

A more generous embrace:

Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West

Written by Delphine Brun, GenCap Senior Gender Adviser
July 2022



About the report

This report was researched and authored by [Delphine Brun](#), senior inter-agency GenCap advisor in Cameroon. Delphine has been providing guidance at the global and country level on gender equality policies, strategies, and programmes for over two decades. Specialised in protection and gender, she has specific experience working in conflict-affected countries and fragile contexts, with a focus on West and Central Africa. One of her areas of focus is exploring how, in times of crises, social expectations on men's roles expose them to specific protection risks and vulnerabilities and the implications this has for women and society at large.

The author would like to thank the professionals from local and international organizations that contributed to this study, giving their time to be interviewed and giving feedback on drafts of the report. Her gratitude goes also to the adolescent boys and men who kindly accepted to share their experience, their views on humanitarian aid and their dreams for a better future.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap) is a global provider of expertise to the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. The GenCap Project was established in 2007 and seeks to strengthen capacity and leadership to deliver on commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action. In line with its theory of change, GenCap invests in tailored inter-agency deployments in support of humanitarian operations to reinforce

leadership, programming and localization strategies that ensure the centrality of gender in humanitarian operations. GenCap provides capacity development, largely targeting field practitioners. The Project is also engaged in policy-level discussions and the sharing of practices, tools and guidance, bringing the practitioner's perspective to global forums, interagency panels and thematic learning events. GenCap is managed in partnership by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and NORCAP.

NORCAP works with the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors to protect and empower people at risk. NORCAP develops projects and collaborates with partners including multinational agencies, national authorities and local organisations.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is the oldest and longest standing women's peacebuilding organization in the world with secretariat offices in Geneva and New York and with constituted membership organisations in nearly fifty countries. WILPF is one of the originators of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and played a key role in the passage of Security Council Resolution 1325. WILPF plays a leadership role in feminist movements across the world, especially those working to address conflict and promote peace. Over the last few years, WILPF has strengthened its focus on mobilizing men for feminist peace in collaboration with the MenEngage Alliance.



Delphine Brun

Senior inter-agency GenCap
advisor in Cameroon

Cover Photo:

John is a 22-years-old student, who has settled in Yaoundé after his village in the Southwest region was attacked. Several members of his family died on this occasion. He is concerned about the safety of the loved ones he left behind. *Name changed for protection. (Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap)

Contents

Executive summary	04
Introduction	07
Being a boy or a man in the South West and North West	10
Boys and men in limbo: coping with poverty and insecurity	14
Loss of identity and shifts in gender roles and relations	18
How is the humanitarian response addressing adolescent boys and men's needs?	22
Addressing distinct needs – the humanitarian response	26
Expanding the vision of who are people of concern	30
Conclusion	31
Recommendations	33
End notes	36

Executive summary

Over the past six years, the North West and South West regions (NWSW) of Cameroon have been wracked by violent clashes between pro-independence groups and Cameroon's army. More than one million people have been displaced and a major humanitarian crisis has been unleashed, with two million people in need of assistance.

The dispute has affected girls and women differently than men and boys. They all face specific risks. They also have particular vulnerabilities, needs and coping mechanisms. These differences call for a nuanced understanding of the effects of the crisis that the humanitarian community has yet to fully embrace. The vulnerabilities and needs of girls and women have been recognized and addressed to the extent that available funding allows. There has been less attention to the vulnerabilities and needs of adolescent boys and men. As a result, the crisis' intense impact on males' security situation, socioeconomic well-being, and sense of self-worth has been largely neglected by the humanitarian community, despite its disturbing consequences in frustration, anger, addiction and psychological distress, as well as the upsurge in domestic violence.

This report seeks to rectify that neglect, providing much needed information on how adolescent boys and men are coping with the economic and psychological strains resulting from the armed dispute and how their struggles affect girls and women, as well as the society at large. In doing so, it makes no comparison between male and female vulnerabilities. Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, physical assault and forced marriage, primarily affects women and girls. They face oppressive gender norms and ever greater poverty and hardship as household heads and family providers confronted with the killing or exiling of their husbands. Nothing in this report minimizes those severe impacts or the countless others stemming from gender inequalities. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate how adolescent boys and men also face risks and threats that leave them vulnerable; how attending to these problems is essential under the international legal framework; and how it can improve the welfare of girls and women as well as the broader society.

Protection threats

Protection monitoring data indicate that males represent more than eight out of ten of those exposed to torture or inhuman treatment, theft, extortion, destruction of personal property, arbitrary or unlawful arrest and/or detention. As men are expected to fight, they are also perceived by armed individuals from both parties as threats. There is often an assumption that males in the NWSW belong to the opposing side. This leads to harassment at checkpoints, coercion to join the fighting and to occasional arrests, sometimes without clear evidence that they belong to the other side. Although rape and other forms of sexual violence disproportionately affect women and girls, it is also used by armed actors against boys and men to emasculate them and undermine their gender and sexual identity.

Boys and men in limbo

Neutrality is often impossible. Instead, boys and men mitigate their exposure to risk by reducing their economic and social activities to a minimum, limiting their movements and censoring their opinions to avoid suspicion that they belong to one side or the other. Lack of civil documentation only exacerbate these problems. Some boys and men end up hiding in the bush, relocating to urban areas, or engaging in pendular displacement where they move back and forth between their home and place of refuge. Still others go into exile.

Many men have lost or abandoned their jobs because of the violence and threats. Those working in transport and farming have seen their incomes steadily decline, with agricultural yields down. Meanwhile, most of the schools in the two regions have closed due to attacks against education facilities, children, and personnel, reinforcing adolescents' isolation and lack of prospects. This has led to negative coping strategies such as child labour and exploitation, as well as theft and banditry by young men needing to sustain their livelihoods.

These frustrations, as well as the socially constructed norms equating manhood with being the family provider and protector, have been contributing factors in boys and men deciding to take up arms. Males who want to give up fighting fear poor treatment after demobilization, stigma and rejection by communities and families who have lost members to violence. That, along with the lack of economic opportunity, ends up as a significant disincentive for boys and men who might want to stop fighting.

Loss of identity and shift in gender roles and relations

The demographic imbalance created by the crisis, with many men dead, in hiding or in exile, has forced women to take on the role of household head and family provider in ever more difficult circumstances and with increasingly intense workloads. They have taken up a range of social and economic activities. This has also given them greater decision-making power in the family and opened up spaces for them in the public sphere, without necessarily causing them to enjoy genuine empowerment.

Men have suffered deep psychological disturbances. Many of them have experienced violent situations and have seen their income-generating and educational opportunities decline. That has made them feel helpless, causing depression and suicide attempts to rise. It has also contributed, particularly in the case of adolescent males, to a growing use of alcohol and drugs.

Critically, boys and men have lost their status and sense of identity as decision-makers, protectors and breadwinners in a society in which they are expected to protect and financially provide. In several places, women now earn more than men, and some men have taken up the socially devalued role of caregiver so their wives can work. With these reversal of roles, domestic violence has surged, as men have tried to assert their dominion and authority through psychological and physical abuse.

Humanitarian response

Addressing violations against women and girls should remain a priority. It is also crucial, however, to pay greater attention to the protection crisis' impact on vulnerable populations of all genders and age groups.

This is not happening when it comes to adolescent boys and men. Thirty-six per cent of the project proposal narratives developed as part of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2021 mention how the situation is affecting women and girls. This proportion drops to seven per cent when it comes to discussing how it affects men and boys. Similarly, wide disparities can be seen in how the activities included in project proposals cater for assistance and protection needs. Here again girls and women receive the overwhelming share of attention.

Much of this imbalance is a result of the perception that females are most in need and that males can cope. There is also the view that donors will be more interested in interventions targeting other groups amid funding restraints, and the concern that assisting boys and men risks inadvertently putting money into the hands of combatants.

Unfortunately, the imbalance affects specific services that men and boys desperately need. For instance, income generating activities tend to target women and children, despite the fact that male economic self-sufficiency would contribute to preventing exile, involvement in fighting and domestic violence. Men and boys also face challenges accessing help from service providers who have historically identified women and children as those most in need of support and who have designed and rolled out their services, implicitly or explicitly, with them in mind.

Humanitarian organizations and donors need to expand their vision of who the people in need are. That means making use of the available data disaggregated by sex and age to conduct a thorough analysis of vulnerabilities. It also means providing a response that goes beyond assistance to pre-defined categories. Poverty in Cameroon primarily affects women, and violence against them is horrific. Men and boys, however, also have needs and rights, and by neglecting them, the international community is failing to address some of the root causes of gender inequalities, as well as other direct, and indirect, impacts. Understanding how the lives of men, women, girls and boys interact and how their realities affect each other will help develop responses that are truly evidence-based and that are commensurate to the needs of all members of society.



*Buea, Cameroon.
(Photo: Giles Clarke/UN OCHA)*

Introduction

Over the past six years, the North West and South West regions (NWSW) of Cameroon have been caught up in violence that has led to a major humanitarian crisis, with over one million people displaced and two million in need of aid.¹ What began in 2016 as peaceful protests in English-speaking regions against government policies has transformed into violent clashes between NWSW pro-independence groups and Cameroon's army.

The armed dispute has affected many individuals, including aid workers, students and teachers, and has led to numerous human rights violations, including killings, abduction, sexual violence, the burning of homes, looting, and the torture of people suspected of being collaborators with the opposing side. Various human rights organizations have reported incidents, which would be in breach of the duty bearers' responsibilities with regard to human rights.² Calls by the international community to address the human rights crisis through internal dialogue have proved largely ineffective. With no end in sight to the socio-political crisis, most people are in limbo, confronted by a spiral of violence and heightened levels of unemployment and poverty.

This violence, which has distorted social, cultural, and community structures, has affected women, girls, boys and men differently. They all face common and specific protection risks. They also adopt different coping mechanisms, distinctly

benefit from assistance and have differing views on the support that humanitarian assistance and protection responses can offer.

Women and children face specific risks, and their needs are, quite rightly, highlighted and addressed by the humanitarian community to the extent that funding and access issues allow. The situation and specific needs of adolescent boys and men, however, are often less understood. There is a glaring disparity in the information available on the different effects of crises on female and male populations. As the situation of violence intensifies in NWSW, with men often at the frontline of the fight, what are their distinct protection and assistance needs? How do these needs influence women and girls and how does this affect gender roles? How are gender relations and power dynamics being perceived and factored into the humanitarian response? What groups are considered particularly vulnerable and how are needs being prioritised?

As the humanitarian community strives to respond to the needs of all vulnerable groups, this report aims to address the information gaps surrounding the impact of the crisis on men and boys while recognising the extreme vulnerability of women and girls. Its focus is on adolescent boys and men currently living in the NWSW or internally displaced, and it probes the effect of the security situation on their protection, socioeconomic well-being, gendered identity, and

sense of self-worth. It also explores the humanitarian community's perceptions, discourses, and practices with regard to the prioritisation of assistance and their response to affected males' needs.

In doing so, it does not attempt to compare the needs of boys and men on one hand and those of girls and women on the other, to make value judgements on their different situations, or to understate or diminish the immense risks women and girls confront. There is no doubt whatsoever that humanitarian actors must forcefully address the significant violations inflicted on women and girls, as well as the vulnerabilities stemming from gender inequalities.³

This analysis, however, does recognise the critical importance of considering the gendered dimension of protection crises, including an understanding of how the lives of men, women, girls and boys interact and how their needs and realities influence each other. In particular, it emphasizes how women and girls are affected by men and boy's situations and coping mechanisms. For example, the systematic targeting of males by armed individuals and the scale of the abuses they experience severely affects their mobility, livelihood and sense of dignity. This, in turn, often results in a greater economic and domestic burden on women and girls and their greater exposure to gender-based violence.⁴ Insights and actions to address affected males' situations and vulnerabilities can thus both lead to better outcomes for them and improved protection for females.⁵ By the same token, failing to address the needs of one group can have significant and widespread impacts on other groups.

In this way, this report acknowledges the importance of considering the needs of all vulnerable people. The international legal framework requires it, calling for the provision of non-discriminatory assistance and solutions to the crisis-related vulnerabilities of every affected person, including adolescent boys and men as distinct rights holders.

It is essential to reframe the conversation to avoid any competition between female and male vulnerabilities. The goal instead should revolve around minimizing the impacts of shocks and striving for sustainable recovery with the support of the humanitarian community. As humanitarian-development efforts strive to bridge the gap between the provision of humanitarian and long-term development assistance, the framework for assistance and protection responses must address the gendered needs of all groups and the root causes of inequalities. They must also, in the process, challenge discriminatory norms and practices.⁶ Highlighting actual and potential shortfalls in the humanitarian response, this report

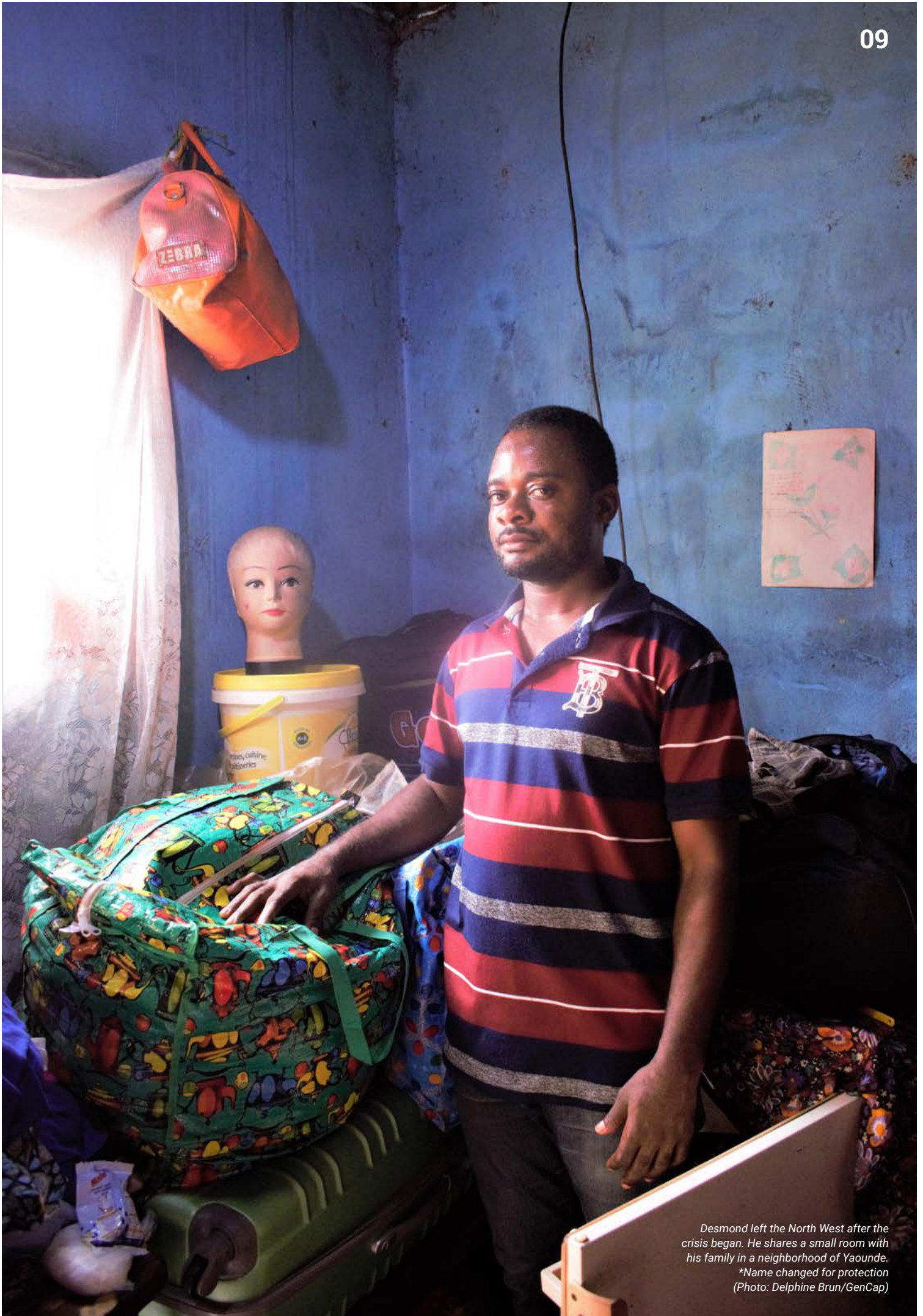
presents recommendations for humanitarian actors and donors to help them design, implement, and fund gender-sensitive policies and programmes that are grounded in evidence, proportionate to needs and aimed at strengthening resilience.

Methodology

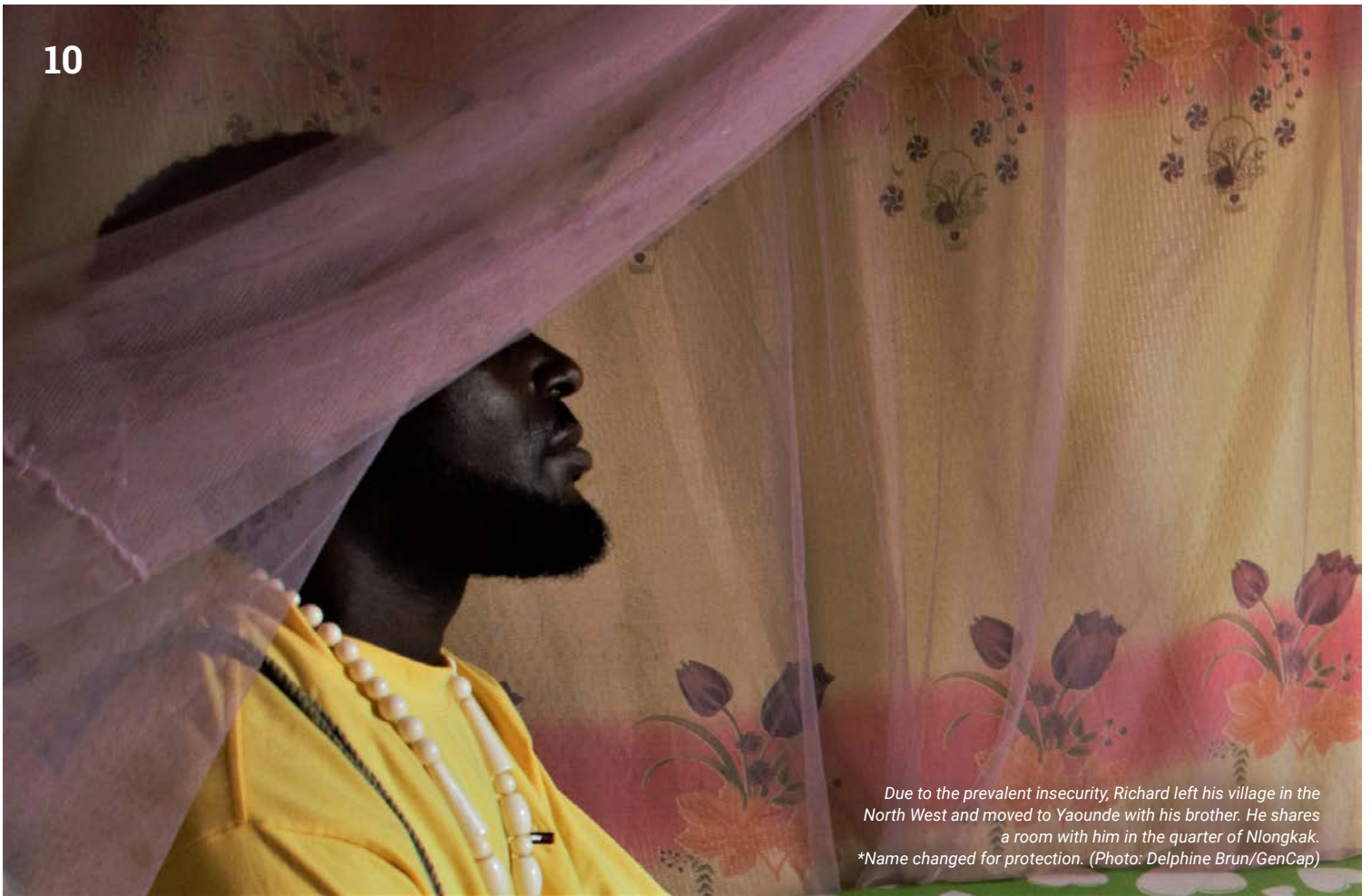
The findings of this report are based on a literature review, on key informant interviews and on focus group discussions with adolescent boys and men. The literature review focused on humanitarian reports and on thematic studies on gender and protection in the NWSW. It also included the review of 135 project proposals developed for the NWSW as part of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2021. Phone interviews were conducted with 26 key informants from 18 organizations, including UN agencies, international NGOs and civil society groups. Interviews were semi-structured and focused on the situation of adolescent boys and men and the perceptions of the humanitarian community regarding their needs and how these are addressed. Key informants were identified based on their direct experience coordinating or providing humanitarian assistance and protection on the ground, while ensuring that they represented a variety of sectors. Additionally, two focus group discussions were conducted in Bamenda and in Yaoundé with displaced adolescent boys and men from the two regions. These spoke of their experiences, struggles, aspirations and views on the response of the humanitarian community to their needs.

This report analyses the consequences of Cameroon's North West and South West crisis on men and adolescent boys. It intends to call humanitarian actors' attention to the importance of grounding their response on contextual evidence rather than on preconceived ideas of who's most affected. The report is not concerned with the political-military aspects of the crisis and the different stand of all involved, which are immaterial to the analysis. For this reason, the author has chosen to refer to the armed elements by using generic terms.

The writer acknowledges the importance of conducting a gender analysis and developing a response inclusive of all genders. This paper, however, is centered along the female/male binary. Information available on LGBTIQ+ individuals in the NWSW is largely absent. The focus of the humanitarian community is also mostly on the protection and assistance needs of females and males, rarely taking into account the situation faced by people with a different sexual orientation or identifying to other genders.⁷



Desmond left the North West after the crisis began. He shares a small room with his family in a neighborhood of Yaounde.
*Name changed for protection
(Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap)



*Due to the prevalent insecurity, Richard left his village in the North West and moved to Yaounde with his brother. He shares a room with him in the quarter of Nlongkak.
Name changed for protection. (Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap)

Being a boy or a man in the South West and North West

The security situation in the NWSW of Cameroon affects girls, boys, women and men in different ways as they are each susceptible to specific risks. There is an acknowledgment that women and girls have faced growing threats of violence since the crisis began, but it is important to recognise that adolescent boys and men also face risks and threats that leave them vulnerable.

1. Significant protection threats

The analysis of protection incidents demonstrates that, while the entire civilian population in the NWSW is exposed to or affected by the ongoing crisis, adolescent boys and men confront different threats to

life and personal safety and security than their female counterparts.⁹ Because of structural discriminations, women and girls are primarily affected by gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, physical assaults and forced marriage: out of the 4,300 cases of GBV that were reported by the GBV Area of Responsibility in the two regions from February to December 2020, 86 per cent of the survivors were females.⁹

Men and young men remain the primary victims of recorded protection incidents, representing between 85 per cent and 95 per cent of those exposed to torture or inhuman treatment, theft, extortion, arbitrary or unlawful arrest and/or detention.¹⁰ In the South West, for instance, boys and men form the vast majority of those exposed to protection

incidents, having suffered 93 per cent of beatings, 96 per cent of illegal detentions, 95 per cent of torture, 78 per cent of kidnappings, 92 per cent of extra-judicial executions and 95 per cent of disappearances.¹¹ Arbitrary arrests alone constitute almost two-thirds of the recorded protection incidents.¹² Boys and men are also more exposed to targeted armed onslaughts and are at greater risk of injury or death related to those attacks. Several informants described a deliberate targeting of males during armed clashes, with men purposefully injured or shot. Boys and men in the NWSW are also exposed to diverse forms of discrimination, harassment and violence from armed men.

Since the start of hostilities, armed elements have often assumed that males in the NWSW belong to the opposite side. This suspicion is common in areas where the armed dispute is the strongest and primarily affects adolescent boys and young men. Such a preconception, however, is seldom directed at women and girls: since armed individuals are predominantly males, females are perceived as unlikely to be involved in fighting.

This perception, combined with the fact that men tend to hold goods and money more than women, exposes them to various threats, including verbal intimidation, bribery, extortion, physical assault, arbitrary arrest and detention, especially during armed clashes in both rural and urban settings. There are reports of farmers deprived of their lands or coerced into paying for accessing them.¹³

Several testimonies suggest that male members of the community tend to be targeted as scapegoats even without any clear evidence that they are involved in the fighting. Being poorly dressed or drug-intoxicated can place them at additional risk, particularly for the young ones, on preconceptions that belligerents are young men.

“Adolescent boys and young men are most at risk because they are the targets of armed men. It is enough to be a young man to be arrested or killed, as young men are suspected of belonging to the opposite side,” said Peter, a displaced adolescent living in Bamenda.¹⁴

Adolescent boys and men’s presumed affiliation with or membership in the parties to the crisis affects their mobility and access to services. Being in a health centre, injured, in the aftermath of a violent incident, often leads to assumptions regarding the affiliation of the harmed person, with grave risks for the latter.¹⁵ As a result, wounded men often resort to informal or unprofessional care for fear of travelling to or being treated in health centres.

Because men are the ones expected to fight, they are also more at risk to be coerced to join as fighters:

“My brother was asked to take up arms. He refused and, a few days later, we heard that he had been killed,” said Solomon, an adolescent who fled with his family to Bamenda and is now displaced.

This pressure, particularly significant in rural areas, is primarily applied to males.¹⁶ Refusing to take part to the armed dispute comes with its own risk: They can be perceived as being spies and have no choice but to join, hide or flee their community.

2. An impossible neutrality

Each side perceives boys and young men as possible informants for the other side. Both parties consider them threats.

“When the crisis metamorphosed into armed clashes, armed elements did not believe that a young man could be neutral. All the young men had to flee. But women and girls didn’t face this suspicion, as they were not seen as fighters,” said Firmin, a 24-year-old man who sought refuge in Yaoundé.

Whenever armed attacks occur, young men are suspected of being involved. This makes their attempts to remain neutral impossible. If they do not provide information about attacks, they are considered complicit. If they share information, they are at risk of retaliation.

Any attempt to adopt a neutral stand is doomed to fail: caught in a spiral of fear, men often mitigate their exposure to risk by reducing their economic and social activities to the minimum, limiting their movements particularly after it gets dark and avoiding gatherings. Social events organized by local associations have also been suspended at times because of the climate of insecurity.

“Most of the young men who stay here have drastically modified their habits. They avoid drinking places and do not stay out late at night. They also avoid unnecessary sociocultural events and gatherings,” said the director of a local organization in the North West. “While they respect the new orders put in place by opposite parties, they are very isolated, having given up their social life,” he added.

Boys and men are also unable to speak freely and voice their opinions, as they fear being reported or denounced by the armed elements and ultimately being abducted as a result. This has stopped many of them from participating in social events.

Some community leaders have put in place programmes, including educational ones, to protect young men and boys and enable them to cope better. These initiatives, however, have not been fully successful in strengthening social cohesion because of the climate of suspicion among participants and the fear that they could be infiltrated by individuals who are actively involved in the dispute.

“Informants are always present in the community. If you leave for a few weeks or move around too much, villagers will think that you are a spy. You can be misjudged and denounced to either of the parties to the fighting,” explained a local NGO staff member.

3. Lack of civil documentation heightens threats and limits mobility

Another indicator of insecurity is the loss, seizure or destruction of identity documents. This only worsens a situation in which the lack of civil and legal documentation was, prior to the crisis, already a problem.¹⁷ Displacement as well as the crisis-related disorganization of administrative systems has made the loss or lack of civil documentation the source of significant risks. IDPs, having abandoned homes that are burned or destroyed, often have no access to the legal papers they lost or left behind. Those papers are required for the renewal or issuance of civil and legal documentation.¹⁸ Thirty-seven per cent of the population interviewed for a multi-sectorial assessment emphasized the lack of civil documentation as a key protection concern, hampering their freedom of movement.¹⁹

Young boys and men’s lack of identification documents may fuel suspicion regarding their possible belonging to armed groups, which discourages them from moving freely.²⁰ Fear of being suspected discourages them from taking steps to acquire or renew such documents. This also entails long trips and cumbersome procedures, increasing the exposure to security hazards:

“The replacement of these documents is now even more challenging than ever,” said a protection specialist working in the North West.²¹

In an environment of increasing insecurity, curfews, lockdowns, and roadblocks, women and girls can usually manage to move around and cross checkpoints without carrying the proper documentation, but they face the risk of being sexually harassed or extorted for a bribe. Men and boys, by contrast, face a tremendous risk of being stopped at checkpoints.²² There have been reports of boys and men detained, including several instances during the Africa Cup of Nations in January 2021 for failure to produce identification documents and/or attempting to evade the requests thereof.²³

The fear of having to pay bribes, of facing consequence for the lack of an identity document, or of being harassed, physically assaulted, tortured or killed, has direct consequences on the ability of boys and men to seek work and maintain normal social relationships. To avoid attracting attention, men tend to avoid checkpoints, and that makes commuting to earn an income and play the socially expected role of family provider often impossible, further isolating them and reducing their ability to cope.

4. Under reporting of protection abuses

Boys and men under-report the violations they suffer because of the lack of health, psychosocial and legal services in certain areas and because they fear for their safety. The social expectation of having to act tough when faced with violence is, according to several informants, an additional barrier preventing men and boys from readily reporting the violations inflicted upon them.

This is particularly true for incidents deemed as shameful. Some organizations have anecdotal evidence that males, particularly displaced ones, are being sexually exploited. They also have anecdotal evidence of sexual assaults and rape, perpetrated by armed or civilian men. These violations remain largely unspoken and hidden. The GBV Area of Responsibility’s tally of gender-based violence in the NWSW in July 2021 reveals that at least 14 per cent of sexual violence survivors are males.²⁴ This quantitative evidence, however, is seldom accompanied by an analysis of how services might be tailored to address the needs of survivors.²⁵

Observations of the situation in NWSW echoes results from research on other situations of armed violence worldwide. These findings show that rape and other forms of sexual violence are prevalent

in most security crises today. Such violence disproportionately affects women and girls, but it is also used against boys and men, usually to disempower or emasculate them and undermine their gender and sexual identity. By “feminizing” or “homosexualizing” heterosexual male identities, it aims to punish, humiliate, terrorize and repress them and their communities.²⁶ Certain types of violence perpetrated against men, such as forced nudity, sexual humiliation and blunt genital trauma are often under-reported as GBV: because of the focus on rape, these other forms of violence are not seen as crossing the threshold of sexual violence.

Research also demonstrates that sexual violence can be exacerbated by displacement, which greatly reinforces vulnerabilities and creates new risks, including for men and boys. Separated and unaccompanied children, including boys, are particularly vulnerable in such situations.²⁷

Prosecuting perpetrators in Cameroon is difficult because its penal code does not include rape against the male population. Instead, lawyers must use the term “*forced homosexuality*” as an element in legal proceedings, with all of the attendant stigma in a country in which homosexuality is criminalized.²⁸



Abandoned school in the North-West region, Cameroon. (Photo: Bibiane Mouangue/UN OCHA)



Kelvin, a 32-years-old IDP from the North West, lives with his wife and child in a small appartement of Nlongkak, in Yaounde. *Name changed for protection (Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap)

Boys and men in limbo: coping with poverty and insecurity

1. Loss of work and income

Violence has had a major impact on the economy and affected the entire population.²⁹ Men with salaried jobs, such as civil servants, have abandoned their positions and fled the cities because they could no longer go to work amid the prevailing insecurity.³⁰ Many men working for Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), the second largest employer in the country after the State, have lost their jobs and, in several instances, their lives.³¹ Private teachers also have been unable to work because many schools are no longer operating. Men, predominant in the wholesale trade of both regions, have seen their commercial activities slow down and be put at risk. Those who were working in transport,

connecting regional capitals to remote areas, have also lost income because of the security situation and the restricted movement of people and goods. The male-dominated activity of driving moto taxis has been curtailed, as bikes have been seized.

Women's economic activities have also been shattered, aggravated by the fact that many of them have become heads of households after the killing or exile of their husbands.³² Widows struggle to have their inheritance rights acknowledged by family members and traditional leaders. When they cannot recover their land, they have no other choice than to relocate to another place.³³ Displacement, where it has occurred, has plunged women into a precarious economic situation, with some having to leave behind their productive assets.

They have had to adapt to a new family situation and to economic hardship, often taking on new income-earning activities while continuing to care for the home.

Eighty per cent of the population was involved in farming prior to the crisis, many of them in family-run agriculture. Cultivable and grazing areas have dwindled in recent years, however, as a result of demographic pressures as well as insecurity and population displacement. Prior to the crisis, women were at the centre of family food production and represented 71.6 per cent of the informal agricultural sector.³⁴ Men were more often involved in cash crops. That activity, however, has often proved hazardous amid the crisis. Men now face mobility restrictions and travelling to their plots of land can be perilous. The lack of income to run their farms and transport and sell their goods constitute additional challenges. Many of them have also lost harvests because of the numerous days in which economic activity has been halted, known as “ghost town days,” as well as the disruption of local markets and the lack of storage facilities.³⁵

Armed actors loot farms and businesses, resulting in extortion and destructions of personal property including livestock and real estate and in the imposition of taxes.³⁶ This makes it difficult to maintain livelihood activities that have little margin for extra expenses. Attacks on property and housing have been the highest number of recorded protection incidents in the two regions in 2019 and 2020.³⁷

Violence and insecurity have also resulted in major population displacements, affecting agricultural yields in the North West and the abandonment of large parts of fruit, palm and rubber plantations in the South West.

“Before the hostilities started, I was a cocoa farmer. Armed individuals came to my house to extort me. As they had killed my mother, I did not give them any money. I also had to buy a laissez-passer (travel document) to go to town and sell my produce. So, I decided to leave. They would have killed me if I had stayed,” said John, a 36-year-old man who now lives in Yaoundé.

Market chains have been broken while prices have plummeted. As a result of insecurity and the departure of most males below the age of 60, production in rural areas has fallen, greatly affecting communities’ food security.

In a national context afflicted by unemployment, displaced men struggle to find a job, especially when they are no longer part of the informal networks that

would help them to do so. For that reason, and despite protection threats, some of them have decided to stay on their farms, in some cases alone after having sent their families to urban areas. This is particularly the case for those who had leased land or who had invested significant sums in cash-crop cultivation. Others, who had fled to different parts of the country, decided to return to their farms as “they prefer risking their lives to living in absolute poverty,” said John.³⁸

2. Challenges in accessing education

Loss of employment and increased poverty, combined with attacks on educational institutions, have severely affected boys and young men, depriving them of a key component of their protective environment.³⁹ Some 80 per cent of education facilities in the two regions are no longer operating, a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁰ The inability to study has only reinforced adolescents and youth’s isolation and lack of prospects.

“Before, we went to school. Now, we are trapped. Without education, we don’t have job prospects any longer,” said Franck, a 22-year-old living in exile in Yaoundé.

Hurdles in accessing education, together with heavy financial challenges, have led to negative coping mechanisms, including increased child labour and exploitation. The need to earn an income is an unfortunate reality for minors too, but as adolescent boys take small jobs, they are at increased risk of adopting negative coping strategies to sustain their livelihoods, such as theft and banditry.⁴¹ They spend more time on the streets and are also more likely to be abducted and trafficked.⁴²

“Boys are stuck in their community. They don’t have education, and they have nowhere to go. Without a means to earn a livelihood, they are at great risk of joining the fight,” said a person working in the health sector in the North West.

There are also ramifications beyond the direct consequences that lack of education opportunities imply. The inability for adolescent boys to complete their education may well have implications for gender relations. Evidence from different countries shows that boys with higher educational attainment have more gender-equitable attitudes than those with less education, which in turn prevents the use of intimate partner violence.⁴³

3. Finding alternatives for staying safe and making ends meet

A. "Force is the only language". Taking part in the fighting:

Adolescent boys and young men adopt different strategies to cope with their situations. Some are forced to join armed elements; others decide to take up arms. Those who make a deliberate decision to join are often among the most disadvantaged of the anglophone population and have been disproportionately harmed in the hostilities.

Those living in rural areas confront precarious conditions. They face the greatest risk that they will be accused of being involved in the violence and hence targeted by the opposite side. Poverty, unemployment, economic hardship and a lack of educational opportunities, which greatly affect young men between 18 and 25 years of age, make men and adolescent boys highly susceptible to involvement in violent actions. Some do it for money,⁴⁴ others fall for promises of educational opportunities and security.⁴⁵ The youngest, because of their relative lack of maturity, may also be more susceptible to being attracted to promises of material gains, such as cars.⁴⁶ The phenomenon of recruitment and use of children is difficult to grasp and measure. Protection actors, however, are concerned about the reportedly growing attraction of young boys (and girls to a lesser extent) to armed violence.⁴⁷

Socially constructed gender norms, equating manhood with fighting and with being the family's provider have also been significant factors in the direct involvement of boys and men in the violence, especially in a context where properties have been destroyed and unemployment is at its peak.⁴⁸ The quest for influence and prestige, which is associated with joining armed elements and especially observed in smaller communities, echoes the militarized norms of masculinity, equating virility with power, violence and control.

Other motivations include:

- The search for revenge after witnessing arrests, killings and harsh treatment of family members.⁴⁹
- The desire to place themselves and their families under armed elements' protection and thus avoid being ambushed or hurt.
- The desire to reduce movement restrictions caused by their lack of civil documentation.

- Peer pressure, sense of belonging and/or interest in maintaining friendships, family or cult ties, some of which are religious.⁵⁰

Grievances among the anglophone community, and in particular the most socio-economically disadvantaged, may have initially fuelled the crisis.⁵¹ However, involvement in armed violence has progressively become an adaptive measure.⁵²

Yet, there are significant impediments to returning to civilian life, including lack of support in social re-integration and lack of employment opportunities.⁵³

"Sometimes young people want to give up their guns. But they do not because there is no dialogue between the two sides. Force is the only language. There are also no prospects for them to support themselves," said Patrick, the adolescent displaced to Bamenda.

The risk of reprisal from all sides, stigma and community rejection also hamper these youths' chances to return to normal life.⁵⁴

B. Adopting a low profile

Some families limit their sons' movements to prevent them from being forced to join the fight or from being killed.⁵⁵ Young men who still reside in areas where violent incidents are frequent must ensure they are not seen by armed actors. They must stay home as much as possible, hide in the bushes or relocate to other areas.⁵⁶

"Since the start of the crisis in my village, men have been forced to hide in the forests to avoid being apprehended. Many abandon their families to do so. My father has been on the run for a year, and I haven't heard from him since he left," said Solomon, the displaced adolescent in Bamenda.

Depending on which side to the crisis is considered as the main threat, men relocate to urban areas or hide in the bush. The security situation has led to pendular displacement, where people move back and forth between their home and their place of refuge. As they hide in the bush, people build huts and cultivate plots of land. In 44 per cent of cases, it is the entire household that undergoes such displacement. In the rest of the cases, men hide in the bushes alone, while their families remain in the village or move to safer urban areas.⁵⁷ Displaced families regularly go back to their village to check on their houses or to see if the area has become

safe enough to move back. Women often visit their homes first to check if the area is safe before deciding if male family members can return.

C. Exile as a last resort

Refusing to participate in the hostilities is most of the time synonymous with exile, particularly for those living in volatile communities. Many men must leave their homes to avoid being forced to join the fight or arrested. Men also move for livelihood opportunities for themselves and to provide for their families, either migrating or moving to other regions.⁵⁸ This can shatter the family unit. Wives and children are often left behind or relocate to other places, one of the reasons for the high percentage of households now headed by women.⁵⁹ Adolescent boys are also often sent to urban centres for their safety and education, sometimes separated from their families in the process.⁶⁰ The movement of the male population, with some of them hiding and others resorting to displacement, has generated an unprecedented situation. Several key informants stressed that, in some villages, no man under 60 can be found.

Having managed to flee violence in their areas of origin, displaced boys and men sometimes face exploitation, harassment and stigmatization, fuelled by existing tensions between ethnic groups:⁶¹

“It has been a bitter experience. It is not easy to leave your place of origin, lose your job and assets and settle in a new town. Here, in Yaoundé, we are not welcome. People tell us: ‘Vous, ambazoniens, là’ (‘You, Ambazonians!’),⁶²” says Albert, the 28-year-old displaced man.

It is difficult to assess the number of men and boys from NWSW who cross borders to seek safety and a better future. Data on the voluntary returns of Cameroonians to their country, however, indicates that international migration is primarily masculine. Out of 4,690 returning migrants from November 2019 to September 2020, 83 per cent were boys and men.⁶³ About 90 per cent of male migrants were unaccompanied. Distinct protection threats, the inability to be economically self-sufficient and to play the provider role, as well as the sociocultural expectation that men should take risks to provide for their families, likely explains this over-representation of lone male migrants.



The Pentecostal church of the neighborhood of Elig-Edjoa, in Yaounde is a place of worship for many IDPs. The pastors, coming from the North West, celebrate the mass in English. (Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap)



18
Young IDP men originating from the Northwest and Southwest regions take part to the weekly activities of the youth club, organized on the premises of the school Saint Vincent Palloti, in Nlongkak, Yaounde. (Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap)

Loss of identity and shifts in gender roles and relations

1. The psychosocial cost of the crisis

Several organizations interviewed as part of this research reported increased levels of suffering and psychological distress among the male population, occasionally leading to mental health disorders and addictions. Many adolescent boys and men have experienced significant stress directly linked to the situation of violence. Many of them have witnessed atrocities. As a result, depression and suicide attempts are on the rise:

“Most adolescent boys have faced emotional stress. They’ve watched their loved ones killed... In some cases, their hearts have become hardened to the point that they joined the armed elements to avenge the death of those loved ones. Some even suffer from mental illnesses. There are so many who need urgent assistance and psychosocial care,” said a psychiatric nurse representing one of the organizations involved in the response.

Going into exile does not put an end to their anxiety. Displaced men and boys worry about their family members back home or grieve over those killed.

“The situation has had the greatest impact on me psychologically. My parents are in Fontem and whatever happens to them deeply affects me. I feel powerless and I don’t know what the future looks like. The crisis has postponed so many things I was planning to do,” said Divine, a 31-year-old displaced man living in Yaoundé.

With no solution to the crisis at hand, adolescent boys and men feel as if they have lost control over their lives and their future. The problems with civil documentation, restricted mobility, targeted violence, limited educational opportunities, and insufficient work and income have all contributed to a sense of helplessness, as well as high levels of anxiety, stress, frustration, anger and, ultimately, a loss of self-esteem.

Cameroonian society traditionally imposes rigid expectations upon males, such as showing strength and hiding feelings. Because of the prevailing view that being a “real man” is about being tough and not showing fear or sadness, emotions can remain “locked inside”. Using drugs, smoking, and drinking alcohol are, for some adolescent boys and men, the easiest way of numbing the pain and dealing with these unacknowledged emotions. Key informants attest that a growing number of adolescent boys use Tramadol, smoke marijuana and drink alcohol to keep boredom at bay and deal with frustration. This can lead to socially disturbing behaviours that bear consequences for the wider family and community and expose users to higher risks. Some adolescents steal or pay for alcohol or drugs.⁶⁴ Substance abuse can also trigger arrests and killings.⁶⁵

2. “You’re not man enough to look after your family”: the inability to fulfil social expectations of manhood

The psychological damage that boys and men suffer is not only caused by the crisis and the accompanying effects of displacement. It is also the result of their perceived loss of gendered status and identity as decision-makers, protectors, and breadwinners.

In a society where it is assumed men will protect and financially provide, boys and men often find themselves incapable of fulfilling expectations and living up to what they understand as being their roles. This affects their identity as males:

“When we grew up, the first thing we had to do as men was get married and look after our wives, our mothers and our siblings... I had a fiancée before the crisis. But she left me because I didn’t have any money anymore. This was very hard. My mother sees me as a failure. She does not say much, but I can feel it,” said Georges, a 35-year-old displaced man.

Marriage is an important social institution in Cameroon that places men at the head of their families. Financial struggles, however, deprive some of the possibility of fulfilling this status.

“At my age, we are supposed to get married. We are no longer respected as men when we don’t,” added Georges.

Where being the “breadwinner” is perceived as a central element of masculinity, the current political and economic context puts men under increasing pressure. The difficulty of earning an income and being self-sufficient does not just affect men’s ability to feed and house themselves. It also alters their sense of self-worth: failing to earn an income is often seen as shameful.

“At my place, I had a job. Here, I have nothing. I feel pain. I’m here with my wife and children and I feel I am not man enough to look after them,” said John, the displaced man now living in Yaoundé.

These testimonies echo global findings on men in security crises. They demonstrate that, given the prevailing, socially expected role of men to work and earn an income, those who experience work-related stress in such situations feel their sense of identity and “manhood” threatened.⁶⁶ During periods of violence, communities’ need for protection may also fuel a greater expectation that men demonstrate “strong man” attributes.⁶⁷ The situation, however, makes it practically impossible for them to live up to these dominant notions of masculinity, making them more likely to report depression and thoughts of suicide.⁶⁸

3. Adapting to a hostile reality: shifts in gender roles and relations

The crisis has also led to a dramatic evolution in the division of roles and responsibilities. The most significant of these relate to mobility, livelihoods, contribution to the family's income and decision-making.

The risk of violent incidents severely hampers men and boys' mobility, often causing significant gender role reversals. Males tend to stay at home and resign themselves to relative immobility. Women and children, less likely to be stopped by armed men, take on new responsibilities. Because women can move where men used to go, wives and children are often the ones to seek humanitarian assistance, work in the fields, and go to market. This exposes women to heightened protection risks, particularly sexual violence.⁶⁹

This evolution in the division of roles is reinforced by the demographic imbalance the crisis has created. With many men dead, hiding or displaced, women increasingly play the role of household head and family provider and juggle between productive and reproductive activities. They are now the protectors of the family, a role traditionally expected of men. This change in family structures has pushed women to engage in a range of economic and social activities that were formally the realm of men and that have generated a heavy workload for them. It is, for example, women who now dig the graves and bury the dead.⁷⁰ The change in family structure has also placed a burden on the shoulders of the few adolescents and young men who still remain in their areas of origin.

Men have faced hurdles in continuing to work as cash crops farmers and have engaged in other livelihood activities, such as growing food crops, that were the domain of women prior to the crisis. In several instances, their wives have taken to cultivating the cash crops. Some men have also dedicated themselves more to caregiving and other domestic responsibilities to ensure their wife has more time to work outside the house. In the process, they have engaged in socially devalued and often invisible tasks that had been the domain of girls and women. Other men have not adapted, spending their time in idleness as they rely on their wife to make ends meet.

As economic roles shift, the contribution of each parent to the family's income has evolved. Men bring

in less money. Women's contribution to household incomes is increasingly vital. Notably, in some areas of both NWSW regions, men report lower incomes than those declared by women.⁷¹ The growing economic role of women gives them greater decision-making power over domestic issues in the home, particularly when it comes to education, nutrition and health.

The crisis has also opened up space for women to play greater roles in the public sphere. They are increasingly involved in conflict resolution and women's associations have regrouped to militate for peace.⁷² They are also more engaged in community decisions. These heightened economic and social roles are not always synonymous with genuine empowerment, however. The shift to the role of provider has entailed new suffering for women: in a context where prices rise and profits made from informal trade fall, it is difficult to fill the gap generated by men's loss of income.⁷³ As a result, women's empowerment feels like a bitter gain. There is also no evidence that they have better control over family resources. Similarly, their increased leadership in local decisions is exercised informally, and official functions remain a male prerogative.

4. Domestic violence as a way of asserting men's authority

Domestic violence is prevalent in Cameroon: more than half of the adult female population in partnerships having been exposed to it.⁷⁴ There is also evidence that the distress men face in the NWSW as a result of their diminished income and social power vis-a-vis women has increased tensions.

As the economic wellbeing of families is harmed and poverty increases, relationships often strain. Men also experience the change in traditional family roles, with women taking up traditionally masculine-coded functions, an affront.⁷⁵ Having lost the economic power that enabled their domination, some men feel as if they have lost their virility. They are frustrated by their lack of economic prospects and their inability to conform to dominant and yet unattainable models of masculinity. Those feelings, combined with the fact that violence is considered socially acceptable in some communities, leads to domestic violence as a way of asserting their authority and domination.⁷⁶ Bearing the brunt of the household economy, women explain domestic violence in the home as exacerbated by men's loss of status.

This situation has led to an upsurge in men's violence against women, including psychological and physical abuse.⁷⁷ Similar consequences have been observed in other contexts, demonstrating a clear association between the economic stress experienced by men and higher rates of lifetime use of intimate partner violence.⁷⁸ The normalization and acceptability of violence by men is further enabled by conflict situations that makes violence seem ordinary.⁷⁹

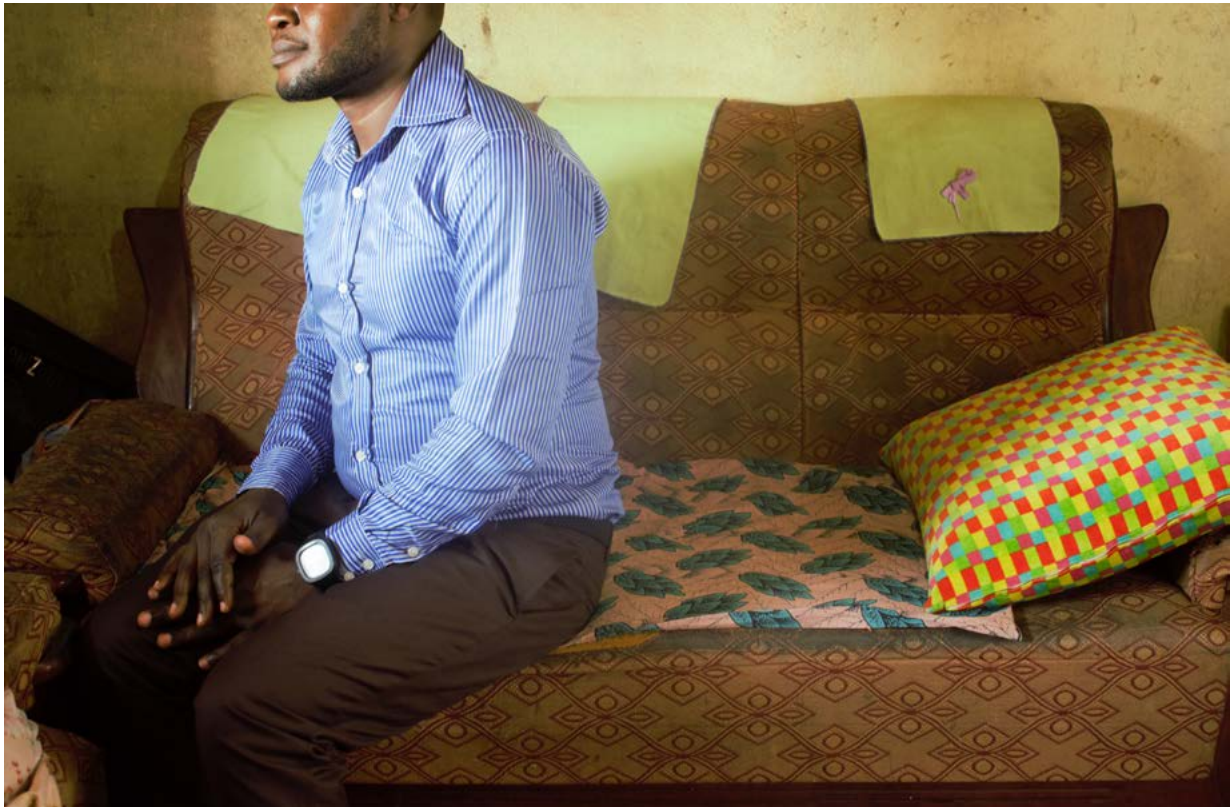
Several key informants also underlined that men feel guilty for not financially looking after their families, underpinning the fact that changes in gender roles are not accompanied by a change in underlying gender

norms. Men are also ashamed of having to depend on their wives' earnings. As a result, they become more aggressive, acting out their frustration within the home.⁸⁰ Violence in the public sphere, particularly affecting women and girls, has also increased.⁸¹

Coping with economic frustration and the change in gender roles is easier for those who have an understanding family.

"My wife understands that it is not my fault. I still stand as a man," said John.

Others blame themselves, with their spouse and wider family reinforcing those feelings.



*Kelvin, a 32-years-old IDP from the North West, lives with his wife and child in a small appartement of Nlongkak, in Yaounde.
Name changed for protection. (Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap)



FOOD DISTRIBUTION CENTER, SW CAMEROON
 Locally displaced people stand in line to register for the weekly food distribution allowance.
 (Photo: Giles Clarke/UN OCHA)

How is the humanitarian response addressing adolescent boys and men's needs?

Violence led to a major humanitarian crisis in NWSW. Adolescent boys and men, among other groups, were exposed to myriad threats and resorted to negative coping mechanisms affecting their safety and dignity, as well as their physical and mental health. This section explores how the perceptions, attitudes and modus operandi of humanitarian actors shape the way in which adolescent boys and men's assistance and protection needs are addressed.

1. "Who should we assist?" – perceptions and myths

A. The Titanic effect: "Women and children first"

Thanks to the ongoing and tireless efforts of feminist organisations, humanitarian organizations commonly acknowledge the structural discriminations that affect the female population, even if they are unevenly

addressed in actual programmes. The majority of key informants from the 18 organizations interviewed for this research, however, noted that the humanitarian response is often based on a presumption that women, children and other specific subgroups are most in need of assistance. They unanimously agreed that, compared to women and girls, the humanitarian community does not give the necessary attention and assistance to adolescent boys and men.

“Organizations, particularly those working on gender, target women, very rarely men. We feel that women and girls are more vulnerable. They have difficulties accessing education. They face sexual violence and early pregnancies. They face financial hardship, especially when they are heads of households. Some girls engage in survival sex,” said a field worker from an international NGO.

This recognition is a clear step forward: addressing the significant violations against women and girls, and the specific needs that gender inequalities generate, should remain a priority. It is also important, however, to pay broader attention to the protection crisis' impact on different vulnerable populations of all genders and age groups.

Vulnerability is a central organising principle that informs the targeting of the humanitarian response. It defines who is most in need and who should be prioritised. This identification, however, is often influenced by humanitarian actors' own rationale of how people are distinctly affected and able to cope.

A review of strategic planning documents, humanitarian sectors' reports and project proposals highlights that women's vulnerability is often simply accepted as a fact that requires no justification or analysis. For instance, the review of 135 project proposals that were approved by the national humanitarian sectors for the NWSW as part of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2021, reveals that the multiple statements about females' vulnerability are sometimes accompanied by an explanation. They are often, however, presented as self-evident. The portrayal of the female population in these regions tends to conflate women, sexual violence, and vulnerability.

There is also a glaring difference in how females' and males' vulnerabilities are broached and addressed. Thirty-six per cent of the project narratives mention how the situation is affecting women and girls. This proportion drops to seven per cent when it comes to discussing how it affects men and boys. Fifty-three per cent of the project proposals include activities

that target women and girls. Only seven per cent of them include activities for men and boys. Protection projects are no exception: even though males are particularly affected by this protection crisis, as few as nine per cent of the reviewed protection project proposals discuss how the crisis is affecting boys and men (against 32% that mention how females are affected). Fifty-six percent of the protection proposals include activities targeting females, as compared to 12 per cent that include actions focused on males. The welcome recognition of the discriminations affecting women comes with its own pitfalls:

- It does not allow for an examination, beyond gender-based violence, of the broader picture of the state of inequalities and how these affect women's rights and wellbeing. The national context is one in which poverty primarily affects women.⁸² It is worsened by a local reality that places them in the role of household heads confronting even higher levels of poverty, a lack of ownership and control over the land they cultivate, and a gruelling workload.⁸³ These represent critical and yet largely unaddressed issues. The focus on gender-based violence, while permitting the provision of much needed help to survivors, leaves important root causes of this phenomenon unaddressed.
- Attaching vulnerability to the person (the woman) rather than to the threats, hurdles or circumstances that create vulnerability, makes it a permanent characteristic of that person, and reinforces victimhood.⁸⁴ This essentialist perception of vulnerability, denying women and girls any kind of agency, also prevents recognition of male marginalisation or vulnerability.⁸⁵
- The focus on “women's vulnerability”, is frequently taken as a fact, with particular attention to incidents of sexual abuse. It leaves little space, however, for analysing how women are disadvantaged or marginalized compared to men. Preconceived ideas of which people should be of concern deter organizations from conducting a comparative analysis of actual vulnerabilities:

“Organisations mostly concentrate on issues of women and children and in some cases people with disabilities. The male population is not properly considered except in general “Do No Harm” approaches which obviously try to limit the negative impacts on communities. Nobody is really focused on young men and teenage boys,” said the representative of a UN agency in Buea.

The view that women are in all circumstances the most affected, even when available data might qualify that perception, can occasionally mislead interventions. Some project proposals target females based on the view that women and girls represent the majority of those affected by protection incidents or that they are most exposed to the COVID-19 epidemic. They do so despite available evidence demonstrating that males in fact are the most affected.

As has been observed in other contexts, the concentration on sexual violence diverts attention from other forms of violence that are also horrific, such as non-sexual torture, arbitrary arrests, recruitment of child soldiers and killings.⁸⁶ The protection sector identifies adolescent boys and men as particularly vulnerable and routinely documents the specific risks they face. Protection reports written by national and international humanitarian actors, however, seldom analyse this issue: data on GBV is usually broached within the frame of a gender analysis. Quantitative and qualitative information on the protection incidents primarily affecting boys and men is less often discussed. In a similar manner, project proposals list the protection risks primarily affecting men and boys but do not accompany this description with an explanation of why males are specifically affected by such risks or how they will benefit from the services provided.

2. Gender stereotyping: “Men can cope”

In a context of chronic underfunding, difficult choices need to be made over who to assist. The consensus that women and girls are the most vulnerable, however, is linked with the common perception in the aid community that men, while also affected, are best able to look after themselves and manage the complexities of the crisis unaided.

“Activities mainly target women, as men are seen as strong enough to cope. Service providers stick to the idea that women and girls are the most vulnerable since they are socio-culturally discriminated against and hence in greater need of support. They are also seen as a weapon of war,” said a protection specialist of a local organisation.

As such, the humanitarian community might be helping to perpetuate the stereotype that males are “stronger” and less in need of support and women are “weaker” and consistently in need of assistance. Consequently, men may not be prioritized when organizations define

who to help first. Male youth, in particular, are not considered as vulnerable as they are:

“Young men are at the bottom of the list. Humanitarian actors see them as healthy, strong and capable. The most vulnerable, it is thought, are older people, women, and adolescent girls. But this is a protection crisis, where young men are in fact among the most exposed,” said a child protection specialist from a UN agency.

According to key informants, the specifics of this crisis are insufficiently considered:

“Coming to the NWSW opens your eyes to how we impose our routine approach on reality, no matter its particularities. Even when the statistics revealed men to be the prime victims of violence, a special statistic was presented to draw attention to the GBV cases, which were minor in number. This deflected attention away from the larger number of male victims of violence. I kept wondering how it is possible that our protection approach can be so insulated from the environment surrounding us,” said an international protection actor.

To move away from static perceptions, it is critical to gain a contextual understanding of the direct situation men and adolescent boys are in.

3. Assisting men and boys comes at a risk

In a tense political environment, in which adolescent boys and men are systematically suspected of being involved in armed violence, providing a targeted response for them can be a perilous venture. Several key informants explain that there is a fear among the humanitarian community that assisting the male population can cause aid structures to be labelled as supportive of armed elements.

“If you support a group of boys who live in communities where there is a strong presence of armed men, you need to be aware that some of them, voluntarily or not, are part of the armed elements... You might not know who they are, and there is a real danger that your activities get tied to the dispute,” said a protection specialist of a local organization.

Parties to the crisis could misinterpret the support. Humanitarian organizations implementing programmes could be perceived by both parties as helping the rival armed elements. Over the years there have been attacks on humanitarian organizations, particularly in the health sector. Health personnel have been assailed by different parties to the violent dispute for treating injured men. A medical organization, that provided ambulance services and treated injured patients,⁸⁷ had its activities suspended for allegedly supporting armed elements.⁸⁸ Providing humanitarian assistance in line with humanitarian principles has been challenging.

Despite these difficulties, several key informants say that providing the necessary support to boys and men can be accomplished. It is essential in areas where the presence of armed elements is strong, for example, to establish ground rules for community projects, like banning the presence of weapons and forbidding politics. Maintaining a continuous dialogue with the parties to the crisis, with clear explanations

on programme implementation, is crucial to preventing accusations and a backlash from them on the support provided to men.

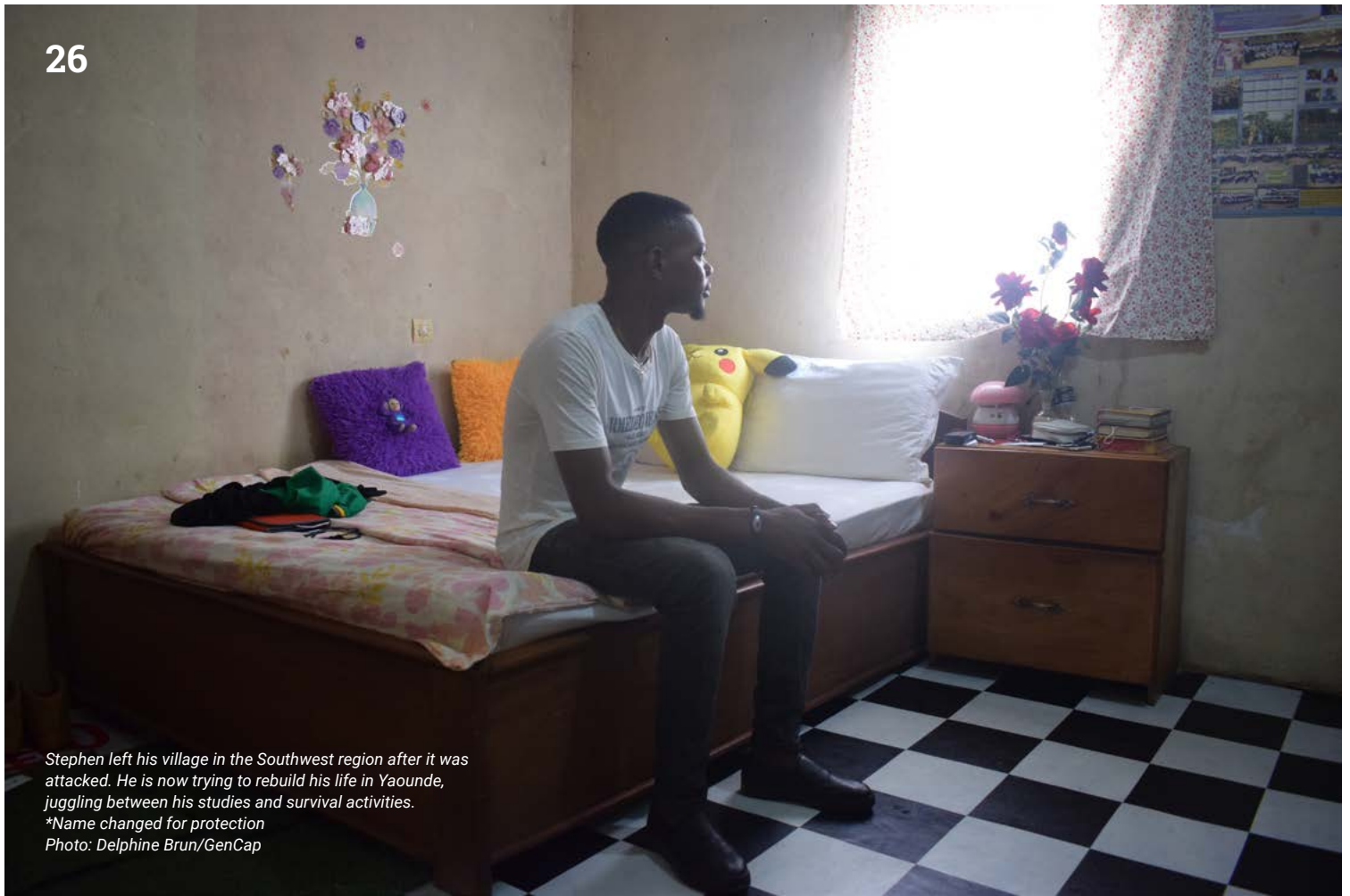
4. Victims or perpetrators?

Because men and boys might also be involved in the hostilities, some organizations hesitate to engage in programmes benefitting them. Distinguishing between affected male civilians, spies, and fighters can be difficult. Providing assistance to women and children is often less questionable and problematic.

“We do not want to enter the minefield of intra-male relations because it is risky to distinguish between those deserving and those not entitled to humanitarian aid. With gender equity as a distant chimera, we are always morally on the safe side when we focus our programmes on females,” said an international protection actor.



A destroyed car outside a former police station that was attacked and abandoned in the rural region of SW Cameroon. (Photo: Giles Clarke/UN OCHA)



Stephen left his village in the Southwest region after it was attacked. He is now trying to rebuild his life in Yaounde, juggling between his studies and survival activities.

*Name changed for protection
Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap

Addressing distinct needs – the humanitarian response



Humanitarian actors' perceptions influence how vulnerable groups are prioritized, the type of assistance provided and the approaches adopted in delivering aid. The humanitarian response framework also influences humanitarian actors' understanding of vulnerabilities and donors' decisions on funding. An examination of the response in the NWSW reveals that the modus operandi of humanitarian organisations contributes to a lower level of attention to adolescent boys' and men's needs.

1. Scarce funding challenges the ability to respond to distinct needs

The chronic underfunding of the humanitarian response in Cameroon results in interventions that are inadequate for addressing the needs of all vulnerable groups.⁸⁹ Only 12.5 per cent of funding was secured as of July 2021 for the NWSW.⁹⁰ As a result, humanitarian actors lack the capacity to address the most urgent needs, with glaring gaps that affect everyone. This has implications for how needs are addressed and forces choices

regarding who to assist. The strategic analysis of the humanitarian consequences of the crisis in the NSW⁹¹ identifies women as among the most vulnerable groups when examining critical problems of physical and mental wellbeing, living standards, resilience, and recovery. With the exception of the protection sector and gender-based violence sub-sector, which recognize men's particular vulnerability, none of the other sectors, including health, food security and early recovery, consider males as most in need.

Key informants explain that decisions on who to target are also made to attract funding. Organizations recognize that donors allocate special attention to gender and often assume that donors equate gender equality programming with a focus on girls and women. Calls from senior leaders, such as that from the Emergency Relief Coordinator to Humanitarian Coordinators,⁹² to prioritize the protection and empowerment of women and girls in the humanitarian planning process for 2021, can also nurture this perception.

“Projects responding to adolescent boys’ needs are very few, either targeted or mainstreamed. A focus on adolescent girls is more appealing to donors because of the perception that girls and women are more vulnerable,” said a child protection specialist.

Humanitarian organisations’ view of what is attractive to donors, be it accurate or not, prevents them from considering how the different categories of the population are affected by the hostilities. The view that funding for projects targeting males will not appeal to donors makes it, in practice, harder to conceive and deliver programmes that address their needs. This perception held by humanitarian organizations has also been observed in other contexts.⁹³

Key informants explain that organisations which recognise the gaps usually target affected males as a sub-group of their current projects or by integrating them as part of a blanket intervention. They may also decide to start working with men when they have the additional resources.

Some local actors reckon that, with more evidence on how boys and men are affected, the response could come to equally target them. Some donors are trying to strike a balance in line with gender policies.⁹⁴ This recognises the importance of working with boys and men, both as subjects of rights and needs and as important players in the development of equal societies.

2. The categorisation of at-risk groups

A gender-sensitive needs assessment is critical. It is the basis for requesting funding to address specific needs, vulnerabilities and risks. It is also the first step in the development of evidence-based, inclusive and efficient humanitarian planning and targeting and secures baseline information upon which response monitoring systems rely.

Assessing needs, vulnerabilities and risks in the NSW regions, however, is challenging. There is a glaring gap in the available information on the effect of the crisis on the female and male populations, because of either a lack of gender sensitivity or a bias in the assessment tools. The latter, meant to determine where the biggest disparities are and who is most disadvantaged, mostly include specific questions about women and girls. Particular questions on boys and men are rarely included.

“Needs assessments have not been tailored to the current context. We still believe that women and girls are primarily the people struggling. But they are not the only vulnerable ones,” said a cluster coordinator.

Assessment questionnaires do not often include a ranking by sex and age of the issues faced by affected people. The use of broad population categories (e.g., “households”, “internally displaced people”) also prevents a gender sensitive understanding of vulnerabilities.

Most critically, the aid system tends to use a “status-based categorisation” that is meant to help categorize and prioritize those most in need. The vulnerability criteria that are set, by calling for a focus on certain population groups and by often placing adolescent boys and men at the bottom of the vulnerability scale, intentionally or unintentionally restrict the identification of their needs and, subsequently, their access to programmes.

“If you look at the vulnerability criteria, you will see that most of them are set towards girls and women: pregnant and lactating women, female-headed households and GBV survivors”, said a humanitarian actor working for a local association. “In fact, we have not yet carried out a thorough analysis of who is the most vulnerable.”

By setting vulnerability criteria that may not reflect specific risks, organisations can inadvertently cause harm by overlooking the fragility of groups that are not part of one of the pre-defined categories. Such shortcomings in how assessment tools are designed and conducted is not exclusive to the NWSW and has been observed in various contexts.⁹⁵

Because they fear for their security on the way to or at the place where meetings are held, men and boys tend to hesitate to join consultations. Enumerators and outreach workers usually make a priority out of approaching women. Information on boys' and men's needs, indirectly collected through consultations with women, might not provide an accurate picture of their vulnerabilities. These various impediments ultimately lead to a logic where those who are prioritized tend to be those whose needs are known:

“Those who prioritize women and girls are doing so based on existing baseline data. As this data type is non-existent for men, it is difficult to justify targeting them with assistance,” said a health professional.

3. Last in line: failure to take into account adolescent boys and men's needs

Several humanitarian organizations strive to ensure boys and men are included in their programmes, but this is not the case for all organisations, according to key informants. The skewed understanding of vulnerabilities and preconceived ideas of who is of concern, combine with several additional factors that result in a differential attention to adolescent boys' and men's needs:

- Assistance will go first to those who are accessible, settled and willing to participate:

“Women and girls mostly receive humanitarian assistance and protection because they are around... We serve almost the same people on several occasions,” said a specialist on non-food items.

- In addition to preconceptions that females are more affected and in need of assistance, they tend to also be considered more trustworthy than their male counterparts. Men are sometimes suspected of embezzling assistance and aid is considered more likely to reach the entire family if it is put in women's hands. As a result, organizations tend to register wives as card

holders for food aid or beneficiaries of livelihood support. This assumption that women have more integrity echoes beliefs that have been observed in other contexts.⁹⁶

- Insecurity and the need to limit people's movements influences the choice of livelihood programmes implemented by organizations. These considerations gear selected support towards home-based activities that have most often been done by women, such as small-scale poultry, gardening, tailoring and embroidery.

The slighter attention given to men and boys' needs is never explicitly presented as ignoring their situation. Humanitarian documents do not state that they are less affected or have fewer pressing needs. Rather, while other vulnerable groups' needs are clearly expressed and emphasized, boys and men's situations are unmentioned.

“There is a common, unspoken agreement that they are not a priority. Organisations do not announce that they are not going to help adolescent boys. They just emphasize that they will target adolescent girls,” said a child protection specialist.

4. Services not tailored to boys and men's needs

Men and boys are eligible to access services available to all affected groups. Yet, in the same way that women can be excluded from certain spheres, such as village committees, subtle barriers may prevent men from seeking help. This is chiefly true for the services that have historically identified women and children as most in need of support and that have been designed and rolled out, implicitly or explicitly, with them in mind. Interviewed young men and key informants provide different examples:

- As observed by health specialists of a UN agency and an international NGO, specialised health services mostly target women and children. There are no specific programmes focusing on men and boys, even when there is evidence of their vulnerability. For instance, though they have been the group most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, there have not been any targeted preventive interventions for them. Also, while the use of psychotropic substance is affecting a growing number of adolescent boys and men, there has been no notable shift to provide services to address the issue. Reference to the role fathers should play in child nutrition and in child health is also absent from the proposals reviewed.

- Sexual and reproductive health services are not commonly designed with boys and men's needs in mind. The review of proposals developed for the NWSW demonstrates that boys and men are not specifically targeted in such projects, although sexually transmitted diseases (STD) are prevalent among them. The involvement of boys and men in this type of programme would change perceptions that women are responsible for preventing unplanned pregnancies. This, in turn, would influence existing masculine stereotypes. As such services are primarily tailored for women, however, it could be difficult for a young man to get information on sexual health.
- Some international human rights commitments address men's experiences of sexual violence in conflict.⁹⁷ Steps have also been taken to better assist male survivors in Cameroon. There is still, however, a lack of recognition that men can be victims of sexual violence. The review of 34 protection project proposals developed for the NWSW shows only one project discussing the issue of GBV perpetrated against boys and men. Most GBV projects targeting men focus on changing their behaviours to prevent GBV. GBV case workers tend to focus on violence against women and girls. The GBV specialist of a local organisation explains that these first line responders may even doubt the possibility of molesting a man. Such failures to recognize the equally terrible psychological and physical consequences such acts have on males, prevents them from reporting incidents of sexual violence affecting them. This is further reinforced by their feeling of shame and their fear of being perceived as weak. The lack of trained protection staff able to address such cases leaves victims in a critical assistance gap and leads to uneven attention in the provision of support to rape survivors:

“Men who are raped are sometimes considered homosexuals and end up being stigmatized by their community. While we would relocate women at particular risk, we do not provide this support to male survivors,” added the GBV specialist.

- Hygiene kits, which include female hygiene materials, do not include items that men need. The non-food items cluster distributes these kits to those groups considered extremely vulnerable, which are female-headed households, GBV survivors, older people, people with a chronic illness or large families. Men can only be targeted if falling under one of these last categories.
- Though men have repeatedly appealed for support to start businesses and receive training from development and humanitarian actors, income generating activities mostly target women. Providing women with livelihood support is intended to enable them to avoid negative coping mechanisms such as survival sex. The importance of male economic self-sufficiency, which would contribute to preventing exile, involvement in armed fighting, recourse to domestic violence, etc., is less widely recognized.

As the mandate of several international or national organizations primarily focuses on women and children, this further explains why this population is prioritized and why services are tailored to its needs.

Men sometimes feel that national and international organizations are simply uninterested in working with them. Their priorities are for protection and income generation support, but the lack or inadequacy of such support leaves them feeling that their skills, capacities, aspirations and hopes are largely invisible to humanitarian and development actors.

Expanding the vision of who are people of concern

Examining the current response in the NWSW demonstrates that the male population often lacks a clear place within humanitarian response frameworks. Too few efforts have been made to assess the unintended consequences of this. Failing to adequately acknowledge boys and men's situation or address their needs bears several potential implications.

They desperately need protection and economic alternatives. The limited degree of attention they receive, combined with short-term humanitarian interventions that only address their immediate needs and development interventions that do not prioritize their economic empowerment, however, has at times dissuaded them from seeking help. This has created a dynamic where the lack of acknowledgement of their vulnerabilities reinforces, and even generates, those vulnerabilities.

In this protection crisis, most interventions have consisted of responsive or remedial actions, often directed at other groups. While the threats come from the parties involved in armed violence, the international community seems powerless or unwilling to act to prevent or limit current and future violations and abuses.

"People hoped for protection from armed violence. We explained that we cannot offer it but can instead offer food and kits. The international community does not know how to address the systematic violations boys and men face. It does not have the bravery, it does not act," said a protection specialist.

The lack of international attention to the situation of male youth, combined with the paucity of adequate protective measures,

constitute a fertile soil for more young men to get involved in violence.

"Because adolescent boys have been neglected, they have a growing attraction to armed violence. They are being brainwashed. Sometimes they don't even know why they take up the arms. It is difficult to solve the problem if we do not secure their protection," said the founder of a local youth organization.

Without providing economic alternatives, preventing young men from getting involved with armed elements or supporting their reintegration is a chimera. Breaking the spiral of violence also requires implementing effective humanitarian, recovery, and development interventions that help reduce males' violent behaviour and that protects those who are affected by violence.

"If the crisis were to end today, boys would still not be able to live in peace in their communities. When you think of the things that were done to you, you want to do them back. The reintegration of these boys is not a given. It requires rebuilding social trust and cohesion," said a psychiatric nurse.

It is time to expand our vision of who the people of concern should be. If vulnerability is defined by both the external threats of a specific environment and by the coping capacity of those experiencing that environment, adolescent boys and men can clearly be described as a vulnerable group. The consequences of neglecting their needs are not just potentially disastrous to them but also, indirectly, to the security, resilience and cohesion of the broader society.

Conclusion

The static models of gender vulnerability that shape the humanitarian response do not only mean that the specific vulnerabilities of men and boys have been largely rendered invisible. These models have also restricted our understanding of how the lives of men, women, girls and boys interact and how their needs and realities affect each other.

Examining the inter-connections and relationships between different groups in the crisis-affected communities of the North West and South West forces us to recognize that failing to address the vulnerabilities and needs of adolescent boys and men has direct, and indirect negative impacts on other groups. When men are arrested, killed or forced into exile, women face greater burdens and responsibilities, with more frontline activities that place their own safety at risk. Similarly, their lack of economic prospects and inability to conform to dominant yet unattainable models of masculinity affect boys and men's well-being and sense of self-worth. They generate frustration, anger, and idleness, which could lead to addictions and mental illnesses, and exacerbate protection risks for the broader community. There is evidence that the distress men face has increased tensions that lead to a significant upsurge in household violence.⁹⁸

By examining how gender roles and power dynamics generate and exacerbate vulnerability, humanitarian organisations

could ensure that unmet needs and harm done to one group do not negatively impact other groups. For instance, they could, in collaboration with recovery and development actors, help men to play the role of economic agent within their family by providing them with livelihood support. That, in turn, would prevent them from going into exile and avoid all the consequences men's absence has on women's workload and safety. Similarly, addressing threats affecting boys and men would have myriad benefits for girls, women and the broader society.

If the humanitarian community truly seeks to promote gender equality and empower women and girls, men's needs should be taken into account in developing responses that address the relational and intersectional nature of the vulnerabilities and crises-related risks. At the same time, it is critical to reframe humanitarian discourses around perceived vulnerability. As they currently stand, these reinforce stereotypes and hinder women's empowerment.

We must abandon the preconceptions that so severely constrain the quality and inclusiveness of the humanitarian response. We must replace them with an analysis of needs tailored to specific contexts. This will expand our vision of who the people of concern should be. It is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. It is the prerequisite to a response grounded in evidence, proportionate to needs, that strengthens resilience.



Georges, originating from Bamenda, in the Northwest, moved to Yaounde fifteen years ago, before the crisis began. He works in Elig-Edjoa as a tailor.
*Name changed for protection. (Photo: Delphine Brun/GenCap)

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for international and national humanitarian organisations

A. Ensure your response is based on facts, not assumptions

- Ensure gender and age are incorporated in the needs assessment tools you use to understand how gender norms and inequalities shape women, girls, men and boys' experiences:
 - Needs assessments and protection audits should review risks facing boys and men.
 - Use the Rapid Gender Analysis toolkit.⁹⁹
 - Organise sessions to seek feedback from adolescent boys and men who may be hesitant to participate in activities in which they share their challenges. Consider going to places where males are known to gather.
 - Make use of available sex- and age-disaggregated data to conduct an analysis of vulnerabilities.
- Then, identify information gaps that need to be addressed by primary data collection.
- Use the information you gather to provide a response that is fact-based, inclusive and involves targeting commensurate to needs:
 - This may at times mean significant changes to initial plans and the development of activities to address specific needs or redress gender imbalances. Oftentimes, it may simply require adjusting your type of assistance and how it is delivered.
 - Think about who programme activities should target and consider providing a response that goes beyond assistance to predefined and status-based categories.
- Ensure that the voices of both women and men count, placing their protection concerns at the centre of your interventions. Design activities with them and for them, including the implementation of accessible feedback and complaint mechanisms.
- Monitor your response to measure how and if women, girls, men and boys are accessing services:
 - For instance, analyse your projects' data disaggregated by sex and age to confirm that everyone is benefiting from equitable access and benefits. Also verify that the most marginalized groups have access to the feedback and complaints mechanism.
 - Use your findings to take corrective actions that will improve access and meet real needs.

B. Acknowledge and address women and men's anxieties about changing gender roles

The social and economic well-being of women and girls, and men and boys, requires approaches that tackle harmful gender norms and the perpetration of violence:

- Humanitarian actors should work with development actors to go beyond responsive and restorative actions, using existing platforms such as the Nexus task force. Together, they should address the root causes of violence against women and girls, such as poverty, land conflicts, physical and economic insecurity and oppressive gender norms.
- Identify existing networks within communities that could serve as dialogue spaces, for women or men, girls or boys, so they can safely reflect on the changes in their social identities and challenge restrictive and discriminatory beliefs about gender roles and relations. For example:
 - Facilitate exchanges about how they feel about societal expectations in terms of the "proper" behavior for females and for males and how they deal with not living up to such standards.

- Provide awareness-raising information on equal and respectful relationships, alternative ways of defining manhood, non-violent life choices, and anger and stress management.
- Support joint discussions on how to prevent violence and the outbreak of hostilities.
- Find gender equality champions in the community who could serve as role models and facilitate discussions.

C. Support boys and men at risk of being targeted by armed violence

- Consider the barriers adolescent boys and men face in accessing assistance; for example, shame, fear of arrest or their belief that certain services are strictly reserved for women. Schedule the timing of assistance and outreach so it is accessible to them and inform them that such services are available to everyone.
- Take steps to involve boys and men in community-led protection initiatives:
 - Where relevant and out of harm's way, provide males with single-sex secure spaces to discuss protection issues, including measures to mitigate harassment by armed men and the risks of getting forcibly involved in armed violence.
 - Livelihoods programmes could be used to provide initial counselling and support so that men and boys can access that help without feeling stigma or "less manly".
- Humanitarian actors should work with recovery and development ones to provide vocational training and livelihoods support for adolescent boys and men. There should also be advocacy of stronger programmes for the economic re-insertion of demobilized male youth in communications with the government.
- Provide financial and technical support to local human rights organizations' efforts to sensitize armed elements to the need to respect national and international human rights laws.

- Advocate for reinstating civil registration centres at the sub-divisional and divisional levels. The issuing of ID cards by these centres would help reduce the protection risks faced by people lacking official identification documents.
- Gender-based violence against adolescent boys and men is a reality. Train protection and psychosocial staff to provide high-quality, age-appropriate, stigma-free, male-friendly services.

D. Ensure that coordination mechanisms, particularly cluster meetings, focus on addressing specific gender risks, vulnerabilities and needs in emergencies

Ensure that coordination meetings allow for discussions about the distinct effects of the protection crisis on women, men, girls, and boys that go beyond the current focus on gender-based violence:

- Regional gender in humanitarian action coordination groups can help clusters collect local analysis on the most pressing gender issues. This should inform the choice of the type of assistance, how it should be delivered and to whom. It should also support the development of gender-sensitive, national humanitarian planning processes.
- Identify ways to engage males in programmes that can help balance family responsibilities and support nonviolent relationships. Be mindful of the fact that men and boys will resist approaches that they perceive to be negative or judgmental and that aim to "fix" them. Agree on key messages that focus on the positive contribution males can make and what they want for themselves and for their families, including better relationships, enhanced sexual and reproductive health, and greater involvement in the health and education of their children.
- Using evidence gathered from assessments, carry out advocacy at the highest possible levels to make the targeting of adolescent boys and young men in humanitarian programmes a safe practice.

2. Recommendations for the Humanitarian Country Team

- Request that the inter-sectoral group, in collaboration with the regional gender in humanitarian action coordination groups, regularly provide data and analysis on the most critical gender issues in the NWSW regions, beyond gender-based violence, and clear directions on how to address them.
- Ensure in your oversight of the humanitarian needs overview that it includes an analysis of needs according to gender and age groups and that the humanitarian response plan (HRP) responds to them adequately. Make sure that all assistance promotes the protection, safety and dignity of affected females and males and that monitoring mechanisms verify people's equitable access to aid and benefits.
- Contribute to private and/or public advocacy, as appropriate, to enhance the prevention and mitigation of protection risks in the regions, including arbitrary arrests and illegal detention, and promote respect for international humanitarian and human rights laws by all parties.

3. Recommendations for donors

- Review and prioritize project proposals that are grounded in a solid gender analysis and that seek to address the needs of different sex and age groups, beyond assistance to predefined categories. Organizations receiving funding should report on how their interventions address gender inequalities and affect different groups.
- Insist that recipient organisations integrate a gender and diversity perspective in all interventions., particularly organizations that have traditionally targeted women and children (e.g. gender-based violence, reproductive health, child and maternal health).
- Encourage and fund research initiatives and interventions that lead to an understanding of gender issues and masculinity in crisis contexts and that support gender equality in humanitarian action.
- Ensure sufficient funds are allocated to programs that can prevent youth radicalisation and support social cohesion in conflict situations.



Endnotes

- 1 OCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Cameroon 2022, p.16
- 2 Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa & Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, *Cameroon's unfolding catastrophe*, p 7, 2019.
See also <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/ssrn-id3576732-1.pdf>
- 3 Structural gender-based discriminations and disadvantages faced by girls and women have worsened as a result of the socio-political crisis in the NWSW. At the national level, poverty primarily affects women: While 39 per cent of the national Cameroonian population lives below the poverty line, this stands at 51.5 per cent for women. Of those below the poverty line, eight out of ten women are underemployed. This situation is worsened by a local reality that has further reduced economic options. Because of the crisis, girls and women face increased levels of gender-based violence, resort to harmful coping mechanisms, such as sex for survival or early marriage, and often lack access to essential services, such as education and healthcare. With the killing or exile of their husbands, they often have to navigate an unnerving reality entailing additional burdens, responsibilities, and activities that put them at greater risk. For additional information, see: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/29/gender-based-violence-pervasive-in-cameroods-anglophone-regions>, <https://www.nrc.no/expert-deployment/2016/2020/gender-based-violence-beyond-crisis/>
- 4 Protection sector, Protection Analysis 2021, *Humanitarian Needs Overview*, p.25, October 2020. OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, p.54
- 5 Global Health Action, *New learnings on drivers of men's physical and/or sexual violence against their female partners, and women's experiences of this, and the implications for prevention interventions*, p.9, 2020
- 6 See, for instance, the resolution of the Human Rights Council that calls on member states to engage men and boys in addressing GBV: <https://www.right-docs.org/doc/a-hrc-res-35-10/>
The Women, Peace and Security resolution 2106 calls for "the enlistment of men and boys in the effort to combat all forms of violence against women." Resolution 2242 stresses the importance of engaging "men and boys as partners in promoting women's participation in the prevention and resolution of armed conflict, peacebuilding and post-conflict situations".
- 7 Homosexuality is criminalized in Cameroon (Article 347-1 of the Penal Code). LGBTIQ+ individuals are stigmatized, and face distinct security threats and hurdles in accessing services. Yet, none of the needs analysis and response plans of the sectors, developed as part of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2020, considered addressing the needs of these groups.
- 8 Most protection incidents in the NWSW regions are perpetrated against Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and returnees who represent 60.5 per cent and 28.6 per cent of the victims respectively (Protection sector, *Monthly Protection Brief for the North West and South West Regions*, March 2021).
- 9 GBV sub-Cluster Reported cases GBV data from February to December 2020, North West & South West crisis, p.1.
These statistics should be considered with caution since the GBVIMS was not fully rolled out at that time. Hence, these figures are not fully representative of the situation. In February 2022, 81 per cent of reported GBV survivors were females (Protection sector, Protection Update for the North West and South West Regions, p.3, March 2022).
- 10 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022*, p. 36
Protection incidents recorded through protection monitoring activities do not cover gender-based violence, such data being recorded through the GBVIMS.
- 11 Danish Refugee Council (DRC.), *Protection Monitoring Report, Southwest Cameroon*, January to December 2020
In 2021, DRC recorded a total amount of 4,712 victims of protection incidents in the South West, amongst which 3,518 were men, 626 were women, 329 were boys and 239 were girls (Danish Refugee Council, *Annual Protection Report Southwest Cameroon*, p.7-8, December 2021). Whereas the Danish Refugee Council's protection monitoring reveals that more than nine out of ten people exposed to such violations are males, it is worth noting that the results of the protection monitoring done by INTERSOS and UNHCR in the North West and South West regions for 2020 provide notably different proportions by types of violations: While all victims of forced recruitment are males, men and boys constitute 70 per cent of the victims of illegal detention, 62 per cent of those arbitrarily arrested, 54 per cent of those facing injuries and mutilations or inhuman treatment, 26 per cent of those confronted with threats to life and personal security, 25 per cent of those killed and one per cent of those affected by sexual and gender-based violence (INTEROS and UNHCR, *Protection factsheet, North West and South West*, 2020).
The fact that males are disproportionately affected by such violations is consistent with findings from other contexts. Where data exists, it indicates that men are more likely to die during conflicts, whereas women die more often of indirect causes after the conflict is over (Chris Dolan, *Victims who are men*, p.5, The Oxford Handbook of Gender & Conflict, 2018).
- 12 DRC, *Ibid.* In 2021, 1,435 cases of arbitrary arrests and illegal detentions were reported through protection monitors, primarily affecting men and adolescent boys. OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2022...*, p. 51
- 13 Reach Out's database, which aggregates reports from different parties on protection incidents in NWSW,

- records several such incidents.
- 14 All names of adolescent boys and men quoted in this report have been changed for protection reasons.
 - 15 OCHA, *Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No. 08 As of 30 June 2019*, p. 3
 - 16 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*, p.19
 - 17 Civil and legal documentation was already a gap prior to the crisis because of a combination of factors: An insufficient number of public services issuing the documents; costs associated with their delivery; lack of supporting civil documents, such as birth certificates; lack of knowledge of the procedure for processing legal documents; and limited awareness about the importance of civil documentation (Protection sector, *Monthly Protection Brief for the North West and South West Regions*, p.3, February 2021).
 - 18 Protection sector, *Protection Analysis...*, p.20.
 - 19 MSNA, NWSW, OCHA, September 2021
 - 20 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2021...*, p.51
 - 21 Child Protection Area of Responsibility, Risks and Needs for Child Protection in Cameroon – North West and South West Crisis Secondary Data Review, p.6, April 2019
 - 22 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2022...*, p. 36
 - 23 OCHA, *Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No. 27; p.2*, 31 January 2021
 - 24 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview Cameroon 2022...*, p.58
According to cases of gender-based violence in the NWSW reported by the GBV Area of Responsibility between February and September 2020, 14 per cent of survivors are males. Twenty-eight per cent of those are minors (GBV sub-Cluster, *Ibid*, p.1.)
 - 25 Protection sector, *Monthly Protection update NWSW*, p.3, October 2021.
 - 26 Henri Myrntinen, Lana Khattab & Jana Naujoks, *Rethinking hegemonic masculinities in conflict-affected Contexts*, p.10, 2017
 - 27 <https://allsurvivorsproject.org/about-us/how-we-work/>
 - 28 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/data_on_gender_equality_in_cameroon-hno_2020-17_oct_19.pdf
See also DRC, *Cameroon – Child Protection Report*, December 2020
 - 29 The employment status of men and women in NWSW is very similar, with 37% of men reporting that they are unemployed, compared to 36% of women. 71% of women say their income has either 'slightly' or 'significantly' decreased since the crisis, compared to 68% of men. (IOM, *Labour market survey in North-West, South-West regions of Cameroon for the HDP Nexus*, April 2022).
 - 30 CARE & PLAN INTERNATIONAL, *Rapid Gender Analysis, South West and North West Cameroon*, p.1, April-May 2019.
 - 31 https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/08/07/au-cameroun-les-regions-anglophones-au-bord-de-la-faillite_5497294_3212.html
 - 32 According to EFSA, 38 per cent of households in the North West and 31 per cent in the South West are headed by females: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/cmr_hno_2020_print2.pdf
See also International Crisis Group, *Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict*, p.26, February 2022
 - 33 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2022...*, p. 61-62
 - 34 *Annuaire Statistique du MINPROFF*, Edition 2014, p.59
 - 35 "Ghost town" days are general strikes imposed by NSAGs. During ghost town days, shops and business are closed and movement is prohibited in the North West and South West regions. Ghost towns are imposed every Monday but are also called for in anticipation or reaction to certain events, such as elections.
 - 36 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2022...*, p. 61
 - 37 Protection sector, *Protection Analysis...*, p.18.
 - 38 The main reasons displaced people return to their village of origin is to access farmland and a lack of livelihood opportunities in the areas where they were displaced (IOM, *MSNA NWSW*, February 2021).
 - 39 *ACAPS Thematic Report: Cameroon - The education crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions*, p.9, February 2021
Cameroon education cluster, *Cameroon education cluster strategy North West & South West*, p. 10, Jan-dec 2020
 - 40 Protection sector, *Protection Analysis...*, p. 15.
 - 41 *ACAPS, Ibid*. Girls, particularly adolescents, are also greatly affected by the lack of educational opportunities, exposing them to risks and leading to the adoption of negative coping strategies, such as transactional sex.
 - 42 *ACAPS, Ibid*
 - 43 International Center for Research on Women and Instituto Promundo, *Evolving men, Initial Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey*, p.23, 2011. See also <http://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Risk-Factors-Men-Lifetime-Perpetration-Physical-Violence-Against-Intimate-Partners-Results-IMAGES-Eight-Countries.pdf>
 - 44 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2022...*, p. 56; DRC, *Cameroon – Child Protection...*
 - 45 *ACAPS, Ibid*, p.7
 - 46 WILPF, *Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon*, p.36, 2020
 - 47 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2021...*, p.54; Protection sector, *Protection Analysis...*, p. 23.
Girls would engage in sexual activity with armed individuals to "protect" their family and get money. See also https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/08/08/au-cameroun-anglophone-le-business-des-rapts-et-des-rancons_5497623_3212.html
 - 48 WILPF, *Ibid*, p.36
 - 49 UNHCR and INTERSOS *Cameroon: North West & South West Regions, Monthly protection monitoring report*, p. 3, July 2021
 - 50 Plan International, *CAFAAG workshop notes and action plan NWSW*, February 2021

- 51 University of Oxford, *'We Remain Their Slaves' Voices from the Cameroon Conflict*, p.53, 2020
- 52 Child Protection Area of Responsibility, *Risks and Needs...*, p.15.
- 53 In Buea, youth recently protested against the conditions at the Borstal Institute, originally a boarding school for juvenile delinquents.
- 54 WILPF, *Ibid*, p.38. See also Protection sector, *Protection Analysis...*, p.23., OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2021...*, p.54
- 55 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs 2021...*, p.54
- 56 The bush refers to the extensive forest areas in the anglophone regions. People living in the bush face particular difficulties accessing clean water and are vulnerable to contracting illnesses, such as malaria, which is prevalent in Cameroon. (University of Oxford, *Ibid*.)
- 57 While entire families can resort to pendular displacement, this coping strategy is also adopted by individuals who move around alone: 36 per cent of them are men, 11 per cent are women. Pendular displacement is observed in 61 per cent of the surveyed villages of the North West and 44 per cent of the assessed localities in the South West. Thirty-three per cent of these displacements are a result of armed attacks while 30 per cent result from a fear of violent incidents (IOM, *MSNA NWSW...*)
- 58 https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/08/08/au-cameroun-anglophone-le-business-des-rapts-et-des-rancons_5497623_3212.html
- 59 https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/cmr_hno_2020_print2.pdf
- 60 INTERSOS/UNHCR, *Ibid*. More than 100,000 Anglophone children are believed to live in the neighbouring Francophone regions. The majority do not speak French and lack civil documents (ACAPS, *Ibid*)
- 61 Protection sector, *Protection Analysis...*, p.17
- 62 The pro-independence movement in Cameroon's North West and South West regions is proclaiming an independent state called Ambazonia. Members of the NSAG are sometimes referred to as "Ambazonians" or "Amba boys".
- 63 The International Office for Migration's voluntary returns database for returning Cameroonians records 4,690 migrants (3,876 males and 814 females). This total includes 400 children (165 girls and 235 boys). The breakdown for the adult population is 649 women and 3641 men.
- 64 DRC, *Cameroon – Child Protection...* See also Child Protection Area of Responsibility, *Ibid*.
- 65 OCHA, *Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No. 27, As of 31 January 2021*
- 66 See for instance p.26 of the IMAGES report for North Kivu: <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Gender-Relations-Sexual-and-Gender-Based-Violence-and-the-Effects-of-Conflict-on-Women-and-Men-in-North-Kivu-Eastern-DRC-Results-from-IMAGES.pdf>
- 67 Global Health Action, *Ibid*, p.9.
- 68 Henri Myrntinen, Lana Khattab & Jana Naujoks, *Ibid*, p. 7. See also International Center for Research on Women and Instituto Promundo, *Ibid*, p.23
- 69 Protection sector, *Ibid*, p.23. See also IRC Cameroon, *Protection Needs Assessment Ndiang & Meme Divisions (South-West Region), Summary of Key Findings*, p.10, October 2020.
- 70 Community Center for Integrated Development, *The impact of the Anglophone crisis on the realization of gender equality and equity*, p.51, 2021.
- 71 CARE & PLAN INTERNATIONAL, *Ibid*.
- 72 See, for instance, the appeal that a group of women's organizations sent in June 2021 to the UN Security Council, asking it to help end conflicts in Cameroon: <https://fr.sputniknews.com/afrique/202106091045710229-crisis-dalerte-de-femmes-au-cameroun-nous-ne-souhaitons-pas-accueillir-des-casques-bleus/>
- 73 In the North West, female-headed households tend to be more food insecure than households headed by males: https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021.04_cmr_ensan_report.pdf
- 74 In Cameroon 43.2 per cent of women in union experience domestic violence, and 39.8 per cent and 14.5 per cent respectively experience emotional and sexual violence. Nationally, 20.1 per cent of women were reported to have been forced to have sex for their first sexual relationship. Overall, 56.4 per cent of women in union experienced at least one of these forms of violence. The lack of legal criminalization of domestic violence and marital rape is a major gap in the protection of women's rights. (Annuaire Statistique du MINPROFF, p.55)
- 75 CARE & PLAN INTERNATIONAL, *Ibid*., p.4.
- 76 <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/operations/cameroon/document/donnees-sur-legalite-des-sexes-au-cameroun-hno-2020>
- 77 IRC Cameroon, *Gender Based Violence -Rapid Assessment, South West Region*, January 2019 and *Protection Needs Assessment Ndiang...*, p.10; Protection sector, *Protection analysis...*, p.20; INTERSOS/UNHCR, *Ibid*.
- 78 International Center for Research on Women and Instituto Promundo, *Ibid*, p.49.
- 79 See Global Health Action, *Ibid*, p.9
Existing global studies suggest that armed conflict has an indirect impact on intimate partner violence through increasing known drivers: the erosion of the rule of law, limitations in the prosecution of crimes, forced displacement, increased poverty, separation from family and support systems, the normalization of violence, the worsening of mental health and the increase in substance use can reinforce patriarchal social relationships and form potential pathways affecting intimate partner violence.
- 80 INTERSOS/UNHCR, *Cameroon: North West & South West regions monthly protection monitoring report*, p.2, March 2021
- 81 Forty-six per cent of community members interviewed as part of a protection survey say that women and girls do not feel safe (DRC, *Protection...*, 2020)

- 82 <https://www.nrc.no/expert-deployment/2016/2020/gender-based-violence-beyond-crises/>
- 83 As few as 1,6 per cent of women have a land title in their own name. Access to a plot does not allow them to have control over it, as they have few opportunities to assert their rights. (ONU Femmes Cameroun, *Rapport annuel 2018*, p. 9). Lack of finance and poverty are main stressors for women and girls, cited by 57 per cent of the people in the focus group discussions held in Ndian and Meme, as against eight per cent for SGBV (IRC Cameroon, *Protection Needs Assessment Ndian...*, p.9).
- 84 <https://www.mei.edu/content/map/are-syrian-men-vulnerable-too-gendering-syria-refugee-response>
- 85 Henri Myrntinen, Lana Khattab & Jana Naujoks, *Ibid*, p. 9
- 86 Séverine Autesserre, *Dangerous tales: Dominant narratives on the Congo and their unintended consequences*, Oxford University Press, 2012. See also <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/men-boys-displacement-challenges-refugee-contexts/>
- 87 <https://www.msf.fr/decouvrir-msf/nos-operations/cameroun-assistance-aux-victimes-du-conflit-separatiste>
- 88 <https://www.journalducameroun.com/cameroun-medecins-sans-frontieres-de-nouveau-accuse-de-soutenir-les-separatistes-dans-le-nord-ouest-cameroun/>
- 89 The country ranks second on the Norwegian Refugee Council's annual list of the world's most neglected displacement crises: <https://www.nrc.no/shorthand/fr/the-worlds-most-neglected-displacement-crises-in-2020/index.html>
See also https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/08/05/au-cameroun-le-calvaire-des-deplaces-des-regions-anglophones_5496573_3212.html
- 90 OCHA, *Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No.33*; p.3, 31 July 2021
- 91 OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs...* 2020, p.17-26.
- 92 Message by Mark Lowcock to the Humanitarian Coordinators, Tuesday, December 8, 2020.
- 93 See for instance CARE & Promundo, *Men and boys in displacement, Assistance and protection challenges for unaccompanied boys and men in refugee contexts*, p.17, 2017.
- 94 See, for example, ECHO Factsheet (2017) Gender: Different needs, adapted assistance, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/gender_en.pdf; Sida's gender priorities are described at <https://www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work/gender-equality>
- 95 OCHA, Tufts university, Feinstein international center & CARE, *Sex and Age mater, Improving Humanitarian Response in Emergencies*, 2011.
- 96 Henri Myrntinen, Lana Khattab & Jana Naujoks, *Ibid*, p. 8
- 97 <https://allsurvivorsproject.org/resources/un-security-council-resolutions/>
For a long time, GBV against men and boys was not recognized under the different UN Security Council resolutions, being mentioned for the first time in UNSCR 2106 (2013). This limited resources and political attention to the issue. By contrast, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court suggests that assumptions about who can or cannot be a victim must be suspended if justice is to be done based on available evidence. Thanks to this, male victims of sexual violence can now be recognized under international criminal law. Chris Dolan, *Victims who are men...*
- 98 Protection sector, *Protection Analysis...*, p.20
- 99 The Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) is an assessment tool developed by CARE and adopted by the IASC. It is increasingly recognized and used by humanitarian actors because of its simple, practical and progressive nature. It provides essential guidance about how to assess gender roles and responsibilities, capacities and vulnerabilities, and how to develop practical recommendations. It is used in situations where time is of the essence and resources are very scarce. The toolkit is available at <https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/in-practice/rapid-gender-analysis#:~:text=%20Rapid%20Gender%20Analysis%20in%205%20Steps%20,data%20that%20has%20been%20collected%20is...%20More%20>



NORCAP
Prinsens gate 2
0152 Oslo Norway

www.nrc.no/norcap