

Overview of services available to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Democratic Republic of Congo is available predominantly through referrals to providers of services relating to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). United Nations entities have developed referral pathways to existing services for this purpose. Gaps in service provision include lack of safety and protection, legal services and transportation for victims, who must often travel long distances to reach service providers. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) provides support to victims through



Participants in the bread-baking training project funded by the Trust Fund for Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UN Photo/2018

projects funded by the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Where there are no implementing partners and services MONUSCO fills gaps, including through providing victims of sexual exploitation and abuse with transportation for medical care and court appearances, accommodation, and referral to specialized services. A Field Victims' Rights Advocate, in place since December 2019, supports the coordination of the system-wide response to victims' assistance and the integration of a victim-centred approach in all protection and response efforts. More efforts are required to identify necessary dedicated services so that assistance and follow-up on cases for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse system-wide are sustainable.

Findings and recommendations

on United Nations assistance and support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse

- **Victims of sexual exploitation and abuse can access SGBV services directly, and through referrals from United Nations entities and implementing partners.**
- Since 2015, an inter-agency protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) **community-based complaint mechanism** works with twelve internally displaced persons camps in North Kivu **focusing on** awareness-raising, training, **assistance referrals** and referral of allegations for follow-up and investigation.
- **Three inter-organizational mechanisms for the response** to and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse are in place: a PSEA Task Force, set up in 2016 and co-led by MONUSCO's Conduct and Discipline Team, UNICEF and UNFPA; a PSEA Network set up in August 2018, coordinated by UNFPA, to strengthen accountability to affected populations; and the Pro Routes Complaint Management Committee implemented by UNFPA and funded by the World Bank to address cases of sexual exploitation and abuse related to the Bank's road rehabilitation project.
- **MONUSCO relies on UNFPA and UNICEF to provide victim-assistance**, referring child victims to UNICEF and adult victims to UNFPA which then refer victims to relevant service providers. Where no service providers are present, **the Mission supports**, with its own funds, victims to access **medical care, and logistical support (transportation) to other services.**
- The United Nations **Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse** has supported **three projects promoting livelihood and economic empowerment** which are implemented by MONUSCO



in collaboration with Samani Ya Mazingira (SYAM), a local organization and a United Nations partner. Further projects have been approved.

- **Gaps** identified include **lack of shelter** and **legal services** as well as limited availability of quality **medical care** and **psychosocial support**. Services to transport victims to service providers are provided on an ad hoc basis.
- To guarantee that services for victims are available and accessible, including in locations where few service providers are present, **mobile services/clinics or one-stop service centres should continue to be developed**, and expanded to include legal services, psychosocial support and other essential support, adapted to the needs of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- The United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should **consider entering into partnerships with legal aid organizations** to address legal services including for the resolution of paternity and child support claims. **The Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate recommends** that projects to support children born out of sexual exploitation and abuse include **education support** in the form of school fees and material assistance, **psychosocial support, medical care, and legal services** for the resolution of their cases.
- **Coordination and collaboration across the system should be strengthened**, particularly **across the three inter-organizational PSEA mechanisms**, on victims' assistance through the development of common tools and information-sharing protocols to provide safe, confidential and consistent support to victims, and harmonized referral mechanisms.
- The **adoption of a secure, regularly updated system-wide tool to record and track victims' assistance should be considered**. Such a mechanism should include details on referrals for assistance, assistance received, and information on service providers, building on the Victim Assistance Tracking System currently used by MONUSCO.