

II. METHODOLOGY

The assessment was conducted by reviewing existing research related to the issue and by conducting a field mission to the three countries. In each country, the team consulted with different groups within refugee and returnee communities, as well as host communities (children, community leaders, government officials, international & national NGOs, UN agencies and security forces).

The mission team comprised an independent consultant, a UNHCR consultant and a staff member of SC-UK who formed the core group. Their work was facilitated in each country by staff members from UNHCR and SC-UK.

The findings of the assessment indicate that sexual violence and exploitation of children appears to be extensive in the communities visited and involves actors at all levels, including those who are engaged to protect the very children they are exploiting – UN staff, security forces, staff of international and national NGOs, government officials, and community leaders.

III. KEY FINDINGS

A) Sexual Exploitation

a) The problem of sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation was defined by children as: *‘when them big man go loving with small girl for money. Them big men can go loving to small girls, they can call girl when she walking along the road, and then the girl go and they go in house and lock the door. And when the big man has done his business he will give the small girl money or gift’*

The exchange of sex for money or gifts appears to be widespread and the majority of children consulted said they knew of at least one other child involved in such an exchange. The children themselves, whilst aware of the exploitative nature of the exchange, felt this was often the only option they had in order to receive food and other basic necessities and to pay for education. Parents were often aware of the exploitation but also felt that there were no other options for their family to secure a livelihood and whilst not approving it, generally turned a blind eye. In some cases, however, it was reported that parents encouraged their daughters to engage in such activities to bring an income into the family.

The majority of children involved are girls between the ages of 13 and 18 years. Younger girls were sometimes befriended by men to gain access to their older sisters or to their mothers. A few boys were reportedly exploited in a similar way by older women, but there were no suggestions of boys being sexually exploited by men. This may have to do with the greater taboos surrounding homosexuality.