtable-Presentation-by-Grace-Poore-Sept2020.pdf

- The information gathered through the application process would complement the above, with the requirements simplified and minimizing the work generated by an application process.

2. Introduce flexibility and build bridges

Donors should take into account that people with lived experience engage in activism in different ways, and must avoid building artificial barriers within budgets and between issues, for instance conditioning support to disclosure, imposing a narrow definition of the issue, or requiring the establishment of legal entities or the fulfilment of too many requirements (described as [“unrealistic, excessive, and intrusive demands”](#)).


All NGOs interviewed encountered the following obstacles:

- Donors are mostly project-driven, usually favouring short term projects (one year), whereas longer term investment is usually needed for transformative results;
- donors’ reluctance to finance staff and overheads;
- too many unsuccessful and complicated application, negotiation and reporting processes that many cannot afford because of lack of human resources and expertise;
- funds channelled through big international organisations (both non-governmental and intergovernmental) with little or no presence/engagement with grassroot organisations (and considerable amounts going to those “intermediary” organisations’ staff and overheads);
- “top down” definition of priorities and approaches.

Some NGOs mentioned:

- Donors’ lack of understanding of the context;
- donors’ sudden interest in some specific areas, “forcing” NGOs to change their own agendas and neglect other areas they know much better;
- concerns about the possible impact of funding directed towards “survivors’ activism” without proper needs and risks assessment.

Supporting the creation of enabling environments for survivors should not translate in more paperwork required from applicants, but generate opportunities for them to access information, training and coaching needed to embed the key principles and values in their projects, policies and operations.

 A strategy to fund advocacy by survivors of sexual violence in childhood should be based on a fair understanding of context and honest engagement with survivors, potential grantees and other key stakeholders. Application and reporting requirements should be simplified and avoid imposing unrealistic constraints.

Support can also take different forms (see [section II.B](#) above), including helping survivors connect with existing organisations, providing coaching, financing training, sponsoring internships, and facilitating the exchange of knowledge between organisations with “connected agendas”.

There is a wealth of lessons learnt in the advocacy of people with lived experience around the various settings, issues and regions. Survivors of sexual violence in sport or in the Church could for instance benefit of work carried out by survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The [Murad Code](#) project, for example, “is a global consultative initiative aimed at building and supporting a community of better practice for, with and concerning survivors of systematic and conflict-related sexual violence

("SCRSV"). Its key objective is to respect and support survivors' rights and to ensure work with survivors to investigate, document and record their experiences is safe, ethical and effective in upholding their human rights". Although designed for systematic and conflict-related sexual violence, many of its principles are relevant for sexual violence in other contexts and the way it was designed is a good source of inspiration.

6! Donors should support both the broader agenda (ending violence, children's rights and in particular child participation) and the connected agendas (gender-based violence, children born out of rape, discrimination of LGBTBI people), always actively seeking to bridge them. They should engage with the various stakeholders to:

- a. Address complex and systemic issues with multiple entry points;
- b. strengthen equity, diversity and inclusion in grant making, in particular in the Global South;
- c. mutualise resources, create synergies and build trust with the community through a permanent or semi-permanent presence in priority countries/regions;
- d. monitor progress and share lessons learned, in particular on survivors' experiences of advocacy and its impact.

D. Including survivors' voices in donors' work

[Section II.B](#) of this report identifies ways in which survivors' advocacy can be supported and promoted. For donors, an additional step would be considering how survivors' voices could be integrated in their own work. This would mean addressing the following questions:

- What kind of space can we offer for survivors to engage? Programming? Project design and evaluation? Grant allocation? Permanent advisory role? Occasional consultations?
- How do we create an enabling environment for survivors to engage? How can we identify survivors' needs and aspirations? How do we manage expectations? How do we ensure accountability?

Because survivors' needs, motivations and limitations ([Section II.A](#)) vary so much, and given donors' own constraints, it seems advisable to follow a step by step strategy.

1. Consult survivors when defining programmes, projects and initiatives

As a first step, donors could consult survivors-led organisations and organisations supporting survivors on priorities for their grant making. Ideally, the consultation should allow going beyond each individual organisation's needs, and rather focus on developing a shared vision. With the experience gained, the creation of focus groups, an advisory body or/and the recruitment of survivors with the relevant expertise could be amongst the next steps. The ultimate objective would be to embed this participation in all the programming cycle and critical decision making.

2. Explore participatory funding

Participatory funding is emerging as an empowering strategy for survivors at national and regional level. Those practicing participatory funding highlight the many benefits that it brings when addressing very specific issues with grassroot organisations at national/local levels. Quality participatory funding

creates a meaningful connection with the context and the communities, reinforces values such as equity, diversity and inclusion and contributes to “a shift in power”, allowing survivors to regain the control they feel they had lost with their traumatic experience and giving them the opportunity to decide what gets financed. It also presents a number of challenges, included the resources needed for the process and the fact that the donor keeps the control (see lessons learned in the [report by Fund for Shared Insight](#)). The experience of the [Global Survivors Fund](#) created to enhance access to reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence across the globe, is of particular interest, as it allows multistakeholder engagement through [a diverse steering committee including survivors](#).

Survivor-Centricity

Co-creation: *Make sure that both the content and processes of any reparations programme is defined based on what survivors propose. This will require development of a co-creation process where survivors can actively participate in developing reparations programmes. To achieve this, a safe space and support by trained personnel is needed to allow survivors to contribute freely. Special consideration of different categories of survivors will be needed here, including gender, age and culture sensitive approaches to developing survivor participation.*

Support Survivors' Initiatives: *Provide resources and expertise to support survivor initiatives as needed, and create space for such initiatives to be heard during public consultations, policy discussions and other events of relevance to the provision of comprehensive reparations.*

Key recommendation in the preliminary conclusions of “[the Global Reparations Study](#)”, the Global Survivors Fund

A recent report by Philea on [Child and Youth participation in Philanthropy](#) provides very useful insights in how this is currently done, as well as recommendations on how to work more collaboratively with and for children and young people. The interviews conducted by the consultant with survivors and organisations supporting them also confirm the findings and recommendations included in the Elevate Children Funders Group report “[Shifting the Field: Philanthropy’s role in strengthening child- and youth-led community rooted groups](#)”. While it may be difficult to identify children with lived experience, engaging with children and young people when designing, implementing and evaluating funding programmes and when allocating funds remains a good strategy to empower children and reinforces Philanthropy’s values.

! Philanthropy should further explore ways of involving survivors in its work. A step-by-step approach could start with consulting survivors in the context of programming to then aim at embedding their participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of the organisation’s work, including through participatory funding.

III. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommended measures for donors to maximise opportunities to support advocacy by persons with lived experience of sexual violence in childhood while minimizing associated risks:

1. Adopt a broader approach to sexual violence in childhood, including gender-based violence, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity and children born of rape and actively seek to build bridges between specific agendas (such as supporting survivors of sexual violence in sport), connected topics (such as gender-based violence or discrimination against LGBTBI persons) and broader agendas (ending violence against children, promoting children's rights, in particular child participation).
2. Understand the obstacles to and the motivation behind disclosing and reporting sexual violence.
3. Embrace the different ways in which survivors engage in advocacy and develop strategies to support all of them, understanding and respecting survivors' aspirations, needs and constraints.
4. Promote empowering strategies, including through:
 - a. The definition of safe and meaningful engagement;
 - b. the creation and promotion of enabling environments for survivors to engage;
 - c. understanding and promoting awareness on the risks and possible mitigating measures;
 - d. building survivors' capacity to advocate safely and effectively;
 - e. promoting knowledge transfer, access to resources and networking across settings, within countries and internationally;
 - f. documenting survivors' experiences of advocacy.
5. Introduce context and flexibility in grant making, in particular by:
 - a. Investing in gathering information and expertise on the specific context without creating additional burden to potential grantees;
 - b. simplifying application and reporting requirements;
 - c. acknowledging the need to fund the necessary human resources and overheads, in particular those needed to engage in a trauma-informed way;
 - d. privileging medium and long term grants.
6. Join forces with other donors and stakeholders, including to:
 - a. Address complex and systemic issues with multiple entry points;
 - b. strengthen equity, diversity and inclusion in grant making, in particular in the Global South;
 - c. mutualise resources, create synergies and build trust with the community through a permanent or semi-permanent presence in priority countries/regions;
 - d. monitor progress and share lessons learned, in particular on survivors' experiences of advocacy and its impact.
7. Involve survivors in the work adopting a step-by-step approach and exploring:
 - a. Meaningful ways to involve survivors in the design, implementation and evaluation of strategies and programmes;
 - b. participatory funding on projects and initiatives at national and local level;
 - c. avenues to introduce/reinforce children and young people participation in philanthropic work.

APPENDIX I- LIST OF KEY RESOURCES CONSULTED

CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

[Nadia's Initiative \(nadiasinitiative.org\)](http://nadiasinitiative.org)

[Survivor-Centred Documentation of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: The MURAD Code Project | UN Web TV](#)

[Draft Murad Code — Murad Code](#)

[Mandatory reporting of sexual violence in armed conflict | ICRC](#)

[Iraq: UN expert welcomes law to aid ISIL atrocity survivors, but more needs to be done for children born from rape | OHCHR](#)

[A milestone towards justice? first anniversary of the Yazidi survivors' law on march 1, 2022 — HÁWAR.help \(hawar.help\)](#)

[WHO WE ARE – Coalition for Just Reparations - C4JR](#)

Briefing by Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights: [Yazidi-Survivors-Law-Briefing.pdf \(ceasefire.org\)](#)

[Follow-up to the concluding observations on Iraq of the Committee Against Torture and Human Rights Committee - “Dialogue on Reparative Justice: Ensuring Effective Reparations in Iraq” - Jiyan Foundation For Human Rights](#)

[Global Survivors Fund \(globalsurvivorsfund.org\)](http://globalsurvivorsfund.org)

[Platform for action promoting the rights and wellbeing of children born of conflict-related sexual violence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[PSVI Principles for Global Action.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

LGBTI

[Male and LGBT survivors of sexual violence in conflict situations: a realist review of health interventions in low-and middle-income countries | Conflict and Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

[Male and LGBT survivors of sexual violence in conflict situations: a realist review of health interventions in low-and middle-income countries | Conflict and Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

Red cross [Sexual and gender-based violence against men, boys, LGBTIQ+ | ICRC](#)

[REPORT LGBTQ-Roundtable-Presentation-by-Grace-Poore-Sept2020.pdf \(api-gbv.org\)](#)

<https://outrightinternational.org/> (LGTBI)

Independent Inquiry Child Sexual abuse, UK. [Engagement Report, May 2022, Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/ questioning + victims and survivors Emily Gibson, Russell Knight, Annie Durham and Imran Choudhury IICSA Engagement Team](#)

SEX AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN OTHER CONTEXTS

[Addressing the Sex and Gender-Based Violence in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador Fueling the U.S. Border Crisis Corruption, Impunity, and Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

Report on SGBV in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador by Kids in Need of Defence (KiND) [Neither-Security-nor-Justice_SGBV-Gang-Report-FINAL.pdf \(supportkind.org\)](#)

[Asian and Pacific Islander Survivors - Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence Website \(api-gbv.org\)](#)

[Alliance For Immigrant Survivors](#)

SURVIVORS MOVEMENTS

[Survivors Speak OUT | Freedom from Torture](#)

[metoo-frameworkbook-fullbook-singlepage-DIGITAL.pdf - Google Drive](#)

[As adult survivors join #MeToo, children listen — and confront their own abuse | Mashable](#)

[2019-12-09 MeToo ImpactReport_VIEW_4.pdf \(metoomvmt.org\)](#)

[About Us \(nationalsurvivornetwork.org\) \(trafficking\)](#)

[Empowering Survivor Leadership in the Movement – HTAM 2022 \(nationalsurvivornetwork.org\)](#)

[Brave Movement | Florence Keya](#)

[Our history | Rape Crisis Scotland](#)

RESEARCH

[Effective engagement of survivors of harassment and abuse in sport in athlete safeguarding initiatives: a review and a conceptual framework | British Journal of Sports Medicine \(bmj.com\)](#)

[RSH EE Tip Sheet Engaging Survivors_FINAL.pdf \(safeguardingsupporthub.org\)](#)

[ECPAT report “Disrupting harm: conversations with young survivors about online sexual exploitation and abuse](#)

[Child Sexual Abuse | Sexual Abuse Prevention | Darkness to Light - Darkness to Light \(d2l.org\)](#)

[“A Community of Survivors”: A Grounded Theory of Organizational Support for Survivor-Advocates in Domestic Violence Agencies - Joshua M. Wilson, Lisa A. Goodman, 2021 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

[Guidelines-for-Ethical-Research-on-Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children-ECPAT-International-2019.pdf](#)

[Survivors' Perspectives - ECPAT](#)

[UoB_BeingHeard-report.pdf](#) (Involving Children and Young people in participatory research)

[Innovations in Survivor-Centered Advocacy](#)

[Survivors' Perspectives - WeProtect Global Alliance](#)

[Being heard: promoting children and young people’s involvement in participatory research on sexual violence.](#)

THEORY OF CHANGE/STATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

[Porticus Child Protection Theory of change](#)

[GBViE Theory of Change Framework Narrative.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#)

[Oxfam-Canada-EVAWG-Theory-of-Change-2021.pdf](#)

[A theory of change for addressing conflict-related sexual violence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[ECPAT-Strategic-Framework-2021-2025-EN.pdf](#)

[Brave Movement | Our Theory of Change](#)

[Theory of Change — Global Survivor Fund \(globalsurvivorsfund.org\)](#)

[https://thearmyofsurvivors.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/TAOS_StrategicPlan_FINAL.pdf](#)

GRANT MAKING

[Intro to Participatory Grant-Making | The Fund for Global Human Rights](#)

[Some Lessons from Participatory Grantmaking and Meditations on Power for the Field \(issuelab.org\)](#)

[Child and Youth Participation in Philanthropy : Stories of Transformation \(issuelab.org\)](#)

[Shifting Power in Grantmaking Series Toolkit \(showit.co\)](#)

[Community-driven systems change - at a glance 2021.pdf | Powered by Box](#)

[Strategic Plan 2021-2023 | Publications | ECFG \(elevatechildren.org\)](#)

[Six Things Funders Can Change to Better Support Child- and Youth-led Grassroots Groups - The Center for Effective Philanthropy \(cep.org\)](#)

ADVICE/GUIDELINES TO ENGAGE WITH SURVIVORS

[UNHCR - Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct](#)

[Guidelines-for-Ethical-Research-on-Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children-ECPAT-International-2019.pdf](#)

Eastern Europe Hub (Tips for engaging with survivors) [RSH EE Tip Sheet Engaging Survivors_FINAL.pdf \(safeguardingsupporthub.org\)](#)

[IRC-CSS-Guide-2012.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#) Guidance for engaging with child survivors in humanitarian context

[Independent Sexual Violence Advocates | CIS'ters \(cisters.org.uk\)](#)

[HBF Trauma Informed Code of Conduct 2nd Edition.pdf \(helenbamber.org\)](#)

<https://thearmyofsurvivors.org/trauma-informed/>