FRAMEWORK FOR THE PREVENTION OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE
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The unbridled brutality of sexual violence on 21st Century battlefields, and its recurrence with each new wave of warfare, continues to shock the collective conscience. War’s oldest crime seems to be never out of the news cycle, spanning all of history and geography, with no region, religion, culture, or continent left unscathed. When the interagency network I Chair, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, was launched in 2007, its founding vision was to bring political, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and human rights actors together with humanitarian responders and programmatic specialists, in a mutually-reinforcing manner, to amplify action to address sexual violence as a political, rather than exclusively technical, challenge. This was a corollary of viewing the issue through an operational security, as well as a gender, lens. Prevention was the driving impetus behind this agenda, which aimed to avoid perpetually reacting to the consequences of sexual violence downstream, in the absence of concerted upstream preventive diplomacy.

The advent of my mandate in 2009, to lead and cohere system-wide strategic advocacy and engagements, reflected this shift in paradigm and perspective, dispelling the myth of rape as mere “collateral damage” or an “inevitable by-product of war”. The most insidious effect of the long-standing myth of inevitability was the implication that rape would always be pervasive in the midst of war and could not be prevented. In international relations, the framing of a phenomenon as inevitable generally reflects a lack of political will to change it, and is code for complacency and acceptance, which in turn breed fatalism and passivity. Against that backdrop, the series of resolutions that anchored this issue on the Security Council agenda, namely resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2331 (2016), and 2467 (2019), demanded zero tolerance and credible consequences for conflict-related sexual violence. Cumulatively, they represent a political commitment to lift the veil of silence, and bring the full repertoire of diplomatic and enforcement tools to bear to convert the vicious cycle of violence and impunity into a virtuous cycle of recognition, reporting, and real-time, real-world response.

These resolutions recognised that sexual violence is used as a tactic of war, torture, terrorism, reprisal, and political repression, which can propel forced displacement, punish and persecute targeted populations, and serve as an instrument of “ethnic cleansing” and social control, whether in intention or effect. Accordingly, the issue could no longer be “privatized” or side-lined from serious consideration by peace and security stakeholders, but was required to be addressed with alacrity as a self-standing threat to collective security, requiring preventive, precautionary, and protective measures, as well as an impediment to the restoration of peace, demanding de-escalation, and diplomatic pressure on perpetrators to induce behavioural change. This marked a fundamental rethinking of wartime rape, from being viewed as regrettable, like any other tragedy, to being understood as preventable, like any other threat. Although notoriously difficult to detect and anticipate, as an invisible and highly-stigmatized crime, conflict-related sexual violence has since triggered proactive, not just reactive, approaches to reducing vulnerability, including embedding the issue in wider risk assessment, civilian protection, and early-warning tools, including threat and hotspot mapping, as an atrocity that is planned or permitted, and therefore preventable.

The new normative framework enabled actors and advocates to connect the dots between sexual violence and the global network of political and economic interests perpetuating it, as well as with peace negotiations, transitional justice processes, ceasefire and cessation of hostilities agreements, mandate authorizations and renewals of peacekeeping and special political missions, and the designation criteria and deliberations of sanctions regimes. It thereby broadened the circle of stakeholders, expanding our operational reach and impact, bringing a new consciousness and new constituencies to the search for solutions.

The present framework aims to enhance both structural and operational prevention. Structural prevention includes addressing gender inequality as a root cause and invisible driver of sexual violence, in times of war and peace. This may be manifest in discriminatory laws and harmful social norms, such as stigma, shame, and victim-blame. Long-term structural prevention aims to build a protective environment and foster the resilience of individuals and communities at risk, including through peer support networks and economic empowerment, recognizing the links between economic security and physical safety. Operational prevention includes more immediate risk mitigation measures and early action in response to red flags and early-warning signs. For instance, the Matrix of Early-Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, developed by my Office in 2011 and widely rolled out in the field, has improved monitoring of misogynistic hate speech, incitement, dehumanizing propaganda, extremist ideologies, changes to mobility patterns, arms accumulation,
The International Criminal Court (ICC) casting a long shadow that can shape the behaviour of belligerents. And non-State armed groups. Prosecution is also a form of prevention and deterrence, with institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC) casting a long shadow that can shape the behaviour of belligerents.

Social dynamics can be either supportive or stigmatizing; they can either inhibit or enable further harms, and social cohesion in the midst of war, and protecting women's rights defenders at risk, are widely acknowledged, macro-level trendlines are moving in the wrong direction and feeding the flames of violence through runaway military spending, the spread of armed groups and private military companies, extremist ideologies including in the relatively ungoverned digital space, the proliferation of arms, increasing inequality, and an epidemic of coups and military take-overs, which have turned back the clock on women's rights.

This prevention framework articulates a two-track approach that aims to both prevent sexual violence in the first instance, and to mitigate the secondary harms to affected individuals and communities that arise in its wake. Compliance with existing norms and obligations is the most effective form of primary prevention. That is why I have emphasized the importance of moving from commitments to compliance, and from resolutions to results. Through timely, accessible assistance that is survivor-centred, rights-based, and trauma-informed, secondary harms can also be prevented, enabling survivors to rebuild their lives and livelihoods, and replace horror with healing and hope. Services must include medical care, sexual and reproductive healthcare, psychosocial support, safe shelter, livelihood opportunities, and access to justice, reparations, and redress. Essential civilian infrastructure is often decimated by war, at the same time as social safety nets unravel. Social dynamics can be either supportive or stigmatizing; they can either inhibit or enable further harms, hence the importance of socioeconomic reintegration support for survivors and their children, to strengthen the bonds of social cohesion. Indeed, stigma and untreated physical and psychological trauma can have lingering consequences, with some survivors describing isolation, rejection, fear, and shame as worse than the act of violence itself. Many have succumbed to their injuries, to HIV/AIDS, traumatic fistula, suicide, "honour killings", maternal mortality, poverty, or reprisal attacks, including to silence victims and witnesses. Prevention permeates every action taken pursuant to my mandate, from advocacy to raise the red flag about risks and impending violations, to resource mobilization to expand the operational response, to engaging with traditional and religious leaders to help shift harmful social norms, to gender-responsive justice and security sector reform, training and sensitization of arms bearers, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), and community violence reduction (CVR) initiatives. As this framework illustrates, with the right combination of incentives, disincentives, and norms that are known, understood, and enforced, conflict-related sexual violence can be prevented.

In that respect, international law can exert a powerful restraining influence on the behaviour of both States and non-State armed groups. Prosecution is also a form of prevention and deterrence, with institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC) casting a long shadow that can shape the behaviour of belligerents. While questions have been raised about the deterrence theory in practice, the counterfactual is everywhere in evidence: impunity serves to embolden the perpetrators and is tantamount to license to rape, with amnesty and immunity associated with continued or increased violence. Access to justice is particularly important given sexual violence crimes are characterized by staggering rates of recidivism. We have learnt over the years that legal and policy frameworks only have deterrent value if visibly and consistently enforced. Moreover, we must deliver justice not just law, meaning social justice in communities as well as courtrooms. Survivor-centred rules of procedure and evidence are critical to minimise the risks of re-traumatization or physical danger before, during, or after trial. Sanctions and accountability must work in tandem to change the calculus made by arms bearers and commanders, even during active conflict. It is also important to note that conflict and mass population flight can create conditions conducive to human trafficking, including for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, which flourishes in a climate of impunity.

Prevention demands permanent prioritisation, given the continually changing face of war, and the ever-evolving peace and security landscape. We cannot effectively prevent what we do not adequately understand. This framework consolidates key findings from academic research and leading scholars in the field, to deepen our collective awareness of the causes and consequences of conflict-related sexual violence.

In developing this framework, I was inspired by the words of survivors I have met in warzones around the world, who have repeatedly told me: “what happened to me could have been prevented”, and “no one else should have to suffer as I did”.

I launch this framework in the conviction that history does not simply repeat itself; people repeat history, or they make different choices. Through our annual reports, my Office has built a public historical record for this crime, and continues to shed light on previously invisible victims. Each of the tens of thousands of cases we have reported cry out for justice and redress; each of them could have been prevented. In this effort, we are only as strong as our partnerships, and must pursue a multistakeholder approach in collaboration with Governments, civil society, the private sector, the donor and diplomatic community, and survivors themselves. At this time of cascading global crises, the demands on my mandate continue to grow. We have shifted the paradigm from inevitability to preventability, but a corresponding shift is needed in terms of the public spending paradigm, to allocate resources equal to the scale of the challenge. Sustained political resolve and resources will signal to survivors that they are not forgotten, and that international law is not an empty promise. Our ultimate aim is to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, including its most intimate and enduring atrocity, the scourge of wartime rape. We must dig deeper and unearth the intertwined root causes of conflict-related sexual violence, and in their place sow the seeds of prevention and change.
The prevention of conflict-related sexual violence contributes to the fulfillment of several critical UN priorities.

### Women, Peace and Security Agenda

First, prevention of conflict-related sexual violence is a core aim of the women, peace and security agenda, which was established by Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and expanded in subsequent resolutions. For over two decades now, the women, peace and security agenda resolutions have consistently highlighted the need to prioritize prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, alongside response.  

Member States are encouraged to implement these resolutions to domestically advance the agenda.  

### Resolution Alignment with United Nations Priorities

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<td>1325 (2000)</td>
<td>- Reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peacebuilding efforts;</td>
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<td>- Emphasizes the important role of women in maintaining and promoting peace and security;</td>
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<td>- Stresses the need to include women in decision-making as it relates to conflict prevention and resolution;</td>
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<td>1820 (2008)</td>
<td>- Condemns the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war;</td>
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<td>- Declares that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, or a constituent act with respect to genocide;</td>
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<td>- Recognizes that prevention of and response to sexual violence in conflict can contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security;</td>
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<td>1888 (2009)</td>
<td>- By adopting the principle of sexual violence in conflict to international peace and security, noting that acts by non-state actors can also violate international law;</td>
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<td>- Calls for the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to lead and cohere system-wide efforts, promoting cooperation and coordination primarily through the interagency UN Action network;</td>
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<td>- For the deployment of Women Protection Advisors as well as a Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual violence in Conflict;</td>
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<td>1819 (2009)</td>
<td>- Emphasizes the necessity of women’s participation in peace processes, including in the prevention of conflict;</td>
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<td>- Emphasizes factors limiting participation;</td>
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<td>- Calls for the development of indicators to measure implementation of resolution 1325 (2000);</td>
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<td>1960 (2010)</td>
<td>- By relying on the accountability infrastructure for sexual violence in conflict to end impunity;</td>
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<td>- Asks that women’s participation in peace processes, including in the prevention of conflict;</td>
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<td>- Emphasizes the need to increase women’s participation in mediation, post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding efforts;</td>
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<td>- By addressing sexual violence in conflict;</td>
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<td>- By stressing the importance of all actors in accountability measures to end impunity;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2106 (2013)</td>
<td>- By emphasizing the need to increase women’s participation in mediation, post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding efforts;</td>
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<td>- By stressing the importance of all actors in accountability measures to end impunity;</td>
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<td>2122 (2013)</td>
<td>- By undertaking to increase women’s participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, reinforcing the Security Council’s commitment to incorporate women, peace and security thematic issues into its agenda;</td>
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<td>2242 (2015)</td>
<td>- By recognizing the structural root causes of sexual violence in conflict;</td>
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<td>- By recognizing the root causes of sexual violence in conflict;</td>
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<td>2247 (2019)</td>
<td>- By recognizing the root causes of sexual violence in conflict;</td>
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<td>2403 (2019)</td>
<td>- By recognizing the root causes of sexual violence in conflict;</td>
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**INTRODUCING THE FRAMEWORK**

Through a series of resolutions on women, peace and security, the United Nations Security Council (“Security Council”) has emphasized that sexual violence, including when used as a tactic of war, torture, or terrorism, or as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population, can significantly exacerbate situations of armed conflict and threaten international peace and security.  

The Security Council has thus taken conflict-related sexual violence up as an area of grave concern, asserting the need for effective prevention and response measures in order to promote the maintenance of international peace and security.  

Over the past decade, increasing evidence shows great variation in how, when, and why sexual violence during specific armed conflicts is committed. Not all parties to armed conflict commit sexual violence to the same degree, in the same ways, or at all.  

Further, even within a single armed conflict, commission of sexual violence may fluctuate across geography or time. This variation indicates that sexual violence is not inevitable in armed conflict.  

It also suggests that, with the right interventions and disincentives, conflict-related sexual violence can be prevented.  

General Assembly resolution 70/262 and Security Council resolution 2282 (2016) underlined the importance of Member States’ involvement and cooperation in sustaining peace at all stages of conflict and in all its dimensions, stressing that sustaining peace is imperative to preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict. In response, the United Nations Secretary-General placed prevention at the centre of all United Nations efforts. As part of these efforts, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as Chair of the United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict network of 23 entities, presents this Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence.  

Much programmatic work is already being done to address gender-based violence in emergency settings. This Framework complements those critical efforts by addressing how prevention of conflict-related sexual violence in particular is also a peace and security imperative. Prevention demands not only a programmatic response at the individual and community level, but a political response grounded in the women, peace, and security agenda and international humanitarian law. Programmatic mandates and policy protection mandates should address the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence strategically and in a complementary, mutually-reinforcing manner.  

The Framework outlines critical elements and considerations for prevention, in order to guide decision-making in a clear and comprehensive way. It builds on general acceptance that the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence must involve normative change and the elimination of gender inequality and power imbalances, but also highlights critical political and security-focused approaches that can help reduce the occurrence of armed conflicts in which this particular form of violence necessarily arises. For this essential work, Member States and other political entities must be engaged. This Framework provides guidance to this end and further aims to dismantle silos by enhancing efforts and collaboration between diverse actors within broader efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence. In doing so, the Framework contributes to the overall prevention of conflict and human suffering, which lies at the heart of the United Nations mandate.  

**UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY**

**Prevention:**

- Aligns with United Nations Priorities

- The prevention of conflict-related sexual violence contributes to the fulfillment of several critical UN priorities.
THE FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCING THE FRAMEWORK

Prevention of conflict-related sexual violence also contributes to achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by addressing specific targets related to gender equality, reduced inequalities and peace, justice and strong institutions. 11

Goal 5
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other forms of exploitation
5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources
5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

Goal 10
Reduce inequality within and among countries
10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequities of outcome, including, by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard

Goal 16
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime
16.5 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
16.6 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ADVANCED BY THE PREVENTION OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Our Common Agenda and other calls from the Secretary-General

This Framework aligns with the Secretary-General’s Call to Action for Human Rights (2020), which sets out overarching guiding principles for seven domains which collectively advance the United Nations human rights agenda. 11 The Call to Action affirms fulfillment of human rights considerations as a core component of broader prevention efforts, encompassing the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence.

Prevention is also central to Our Common Agenda, issued by the Secretary-General on 5 August 2021. The Common Agenda highlights the need for renewed multilateralism in an age of growing risk and integrates the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development among its commitments. 13 Specifically, the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence supports Commitment 3: Promote peace and prevent conflicts and its particular call to place women and girls at the centre of security sector policy. It also addresses Commitment 5: Place women and girls at the centre and its call for the eradication of violence against women and girls, including through development of an emergency response plan. 14

BUILDING ON EXISTING PREVENTION EFFORTS AND GUIDANCE

Conflict-related sexual violence is an expression of gender inequality and occurs in the context of other forms of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. As a result, longstanding approaches to combat gender inequality and gender-based violence are critical to prevention efforts. Conflict-related sexual violence differs from general forms of gender-based violence, however, due to its connection with armed conflict. Its prevention is thus also tied to the prevention of conflict itself. The Secretary-General captured this relationship in his report on 3 June 2020, noting that the end goal of the conflicts-related sexual violence agenda is not a “war without rape”, but rather a world without war. 15

For this reason, preventing conflict-related sexual violence requires attention to deep-rooted political, socioeconomic, cultural, environmental, and institutional drivers of conflicts. 16 Several United Nations documents call for a coherent, comprehensive, and coordinated approach to conflict prevention through structural, systematic and operational approaches. 17 In particular, the United Nations has long established the critical role of women, girls, and women’s organizations in conflict prevention and resolution, and has stressed the need for their equal and meaningful participation and full involvement in efforts to promote peace and security at all levels. 18 Engagement of youth and representatives of other often-neglected or invisible populations (e.g., communities associated by race, gender, indigenous or disability status) is also critical.

To address this complexity and promote a comprehensive approach, this Framework incorporates by reference significant existing guidance related to the prevention of gender-based violence and conflict generally (see Annex 1: Related Guidance and Frameworks). 19 It then complements and builds on this longstanding work by highlighting specific considerations for the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence in particular, providing conceptual and pragmatic elaboration as needed. In doing so, this Framework clarifies how conflict-related sexual violence may be addressed in conjunction with national commitments to uphold and defend human rights and to abide by the responsibility to protect, 20 as well as in the context of broader efforts to prevent conflict and promote lasting peace and security.

This Framework does not explicitly cover sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations peacekeepers. Instead, it complements The United Nations Secretary-General’s Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: a new approach (2017) and the Policy on Integrating a Human Rights-Based Approach to United Nations efforts to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (2021), which together set forth a system-wide approach to prevent and respond to sexual abuse and exploitation, including by United Nations peacekeepers in the context of armed conflict. 21 While sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeepers is related to conflict-related sexual violence, prevention of and accountability for these issues are operationally distinct in terms of institutional mandates, policies and protocols to ensure they receive thorough and context-specific consideration. 22 This division of labour also acknowledges the important role peacekeepers can play, separately, in the detection and prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. Duty-bearers responsible for the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and those responsible for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse work in complement to address these related but distinct violations.
ROUTES AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Prevention of any form of violence requires elimination of its root causes, or the fundamental, underlying conditions driving a specific event. The occurrence of an event may be influenced by certain factors or conditions that increase the event’s likelihood in a certain context. These “risk factors” or “contributing factors” may also accelerate the speed at which the event happens or the severity of its impacts. Identification of these factors can help guide and target prevention efforts to areas or populations most vulnerable to harm.

Conflict-related sexual violence is a complex form of violence arising from multiple, intersecting root causes. On one hand, conflict-related sexual violence arises in the context of conflict and so it is in part due to the drivers of armed conflict itself. These include political, economic and social inequalities; human rights violations; extreme poverty or economic crisis; climate change, environmental degradation, and competition for natural resources; ideological extremism; and availability of arms. The United Nations Office of the Special Advisers on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect have also identified several factors associated with risk of conflict outbreak, escalation or resurgence, such as: tension between different groups or lack of social cohesion; absence of the rule of law, including conflict-related failure of formal and informal justice and protection systems; arms proliferation; forced displacement; impacts of climate change, including climate-related disasters and access to natural resources; and the existence of criminal networks or generalised violence.

At the same time, conflict-related sexual violence is also a form of gender-based violence, which is driven by gender inequality and power imbalances within a society. Several United Nations entities have identified basic risk factors for gender-based violence. For example, UN Women’s RESPECT Framework for preventing violence against women (2019) notes conditions ranging from individual to societal level, e.g., childhood exposure to violence in the family, high levels of power disparity in relationships, discriminatory laws on marriage, divorce, and child custody and gender discrimination in institutions.

CONFLICT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ARISES IN THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN ARMED CONFLICT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, SO THEIR DISTINCT DRIVERS INFLUENCE ITS OCCURRENCE

What Is Conflict-Related Sexual Violence?

Conflict-related sexual violence is an invisible, silenced and stigmatised crime, and is often committed by those who are meant to provide protection. The United Nations Secretary-General defines conflict-related sexual violence as referring to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abduction, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. This link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, including terrorist entities or networks, the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a persecuted political, ethnic or religious minority, or targeted on the basis of gender inequality or of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; the climate of impunity, which is generally associated with State collapse; cross-border consequences, such as displacement or trafficking; and/or violations of the provisions of a ceasefire agreement.

The term also encompasses trafficking in persons, i.e., the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons for the purpose of the exploitation, including of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation; of slavery or slavery-like practices, and other forms of exploitation, when committed in situations of conflict. In the case of adults, a means by which the action is achieved must be present to constitute trafficking, including a threat or use of force, coercion, deception, fraud, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, abduction, or giving payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person.

The Security Council has also noted, and the Secretary-General affirmed, that certain terrorist groups have adopted gender-based violence, including or in particular sexual violence, as part of their ideologies or as a tactic of terrorism, with survivors suffering as both victims of terrorism and survivors of sexual violence. Terrorist groups may also engage in trafficking in persons, including for sexual purposes, as a source of financing and recruitment.
Conflict-related sexual violence sits at the confluence of armed conflict and gender-based violence. As such, risk factors associated with conflict-related sexual violence draw from conditions linked to both conflict and gender-based violence, often creating unique, compound risks. They can manifest from individual through supranational, political levels. For example, conflict-related sexual violence may arise due to the co-occurrence of misogynistic extremist ideologies and access to weapons and the war-related destruction of social support and protection networks.

Depending on the conflict, different characteristics or circumstances may increase individual or community risk of conflict-related sexual violence. At an individual level, a person's sex, gender identity, and position in a hierarchy of power may put them at heightened risk for specific forms of conflict-related sexual violence. For example, women and girls of childbearing age are primary targets for reproductive harms such as forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, and forced marriage. Detainees during wartime are at risk of conflict-related sexual violence due to their captive status; they can be sexually tortured during interrogation or forced to perform sexual acts in exchange for food or safety. Male combatants, such as in West Africa, have reported high rates of sexual violence, as well. It is also important to note specific vulnerabilities of persons with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics, who have been singled out for sexual violence or “social cleansing” on account of their non-conforming sexual orientations or gender identities.

Age is another potential risk factor in some contexts. For example, children (under 18 years of age) and youth (18 through 29 years of age) may be vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups or terrorist organisations because they are perceived as being more susceptible to manipulation. Participation in these organisations can increase the likelihood of their exposure to sexual violence — as victims, perpetrators, or both. Age, too, exacerbates the influence that other risk factors may have on an individual. For example, situations of instability can limit the means for education and employment, inciting youth to join parties to a conflict because of their frustration with constrained future opportunities, exacerbating risk for not only victimisation but also perpetration of sexual violence.

Several other characteristics may influence an individual's or community's risk of conflict-related sexual violence, including actual or presumed race, ethnicity, political opinion, or relationship to enemy fighters. Certain circumstances may also matter, such as displacement or detention status, the presence of occupying forces in a community, or increasing political or electoral violence, including targeted violence against women human rights defenders and political activists on social media or elsewhere. Protection programming may also inadvertently prioritise certain racial, ethnic, or religious groups over others. As such, it is critical to take an intersectional approach to understand the way multiple aspects of a person's or community's identity or relative position in a hierarchy of power may give rise to compounded vulnerability and discrimination. For example, women of childbearing age in a particular ethnic group may be targeted for forced pregnancy or forced abortion in contexts of ethnic cleansing. Similarly, men of “fighting age” may be targeted for either recruitment or elimination and subjected to sexualised forms of harm in the process. Rural indigenous women associated with political opposition may be violated by armed actors and struggle for access to and recognition by the legal system. Women’s access to these areas, for example, found that support programs significantly improve both perceived social inclusion and economic well-being for survivors of sexual violence and others, with the effects of economic well-being greater for survivors than other women. From a practical guidance standpoint, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action (2015) provides valuable guidance for humanitarian actors seeking to reduce risk of gender-based violence in humanitarian emergency settings.

UNDERSTANDING PERPETRATION

Disaggregation of conflict-related sexual violence is critical for effective prevention, which must be context-sensitive and target specific forms of harm and perpetrator motives. Foundational to these efforts is the critical need to ensure that any prevention approach responds to the power imbalances, differential forms of discrimination and gender inequalities fuelling this violence. Sexual violence is not a tactic of warfare in all conflicts. The forms of sexual violence, identities of the perpetrator(s) (i.e., the armed group), identities of the targeted group(s) (i.e., survivors), motivations for perpetration and locations of perpetration differ within and across conflicts. Documenting variations in sexual violence perpetration helps clarify its range of forms, motives, and circumstances — including when it is used as a tactic of war.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND RISK MITIGATION

Certain conditions and circumstances may reduce risk of exposure to conflict-related sexual violence, as well. For example, certain factors are understood to be protective from gender-based violence generally. These include laws, norms, and relationships that are based on gender equality, as well as women's access to secondary and higher education, employment, and general empowerment.

There is limited research on factors and interventions that serve to protect individuals from conflict-related sexual violence, specifically. However, some studies do indicate the importance of support for survivors, including increasing social inclusion and reducing stigma and shame as critical ways to prevent further harm. A study examining social relationships and re-integration in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, found that support programs significantly improve both perceived social inclusion and economic well-being for survivors of sexual violence and others, with the effects of economic well-being greater for survivors than other women. From a practical guidance standpoint, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action (2015) provides valuable guidance for humanitarian actors seeking to reduce risk of gender-based violence in humanitarian emergency settings.

Protection and natural resources

Armed groups may engage in illicit extraction of natural resources, often to fund their operations and continue to fuel conflict. Sexual violence is used as a tactic of intimidation and social control to displace populations from settlements surrounding natural resources, disproportionately affecting ethnic minority and indigenous populations. Women living in proximity to mining sites are at heightened vulnerability of sexual exploitation, forced prostitution and trafficking. Women environmental rights defenders have been targeted specifically. Protective programming in this context must be flexible and attuned to women’s needs. Some women rely on access to these areas for their livelihood, including to access employment. Rather than limiting women’s access to these areas, for example, protective programming should focus on improving security to limit sexual violence while maintaining access.
A CLOSER LOOK

It is critical to avoid approaching conflict-related sexual violence as a single phenomenon because it has many forms, perpetrators, and survivor profiles, and can happen at different frequencies across contexts. Scholars have noted that armed groups within the same country and conflict can perpetrate sexual violence to different degrees or at different times, and some may barely commit it at all. Groups can also have varied “sexual violence repertoires”, which include the different forms of sexual violence that groups perpetrate. Further, women, including female combatants, are sometimes perpetrators.

Motivation

Analysing the repertoires of sexual violence by armed groups reveals differential motivations behind perpetration. These differences do not reflect or imply a hierarchy of wartime horrors, but instead highlight how prevention efforts must be comprehensive to combat the myriad ways in which sexual violence can be weaponized.

Perpetrators may take advantage of collapsed protection infrastructure or a general context of impunity. Even seemingly random or individual actions may be connected to, or influenced by, a surrounding armed conflict. Sexual violence is also committed in furtherance of some organisational policy or advantage as a tactic of war. It may be authorised or ordered by command, either explicitly or implicitly.

Variation

The perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence is deeply rooted in patriarchy and other forms of structural gender inequality. Women and girls across the world suffer conflict-related sexual violence at the hands of soldiers, traffickers, terrorists, and even family members. Recently, there is increased awareness of how gender norms can drive the use of conflict-related sexual violence to punish or emasculate men, boys and persons with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics.

Research has also produced useful insights regarding organisational structures of rebel groups and non-state actors. Findings have shown, for example, that groups that engage in forced recruitment practices are more likely to perpetrate gang rape than other groups, possibly to forge intragroup cohesion through shared transgression. Some groups demonstrate selectivity in their use of sexual violence. For example, the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia prohibited sexual violence generally while still institutionalising forced marriage as a way to create a new ethnic group or new generation of laborers, respectively.

Scholars have also studied restraint shown by armed groups. Controlling the commission of sexual violence in armed conflict is often due to ideology. Leftist organisations promoting structural gender equality, for example, risk undermining their ideological position and may lose legitimacy by perpetrating sexual violence. In contrast, some scholars have observed that ideologically conservative armed groups, including religious extremists, may perpetrate higher rates of sexual violence, in line with ideologies that perpetuate gender inequality.

For rebel groups and non-state actors in particular, prevention targeting perpetration requires disaggregation of motive in order to effectively incentivise their prohibition of sexual violence, including from political and ideological standpoints. Given the critical role gender norms play in armed actors commission of or restraint from sexual violence, prevention efforts should be informed by an analysis of power and gender in the given context.

Regardless of how or why they are perpetrated, acts of conflict-related sexual violence all harm those who experience them, leaving physical, psychological and social impacts. These acts can also be crimes under national or international criminal law. For all these reasons, States have a duty to prevent harm, protect the population and provide accountability for the full range of these acts of conflict-related sexual violence.

Rebel groups and organisational structure

An off-duty soldier rapes a woman he encounters in town
One or more members of a group takes advantage of chaos in acute conflict to sexually assault neighbour(s) from a different ethnic group
Mid-level commanders keep women in private apartments, using them for sexual services and sharing them with comrades without fear of punishment
Border authorities routinely and collectively demand sexual acts from persons fleeing conflict in exchange for border crossing without fear of punishment
Armed actors rape civilians to intimidate political opponents or displace communities from their territory
State actors subject detainees to sexual humiliation or torture in the course of interrogation
Terrorist organisations abduct and sell women and girls into slavery to finance terrorist activities
Armed actors force female members to take oral contraception to undergo abortions, to avoid pregnancy while in service
Rank and file members of armed groups rape civilians to create bonds of friendship and trust between forcibly recruited members and to signal masculinity
Armed groups use sexual violence as a tactic of genocide and ethnic cleansing

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Some groups may recruit members who are already ideologically aligned and do not require socialisation, while others may show restraint in order to recruit women. Some organisations may recruit women as a way to create a new ethnic group or new generation of laborers, respectively. Some organisations may recruit women as a way to create a new ethnic group or new generation of laborers, respectively.

Note, however, that while the presence of women combatants may indicate an ideological commitment to gender equality, this may not deter sexual violence. Organisations relying on civilian support or assistance may show restraint in order to build trust with the local community. Some organisations may recruit members who are already ideologically aligned and do not require socialisation, while others may show restraint in order to recruit women. Note, however, that while the presence of women combatants may indicate an ideological commitment to gender equality, this may not deter sexual violence.

For rebel groups and non-state actors in particular, prevention targeting perpetration requires disaggregation of motive in order to effectively incentivise their prohibition of sexual violence, including from political and ideological standpoints. Given the critical role gender norms play in armed actors commission of or restraint from sexual violence, prevention efforts should be informed by an analysis of power and gender in the given context.
This Framework conceptualises the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence as having two main aspects: preventing occurrence of conflict-related sexual violence and preventing further impact to a survivor or community once the violence has already occurred.

The first aspect refers to preventing the occurrence, escalation, and recurrence of conflicts-related sexual violence. This requires a) building upon broader efforts to prevent conflict and atrocities, as well as gender inequality generally; b) developing structural and operational approaches (such as strengthening social norms and rule of law and developing early warning systems indicators specifically focused on conflict-related sexual violence); c) interventions tailored to diverse perpetrators and specific forms of conflict-related sexual violence; and d) women’s meaningful engagement in peace processes, to increase chances of more durable and stable peace. This first area of prevention is referred to as “preventing occurrence”. It conceptually includes the public health concepts of “primary” and “secondary” prevention, which aim to keep harm from happening in the first place, and then to detect its occurrence early and intervene to control its spread.

As conflict-related sexual violence also can include efforts to reduce its harmful impacts after occurrence, so as to avoid deepening harm to survivors and their communities. In a humanitarian and international security context, this might refer to the work of first line responders and service providers, who can mitigate the immediate impacts of violence through, inter alia, medical care, including sexual and reproductive health and mental health services; psychosocial support; care for children born of rape; safe shelter; and police protection. Efforts may also be longer-term in scope, focusing on peacebuilding and creating security in the community or society at large after violence has occurred. These measures might include peacebuilding or transitional justice efforts, including access to reparations. For both aspects of prevention, this Framework adopts the concept of an ecological model as an additional organising system. Here, an ecological approach helps conceptualise how efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence may be enacted at multiple, interacting levels: supranational (including regional and international), institutional / structural, community, and individual.

At the supranational level, measures refer to prevention efforts that operate above or between States, at regional or international levels. At the institutional and structural level, measures include systematic prevention efforts, often undertaken by State entities, with measures taken on large scales, often nationally. At the community level, approaches address social dynamics and relationships, such as supporting community-based movements aimed at preventing conflict and reducing gender inequality and stigma. At the individual level, prevention measures focus on survivors and their immediate family members. In some cases, it may also focus on perpetrators.

For both aspects of prevention, this section highlights key approaches relevant to preventing the occurrence of conflict-related sexual violence, in particular. This includes efforts to prevent escalation and recurrence.

The below table presents concrete examples of approaches to the “prevention of occurrence”, organized by the social or political levels at which they operate. These approaches aim to address occurrence, escalation, and recurrence of conflict-related sexual violence, while also addressing underlying conditions of gender-based violence and conflict, and also in combination with conflict-related sexual violence by targeting its occurrence, escalation, and recurrence.

At the supranational level, prevention measures focus on survivors and their immediate family members. In some cases, it may also focus on perpetrators.
**Level of Operation**

**Preventive Approaches to Prevent Occurrence of Gender-based Sexual Violence**

- **Institutional and Structural**
  - Laws, policies, institutions
    - Legal frameworks that aim to eliminate gender inequality and address gender-based violence generally, as well as conflict-related sexual violence specifically.
    - Inclusion of sexual violence prevention measures in ceasefire negotiations and monitoring, of women in negotiating bodies.
    - Gender-sensitive justice and security sector reform aimed at increasing human security, possibly including engagement with police, military, and non-state armed groups; enhanced effectiveness of peace operations to detect and respond to risks of conflict-related sexual violence, asset with law reform, contribute to early warning efforts and targeted tools, and promote community-level political engagement.

- **Gender-based violence prevention efforts, often undertaken by State entities. These measures are taken at large scale, often nationally.**

- **General Education**
  - Policies and approaches to scale up comprehensive sexuality education that is age-, and culturally-appropriate and which focuses on gender equality, respect, consent, and healthy family and intimate relationships.
  - Human rights education for community members to clarify understanding of rights and prohibited behaviours.

- **Security forces and personnel of armed groups**
  - Codes of conduct, training on attitudes / protocols / responses with military / peacekeepers / police / aid workers; policies to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse; deployment or increased recruitment of female officers.

- **Humanitarian and human rights law**
  - Direct engagement with armed actors (both command level and ground troops) to understand their structures and priorities, in order to understand how to disseminate international and national countermeasures to sexual violence.
  - Committed national and local authorities and community-based organisations to effectively monitor and respond to sexual violence.

- **Development of comprehensive mechanisms**
  - Provision of foot and vehicle patrols and security details to vulnerable areas; establishment of safety protocols.

- **Human rights education for community members to clarify understanding of rights and prohibited behaviours.**

**Laws, policies, (continued)**

- **Peacebuilding for prevention of sexual violence**
  - Supporting and protection efforts focused on those in remote and rural areas where justice and protection systems may be weak.
  - Engagement and protection of specific groups
    - Support and protection efforts focused on internally or internationally displaced populations, to reduce compounding vulnerabilities to sexual violence, trafficking, and displacement.

**PREVENTING THE OCCURRENCE, ESCALATION, AND RECURRENCE OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Fig 6
PREVENTING OCCURRENCE: THEMATIC ISSUES

The section provides additional background and discussion of certain approaches and themes featured in the above table on the prevention of occurrence, escalation, and recurrence of conflict-related sexual violence. It describes fundamental, structural, longer-term prevention approaches and nearer-term, operational and programmatic ones.

Elimination of gender inequality: Fundamental and cross-cutting

The elimination of gender inequality is a fundamental and cross-cutting aspect of prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. It should inform all aspects of work aiming to prevent conflict-related sexual violence. Research has indicated a correlation between the level of gender equality in a country and the tendency to commit atrocities like conflict-related sexual violence. Indeed, conflict prevention efforts, including by armed groups or terrorist organisations.

Political engagements that support the peaceful resolution of conflict and prevent relapses into violence and insecurity. Political engagements that support the peaceful resolution of conflict and prevent relapses into violence and insecurity. Political engagements that support the peaceful resolution of conflict and prevent relapses into violence and insecurity.

Community awareness and mobilisation around issues of gender equality, anti-discrimination, intrafamilial violence, and the forms and impacts of conflict-related sexual violence, potentially including: Education on rights related to sexual coercion, increasing opportunities for women to participate in political, economic, and social activities, engaging with men and boys, including on issues of masculinity, gender equality, family relationships, and human rights generally.

Sustainable and climate-resilient livelihood options, including through investments in nature-based solutions, for local communities suffering from compounded impacts of climate change and conflict.

Reducing military spending and increased investment in human security and social support

Military spending closely relates to broader development goals and disarmament efforts. Article 26 of the United Nations Charter recognises the need to maintain the peace and security with the least diversion of the world's economic and human resources to arms. Despite an understanding of the interconnectedness between military spending, development, arms, and armed conflict, military spending has continued to increase in recent years. A growth in military spending can negatively impact international security by, inter alia, spurring arms races, inciting increased military spending elsewhere or, most importantly, diverting funds away from social infrastructure and other development and human security priorities. In fact, military spending is so high that reallocation of small percentages of the overall budget can make significant strides in developing social infrastructure.

Only four of the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, including 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015) and 2143 (2013) on preventing gender-based discrimination, ensuring access to development and implementation of laws protecting equal rights and prohibiting gender-based discrimination, ensuring access to education for women and girls alongside their male counterparts, and promoting full and effective participation of all people regardless of gender in the public and political life of the country.

Work surrounding the fifth Sustainable Development Goal on the promotion of gender equality offers additional possible prevention efforts. The fundamental work of building gender equality is broader than this Framework and is guided by myriad other guidance documents.

Disarmament and arms control

Human suffering and destabilisation resulting from illicit arms trafficking has been historically recognised.14 integrated into conflict prevention efforts,15 and aligned with the women, peace, and security agenda.16 The ubiquity of small arms and light weapons in conflict-affected areas destabilises a community at one level and also enables individual armed actors to commit atrocities against civilians without restraint. Indeed, conflict-related sexual violence is directly correlated with increased militarisation, resource of hostilities, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the proximity of arms bearers to civilian populations.17 The illicit flow of small arms and light weapons facilitates conflict-related sexual violence,18 including fuelling insecurity for internally displaced women and girls, and allowing transnational smugglers, traffickers, and armed groups to operate. Additionally, research suggests that gun ownership is associated with expressions of masculinity, power, and control,19 operating as an additional driver of conflict-related sexual violence.

Disarmament and arms control are thus key to preventing atrocities like conflict-related sexual violence.20 Importantly, the Arms Trade Treaty (2012) connects the export of arms with the risk of gender-based violence. Pursuant to Article 6, State Parties cannot authorise arms transfers if there is a risk that they will be used in the commission of war crimes, which can include some forms of conflict-related sexual violence. Further, Article 7(4) requires State Parties to assess the risk of arms “being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence against women and girls.” However, there is little indication that States consistently conduct this risk assessment.

Member States have also begun reporting on their efforts to conduct a gender analysis when implementing the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) (2001). More can be done to ensure its application, and for more gender-responsive and transformative approaches to all arms control and disarmament.22 Reducing military spending and increased investment in human security and social support

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PREVENTION OF CRSV: A FRAMEWORK

2467 (2019), reference military expenditure. They take a limited focus on small arms and light weapons, which only account for a fraction of global military spending. High military spending in post-conflict settings, however, significantly increases the risk of recurrence of conflict. It also has potential impacts on broader gender relations in society, with high levels of spending correlating with lower levels of women’s equality regarding choice, agency and participation in decision-making during and post-conflict.

Realizing military spending to the development of robust social infrastructure is thus a critical preventive measure linked to conflict and sexual violence. It will reinforce efforts towards gender equality and shift militarised narratives of resolution towards cooperation, trust-building, and dialogue.

Accountability through laws, prosecution, and sanctions

Accountability for conflict-related sexual violence can contribute to prevention; it can be strengthened through legal frameworks, prosecution and sanctions. These efforts should be made in alignment with General Recommendation 31 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2014), which outlines the responsibility of States to develop robust legal frameworks that address all forms of gender-based violence, while also taking concrete measures to increase access to justice through full implementation and enforcement of these laws.

Strengthening legal frameworks for gender-based and international crimes

As noted in Security Council resolution 2467 (2019), strong legal frameworks and justice institutions are important aspects of the fight against conflict-related sexual violence. Laws have preventative value. First, the criminalisation of gender-based violence and atrocities indicates what is and what is not acceptable behaviour in a society, holding tremendous normative value and contributing to the rule of law. Criminalisation may also increase vulnerability and perpetuate harmful norms, such as through the criminalisation of certain sexual orientations and gender identities. In these instances, legal protection mechanisms may need to be implemented. Second, these laws and institutions may also have preventative value as robust frameworks to punish gender-based violence and atrocity crimes are a necessary first step in making accountability efforts possible later, should these acts occur.

Unfortunately, domestic legal frameworks are often inadequate to comprehensively address conflict-related sexual violence. As a threshold matter, criminal code provisions may need to account for victims of all genders, elimination of defense provisions that allow rapists to evade conviction by marrying their victims, and repeal of provisions criminalizing consensual sexual acts between members of the same sex. Procedural reform may also be necessary. For example, rules of evidence and criminal procedure in cases of gender-based violence should be survivor-centred and minimize risks of re-traumaisation or physical danger – before, during, or after trial. UN Security Council resolution 2467 (2019) outlines several additional procedural measures that States should take, including the elimination of corroboration requirements that discriminate against victims as witnesses and complainants, and providing access to legal aid, meaningful witness protection, and protective methods of testifying consistent with rights of the accused.

It is essential to develop multiple avenues to accountability for conflict-related sexual violence. National courts play an increasingly critical role. To maximise domestic courts’ ability to address international crimes including conflict-related sexual violence, a national legal framework must incorporate relevant aspects of international criminal law and international humanitarian law. States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) should ensure its full domestication and address any potential conflicts with substantive and procedural aspects of existing domestic law. Domestic legal systems faced with crimes committed prior to their enactment or domestication of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide provisions may also need to address potential retroactivity challenges and avoid complications related to the principle of nullem criminis sine lege (legal principle), which can cause an accountability gap for crimes committed decades ago. This may require legislators and the judiciary to clarify the applicability of customary international law in domestic criminal proceedings. Since these trials often happen years or decades after the commission of crime, legal systems may also need to repeal statutes of limitations for rape and other sexual offenses to preserve the chance of future prosecution under either international or national law.

Additional provisions may be valuable in terms of strengthening chances of legal accountability for conflict-related sexual violence. These include ensuring clear mechanisms for the submission of amicus curiae briefs to assist local judges in their consideration of charges of conflict-related sexual violence as an international crime, especially useful in cases of sexual and gender-based crimes, where the international jurisdiction is complex and dynamic.

To further close the impunity gap for international crimes including conflict-related sexual violence, national legislation should also clarify and strengthen the operationalization of principles of “universal jurisdiction”, whereby national courts may prosecute atrocities committed by perpetrators who are not nationals of the territory or against its own citizens. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 impose an obligation of all states to prosecute “grave breaches” of international humanitarian law; the 1984 Convention Against Torture mentions the principle as a universal standard. The threat of prosecution in multiple countries, through extradition or even through unexpected personal arrest abroad, may serve as a deterrent for certain actors.

Finally, legislative frameworks should clarify the extent to which survivors of atrocities crimes including conflict-related sexual violence can access reparations – including through administrative mechanisms or judicial processes. These legislative provisions can lay the groundwork for preventing further psychosocial, physical, and economic harm to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and others.

There are a number of tools available to guide domestic legislators in their law reforms efforts. In 2021, the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict developed model legislation on the investigation and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence. In addition, United Nations entities such as UNODC and UN Women have developed model legislation for a number of related criminal justice matters, including violence against women, the trafficking in persons, rights of victims of terrorism, and child witnesses and victims of crime.

Investigation and prosecution

While legal accountability for conflict-related sexual violence is essential in its own right, the preventive effect of prosecution is not well understood. Scholars have generally focused on whether the prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence has been associated with a reduction of these acts in the same country or context, but recent research indicates that there is not a positive effect of trials on subsequent sexual violence by nonstate armed groups. However, the United Nations posits that prosecution has value as a form of prevention and deterrence, and that judicial processes have preventative value in myriad other ways. First, criminal trials reinforce societal condemnation of violence and help counter impunity. Outright signals of impunity, including amnesty agreements, are associated with continued or increased sexual violence. Second, increased awareness or prospects of prosecution for conflict-related sexual violence may disincentive armed actors. Deterrence theory posits in part that, where actors act rationally, prosecution may disincentivise future criminality if the chance of punishment is certain and consistent. For this reason, predictability of investigation of conflict-related sexual violence may signal a greater likelihood of prosecution and thus have deterrent effect on certain armed actors. Consistency of and public awareness about the prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence may optimize its deterrent effect. Third, accountability and justice processes counter impunity, which is tantamount to a license to rape, and its embedding effect on perpetrators and potential perpetrators.

Sanctions

Sanctions tools offer significant – and, as yet, largely unexploited – potential to advance protection from conflict-related sexual violence. The threat of sanctions sends a powerful political signal that can alter the behaviour of parties to conflict. For those operating beyond the reach of the rule of law or for those who do not fear judicial accountability, sanctions in the form of arms embargoes, travel bans and asset freezes can remove their means of doing harm, divest them of resources and limit their freedom of manoeuvre. The application of targeted sanctions can increase the cost and consequences of conflict-related sexual violence, and as such establish deterrence and enhance prevention of such crimes. Sanctions as a means of political pressure reinforces the gravity of sexual violence as a threat to security and an impediment to the restoration of peace, and can generate political commitments from the relevant parties to put in place concrete prevention measures.

While legal accountability for conflict-related sexual violence is essential in its own right, the preventive effect of prosecution is not well understood. Scholars have generally focused on whether the prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence has been associated with a reduction of these acts in the same country or context, but recent research indicates that there is not a positive effect of trials on subsequent sexual violence by nonstate armed groups. However, the United Nations posits that prosecution has value as a form of prevention and deterrence, and that judicial processes have preventative value in myriad other ways. First, criminal trials reinforce societal condemnation of violence and help counter impunity. Outright signals of impunity, including amnesty agreements, are associated with continued or increased sexual violence. Second, increased awareness or prospects of prosecution for conflict-related sexual violence may disincentive armed actors. Deterrence theory posits in part that, where actors act rationally, prosecution may disincentivise future criminality if the chance of punishment is certain and consistent. For this reason, predictability of investigation of conflict-related sexual violence may signal a greater likelihood of prosecution and thus have deterrent effect on certain armed actors. Consistency of and public awareness about the prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence may optimize its deterrent effect. Third, accountability and justice processes counter impunity, which is tantamount to a license to rape, and its embedding effect on perpetrators and potential perpetrators.


These resolutions have expressed the link between the conflict-related sexual violence agenda and the Security Council sanctions regimes in increasingly precise and operational terms, including by reaffirming the Council’s commitment to adopt sanctions against persistent perpetrators of sexual violence, and by mandating information sharing and cooperation between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Security Council sanctions committees as well as their expert panels and monitoring teams.
Since 2016, the Security Council has also considered the imposition of thematic sanctions, to target individuals associated with terrorist groups and networks involved in sexual violence, sexual slavery and trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation in connection with armed conflict. This reflects the newfound recognition of sexual violence as not only a tactic of war, but also a tactic of terrorism, directly related to the recruitment and resourcing strategy of violent extremist groups – most notably, ISIS, Boko Haram and Al Shabaab.66 Significantly, Security Council resolution 2331 (2016) expresses for the first time the nexus between conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking in armed conflict and terrorism.67 It calls for sanction measures against members of terrorist groups responsible for sexual violence or the trade and trafficking of women and girls.68

In spite of the normative developments at the level of sanctions resolutions, the current practice of Security Council targeted sanctions to address conflict-related sexual violence remains inconsistent across and within sanctions regimes. Individuals and entities who have crimes of sexual violence added to the narrative accounts of their violations are not always designated primarily on the ground of rape or sexual violence. Furthermore, the parties listed in the annual reports of the Security-General are not consistently the individuals and entities designated by sanctions committees. Persistent perpetrators listed by the Secretary-General should be referred for the consideration of relevant sanctions committees.

Enhancing overall compliance of parties to conflict also requires that sanctions and judicial accountability measures work in tandem. Therefore, the recipe for transformation necessitates both sanctions for perpetrators and justice and reparations for victims. There is room for creativity here. To extend accountability into the private sector, for example, private companies can be encouraged to file public commitments to refrain from investing in third-party entities that may be financing human rights abuses, including conflict-related sexual violence. Specific measures to improve effectiveness of the sanctions tool include:

- Continuing efforts to ensure sexual violence as part of the designation criteria for sanctions, particularly stand-alone designation criteria in resolutions updating all relevant sanctions regimes. However, once designation criteria have been adopted, they must be activated;
- Enhancing cooperation between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Panels of Experts of Security Council Sanctions Committees; and deepening the expertise on conflict-related sexual violence of the Panels;
- Strengthening the information on conflict-related sexual violence to Sanctions Committee, including through the inclusion of sexual violence information and listing recommendations in the reports of Panel of Experts to respective Sanctions Committees, as well as more regular briefings by Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict;
- Developing guidance, protocols and training materials for investigation of conflict-related sexual violence by Panels of Experts; and
- Evaluation of the impact of sanctions on listed individuals in terms of deterrence and behavioural change.

Crucially, in engaging national authorities in affected countries, emphasis should not only be placed on sanctions and punitive measures, but primarily on the support that the United Nations can provide in aid of national efforts to deal with the problem. Finally, Member States can also coordinate the use of unilateral national sanctions and regional sanctions to maximise collective impact, especially in contexts where there are no United Nations sanctions regimes or there is a lack of consensus in the Security Council that may paralyse sanctions regimes.

**Perpetration in detention settings**

As recognised in Security Council resolution 2467 (2019), conflict-related sexual violence occurs in detention settings and detainees are at heightened risk of harm. Extensive guidance exists defining detention and laying out the requirements for humane treatment of detainees, including in situations of armed conflict.81 International criminal law jurisprudence has further established that sexual violence during international and non-international armed conflict can amount to torture.106 Conflict-related sexual violence may be perpetuated at any point during detention, including during capture and arrest; interrogation; transfers, as perpetrated by personnel and other detainees; and body searches, as well as upon admission or during detention. Detention settings in armed conflict exacerbate existing unequal power dimensions between personnel and detainees, increasing vulnerability and the risk of the occurrence of sexual violence.

Women and girls, in particular lawyers, journalists, and activists, are often detained as punishment for their or a male relative’s opposition to a regime, as a way to disrupt family and community bonds, or as a way to gain information about male relatives.114 Men and boys in detention are often perceived as either enemy combatantes or as having connections with opposition groups, leaving them at heightened risk of harm in detention settings, including to coerce confessions or extract information. Individuals of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics can also be targeted for sexual violence in detention due to their perceived violation of dominant gender norms.115 Sexual violence in detention may also be used as a tactic of terror towards opposition communities.116

**Conflict-related trafficking in persons**

Trafficking in persons, a fundamental violation of human rights, is used in conflict contexts for purposes including sexual exploitation, forced and child marriage, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, forced marriage, forced labour, domestic servitude and forced criminality, and disproportionately affects women and girls.117 Trafficking in persons can occur where there is displacement across borders or internally within a State and it may be perpetrated by terrorist organisations, extremist groups, State actors or non-State armed groups, as well as other forms of gender-based violence, trafficking in persons constituting sexual violence stems from existing inequalities and power imbalances.

Refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, persons seeking asylum, persons displaced across borders and persons with irregular migration status are vulnerable to trafficking in persons. Conflict-related sexual violence may itself be cause for displacement or seeking asylum, including for reasons of gender-related persecution. Indigenous populations often experience forced displacement or are at risk given existing political and economic marginalization leading to migration in search of new opportunities. These populations may also be subject to statelessness.

Children experience heightened vulnerability, particularly those who are displaced, unaccompanied, separated from their families, seeking international protection, or born of wartime sexual violence, and are often neglected in child protection systems and disproportionately targeted by armed groups. Children may be recruited by armed groups into combatant roles; into supporting roles, for example, to gather intelligence; as sexual slaves; as spouses to armed actors, for example, to control local populations or fulfil sexual demands of armed actors; and as rewards to armed actors or associated groups.118 Early child marriage is often a harmful coping strategy, as it may be pursued as a source of economic support for families receiving limited humanitarian assistance.119 In these ways, trafficking of children is linked to the sixth grave violations against children in armed conflict.120
Victims of trafficking are often targeted through abduction, including through attacks on schools or at internally displaced persons sites and refugee settlements. Survivors of abduction may be arbitrarily detained or held indefinitely at displacement sites. Children, too, are often arrested and detained, often for alleged associations with armed groups. Women and girl victims of forced marriage are also frequently presumed to be associated with armed groups, and may be arbitrarily detained after release. Men and boys are often forgotten victims of trafficking, a gender bias which limits service provisions and anti-trafficking programming.

The UNODC Human Trafficking First Aid Kit for Law Enforcement Agencies can be consulted to understand the complexities of identification and further documentation of these crimes.

Addressing the nexus between trafficking, terrorism, and conflict-related sexual violence

In armed conflict, terrorist organisations and extremist groups may engage in trafficking in persons129 to incentivise recruitment; generate revenue; terrorise populations into compliance; displace communities from strategic areas; indoctrinate communities through forced marriage; establish, alter, dissolve, or destabilise kinship ties and social structures; establish statehood by controlling reproductive capacity; raise a new generation in their image; elicit operational intelligence; entrench ideology by suppressing women’s rights; extort ransoms from families; gift as in-kind compensation or payment to fighters to resell or exploit; and hold women and girls as hostage to extract ransom payments; gift as in-kind compensation or payment to fighters to resell or exploit; hold women and girls in sexual slavery for use as human shields and suicide bombers.130 These examples indicate the use of trafficking in persons as ‘part of the political economy of war’,131 with women themselves viewed as the ‘stakes of war’.132

Due diligence obligations under international law requires the prevention of and response to trafficking in persons, including in armed conflict. Prevention requires a victim- and survivor- centred, trauma-informed and human rights-based approach that is not sidelined within broader law enforcement and security sector efforts.133 Persons fleeing armed conflict are often vulnerable to trafficking due to disruptions of protective social networks and new risks arising during forced internal or cross- border displacement.134 Prevention efforts must strengthen relevant infrastructure, including the structures and risk factors enabling displacement, to mitigate these disruptions. Given the extremely low prosecution of trafficking in persons cases, accountability is needed to act as a deterrent and curb impunity. Criminal justice systems should be sensitive to the complex experience of survivors of trafficking, safeguard victims’ rights and ensure that they are not punished for acts committed while subject to the control of traffickers.

This is particularly true for survivors with alleged affiliations with terrorist organisations, who may be seen as perpetrators of unlawful activities that they were forced to commit.135 This can mean that, instead of being seen as entitled to protection and support, these survivors are targeted by State counter-terrorism measures and vulnerable to arrest and detention. Broad application of counter-terrorism laws has also led to forced disappearances of men and boys.136 It is imperative that these survivors are seen as victims of violent crime and not stigmatised or penalised for actions taken while under the control of terrorist groups. Victims, too, may be open to classification as victims of terrorism. However, the benefits of this designation require further exploration.137

Early warning systems

Early warning systems can contribute to the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence insofar as they measure risks through a set of indicators that can be targeted and then, with adequate systems and resources, mitigated by preventative action. Sexual violence is often included as an early warning indicator of violence, including of violent conflict and atrocity crimes. Early warning systems can also be designed to measure the risk of sexual violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, or of the violation of human rights more broadly. They can also help detect conflict-related sexual violence indirectly, by forced recruitment. Gender-sensitive analysis is thus critical to identify the most effective, context-specific indicators of violence. Gender-sensitive indicators, often informed by sex-disaggregated data, can enhance early warning capacity by improving the predictability of risk.138

Monitoring indicators is central to early warning systems and can be carried out by several actors, including human rights organisations, civil society organisations, women’s protection advisors, activists and journalists. Actors from diverse backgrounds, including gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age and religion, are needed to effectively monitor indicators. It is essential to provide safe and effective mechanisms for reporting observed changes in indicators.139

A diverse set of actors provides insights into different social dynamics, enabling identification of subtle changes in community-level relations that may indicate or even contribute to national-level tensions. For example, women may observe changing patterns in how men and boys are spending their time, including attending clandestine political meetings or combat training; the storage of weapons in homes or community centres; or occurrences of domestic violence or upticks in other local-level indicators of community stress.140

Youth in particular are keenly aware of shifting social and political dynamics, in part because they are increasingly more connected to and engaged with social media and other digital information platforms, allowing them to both detect concerning developments and disseminate information quickly. Similarly, gender and sexual minorities may have specific and valuable observations about evolving dynamics in different, often invisible corners of the community. For guidance on how to work with local communities to develop context-specific indicators, see Gender-Response Early Warning: Overview and How-To Guide.141

Early warning systems include indicators that address military and security factors, humanitarian and social factors, political and legal factors, as well as economic factors. Indicators included below were identified in United Nations publications and frameworks, including the UN Action’s Matrix of Early Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and UN Women’s global study, Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace.142 These indicators are not mutually exclusive and can inform early warning for multiple forms of violence.

Gender-sensitive indicators for conflict prevention early warning systems

• Sex-specific movement of populations
• Increase in female-headed or male-headed households
• Increased harassment, arrest and interrogation of civilian men by security forces
• Changes to patterns of gender roles, e.g., men occupied with political activities or women taking over more productive roles in the household
• Harassment of goods or lack of goods on local markets
• Training in weapons for men, women and children at community levels
• Increased propaganda, news stories, or programmes glorifying militarised masculinities
• Resistance or curtailment of women’s involvement in marketing and trade or in public community discussions
• Increased numbers of meetings by men for men
• Random and arbitrary detention of men
• Increased misogyny or hate speech

Gender-Response Early Warning: Overview and How-To Guide
Early warning indicators for conflict-related trafficking for purposes of prostitution or sexual exploitation

- Abductions and forced disappearances, particularly of children
- Restrictions on educational opportunities, employment opportunities, or access to medical care, forcing civilians to seek these services elsewhere
- Denial of humanitarian access, which may result in displacement
- Implementation of restrictive migration policies
- Increased economic desperation, which may force migration or limit economic opportunities to those requiring protection
- Increased occurrence of climate-related emergencies or of instability surrounding natural resources
- Increased serious acts of violence against women and children, or creation of conditions facilitating acts of sexual violence against those groups, including as a tactic of terror
- Imposition of life-threatening living conditions or the deportation, seizure, collection, segregation, evacuation, or forced displacement or transfer of protected groups, populations or individuals to camps, rural areas, ghettos, or other assigned locations
- Marking of people or their property based on their affiliation to a group
- Increased misogyny or hate speech

Increasing engagement and protection of specific groups

Efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence require inputs from diverse populations, including not only men and women, but also youth and marginalised communities, such as persons with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, persons with disabilities — all of whom may have differing protection insights and needs. Engagement of diverse groups in prevention planning requires an intersectional approach, understanding the multiple and overlapping identities and vulnerabilities different people experience both in peacetime and in times of armed conflict or situations of conflict. For example, women’s rights activists and women human rights defenders may require heightened protection, particularly in times of political tension.

PREVENTING FURTHER IMPACT: POTENTIAL APPROACHES AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

A second major area of prevention focuses on the mitigation of deeper harm to individuals and communities once conflict-related sexual violence has already occurred. This includes both near-term response to recent injury to an individual survivor, as well as longer-term efforts to rebuild and sustain peace at the community level. While these approaches have not all been evaluated for effectiveness across contexts, they may provide illustration of ways to prevent further negative impacts to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and their communities in a multi-layered way.

LEVEL OF OPERATION Approaches to prevent further impact

Supranational
- Access to international protection for children, women, and other victims of sexual violence and human trafficking
- Subnational interventions to provide targeted support to communities
- Gender-sensitive approaches to programming

Supranational
- Studies and data collection on the prevalence of conflict-related trafficking
- Legal and policy frameworks to address trafficking

Institutional / Structural
- Increased access to holistic care for survivors
- Community-based interventions to address stigma and prejudice
- Diversification of programming to meet the needs of survivors

Community
- Implementation of trafficking indicators to identify victims of trafficking
- Access to support, including medical, psychosocial, legal aid, and shelter

Individual
- Awareness-raising campaigns and social mobilization
- Diverse community-based shelter options
- Safe migration pathways to minimize risk of re-trafficking

Law, justice, and policy
- Promotion of legal reforms, enhancing access to justice and accountability (at national and international levels)
- Establishment of inclusive and gender-responsive law enforcement institutions
- Legal and policy frameworks to protect and support survivors

Fig. 7
This section elaborates on aspects of approaches to prevent further harmful impacts to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and their communities.

**Survivor support**

Once an act of conflict-related sexual violence has occurred, it can have many negative physical, psychological, and socio-economic consequences for survivors. Access to immediate, survivor-centred support services (such as medical care, specialised mental healthcare and psychosocial support, safe shelter, socio-economic re-integration and legal aid) is critical, as it can help minimise the harm a survivor experiences as a result of the violence. It is essential that these support services be delivered in a survivor-centred, trauma-informed manner and that they can be accessed by the full spectrum of potential survivors, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Survivor-centred care must also be intersectional, accessible, and properly resourced.

National systems for healthcare, shelter, and justice have primary responsibility for responding to all forms of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence and trafficking in persons. However, much of this work frequently falls to local civil society organisations, which often provide significant first response and ongoing support, also referring survivors to additional specialised services where available. In some humanitarian crisis settings, United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organisations also provide critical assistance. States should ensure that civil society organisations and international entities are able to conduct essential first response and longer-term support work without administrative or political obstruction. Perhaps more importantly, providers at public institutions must be equipped and trained to respond to gender-based violence generally, including with regard to potentially heightened medical, psychological, legal aid, or security needs of survivors who have experienced gang rape by armed actors, sexual torture, or mutilation in prison, or trafficking or enslavement by terrorist organisations.

A survivor-centred approach is critical in all cases.**

**Trafficking in persons**

Survivors of trafficking need specific forms of support, protection, and redress, particularly given their heightened risk for re-trafficking. They need immediate availability and quality support services that must be inclusive and accessible, including access to information on their rights, medical, psychological, social and legal services available to them and how to access them as well as to safe and appropriate accommodation. Reducing the risk of revictimization includes guaranteeing them protection against forcible return. It requires, at a minimum, long-term assistance and protection, which includes highly secure shelter arrangements and specific psychosocial support, as well as other immediate needs such as food, sanitation, clothing, and financial assistance.**

To avoid renewed vulnerability, survivors of trafficking often need identity documents and pathways to regular immigration status if no longer located in their countries of origin. Additionally, because of the close link between the perpetration of trafficking in persons and other severe human rights violations, survivors may be eligible for international protection as refugees or on other humanitarian grounds.**

**Children Born of Wartime Rape**

As captured in the Secretary-General’s Special Report on women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in conflict and children born of sexual violence in conflict (2022),** 146 special attention is due to children born as a result of conflict-related sexual violence. Their conception and birth can be particularly fraught when associated with armed conflict** and may be the result of forced pregnancy in the context of ethnic cleansing or political or religious persecution,** 147 of rape, including for purposes of replenishing an armed group's forces,** 148 or of other forms of sexual violence, including in the context of captivity or of identity and resource-based conflicts.** 149 Women and girls often lack access to contraception or services for safe termination of pregnancies, placing them at risk of illness, injury, or death from illicit, unsafe abortion practices.** 150 Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal mortality in displacement settings.** 151 In some instances, women and girls are held captive to ensure abortion is not possible.** 152

Children conceived of sexual violence are often perceived as being affiliated with parties to conflict and are at risk of severe stigma, infanticide, abandonment, or other physical, psychological, and socioeconomic harms.** 153 Mothers are often revictimised,** 154 and some return to where they were held captive after facing community rejection.** 155 These harms may be exacerbated when a child is born of sexual violence perpetrated by a foreign terrorist fighter,** 156 and these children may not be recognised as victims of terrorism.

Children and mothers are vulnerable to further perpetration of sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking, often because of stigmatisation and socioeconomic precarity.** 157 In countries with discriminatory nationality laws and practices, women may be unable to transfer their nationality to their children, barring them from support services and rendering them stateless.** 158 This makes children increasingly vulnerable to radicalization, abduction and recruitment by armed groups and trafficking.** 159

Prevention of pregnancy in conflict contexts and prevention of further marginalisation for mothers and children is important not only for individual well-being but community recovery as well.**
It is critical to take a comprehensive, survivor-centred approach to prevention interventions at both policy and programmatic levels. These cross-cutting guidance notes can inform prevention approaches across both parts of Framework.

**Comprehensive and multi-level engagement**

At local and national levels, pursue a comprehensive, all-of-society approach to normative change around gender and power both in peacetime and during times of conflict and political unrest. This includes engaging men and boys in transforming social and gender norms, as well as youth and religious leaders. It also calls for partnership between state and civil society to ensure the development of effective interventions to prevent occurrence as well as deepening harm to survivors. Finally, cooperation and coordination between states is also essential, due to the cross-border nature of war, displacement, and protection. Ensure all actors (e.g., state actors, humanitarian actors, civil society organisations, international organisations, donor countries, neighbouring governments, and others with influence on conflict parties) work towards coordinated, mutually enforcing efforts.

**Engage survivors and communities when designing prevention interventions**

Where it is safe and ethical to do so, invite insights from survivors’ advocacy groups about how to reduce vulnerability to conflict-related sexual violence and mitigate its impacts. It is critical to consider a diversity of survivors and communities, also accounting for intersectional vulnerabilities such as those arising from race, gender identity, sexual orientation and indigenous identity. Broader community input in the design and implementation of prevention activities is also critical. Community members have deep insight as to who is at risk, where, and why; they are also agents of prevention. Community engagement in the design and delivery of interventions may contribute to the success of programs aimed at preventing gender-based violence in armed conflict settings. 116

**Engage, support, and protect civil society organisations and human rights defenders**

Whether they are providing survivor care or documenting human rights abuses, civil society organisations and human rights defenders play a critical role in the prevention of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, before, during, and after periods of armed conflict. Some may provide protection and support to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence who may be marginalised due to gender identity, sexual orientation, race, immigration status, or other aspect of identity. Others may document gender-related harms experienced by marginalised communities. Their work complements and often relieves the work of national entities and it is particularly critical in emergency periods. They should be supported financially, administratively, and logistically to the extent possible.

Further, these service providers and human rights defenders, including women’s rights defenders, can be particularly vulnerable to political intimidation and harassment during periods of violence and political unrest. They should be protected to the fullest extent of the law.

**Data**

In conflicts and humanitarian contexts, including post-conflict contexts where access to services, risk of retaliation, high community stigma and political sensitivities may be in effect, any effort to collect information about conflict-related sexual violence is challenging and potentially dangerous. The rate of case reporting is understood to be markedly lower than the actual magnitude of the violence. Under-reporting can be explained by the stigma and shame faced by survivors if they disclose an incident, as well as risks of retaliation; the chronic lack of available services; or multi-level barriers to accessing services. Collecting and sharing survivor data may pose further risk for survivors, their families, communities as well as service providers. Given these risks, alternate data points can be useful to inform prevention programming, focusing on the risks perceived by women and girls if they disclose an incident, as well as risks of retaliation; the chronic lack of available services; or multi-level barriers to accessing services. Collecting and sharing survivor data may pose further risk for survivors, their families, communities as well as service providers. Given these risks, alternate data points can be useful to inform prevention programming, focusing on the risks perceived by women and girls if they disclose an incident, as well as risks of retaliation; the chronic lack of available services; or multi-level barriers to accessing services.

**Disaggregation**

To prevent conflict-related sexual violence, it is critical to have clarity about what form of harm is targeted. Not all forms of conflict-related sexual violence have identical drivers or the same risk factors. Similarly, it is essential to calibrate prevention approaches for different kinds of harm, perpetrators, and survivors. For example, interventions to prevent the sexual exploitation of adolescent boys in displacement might be designed and implemented differently than an intervention to address the abduction of young women by violent extremist organisations. It is critical to develop tailored approaches that are gender- and age-sensitive at a minimum. Research is critical to disaggregation.
When marking the ten-year anniversary of my mandate in 2019, I convened a Survivors’ Hearing at United Nations Headquarters, which included a range of survivors and civil society representatives. At that Hearing, an indigenous woman from Guatemala stated: “We do not want history to repeat itself. We are working for progress, so our children and grandchildren never have to experience what we suffered”.

Survivors are the heart of my mandate and I am guided by their voices, their needs, and their hopes for a world where violent conflict and conflict-related sexual violence no longer occurs. This is one of the many reasons why my Office commemorates the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict every year on 19th June, as an important opportunity to stand in solidarity with the survivors. Over the years, we have harnessed the International Day to highlight emerging issues and neglected perspectives, such as the plight and rights of children born of wartime rape, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sexual violence survivors. This year, in 2022, the commemoration focuses on the launch of this Framework – a new strategy to prevent the occurrence and recurrence of these crimes, through structural and operational measures to mitigate risk and build resilience.

When we look closely at the number of frameworks and Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence, it is clear that we are not short on political promises and commitments. However, we are definitely short on concrete action and resources commensurate with the scale of the problem.

Indeed, it is my vision and my hope that the international community will mobilise to take proactive steps to act upon the multi-level approaches outlined in this Framework.

• For Member States to develop implementation and action plans that are context- and needs- specific;
• For donors to provide not only the political will and advocacy for my mandate but also the financial support through predictable, sustained funding;
• For all relevant actors within and beyond the United Nations system to build the capacity of service providers, implementing partners, survivors, and other practitioners, as well as supportive Member States and those affected by conflict;
• For all relevant actors to build our knowledge base about prevention of conflict-related sexual violence at all levels of our collective work, by gathering and sharing evidence of effective prevention measures across different contexts, with input from survivor advocacy groups where appropriate.

Human dignity demands respect for the right to physical integrity, which is universal and non-negotiable. As we work together to confine sexual violence to the past, we must continually strive to give all survivors a better, brighter future, through inclusive and intersectional approaches that leave no one behind.

Under Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
Pramila Patten
The idea for this Framework was conceived by Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, as part of her mandate under Security Council resolution 1888 (2009). Under SRSG Patten’s leadership, the UN Action Secretariat served as the primary coordinating body for the Framework’s development. Throughout 2021, the UN Action Secretariat gathered inputs and developed the Framework’s preliminary content through a core group of member entities (Chaired by UNHCR, including ODA, OSRSG-VAC, UN Women, OSRSG-CAAC, UNOCT, UNODC, DPPA, UN, UNPAA, OSGEO, UNAIDS, and DPO) with additional feedback and inputs from the wider UN Action network. In 2022, Kim Thuy Seelinger (Center for Human Rights, Gender and Migration at the Institute for Public Health, Washington University in St. Louis) developed the Framework structure and text based on extensive desk research and consultation. Mikaylah Ladue (Princeton University; United States Institute of Peace) provided project coordination and research support. In addition to feedback from UN Action members, drafts benefited from input from members of the Missing Peace Initiative Scholars Network, chaired by the United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action) and the Justice for Victims of Conflict Network (UN Action) while the technical design of the framework was developed by the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict (TOE). The Office was established by Security Council resolution 1888 (2009), one in a series of resolutions recognizing the detrimental impact that sexual violence in conflict has on communities and acknowledging that this crime undermines efforts to peace and security and rebuild societies once a conflict has ended. These resolutions signal a change in the way the international community views and deals with conflict-related sexual violence.

Several entities within the UN system are involved in the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence. The Framework directly benefited from their inputs throughout the drafting process. Relevant entities include:

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

(Office of the SRSG-SVC): The Special Representative serves as the United Nations’ spokesperson and political advocate on conflict-related sexual violence. She chairs the United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict Network (UN Action) while the technical implementation of the rule of law aspects of her mandate is supported by the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict (TOE). The Office was established by Security Council resolution 1888 (2009), one in a series of resolutions recognizing the detrimental impact that sexual violence in conflict has on communities and acknowledging that this crime undermines efforts to ensure peace and security and rebuild societies once a conflict has ended. These resolutions signal a change in the way the international community views and deals with conflict-related sexual violence.

United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict

(UN Action): UN Action is a network of now 23 United Nations entities working to end sexual violence during and in the wake of conflict. The network is chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC), supported by a Secretariat located in the OSRSG.SVC. It is governed by a Steering Committee consisting of Principals from the 23-member entities. Current members include the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee’s Executive Directorate (CTED), the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG), the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth (OSGEO), the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC), the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (OSRSG-VAC), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Security Council resolution 1888 (2009), the TOE works closely with Governments, United Nations missions and United Nations Country Teams to assist national authorities in establishing institutional safeguards against impunity as part of broader efforts to reinforce the rule of law. The TOE provides support to the investigation of sexual violence crimes, prosecution of perpetrators, adjudication of crimes under civilian and military systems, protection of victims and witnesses and legislative reform efforts. The TOE consists of specialists from the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the SRSG.SVC.

United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict

(TOE): In accordance with its mandate under Security Council resolution 1888 (2009), the TOE works closely with Governments, United Nations missions and United Nations Country Teams to assist national authorities in establishing institutional safeguards against impunity as part of broader efforts to reinforce the rule of law.
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RELATED GUIDANCE AND FRAMEWORKS

Two relevant prevention frameworks include the Framework for Analysis of Atrocity Crimes, which lays out critical risk factors to target for prevention or minimization of harms associated with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence, and RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women, which provides seven inter-related intervention strategies to prevent and respond to violence against women, though not in the context of armed conflict.

While not technically presented as frameworks, substantial guidance exists on the prevention of gender-based violence in the context of humanitarian emergencies, including which may have direct or indirect links to armed conflict. Humanitarian actors, including United Nations Agencies such as UNHCR, UNFPA, UNDP, and UNICEF, have long included gender-based violence as a core aspect of their operations in conflict-affected settings. These entities have ample internal operational guidance regarding provision of support and protection for survivors of gender-based violence and for minimizing its impacts at the community or societal level, including in the context of armed conflict and other humanitarian crises.

Several of these guidance documents address prevention. For example, UNFPA’s Minimum Standards on the Prevention of and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies includes standards to prevent gender-based violence and mitigate its impacts in humanitarian crisis settings. Further, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergency Programming aims to establish a common understanding of what constitutes prevention and response programming in emergencies, including those related to armed conflict. Similarly, UNHCR issued its Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence to protect asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons and returnees affected by diverse contexts, including those of armed conflict. One recent joint policy focuses directly and exclusively on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, the United Nations Field Missions: Preventing and responding to Conflict-related Sexual Violence, explicitly highlights the preventative role of United Nations field missions. Released by OPO, DIPPA, OHCHR and OHRSG-SVC, the policy provides concrete guidance to institutionalise the approach and role of United Nations field missions in preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence.

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<tr>
<th>Document</th>
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<td>What works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls</td>
<td><a href="https://unesdoc.un.org/record/2014/10/1041778877">https://unesdoc.un.org/record/2014/10/1041778877</a></td>
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6 See António Guterres, “Meeting the prevention challenge”, UN Chronicle, vol. 54, No. 3 (2017); A/72/PV.83 and A/72/PV.84; A/72/707 (2018); A/73/990 (2018); 1448, A/74/976 (2020); A/77/5 (2020); A/76/668 (2020); A/73/890 (2019); A/74/976 (2020); A/75/982.


8 A/75/182.

9 See United Nations DPO/DPPA/DCHR/RSRG-SVC, Policy on United Nations Field Missions.

10 A/RES/70/1.


12 A/75/182.

13 See United Nations DPO/DPPA/DCHR/RSRG-SVC, Policy on United Nations Field Missions.

14 A/75/182.

15 See United Nations DPO/DPPA/DCHR/RSRG-SVC, Policy on United Nations Field Missions.

16 S/2022/272.

17 S/2020/487.

18 S/2001/574. In addition, Security Council resolution 1366 (2001), para. 6, provides language on the prevention of conflict, which can aid in understanding the boundary between emergencies and conflict situations: “undertakes to keep situations of potential conflict under close review as part of a conflict prevention strategy and expresses its intention to consider cases of potential conflict brought to its attention by any Member State, or by a State not a Member of the United Nations or by the General Assembly or on the basis of information furnished by the Economic and Social Council”; para. 10, “invites the Secretary-General to refer to the Council information and analyses from within any Member State, or by a State not a Member of the United Nations or by the General Assembly on the Secretary-General’s Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace”, statement, 5 March 2018.

19 A/RES/70/1.


21 A/75/182.
(2) sexual violence as a recruitment tool, including through the promise of wives and access to sex slaves; (3) exploitation of modern and 2242 (2015) on women, peace and security.


For information on the responsibility to protect, see A/RES/60/1, paras. 138-140, stating in part that “Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through and appropriate and necessary means.”

A/71/818.


The Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence on 23 March 2015 made reference to conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist organisations (S/2015/203, para. 61). This link was explicit and further unpacked in the report on 20 April 2016 (S/2016/361, para. 1 and 20), following Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) recognizing that sexual violence can be part of the strategic objectives and ideology of certain terrorist groups. Security Council resolution 2331 (2016) further recognizes the link between trafficking in persons, sexual and gender based violence.


In conversations prior to the adoption of resolution 2331 (2016), six dimensions of sexual violence were identified as used for tactics of terrorism. This includes: (1) sexual violence as part of the political economy of conflict and terrorism, allowing for financing and revenue; (2) sexual violence as a recruitment tool, including the promise of wives and access to sex slaves; (3) exploitation of modern communication technologies, allowing for the sale and trade of persons online for sexual violence and exploitation; (4) instrumentalization of medical professionals to enable sexual violence, including administration of hormone injections to prepare girls for forced marriage and sale; (5) threatened use of sexual violence and abduction to terrorise and forcibly displace targeted minorities, to gain or expand control over contested territories; and (6) destruction of targeted communities, including use of sexual violence to destroy the social fabric of societies.

United Nations Security Council resolution 1820 (2008), para. 4 notes that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide”. Sexual violence has also been legally acknowledged as a component of ethnic cleansing campaigns including, notably, in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, case No. IT-98-33-T, Prosecutor v. Krstic, judgment of 2 August 2001.


See Security Council resolution 2106 (2013), p. 1, “consistent and rigorous prosecution of sexual violence crimes as well as national ownership and responsibility in addressing the root causes of sexual violence in armed conflict are central to deterrence and prevention as is challenging the myths that sexual violence in armed conflict is a cultural phenomenon or inevitable consequence of war or a lesser crime” and 2122 (2013), p. 2-3, “address the gaps and strengthen links between the United Nations peace and security in the field, human rights and development work as a means to address root causes of armed conflict and threats to the security of women and girls in the pursuit of international peace and security”.


World Health Organization, RESPct Women.


For a discussion on the impact of arms on human rights and its relation to conflict and sexual violence, see A/HRC/44/29.


S/2021/1012.


Meihwih Sawari, ‘Impact of Rebel Group Ideology’.


Ragnhild Nordás and Dara Kay Cohen, ‘Conflict-Related Sexual Violence’.


Geneva Call, for example, signs deeds of commitment with armed groups and de facto authorities to urge them to respect norms under international humanitarian and international human rights law. For example, see Geneva Call, ‘Deed of Commitment under Geneva Call for the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict and Towards the Elimination of Gender Discrimination (2020).’


A/HRC/44/29.


The Arms Trade Treaty (A/RES/67/2348); Article 746.

A/CONF.2/192/15.


For more on sexual violence in conflict and the prosecution of atrocity crimes, see Kim Thuy Seelinger and Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Sexual Violence as a Practice of War".


UNODC, Model Law on Trafficking in Persons (2009).

Inter-Parliamentary Union, UNCTC and UNODC, Model Legislative Provisions to Support the Needs and Protect the Rights of Victims of Terrorism (2022).


Helga Malmin Binningsbø and Ragnhild Nordås, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”.

United Nations DPO/OPPA/HCR/SRSGSVC, Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-related Sexual Violence (2022); Murad Code Project, Global Code of Conduct for for Gathering and Using Information about Systematic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (13 April 2022); Sara Ferro Ribeiro and Danai van der Straten Ponthoz, “Responding to Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Crisis Settings” (2022) provides practical, cross-sectoral guidance for creating a safe, enabling environment for survivors to speak about their experiences of gender-based violence including conflict-related sexual violence.

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15 See, generally, All Survivors Project and International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School, Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Detention Settings: Principles and Commentary (2020).

16 A/HRC/37/CRP.3.


20 S/2016/261.

21 A/58/546-S/2003/1053, para. 81, “recruiting and use of child soldiers; killing and maiming of children; rape and other grave sexual violence against children; illicit exploitation of natural resources; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access to children”.


26 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, First Aid Kit for use by Law Enforcement Responders in Addressing Human Trafficking.


29 S/2016/761.

30 S/2017/249.

31 A/HRC/44/46.

32 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Conflict in Ukraine: Key Evidence on Risks of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (2022).

33 Security Council resolution 2331 (2016).

34 See, for example, United Nations, “UN experts call for removal of rights defenders Ramy Shaath and Zyad El-Elaimy from ‘terrorism entities’ list”, press release (11 February 2021).


36 International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Gender-Sensitive Indicators, p. 198.

37 UN Women, Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace.

38 UN Women, Gender-Responsive Early Warning: Overview and How-To Guide (2012).


40 See footnote 40 on intersectional theory.

41 See, for example, S/RES/2242 (2015).

42 Center for Human Rights, Gender and Migration, Gender-based Violence Disclosure Toolkit; Mural Code Project, Global Code of Conduct.


44 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Countering Trafficking in Persons in Conflict Situations Briefing Note (2018); See also the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (A/RES/42/92)(IV) and its 1967 Protocols.

45 S/2022/77.
FRAMEWORK FOR THE PREVENTION OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE