

HIGHLIGHTS

- 663 protection incidents were reported in the North-West and South-West (NWSW) regions.
- 52 per cent of the IDPs in the NWSW are women and children who are at risks of sexual violence, sexual slavery, trafficking, forced marriage and an increase in prostitution for survival and security.
- COVID-19: 1,206 cumulative cases and 10 deaths.

FIGURES

(OCHA/IOM APRIL 2021, UNHCR MAY 2021, IOM JUNE 2020, OCHA FEBRUARY 2020)

4.4 million

People in need of humanitarian assistance

3 million

People targeted by the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan

1 million

Internally displaced people

449,796

Refugees and asylum seekers

465,757

Returns (previously IDPs)

FUNDING

(HRP 2021, FINANCIAL TRACKING SERVICES - FTS)

362 million

Requested in US dollar

21.5 per cent

funded as of 3 August 2021



Credit: OCHA

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SURVIVORS HEAL IN SAFE SPACES AFTER GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Safe spaces run by UNFPA protect and empower women affected by the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions.

By Agha Fru, UNFPA Buea



Safe space in Buea, South-West region | Credit: UNFPA/Agha Fru

The women and girls' safe spaces were initiated by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in 2018 to ensure the protection and empowerment of women and girls affected by the socio-political crisis in the North-West and South-West (NWSW) regions of Cameroon. As part of its humanitarian response plan, the organization has created 12 safe spaces in Buea, Mamfe, Mutengene, and Kumba in the South-West, Bamenda in the North-West, Bafoussam in the West, and Douala in the Littoral region.

Safe spaces are designed for women and girls in distress including gender-based violence (GBV) survivors, internally displaced and members of the host communities. Those spaces aim at providing them with psychosocial support, skills training, medical support and economic empowerment opportunities.

Over the years, hundreds of women and girls have benefitted from services at safe spaces. Here are some stories of women and girls, who survived GBV and were struggling to have a decent life.

Ita, 12 years

Twelve-year-old Ita¹ visited the safe space in Bamenda, North-West region. She had been referred in January 2021, by the regional delegation of women empowerment for the North-West. The social worker who received her reported that the young girl arrived terrified and sobbing.

“I can’t go back to the house. I don’t want him to sleep with me again. He will beat me if he knows that I have told you. Please don’t send me back there, please”. Ita came from the village, few months earlier to help as a babysitter to a family’s friend; a job opportunity which later turned sour when her employer started raping her.”

“He abused me more than 10 times, sometimes in the room I was sharing with his other children and other times in his bedroom”.

After listening to Ita’s painful story, the GBV case manager at the safe space reassured her of her safety and referred her for a comprehensive medical check-up including physical examinations and a series of tests. The young survivor received medical and mental support. The safe space contacted a legal practitioner who opened her case file and followed up for her perpetrator to be arrested and duly prosecuted.

Ita also received support to reconnect with her family. She spent two weeks at the safe space where she met, studied and played with other girls her age. According to the social workers, she began to portray a sense of belonging and fulfilment. She could express herself better and was no longer as frightened as she used to be. Today, Ita lives in her village with her parents while her offender is in jail.



A survivor* of GBV in Buea, South-West region | Credit: OCHA/Giles Clarkes
*The survivor in the picture is not the same portrayed in the story

Tim, 21 years

21 year-old Tim² is internally displaced from Metta village, in the North-West region. Mother of one and HIV positive, she lives in Bamenda. When she arrived to Bamenda, she had no shelter and could not sustain her and her baby. She accepted to live in a young man’s shelter as he offered to support her. But he later took advantage of her by repeatedly drugging and raping her, resulting in her pregnancy. She managed to find her way to the safe space in Bamenda, upon referral from a friend.

“I heard about the safe space through a neighbour and fellow lady who had previously received support through the centre. So when the man who hosted me stepped out of the house, I packed my little belongings and carried my child to the same place where the lady had directed me. Thank God the place was not very far from where I was staying”. Tim was received by a woman who comforted her and gave her a bucket full of necessities, items for herself and her baby. She gave

them a room to sleep, and the following day another woman took them to a clinic for medical check-up.

“I am still at the safe space learning how to make soap and continuing with free of charge regular antenatal visits to the clinic. I am truly thankful to the woman who told me about this safe space, and I implore the almighty God to bless all those who are behind this initiative. I will thus inform other women with similar experiences to visit the safe space”.

1 name changed for protection reasons

2 name changed for protection reasons

Baby Hope's mother

Baby Hope³'s mother was eight months pregnant when she first visited the safe space, in Buea town, South West region. She had been stuck in the bush alongside her family after armed men attacked their village and set ablaze their home. While in the bush, Hope's mother did not receive any antenatal care. Her family was extremely worried because she was only 16 years old and was about to have her first baby in such deplorable conditions. Her parents decided to send her to Buea to live with a family's female friend who unfortunately could not take proper care of the pregnant teenager considering her limited income. Additionally, the family's friend had about nine other internally displaced people (IDPs) under her care.

One day, the family friend heard of the safe space services through a community mobilizer and decided to give the safe space a call. An appointment was quickly scheduled for Baby Hope's mother and after listening to her story, the social workers took her to the Buea regional hospital where she was enrolled for antenatal consultations, medical tests and treatment. A few weeks later she gave birth to Baby Hope and benefitted from a baby box and dignity kit, and had her medical bills covered by the safe space. The safe space continues to support Baby Hope with food and medication. The young mother was also enrolled into a professional training program in hair dressing.

"My dream is to own a hairdressing business and raise money to take care of my family and send my daughter to school. I wasn't able to go to school but I would like my daughter to be well educated so that she can become a minister in this country".

The crisis in the North-West and South-West regions has caused the displacement of over 712,800 people within the NWSW and communities in other regions in Cameroon, and 67,500 refugees in Nigeria. 52 per cent of the IDPs are women and children who are at risks of sexual violence, sexual slavery, trafficking, forced marriage and an increase in prostitution for survival and security. INTERSOS and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) reported 661 protection incidents in the North-West and South-West regions. 11 per cent were cases of gender-based violence including rape and physical violence. Through the safe spaces, UNFPA and partners are addressing the emotional and physical needs of women and girls by enabling them to connect with others who suffered similar experiences, receive information, guidance and support, access services, build social networks - and most importantly help to reduce their vulnerability.

A DISPLACED FAMILY STRIVES TO MAKE A NEW START

Solomon⁴, 47, with his wife are struggling to take care of their eight children in Souza town, Moungo division in the Littoral region, where he found a shelter.



A displaced family* in the South-West region | Credit: OCHA/Giles Clarkes
*The family in the picture is not the same portrayed in the story

³ name changed for protection reasons

⁴ name changed for protection reasons

For the past eight months, Solomon and his family have been living in Souza town, about 80 km from Muyuka town in the South-West region where he is originally from. Before moving, he was a teacher and was running a farm.

“On 9 January 2019, I was abducted and tortured by a non-State armed group (NSAG). They suspected I was giving information to the police and tortured me for more than nine hours before believing I was innocent and releasing me”, said Salomon. “Two days later, I was kidnapped again by members of another NSAG who beat me violently. I was able to escape with the help of one of my former students who had joined the group. I went into hiding in the bush where I spent more than one year”, he added. Thousands of people have taken refuge in the bushes in the North-West and South-West regions, where they don’t have access to basic social services nor adequate shelters.

While he was hiding in the forest, Salomon’s family was robbed, and his wife killed. Sometime later, he managed to get his children back and sought refuge in Souza thanks to financial assistance from his family and friends. “When I arrived in Souza, I couldn’t sleep at night. Every time I heard a car, I woke up thinking that the NSAGs had found me. I heard the sound of bullets, I lived in fear. I miss the comfort in Muyuka before the crisis, but I now prefer the safety in Souza that is priceless”, said Salomon. He is living with his family in a two-room house and the children have free access to education. Solomon and his new wife are engaged in livelihood farming activities.

According to data from the Emergency Tracking Tool (ETT), at least 2,602 persons were displaced in the North-West and South-West regions in July alone. Sustained violence and a ban on movements on main roads several days per week on July aggravated humanitarian needs, as affected people continue to flee their homes, seeking safety in bushes and neighboring communities.

COVID-19: CAMEROON ON ALERT AFTER DETECTION OF THE DELTA VARIANT



A UN staff taking her COVID-19 vaccine | Credit: WHO

After a second wave of the COVID-19 outbreak in Cameroon with a peak of 8,681 cases between 22 to 28 March 2021, there is a considerable decrease in the number of COVID-19 cases and confirmed deaths. The Minister of Public Health reported 1,206 cumulative cases and 10 deaths in July 2021.

Between May and July 2021, the Pasteur Centre of Cameroon announced however the detection of the COVID-19 Delta variant in the cities of Yaounde and Douala. Cameroon has now three variants of the COVID-19 virus: Alpha, Beta, and Delta.

With the identification of the new genome which is more contagious than the others, the country is at risk of a resurgence in cases. According to the Ministry of Public Health, the presence of the Delta variant exposes the country to a third wave of infections that could be more devastating than the first two. Faced with this threat, the Ministry of Public Health launched on 7 July a vaccination campaign and encouraged people to take the vaccine and reinforce barrier measures.

However, vaccination against COVID-19 remains largely rejected in Cameroon. According to the results of the survey administrated among humanitarian actors and United Nations staff and dependents, about 75 per cent of the participants recognize that the COVID-19 vaccine can contribute to reinforcing immunity against the virus. However, 20.8 per cent of the people surveyed were not willing to be vaccinated given the doubts they have about it. As of 28 July 2021, 285,522 people had received the first dose of vaccine and 53,365 people the second dose, which account for 38 per cent of the vaccines that the Government had received by 21 July 2021.

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