



ICRC

PROMISING PATHWAYS FOR THE PREVENTION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE 2023

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are always prohibited under international law and when occurring during an armed conflict, can constitute a war crime. Sexual violence affects women, girls, men, boys, and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or other gender identities and gender expressions. It affects combatants and civilian populations. It is almost never an isolated issue and is usually part of a pattern of violence linked to other International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations such as torture, murder, looting, child recruitment or unlawful destruction of property. Sexual violence doesn't occur in a vacuum, it is linked to a continuum of pre-existing forms of gender-based violence exacerbated by conflict and violence and normally persists in the post-conflict situation.

Addressing sexual violence is part of ICRC's core humanitarian and legal mandate and preventing it is one of its priorities. In 2022, the ICRC launched the Prevention of Sexual Violence Programme (PSVP), a multi-country, multidisciplinary and results-oriented programme through which the ICRC aims to reduce the risk of sexual violence and/or prevent it. The PSVP focuses on fragile operational contexts that are affected by violence or conflict, or during other crises of humanitarian concern – by addressing underlying attitudes and practices with weapon bearers and communities. Through the PSVP, ICRC also tackles the shared challenge of all humanitarian actors in measuring results of prevention efforts.

This document summarizes some 2023 key learnings from the implementation of the PSVP under its two models:

PSVP MODEL	ARMS CARRIERS MODEL	COMMUNITY MODEL
OBJECTIVE	Reduction of sexual violence perpetrated by weapon bearers whether State Armed Forces (Military and Police), Non-State Armed Groups or gangs.	Reduction of family and community rejections through community-based activities tackling stigma.
HIGHLIGHTED PRACTICE	<p>In 2023, the ICRC piloted a new way to engage with weapon bearers. This new approach reinforces the pre-existing prevention efforts by the ICRC presenting key aspects of International Humanitarian Law in a way that is relatable and actionable by all ranks.</p> <p>It emphasises the different roles that an individual weapon-bearer can take to: prevent the perpetration of sexual violence, reinforce a culture of restraint and survivor-centredness while considering the devastating humanitarian impacts of sexual violence.</p>	<p>In 2023, the ICRC, in partnership with Ethiopian Red Cross and Danish Red Cross, implemented a community outreach programme with conflict-affected populations in Ethiopia addressing stigma against victim/survivors of sexual violence.</p> <p>By training community influencers who then raise awareness of the consequences of stigma, the ICRC has seen positive results within communities and a lowered stigmatisation of victim/survivors of sexual violence.</p>
OUTREACH	<p>Type of weapon bearers: State Armed Forces and Non-State Armed Groups.</p> <p>Individual weapon bearers engaged in the monitoring and evaluation of the PSVP: 1,562 (80% man, 20% female, 0% other/prefer not to say).</p>	<p>Number of communities covered by the outreach: 98</p> <p>Community influencers trained, including members of the Red Cross National Society: 633 (40% men, 52% women, 8% other/prefer not to say), 74 (11%) were engaged in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme.</p> <p>Awareness sessions conducted by community influencers: over 3,000 out of which 905 were monitored.</p> <p>Community members reached: over 45,000.</p> <p>Community members engaged in the monitoring and evaluation: over 14,000.</p>



THREATS x VULNERABILITIES CAPACITIES

=


SEXUAL VIOLENCE RISK



WEAPON BEARERS

Due to its unique mandate, ICRC engages in a confidential manner with armed actors to promote a behaviour that is compliant with the set of principles and rules included IHL and, thus, reduces human suffering during conflicts and other situations of violence. Sexual Violence is not an inevitable by-product of war: it is preventable; its prohibition must be commanded and enacted; and its commission sanctioned. We engage with weapon bearers to reduce the threat of sexual violence.

Pre-requisites for an ethical and successful prevention of sexual violence with weapon bearers.

WATCH HERE  Engaging weapon-bearers is an integral part of ICRC's mandate and a constant throughout its 160-years of humanitarian action. The ICRC is therefore uniquely placed to establish and maintain relationships with State Armed Forces, Non-State Armed Groups, and gangs for the purposes of its confidential and bilateral humanitarian dialogue.

The following ICRC actions are concrete examples of entry points through which it can ethically and successfully engage with weapon bearers on the topic of prevention of sexual violence:

- Evacuating and treating persons wounded during conflict regardless of what side they are on. ICRC also supports with the forensic identification of missing and unidentified persons to ensure the dignity of the dead and bring closure to their families.
- Visiting persons deprived of liberty and acting as a neutral intermediary to facilitate release and exchanges
- operations between parties to the conflict. The ICRC also monitors the conditions of detention and treatment of persons deprived of liberty.
- Maintaining a bilateral and confidential protection dialogue with all parties to the conflict to increase knowledge, understanding, and respect for IHL.
- Influencing all command levels to apply IHL and Human Rights law in their operations and facilitate humanitarian action for victims of conflict, such as delivery of assistance or guaranteeing safe evacuations of civilians.

COMMUNITIES

ICRC works alongside affected communities with the clear objective of enhancing their (self-) protection by increasing their capacities to reduce the exposure to the threat; and by reducing vulnerabilities amongst certain segments of the population so they are not subjected to sexual violence (primary prevention) or don't suffer its long-term consequences (secondary prevention).

Pre-requisites for an ethical and successful prevention of sexual violence with communities.

Despite sexual violence being still a taboo in many places of the world, ICRC can engage with communities in the prevention of sexual violence due to its multidisciplinary approach and capitalising on the unparalleled community footprint of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



The following ICRC actions are concrete examples of entry points through which it can ethically and successfully engage with communities on the topic of prevention of sexual violence:

- Protecting family links, including restoring contact among separated family members and/or facilitating family reunification.
- Ensuring access to essential and services including the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure such as health facilities, local water supply and energy networks.
- Supporting life-saving services and assisting victims of conflict and violence regardless of which side they are.
- Training healthcare workers on a survivor-centred response to ensure the dignity of all victims/survivors, regardless of their age, gender, disabilities, and other characteristics.



SOME PROMISING PRACTICES DURING 2023

A holistic and evidence-informed approach to the role of weapon bearers in addressing sexual violence linked to conflict.

As an armed actor...

...you may act to prevent sexual violence against civilians.

...you may be subjected to different forms of sexual violence.

...you may need to respond to needs of victims/survivors of sexual violence

...you may witness, perpetrate or be forced to perpetrate sexual violence.

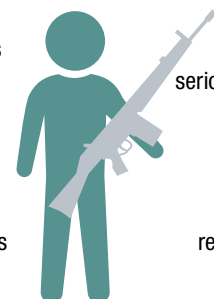
- Informed by the consultations with victims/survivors of sexual violence and ex-combatants, this approach addresses the 4 potential roles of an armed actor in relation to sexual violence: protector, first responder, victim/survivor, and participant in the perpetration.
- Incorporates the recommendations of ICRC's study "The roots of restraint in war".
- Tested with 1,562 members of State Armed Forces and Non-State Armed Groups: 45% very satisfied with the new approach, 47% satisfied. 34% committed to apply everything learnt in the training and 65% more than half of it.
- 77% of the armed actors stated that the "protector angle" is the most effective to prevent sexual violence perpetration by members of their force.

During 2023, the PSVP supported several ICRC Delegations in their ongoing efforts to strengthen the prevention of sexual violence with State Armed Forces and Non-State Armed Groups. On top of the previous undertakings to increase the understanding of the causes and consequences of sexual violence for victims/survivors, their families and communities, ICRC has focused on deepening the understanding of the negative consequences of the perpetration of sexual violence for the weapon bearers themselves. This angle lays out the different levels of participation in the perpetration of sexual violence. It has proved effective and showed promising results to be further galvanized in 2024.

BEFORE TRAINING

41%

of the armed actors that took part in our trainings during 2023 thought that the perpetration of sexual violence has no or no serious consequences for them.



AFTER TRAINING

77%

considered that it had serious (28%) or very serious consequences (49%).

54%

of the participants recognized the importance of the preventive action.

SOME PROMISING PRACTICES DURING 2023

During 2023, the PSVP has supported ICRC Delegation in Ethiopia in the launching and implementation of the community outreach programme addressing stigma against victims/survivors of sexual violence, jointly carried out with the Ethiopian Red Cross and the Danish Red Cross. The programme trains community influencers that turn into drivers of change within their own networks and communities. By reducing stigma and increasing support to victim/survivors of sexual violence, the programme aims at increasing the access to services by those subjected to sexual violence and helping them to recover.

DO NO HARM

The community outreach was launched only after services were in place.

In 2023, ICRC Delegation in Ethiopia supported 12,325 victims/survivors of sexual violence and:



35

Primary Health Centres



21

General/Referral hospitals



20

One Stop Centres



3

Safe houses



14,500

Dignity kits



3,378

cash for transportation

OUT OF THE 633 COMMUNITY INFLUENCERS TRAINED

83%

Understand the causes and 86% the consequences of sexual violence.

72%

Feel comfortable or very comfortable addressing sexual violence within their communities.

86%

Are committed to the important role that family, friends and neighbours play in the recovery of victim/survivor.

IN AVERAGE, THE TRAINING HAS:

69%

Increased the confidence of these community members, with the most notable effect of the programme in the confidence to raise sexual violence with men (98.99%)

70%

Reduced misconceptions around women and girls as the only possible victims of sexual violence.

46%

Reduced the misconceptions around physical evidence as the only evidence that sexual violence has happened.



SURVIVOR-CENTRED PREVENTION

As part of its survivor-centred approach, ICRC puts the experiences, needs and priorities of victims/survivors of sexual violence at the heart of its prevention approach.

- In Ethiopia, the theory of change of the community outreach programme was developed based on the experiences of stigma as feared and felt by victim/survivors and through consultation workshops with communities.
- Victims/survivors are the cornerstone of the programme's monitoring, evaluation and learning framework through a tool devised jointly with them: the stigma scorecard.
- ICRC has consulted with victim/survivors the key prevention messages in a two-fold approach: to incorporate the messaging they feel more effective and the angle that better reflects their experiences regarding the harmful and long-lasting consequences of sexual violence.
- To maximize the efficacy of the prevention messages, ICRC Delegations consulted State Armed Forces and Non-State Armed Groups.



"I learned how to support men or women victims of sexual violence"

Community influencer trained by the ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross. Before the training, most community members believed that sexual violence only affected women and girls. After, there was a 70% increase in the disagreement with this misconception. 75% of the community influencers trained feel comfortable now to talk about Sexual and Gender-based Violence with men.



"I'm personally very grateful and satisfied with the ICRC's efforts to engage us in discussions on the prevention of sexual violence within our units and especially the fact of talking about it to the unit commanders present in this training. [...] If each one of us, as commanders in operations, take measures to reduce the risk of sexual violence within our units, we could further improve the image of our army, as well as our honor and professionalism."

- Officer, École de commandement militaire et d'Etat Major (ECEM)
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo



"ICRC undertakes an invaluable action for us, the Colombian Army, with the goal of preventing sexual and gender-based violence associated to the armed conflict. Our institutional commitment is to be a role model in its prevention, and ICRC reinforces our active role in the conflict-affected regions of our country. Thanks to ICRC's real-life simulations, our commanders and higher ranks have enough tools to prevent sexual gender-based violence and act upon cases by activating the support services. Our Gender Focal Points are strengthening their capacity to be multipliers of sexual and gender-based violence prevention within their units."

- Coronel Barrios, Director of the Gender Office,
National Army of Colombia

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