

# ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

## in the context of conflict-related sexual violence

### DEFINITIONS

**Economic empowerment** refers to an individual's capacity to "participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth".

#### How does economic insecurity intersect with CRSV?

Economic insecurity is both a driver and a consequence of CRSV. Extreme poverty and inequality push vulnerable individuals to engage in harmful coping mechanisms during conflict, such as exchanging sex for basic needs, exposing them to sexual exploitation, violence, and health risks.

Economic insecurity and isolation increase the risk of interaction with armed actors, and can lead to forced marriages and human trafficking. CRSV has severe economic implications for survivors, who face social stigma and marginalisation, hindering access to resources and opportunities. Psychological effects like depression further limit their economic empowerment, impacting their recovery and increasing vulnerability to harm.

To break the cycle of economic insecurity and CRSV, comprehensive support systems are needed, including psychosocial assistance, community rebuilding, and economic empowerment programs.

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*It is evident that food insecurity increases the risk of exposure to sexual violence and conversely that sexual violence often leads to socioeconomic marginalisation, increasing the risks of poverty and food insecurity.*

*Secretary-General's Report on CRSV in 2023)*

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### KEY SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS



**Resolution 1889 (2009):** Recognising that there are strong links between women's social and economic empowerment and the success of post-conflict peacebuilding efforts, this resolution notes women's capacity to engage in public decision making and economic recovery often does not receive adequate recognition or financing in post-conflict situations. It underlines that funding for women's early recovery needs is vital to increase women's empowerment, which can contribute to effective post-conflict peacebuilding.



**Resolution 2122 (2013):** This resolution acknowledges gender equality and women's empowerment as critical to international peace and security and calls for consistent application of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.



**Resolution 2467 (2019):** This calls upon Member States and relevant UN entities to support capacity building for women-led and survivor-led organisations and build the capacity of civil society groups to enhance informal community-level protection mechanisms against sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. This resolution urges support to women's active and meaningful engagement in peace processes, aiming to strengthen gender equality, women's empowerment and protection as a means of conflict prevention.

## EXACERBATED VULNERABILITIES

Armed conflict exacerbates the preexisting economic vulnerabilities of specific groups, such as women, children, people with disabilities and persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities. In nearly every country, women work longer hours than men, but are usually paid less and are more likely to live in poverty.

Specific subgroups of women are particularly affected economically by armed conflict:

- **Rural women** face significant challenges from inadequate health and social services and unequal access to resources, which worsen in conflict settings, leading to food insecurity and loss of property. Vulnerable groups, such as widows and female-headed households, experience heightened economic hardship and limited job opportunities.
- **Displaced women** in conflict zones encounter barriers to education, income, and decision-making, compounded by poor reproductive health care.
- **Persons with disabilities** suffer from the destruction of essential infrastructure during war; in Syria, households with disabled members are 9% less likely to meet basic needs.
- **Children in conflict zones**, numbering about 460 million as of 2024, face violence, disrupted education, and increased risks of exploitation, which perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit future job prospects.

“ Sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution as a basic means of survival, is rampant. This is sexual violence driven by economic desperation where women and girls are compelled to prostitute themselves for less than a dollar in order to survive another day.

Statement of SRSB-SVC Pramila Patten at the 2023 UN Security Council Open Debate on CRSV ”



## OUR PROJECT IN SOUTH SUDAN

Implemented by ITC, UNFPA and UNMISS, our project in South Sudan (Yambio, Juba, Bor, and Bentiu) started in 2023. It aims to build the socio-economic resilience of survivors of CRSV. Employing a survivor-centred approach, we hope to improve access to essential medical, psychosocial and legal services through multi-sectoral collaboration and holistic support and help build survivor's resilience and reintegration through economic empowerment, financial inclusion, advocacy and policy reforms, and community engagement and awareness.

So far, UNFPA has supported One Stop Centres to provide CRSV survivors with essential medical, psycho-social, legal and economic assistance. The Center has played a pivotal role in survivors' economic empowerment, whereby some beneficiaries have already initiated small-scale businesses, like selling oil, sugar, and salt. ITC has conducted a mapping mission and a market assessment in Bor and Yambio to identify conflict-sensitive economic empowerment approaches and quick-win areas where the target groups can be supported to generate income.

Despite challenging operational conditions, we have made significant progress in increasing income and employment opportunities for CRSV survivors and at-risk groups.