

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

The DRC is a priority country for the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI). Widespread sexual and gender-based violence is part of a complex web of conflict, poverty, cultural norms and entrenched gender inequality. Effecting lasting change remains challenging, given the scale of the problem in DRC. Unprecedented steps were taken by the Government in 2014 – prosecution of high-ranking army officers and the payment of reparations to survivors of conflict related sexual violence. President Kabila appointed a Personal Representative on Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment in July 2014 and a National Action Plan for tackling sexual violence by armed forces was created. However sexual violence remains a significant issue.

1. What are the issues surrounding the stigma faced by survivors of sexual violence, their families, communities etc.

- Medical, psychosocial and legal support is only available in and around provincial capitals. In isolated areas, where the justice system is weak or absent, civilians may resort to informal practices between the families of the perpetrator and the victim to “close” the case, including marriage.
- A lack of transparency in the justice system also deters victims from coming forward, lacking the financial means to ensure a fair hearing or fearing reprisals by those responsible.
- Victims of sexual violence are often rejected by their communities and, sometimes, their own families. They are so afraid of being stigmatised that they don’t tell anyone what has happened to them and don’t seek help.

2. Who is doing something already in these countries incl. FCO, DFID, Champion countries, local initiatives (NGO, government, leaders)

- **UK (DfID)** operates a Healthcare Programme with emphasis on women and girls.
- **UK (FCO)** funds a project to enhance community-level prevention, protection and response to CRSV in the eastern DRC, and another project to improve accountability for crimes in the justice system It has also provided support to translate the International Protocol into local languages.
- **Anglican Church of Congo** has worked on a project to reduce both the incidence and impact of gender-based violence in eastern DRC through evidence based interventions.
- **UK (NGO)** is conducting a “survivor mapping” exercise which looks to understand the needs and priorities of survivors of gender-based violence.
- The **Team of Experts** is supporting the creation of three new special police units to respond to sexual violence in Rutshuru, Goma and Bukavu and special prosecution support cells in all civil jurisdictions in Eastern DRC.

3. Specific activities that need doing e.g. access to legal or medical care, judicial reform, evidence gathering etc.

- Government to sustain its efforts to combat impunity by bringing perpetrators of CRSV to justice, including at senior levels, and by ensuring full implementation of the armed forces action plan; recommend the authorities ensure prompt delivery of services and reparations to victims, including outstanding compensation awards.¹
- Provide technical assistance to the Office of the Personal Representative of the President on Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment; assist the Special Commission of the Senate on Sexual Violence; support the Commission on Sexual Violence of the FARDC to implement its action plan; continue to embed an expert on sexual violence investigations in the Prosecution Support Cells (PSC), and support mobile courts; support the deployment of women magistrates to eastern Congo and assist the government to establish protection mechanisms for victims, witnesses and judicial actors, including through drafting a law.²
- Increased support to the Government to pay increased attention to neglected areas, particularly with medical, legal and psychosocial care.
- The military remains key to addressing sexual violence. Without engaging the military directly on specific commitments, through an action plan, little progress can be made.³
- The data on SVC cases is unclear. The UN and MONUSCO quote different figures in the total of verified cases.

¹ SRSR Report: Conflict Related Sexual Violence 2016

² Team of Experts: Rule of Law/Sexual Violence in Conflict: Table of Activities 2016-17

³ Team of Experts Annual Report 2015