

Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Experiences and perspectives of victims and survivors of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Experiences and perspectives of victims and survivors of wartime sexual torture

September 2025

I. Introduction

1. The Global Survivors Fund (GSF) submits this note as contribution to the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment's upcoming report, which will examine victims' and survivors' experiences, perspectives, and recommendations on prevention, accountability, rehabilitation, and reparation at national, regional and global levels, as well as their meaningful participation and collaboration in such processes. This submission specifically responds to questions 2, 3, and 4.
2. GSF was established in 2019 by Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad, Nobel Peace Prize laureates 2018. Its mission is to enhance access to reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) around the globe and ensure they receive comprehensive reparative measures addressing their urgent needs in the meantime. GSF is dedicated to ensuring that reparation is pursued, designed, and implemented with survivors, that the measures are comprehensive, sustainably funded, inclusive of all age groups and gender, and that survivors of CRSV access them urgently. GSF's work is grounded in its unique co-creation model and survivor-centred approach.¹
3. Considering GSF's mandate, this note focuses on the experiences and perspectives of victims and survivors of wartime sexual violence amounting to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the impact of such violence on their lives, families, and communities, and victims' and survivors' views on what reparation should entail. It also

¹ GSF, 'Annual Report 2024' (2025), https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Reports/AR2024_GSF_EN.pdf.

highlights the essential role of participation, and in particular, co-creation with victims and survivors in shaping reparations. The submission draws on direct testimonies collected through the Global Reparations Study,² as well from participants to GSF's Interim Reparative Measures (IRM) projects³ and the Pilot Project on Urgent Interim Reparation for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine.⁴ As such, the experiences shared by victims and survivors most often describe either acts of sexual torture, or instances of sexual violence committed in connection with torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, particularly in detention contexts. This submission includes testimonies of survivors and victims from Burundi, The Gambia, Guatemala, Kenya, Nepal, Syria, Timor-Leste, and Ukraine.⁵

4. Survivors' and victims' views can be summarised into four key points:
 - (i) Wartime sexual violence amounting to torture inflicts profound and layered harm on victims and survivors. These impacts extend across generations, affecting children and grandchildren, and must be recognised and addressed through survivor-centred, comprehensive reparations.
 - (ii) Victims and survivors define reparation as far more than financial compensation. They call for holistic measures, which restore dignity, address urgent needs, contribute to rebuilding their lives, and prevent future violations.
 - (iii) Reparations must be context-specific and responsive to victims' and survivors' realities, including being culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive, and recognising the different needs and circumstances of diverse groups of victims and survivors.
 - (iv) Victims' and survivors' meaningful participation, including co-creation, is essential for the design and implementation of effective reparation. Safe, accessible and structured participation ensures that reparations adequately address harms suffered.

5. The submission first outlines the multifaceted impacts of wartime sexual violence amounting to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment on victims,

² The Global Reparations Study's country reports are available here: <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/how-we-work/global-reparations-study/>.

³ For more information on Interim Reparative Measures Projects see: <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/how-we-work/act-in-the-interim/>.

⁴ While certain patterns and trends can be identified in survivors' and victims' accounts of wartime sexual torture, as shared during their participation in GSF's initiatives, their stories also reveal diverse realities. No two testimonies are alike: survivors and victims do not all seek the same forms of reparation, and even for a single survivor or victim, needs, priorities, and understandings of reparation may change over time. This underscores why co-creation and other forms of meaningful participation are essential for reparation to be grounded on survivors' and victims' experiences and priorities.

⁵ These accounts should not be considered representative of all survivors or victims in a given country, as participants often came from specific regions, conflicts, or time periods, and each is an individual with distinct characteristics, experiences, and priorities.

survivors, and their families. It then examines survivors' and victims' definitions of justice and reparation, highlights the forms of reparation they have identified as priorities, and presents their recommendations to strengthen the implementation of survivors' and victims' rights and participation. Finally, it presents examples of survivors achieving or creating reparations outside judicial processes, drawing on GSF and partners' Interim Reparative Measures project in Türkiye for Syrian survivors of detention and the Pilot Project on Urgent Interim Reparation for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine.

II. Impacts on victims and survivors, their families, and beyond

6. Victims and survivors' accounts demonstrate that sexual torture causes layered and long-lasting harms. These range from physical injuries and reproductive issues to mental health consequences, social exclusion, and intergenerational harm.

Physical impacts

7. Victims and survivors across all contexts reported severe and lasting physical consequences of wartime sexual torture, many of which remain untreated decades later. Acute injuries included heavy bleeding, fractures, fever, unconsciousness, and swelling caused by brutal beatings and rape. Many survivors continue to live with chronic pain, back problems, gynaecological disorders, and other conditions directly linked to sexual torture. As one victim from Nepal explained: *"Having bodily pain is obvious to me as I went through that brutal torture. I still have pain in my back. I can't do heavy work. I feel tired very quickly."*⁶
8. Reproductive and sexual health harms were frequently cited. Syrian survivors described suffering from early menopause and their fertility having been impacted.⁷ In The Gambia, victims described suffering long-term health consequences from beatings, including

⁶ Elena Naughton and Dr. Susan Risal, 'Nepal Study on the Status of and Opportunities for Reparations for Victims and Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence' (Conflict Victim Women's National Network, Global Survivors Fund, International Center for Transitional Justice and Nagarik Aawaz, June 2022), p. 47, https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_Nepal_EN_June2022_WEB.pdf [GRS Nepal].

⁷ Amal Nassar, 'Syria Study on Opportunities for Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence' (Association of Detainees and the Missing of Sednaya Prison, Global Survivors Fund and Women Now for Development, August 2023), p. 55, https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_SYRIA_EN_Sept2023_WEB.pdf [GRS Syria].

miscarriages directly linked to the abuse suffered in detention.⁸ Guatemalan survivors spoke about their experiences of recurrent miscarriages. One recalled: *"I had many miscarriages, around eight ... if you don't get a curettage, it keeps growing inside you, and you can die."*⁹

9. Survivors in Kenya and Timor-Leste reported untreated fistulas and urinary incontinence, leaving them with lifelong pain, disability, and stigma.¹⁰ A Kenyan survivor said: *"[My sexual organ] was badly cut in a bid to teach a lesson."*¹¹ Male survivors of sexual torture in Syria and Burundi reported impotence and erectile dysfunction resulting from electrocution, beatings, and genital mutilation.¹² Male Kenyan survivors of castration and rape reported the devastating effects on their health, dignity, and family life.¹³
10. Other survivors highlighted the worsening of pre-existing conditions due to the denial of medical care during detention. In Ukraine, one survivor explained: *"I generally have a thyroid disease, and I was on hormonal treatment. But when I was taken prisoner, of course, all this stopped [...] and the tumour grew. Well, plus [it led] to complications [in] other organs, [including my] female genital organs."*¹⁴ Some survivors from Burundi reported untreated

⁸ Didier Gbery and Maimuna Manneh, 'The Gambia Study on Opportunities for Reparations for Victims and Survivors of Sexual and Gender-based Violence' (International Center for Transitional Justice, Women Association for Victims Empowerment, Gender Platform for Transitional Justice and Global Survivors Fund, June 2022) p. 25, https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_Gambia_ENG_June2022_WEB.pdf [GRS The Gambia].

⁹ Andrea Bolaños Vargas and Olga Alicia Paz Bailey, 'Nos quitaron todo menos la dignidad: Estudio sobre la situación y las oportunidades de reparación para las personas sobrevivientes de violencias sexuales relacionadas con el conflicto' (Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos, Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala, Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial, September 2024), p. 35 https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/Report_Guatemala_Oct2024_SP_A4_Web.pdf [GRS Guatemala].

¹⁰ Mariana Goetz and others, 'Study on the situation and opportunities of the right to reparation for victims and survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Kenya' (Grace Agenda, Global Survivors Fund and Civil Society Organisation Network, May 2023), p. 23, https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_KENYA_EN_May2023_WEB.pdf [GRS Kenya]; 'Timor-Leste Study on the Status and Opportunities for Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence', (Asia Justice and Rights, Assosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita and Global Survivors Fund, December 2023), (GRS Timor-Leste) p. 29, https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/Report_Timor-Leste_Dec2023_EN_Web.pdf [GRS Timor Leste].

¹¹ GRS Kenya, p. 23.

¹² GRS Syria, p. 39.

¹³ GRS Kenya, p. 26.

¹⁴ Amal Nassar et al, 'Ukraine Study on the Status of and Opportunities for Reparations for Victims and Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence' (Global Survivors Fund, Blue Bird, The Eastern-Ukrainian Center for Civic Initiatives and Truth Hounds) p. 41 https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_Ukraine_EN_June2022_WEB.pdf [GRS Ukraine].

injuries leading to lasting disabilities, while others contracted HIV or other sexually transmitted infections due to the absence of timely post-rape care.¹⁵

Mental health and psychosocial impacts

11. Survivors identified psychological trauma as one of torture's deepest impacts. Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and emotional instability were reported across different contexts. A survivor from Ukraine stated that her life in 2014 "was divided into life before captivity and after captivity" and that she "became a completely different person."¹⁶ Similarly, a survivor from Guatemala shared that "[T]hings were never the same again because I was always filled with shame, sadness and pain... So, it affected me because I wasn't the same, I didn't do things with the same joy."¹⁷
12. In The Gambia, victims of arbitrary arrest and detention mentioned persistent trauma. The fear, personal insults, assaults and death threats they experienced, and, in some cases, separation from their children, left lasting painful memories of humiliation and degradation.¹⁸ In Nepal, victims reported a wide range of psychological symptoms, including flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, fear, difficulty sleeping, loss of self-esteem, and social phobia when in groups or in the presence of the police or army. These symptoms were rooted in the extreme violence they endured while they were brutally beaten and raped over days, weeks or months.¹⁹ In Kenya, most survivors continue to suffer from emotional and psychological stress because of the humiliation and stigma they face within their families and communities. Anxiety, depression, insomnia, and a deep erosion of self-worth remain among the challenges they endure.²⁰
13. Syrian male survivors explained the profound toll sexual torture had on their mental health. Some expressed fear of marriage due to uncertainty about their reproductive capacities.²¹ One recounted: "Being told 'you are infertile,' 'you cannot have children,' affected me badly. You lose your manhood [...] I am still suffering from this."²² Another survivor described avoiding sexual acts that would bring back memories of the mental torture he experienced in detention, where the torturer would describe the sexual acts that he would inflict on the detainee's wife.²³

¹⁵ GSF, 'Étude sur les perceptions des survivant.es de violences sexuelles liées à la crise politique de 2015 au Burundi' (Upcoming 2025) [GRS Burundi].

¹⁶ GRS Ukraine, p. 36.

¹⁷ GRS Guatemala, p. 33.

¹⁸ GRS The Gambia, p. 25.

¹⁹ GRS Nepal, p. 47.

²⁰ GRS Kenya, p. 24.

²¹ GRS Syria, p. 39.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Societal stigma and exclusion

14. Survivors emphasised the stigma and humiliation they faced in their communities. For instance, a survivor from Timor-Leste recounted *"I was 12 when my older sister and I were tortured and raped by the Indonesian military [...] The community still scorns me and my sister. [...] People in the community speak badly about me, saying things like I was the Indonesian soldiers' girl and that I am worthless. But I was 12 years old, I was raped for five months; my body was sacrificed to save my family and this country."*²⁴
15. In Guatemala, survivors shared that their communities discriminate against them for having been victims of rape, as if this violation were somehow different from other human rights abuses. As one survivor explained: *"We cannot talk about sexual violence, they say we let it happen."* Women from Sepur Zarco in Guatemala recalled how, before the court ruling, they were seen as "easy women" and blamed for what had happened to them, forcing some to leave their communities out of shame.²⁵
16. In Kenya, survivors described losing respect in their communities. A survivor stated: *"We are considered less than human."* Another one shared: *"I have no one to run to, my past follows me everywhere. I have lost respect in the community."*²⁶ Women survivors recounted being ostracised in local spaces such as churches and markets, with neighbours refusing to sit near them in church or involved them in activities. Most Kenyan survivors reported having been abandoned by their husbands, and those for which their husband remained, reported physical and verbal abuse. One survivor noted: *"Every time I have conflict with my husband, he uses it to humiliate me. Everyone knows and it is used to put me down."*²⁷
17. Stigma also deeply marked male survivors from both Syria and Kenya. Syrian male survivors spoke of losing social respect, being treated as dangerous or dishonourable, and excluded from community life *"The entire social equation changes. Those who respected you, no longer respect you. Those who found your opinion the most important, now put your opinion in the tenth place."*²⁸ One Syrian survivor explained that when he proposed to a family to marry their daughter, they declined, assuming that as a former detainee, he could no longer [sexually] 'perform' and have children.²⁹ In Kenya, male survivors of castration and rape described feeling

²⁴ GRS Timor-Leste, p. 41.

²⁵ GRS Guatemala, p. 38.

²⁶ GRS Kenya, p. 24.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 25.

²⁸ GRS Syria, p. 39.

²⁹ Ibid.

emasculated, rejected by their wives, and stigmatised by their communities. One survivor recalled: *"I hear women whispering to one another saying look at 'long lilo' [empty trousers] whenever I pass around."*³⁰

Socioeconomic impacts

18. Detention and displacement disrupted education and employment for many survivors and their families, including their children. In Syria, many survivors were students at the time of detention and were unable to complete their studies. Others lost their jobs or saw their business collapse when communities avoided them out of fear of being associated with former detainees.³¹ As a result, many were forced to accept whatever work they could find to support their families, often underpaid or exhausting, while still struggling with the physical and mental health consequences of torture.³² One Syrian survivor shared the challenge of explaining resume gaps corresponding to the years she was arbitrarily detained.³³
19. In Nepal, victims of wartime sexual violence also reported severe socioeconomic consequences. Fourteen survivors were attending school when they experienced sexual torture, which led to prolonged interruptions or the end of their education.³⁴ A survivor shared: *"After I was released from jail, I tried to go to the school... I was a good student, but the perception of the community towards me had changed. Teachers used to ask me about the incident... I was surprised as none of my friends wished to sit with me... I felt hatred and humiliation from their behaviour."*³⁵
20. As it is common for most victims of sexual torture, victims in Nepal were abandoned by their husbands and left without the family and community support structures on which women are traditionally forced to depend. With limited educational and employment opportunities available, they have faced lives of profound financial insecurity.³⁶ A survivor described her situation: *"If somebody can bring my husband back then I will feel good. My children are going through a hard time. If they can be provided good food, education, then this will be a great support for me now. My body does not work, and I don't have hope for the future myself now."*³⁷

³⁰ GRS Kenya, p. 28.

³¹ Project Implementation Plan, IRM for Syrian survivors of CRSV based in Türkiye (Unpublished document, on file with GSF) [Türkiye IRM Report].

³² GRS Syria, p. 40; Türkiye IRM Report.

³³ GRS Syria, p. 40.

³⁴ GRS Nepal, p. 50.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 48.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 49.

Sexual torture affecting children and intergenerational harm

21. Children are affected by sexual torture in multiple ways: they may be subjected to sexual torture themselves, they may witness sexual torture inflicted on others, they may be born as a result of rape amounting to torture, and they also suffer through the intergenerational consequences of their parents' experiences.
22. The traumatic consequences for children who are themselves subjected to sexual torture, or who witness it, can extend across lifetimes. Survivors who were children at the time of wartime sexual torture describe profound, lasting harm. A survivor from Guatemala, who was nine years old when she was raped by the army, recalled: "*It affected me a lot, it gave me a stomach-ache above my vagina. I have some pains... I feel like they're like bumps, in my back, in my spine. I feel a bump that goes up... My leg hurts, my head hurts... and there's a tremendous noise in my ear, why? Because of the bombs in the mountains, the bombs did it. When I was raped by the army, I was about 9 years old... I got sick; I fainted from fear. I saw a lot of white discharge, and then the blood came.*"³⁸
23. In Burundi, a boy detained as an infant together with his mother developed a lasting fear of men in uniform.¹² In Kenya, a survivor described the impact on children who witnessed the sexual violence committed against their parents: "*Our children are destroyed. A new generation that saw what was done to their parents cannot forget.*"³⁹
24. The impact of sexual torture is also transmitted across generations. Children from survivors often experience intergenerational trauma, which manifests as fear, depression and can lead to social stigma and poverty. A Guatemalan survivor explained how the trauma persists across generations: "*There are children who, having nursed sadness and fear, still suffer from susto*⁴⁰ *to this day. Anything upsets them, it unsettles their nerves, and it is a consequence of all the harm they lived through, and which has been nursed by them.*"⁴¹
25. In Ukraine, children displayed symptoms of depression and faced harassment at school because of their parents' detention.⁴² A survivor described her daughters' experience: "*For three days she lay face to the wall and did not turn around. She did not eat, did not go out,*

³⁸ GRS Guatemala, p. 37.

³⁹ GRS Kenya, p. 28.

⁴⁰ "Susto" is a culturally specific expression of trauma, understood as the loss of one's vital essence or soul after a frightening or shocking experience.

⁴¹ GRS Guatemala, p. 41.

⁴² GRS Ukraine, p. 38.

*for three days she lay statically facing the wall, not moving at all and not communicating with anyone, not responding. We tried to somehow to speak to her, she did not react at all.*⁴³ Survivors from Timor-Leste also reported that their children continue to suffer. Many were unable to complete their education, face difficulties to find employment, and live with poverty and stigma. One survivor stated: *"My children and I still do not live freely, because people in the community speak badly about us and treat us as if we are worthless."*⁴⁴

III. Seeking justice and reparation

Survivors' and victims' definitions of justice and reparations

26. Across contexts, survivors emphasised that justice is not only about prosecutions but also about dignity, recognition, and support. In Burundi, survivors described justice as a way to *"regain their dignity and honour"*.⁴⁵ In Ukraine, a survivor highlighted that justice and reparations are inseparable: *"Reparation is the continuation of justice or [...] logical completion of the justice process"*.⁴⁶ For a survivor in Guatemala, *"[r]eparation means justice for everything we've lived through. Why? Because we've spent years demanding justice, and I feel like no one hears us. We're calling for justice so that everything we went through is acknowledged – because what we went through was incredibly difficult. It's not a lie."*⁴⁷
27. For torture survivors in Syria, justice and reparation are deeply intertwined. Some viewed reparation as a component of justice, while others saw justice as a part of reparation. Survivors emphasised that justice required holding the Syrian regime accountable, freeing detainees, and ensuring that others are not subjected to torture.⁴⁸ At the same time, they emphasised that criminal prosecutions were not enough, and measures of compensation and rehabilitation were also essential to achieving both justice and reparation. Interestingly, it appears that **certain sources of funding for reparation have increased reparative value**. Syrian torture survivors stressed that it would provide them with a greater sense of justice and dignity if the assets used to repair their harms came from those who committed or were complicit to crimes committed against them, some specifically referring to Rifaat Al Assad assets held by France:

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ GRS Timor Leste, p. 32.

⁴⁵ GRS Burundi.

⁴⁶ GRS Ukraine, p. 46.

⁴⁷ GRS Guatemala, p. 43.

⁴⁸ Türkiye IRM Report.

"Syrian are right holders of these assets. It belongs to us" or "Getting Assad money would be fair".⁴⁹

28. While many saw justice as an integral part of it, victims and survivors also described reparation in broader, more holistic terms. In Guatemala, for example, one survivor explained that reparation was part of a healing process: *"To build something, something that is broken. To look for those little pieces. I see it as a jigsaw puzzle, putting the pieces together until it becomes whole again."*⁵⁰
29. In most cases, survivors emphasised that reparation must go far beyond financial compensation. A victim from The Gambia shared: *"Reparations for me goes beyond financial support, a lot of people misconstrue reparations to mean just financial support but reparations goes beyond this and it could mean providing psychosocial support, providing employment opportunity for those that lost their sources of livelihood as a result of their experiences."*⁵¹

Priority forms of reparation

30. Victims and survivors consistently articulated a comprehensive vision of reparation, highlighting the need for recognition, rehabilitation, education, support for children and families, and guarantees of non-recurrence, among other measures.

A) Recognition

31. Recognition emerged as a key aspect of reparation for survivors. In Timor-Leste, women survivors stressed the importance of formal acknowledgment of their suffering and their contribution to the independence struggle, which is largely absent from official schemes.⁵² Syrian survivors similarly highlighted recognition as central, identifying measures such as public apologies, national holidays dedicated to survivors, and monuments honouring their experiences as relevant forms of reparation.⁵³
32. In Nepal, victims have insisted on the importance of getting a public apology from the State and being acknowledged as conflict victims. As mentioned by one victim: *"I know what reparations are, the perpetrator has to be punished. [...] We were never acknowledged by the*

⁴⁹ Quotes collected during consultations with Syrian torture survivors in Mersin, Reyhanli, Gaziantep and Sanliurfa (Turkiye) from 28 May to 3 June 2024.

⁵⁰ GRS Guatemala, p. 44.

⁵¹ GRS The Gambia, p. 28.

⁵² GRS Timor-Leste, p. 53

⁵³ GRS Syria, p. 43.

*State as conflict victims despite our ongoing demand. The State never provided a public apology and [taken steps for] non-repetition.”⁵⁴ Similarly, a victim in The Gambia shared: “To me reparation is to first apologise to the victim for the harm caused. To also recognise the victim as someone who has his or her rights violated.”⁵⁵ In Guatemala, survivors emphasised the need for collective recognition through monuments, community radios, and *casas de la memoria*, which would serve as safe spaces to share their experiences, preserve truth, and pass on a common history to future generations.⁵⁶ For many survivors in Kenya, acknowledgement and recognition are almost a precondition to other forms of reparation having any meaning.⁵⁷*

B) Compensation

33. Across contexts, survivors emphasised the need for compensation – often referred to as financial support – as central to reparation. While many survivors linked financial insecurity to their inability to study, work, or support their families after violations, they also saw compensation as a means to regain dignity and rebuild their lives. A survivor in Burundi stated: *“We must repair the hearts of victims by giving survivors the means to start a new life.”⁵⁸* Burundian survivors called for support to launch income-generating activities or vocational training. Similarly, in Nepal, victims stressed that both urgent and long-term financial support were needed: immediate assistance to address basic subsistence needs, followed by sustainable livelihood opportunities, vocational training, and social protection measures for them and their children.⁵⁹
34. In The Gambia, victims insisted that compensation should not come as a one-off payment but rather in regular instalments, to ensure that it meets basic household needs over time and reaches women directly, without being diverted or confiscated.⁶⁰ Survivors in Guatemala expressed the need for seed capital and economic support to develop small businesses or strengthen traditional livelihoods such as weaving, selling food, or cultivating land. They also linked these efforts to restoring cultural practices and passing on skills to their daughters and granddaughters.⁶¹

⁵⁴ GRS Nepal, p. 88.

⁵⁵ GRS Gambia, p. 32.

⁵⁶ GRS Guatemala, p. 46.

⁵⁷ GRS Kenya, p. 33.

⁵⁸ GRS Burundi.

⁵⁹ GRS Nepal, p. 95.

⁶⁰ GRS The Gambia, p. 31.

⁶¹ GRS Guatemala, p. 44.

35. Ukrainian torture survivors called for compensation to cover material losses, such as destroyed housing, and to ensure access to healthcare and psychological support of their choice.⁶² They further stressed the need for compensation to address loss of employment capacity and the additional burdens faced by those with children.⁶³
36. Syrian survivors emphasised support to resume interrupted studies, access job opportunities, and fund small projects, as well as financial support to keep children in school rather than forcing them into work.⁶⁴ In Kenya, survivors similarly expressed their wish to obtain capital to rebuild their lives and secure their children's education. As one put it: *"I wish we could get some compensation to start a new life."*⁶⁵ Another stressed: *"It goes really down to financial support [and] education for the children. [...] Without a doubt, it is about financial care and financial independence."*⁶⁶

C) Rehabilitation

37. In Ukraine, survivors identified rehabilitation services as central. They called for free and holistic medical care, psychological support for themselves and their families, and vocational opportunities to rebuild livelihoods.⁶⁷ Survivors described the challenges of returning to daily life after detention: *"For a very long time I could not come to my senses... I learned everything again, I didn't cook [in detention] for a year, I learned to cook again... I had some terrible complexes, I learned to communicate with people again."*⁶⁸
38. In The Gambia, victims requested free lifelong healthcare for those with chronic conditions and psychosocial support to address both community stigma and the trauma of being unable to provide for loved ones.⁶⁹ Many victims from Nepal described the urgent physical and psychological conditions they continue to endure, highlighting the need for immediate and regular treatment for injuries such as persistent gynaecological problems, chronic back pain, ongoing trauma, and suicidal thoughts.⁷⁰ In Burundi, survivors stressed the importance of psychological care, underlining their need to consult psychologists and psychiatrists and to

⁶² GRS Ukraine, p.48.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ GRS Syria, p. 40.

⁶⁵ GRS Kenya, p. 35.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ GRS Ukraine, pp. 49-50.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 50.

⁶⁹ GRS The Gambia, pp. 31-32.

⁷⁰ GRS Nepal, p. 94.

access therapy. One survivor explained: "*Rape destroyed my life. I need to be able to talk about it with a professional in order to start imagining a future.*"⁷¹

39. In Guatemala, survivors considered access to health care fundamental to reparation. They called for specialised and **culturally appropriate medical services** that are sensitive to their experiences, integrate the knowledge of traditional midwives and **recognise ancestral and holistic medicine**. Without this, women reported feeling unsafe and misunderstood in community health services, leading to the worsening and chronicity of conditions caused by sexual torture.⁷²
40. Survivors from Syria stressed that safety and protection are prerequisites for any meaningful rehabilitation. They emphasised the importance of getting legal documentation and temporary protection status.⁷³ They also identified access to healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and livelihood opportunities as crucial measures.⁷⁴

D) Education as Reparation

41. Access to education was consistently identified as a key form of reparation for survivors and their children. The right to education is complemented and reinforced by the right to reparation and it can give meaning to that right to reparation. As such, education as a form of reparation requires measures that go beyond what States are already obligated to provide such as access to free primary education, trauma-responsive approaches, flexible, accessible and inclusive learning environments and financial support. It also requires explicit acknowledgement of the harms suffered by victims and that the education measures are shaped to help repair wrongdoing.
42. In Syria, detention and displacement disrupted survivors' plans, forcing them to abandon or delay studies to take underpaid work to support their families. Survivors expressed a strong desire to resume higher education but lacked financial means, calling for educational grants and opportunities to restart their lives.⁷⁵ Ukrainian survivors similarly identified education and vocational training as essential for rebuilding dignity, professional opportunities, and self-worth.⁷⁶

⁷¹ GRS Burundi.

⁷² GRS Guatemala, p. 46.

⁷³ Türkiye IRM Report.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ GRS Syria, p. 40; Türkiye IRM Report.

⁷⁶ GRS Ukraine, p. 50.

43. In The Gambia, victims of forced nudity, beatings, torture and humiliation during the witch hunt campaigns requested education for their children.⁷⁷ While primary education is officially free in The Gambia, the poorest families still struggle to afford school fees, education kits, uniforms, and transportation, particularly in the Greater Banjul area.⁷⁸ Survivors in Guatemala noted the need for schools, technical institutes, and training centres to secure dignified employment for their children and grandchildren, with special emphasis on enabling daughters and granddaughters to gain independence and generate income.⁷⁹

E) Guarantees of non-recurrence

44. Survivors who mentioned guarantees of non-recurrence described a range of measures aimed at ensuring accountability for wartime sexual torture, and preventing future violations. Survivors from Ukraine called for deep institutional reform of security services, law enforcement, and the military, alongside training on international standards relevant to conflict-related sexual violence.⁸⁰

45. One Ukrainian survivor explained: "*The non-repetition factor. This is very important for me, because, probably, as one of my psychological ... fears or some of my unhealed wounds. This is what my brain tells me that if you think that nothing like this will happen, then you are very naive.*"⁸¹ Another expressed her demand for "*guarantees to ensure that her child never experiences war*".⁸² These testimonies were collected in 2021, during the conflict in Eastern Ukraine that began in 2014. Russia's invasion in February 2022 tragically confirmed survivors' fears and underscores the great importance and urgency of adequate guarantees of non-recurrence.

46. Victims from Nepal also insisted on the importance of ensuring that no others are ever subjected to the same violence as they were. One victim shared: "*I wish this kind of incident never happened to anyone and especially to our children and others as well. Such kind of conflict that we experienced should never be repeated.*"⁸³ Survivors from Guatemala expressed a similar demand. As one stated: "*That it does not happen again, to seek justice, and for the truth to be known in the communities.*"⁸⁴

⁷⁷ GRS The Gambia, p 31.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ GRS Guatemala, p. 46.

⁸⁰ GRS Ukraine, p. 51.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, p. 52.

⁸³ GRS Nepal, p. 72.

⁸⁴ GRS Guatemala, p. 47.

IV. Strengthening victim and survivor participation in reparation processes

47. Participation is not only a right of victims and survivors but, as expressed by survivors in Ukraine, also an essential requirement for both the design and implementation of adequate reparation policies. Victims and survivors emphasise that when participation is meaningful – when their voices are genuinely heard, respected, and acted upon – it reaffirms their dignity, provides recognition, restores their agency, and helps rebuild their sense of self-worth. This has been particularly evident in GSF’s Interim Reparative Measures projects (explained further in this section and in Section V), where participation takes the form of co-creation.

48. This section addresses the Special Rapporteur’s questions on how to strengthen the implementation of victims’ and survivors’ rights and participation, as well as the conditions they have identified to ensure it is truly meaningful.

I. Meaningful, safe, and accessible participation

49. Victims and survivors consistently stressed that participation in decisions affecting their lives is not optional but fundamental. It must be both meaningful and accessible, not symbolic or tokenistic, but structured to allow survivors to influence decision-making. Having experienced violations first-hand, survivors and victims are uniquely positioned to guide policymakers and advocate for the design and implementation of survivor-centred reparation and justice processes. As one Ukrainian survivor explained: *“I think the victims should be involved in this process. Why for us but without us?”*⁸⁵

50. Where survivors have been excluded, reparation processes have been weakened. In The Gambia, most victims did not actively seek reparations, and while the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission conducted limited consultations, victims reported that engagement was insufficient. Regulations were drafted mainly by experts without input from victims, leading to frustration: *“I think the government alone can’t make decisions about reparation without our awareness because we are the victims, we know what we have suffered more than anyone.”*⁸⁶

51. Survivors emphasised that participation must be practical and supported. Survivors in Ukraine noted that many cannot afford transportation or the loss of wages, so reimbursement and

⁸⁵ GRS Ukraine, p. 52.

⁸⁶ GRS The Gambia, p. 43.

compensation are necessary to make participation feasible.⁸⁷ They also stressed that participation should be publicly acknowledged in order to empower survivors, especially those who have not yet shared their experiences. In addition, they highlighted the need for expert accompaniment, including psychological support.⁸⁸

52. Participation must also be safe. Victims and survivors stressed the need for justice, truth and reparation processes that do not risk re-traumatising them. A Nepalese victim recounted the distressing experience of attempting to file a claim with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which required her to revisit the place where she had been tortured: *"While we were submitting the application to the TRC through the Local Peace Committee they asked us to bring the evidence going into the same police station where I was kept. Why should I go to the same police station where I have been tortured in such an inhumane way? This act of government has once again provided me a psychological pain."*⁸⁹

II. Mechanisms and modalities of participation

53. Victims and survivors across contexts emphasised that participation must go beyond symbolic inclusion, calling for structured and meaningful ways to influence decisions that affect their lives. They proposed different mechanisms to ensure their voices shape reparations, justice, and broader transitional justice processes.
54. Survivors from Ukraine proposed establishing survivor advisory groups within ministries and commissions to ensure direct involvement in policymaking. As one explained: *"I think that the representatives of the [survivors] should be in some commissions – at the ministry, somewhere else. So that you can control this process yourself."*⁹⁰ Others recommended structured forums, professionally moderated consultations, and survivor-led discussions to shape reparation policies.⁹¹
55. They also proposed creating formal survivor organisations to provide both solidarity and professional support. For Ukrainian survivors, such associations, staffed with lawyers and psychologists, could help survivors navigate legal systems, for instance.⁹² In Nepal, victims have found support and solidarity through women's organisations that provide strength, hope and

⁸⁷ GRS Ukraine, p. 52.

⁸⁸ GRS Ukraine, p. 53.

⁸⁹ GRS Nepal, p. 83.

⁹⁰ GRS Ukraine, p. 53.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

a sense of community.⁹³ Participation in these groups has helped victims to share experiences, engage in advocacy and seek solutions collectively.⁹⁴ They have also been able to take active roles in research processes, including making submissions during Nepal's 2020 Universal Periodic Review,⁹⁵ filing cases before the Supreme Court challenging impunity,⁹⁶ and contributing to studies on reparations.⁹⁷

56. Similarly, Syrian survivors emphasised their desire for meaningful roles in supporting other survivors and shaping responses to sexual torture. They highlighted the importance of being centrally involved in designing and implementing programmes and initiatives that provide assistance to survivors, as well as in advancing proposals on justice, truth, reparation, and peacebuilding.⁹⁸

III. Co-creation

57. The *Kinshasa Declaration on the Rights to Reparation and Co-creation of Survivors and Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* – itself developed through a co-creation process with survivors and victims of 12 African countries – affirms that “*survivors and victims should be involved in their capacity as co-creators and actively participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of reparation programmes, institutions, policies, strategies and practices that will impact their lives and livelihood.*”⁹⁹

58. In line with survivors’ and victims’ calls to be treated as equal partners rather than passive beneficiaries, GSF has sought to conceptualise this approach under the framework of co-creation. GSF defines co-creation as a set of processes whereby survivors have an effective influence on decision-making, playing an active role in conceptualising, designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating reparation and other measures. It goes beyond consultations or the provision of mere information to survivors. This understanding has been progressively shaped and strengthened over the years through GSF’s work with survivors, whether in the Kinshasa Declaration, Interim Reparative Measures projects, or other initiatives.

⁹³ GRS Nepal, p. 90-91.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 91.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 104.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ GRS Syria, p. 43.

⁹⁹ *Kinshasa Declaration on the Rights to Reparation and Co-creation of Survivors and Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* (November 2022), article 12 https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Kinshasa_Declaration/GSF_Kinshasa_Declaration_EN_Nov2022_WEB_1.pdf

59. Survivors describe co-creation as transformative. A Syrian survivor activist who participated in the Interim Reparative Measures project in Türkiye stated: *"The unique aspect of this project is that it treated survivors as partners. The concept of co-creation was always at the core of every activity. This approach made the survivors feel that this project truly belonged to them."*¹⁰⁰ Similarly, another Syrian survivor activist, reflected: *"We should talk to survivors. How will we know what they want and what will work for them if we don't?"*¹⁰¹
60. Other survivors echoed the reparative power of being recognised as right-holders and respected as equal partners rather than passive beneficiaries. One survivor participant from Syria noted: *"Through multiple meetings and continuous sessions, and also through phone calls, there was someone who listened to me, exchanged opinions with me, and helped me reach the ideas I wanted to talk about."*¹⁰² Another emphasised: *"Survivors were treated not as beneficiaries but as essential partners with decision-making power, reflecting a respect for their human rights."*¹⁰³ A survivor from Nepal, participant in the Interim Reparative Measures project in her country, similarly stressed: *"What I am most happy about is that normally we are invited only in the middle [of projects], but with this programme we are invited from the beginning until the end. I feel this is justice."*¹⁰⁴

v. Achieving reparation beyond judicial processes

61. Judicial processes play a very important role in achieving justice and reparation, but they are frequently inaccessible, lengthy, and often unable to respond to the realities of conflict and post-conflict societies. Given these limitations, domestic or administrative reparation programmes offer a key alternative to address mass-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. When adequately designed and implemented, such programmes can better respond to victims' and survivors' realities, providing prompt access to reparations at no cost and with a lower evidentiary threshold than courts. Importantly, they also allow for better victim and survivor participation, especially in their design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.
62. In addition, States may provide urgent interim reparations – measures that provide timely relief and prevent irreparable harm while survivors await comprehensive reparation. Alongside these

¹⁰⁰ GSF's Türkiye Project through the Eyes of Survivors (GSF, 2025) documentary, <https://youtu.be/jwVDDeqqTE>.

¹⁰¹ GSF, 'From Türkiye to Damascus: working with survivors of Syrian detention' (Project Update, 24 March 2025) <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/latest/articles/from-turkiye-to-damascus-working-with-survivors-of-syrian-detention/>.

¹⁰² Survivor participant in the Interim Reparations Project in Türkiye, 2024.

¹⁰³ Survivor participant in the Interim Reparations Project in Türkiye, 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Survivor participant in the Interim Reparations Project in Nepal, 2022.

State-led efforts, other measures can be implemented by non-duty bearers, such as the Interim Reparative Measures (IRM) provided by GSF and its partners. While not constituting formal reparations, IRM projects address urgent harms, restore recognition and dignity, and can transform survivors' lives. The following subsections, expand on the Pilot Project on Urgent Interim Reparations in Ukraine and the IRM project in Türkiye, demonstrating that interim measures, particularly when co-created with survivors, can address harms in a timely manner, acknowledge their experiences, and have a transformative impact in their lives, before comprehensive reparations are implemented by states.

I. Pilot Project on Urgent Interim Reparation

63. In May 2024, the Government of Ukraine, in partnership with GSF, survivors, civil society, and international organisations, launched a Pilot Project on Urgent Interim Reparation for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.¹⁰⁵ By early 2025, the project had received 1,208 survivor applications and delivered 634 interim compensation payments.
64. The Pilot was co-created with survivors and civil society organisations, who worked alongside key state actors, including the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Government Commissioner for Gender Equality, and the Ukrainian chapter of the Global Network of Victims and Survivors to End Wartime Sexual Violence (SEMA). Together, they developed a system to register survivors, process applications based on testimonies, and deliver both financial support and service referrals. Survivors were also referred to psychosocial care, legal aid, and assistance in filing complaints with the Office of the Prosecutor General.
65. Survivors emphasised the importance of both recognition and support.¹⁰⁶ A survivor shared: *"I am grateful that this project exists, because it is about recognising pain. This amount can never compensate for the harm done. But it is the recognition, the visibility, the right to document the crime that allows human dignity, selfhood, and faith in oneself to be healed."* The process of completing applications was designed with safe and active listening spaces, which many survivors described as validating and empowering: *"Helping people who have suffered from sexual violence is a great care, not only in financial terms, but also in terms of helping people to express their emotions, to not hold onto their suffering."*

¹⁰⁵ For further information on the Pilot Project on Urgent Interim Reparation for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine, see <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/our-work/ukraine>.

¹⁰⁶ The following testimonies cited in this submission come from survivors who participated in the Pilot Project.

66. The Pilot marks a historic first, demonstrating that Ukraine has been able to provide urgent, adequate, and effective remedies to survivors of wartime sexual torture, even during ongoing conflict. It also served as a catalyst for structural change. In November 2024, the Verkhovna Rada adopted, and President Zelensky signed, Law 4067 'On the Legal and Social Protection of Survivors of Sexual Violence related to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine, and on Providing Them with Urgent Interim Reparations'. This law established the legal foundation for urgent interim reparations and broader support to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.
67. Reparations for survivors, however, are not yet secured. The Government of Ukraine, with support from GSF and partners, is now working to define the modalities of reparations foreseen under the law, establish an institutional framework, and secure sustainable funding.

II. Interim Reparative Measures Projects

68. GSF recognises survivors of wartime sexual torture and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence as rights-holders, with both a moral and legal entitlement to reparation. In contexts where states are unable or unwilling to meet their obligations, GSF and its partners implement Interim Reparative Measures (IRM) to address urgent harms.¹⁰⁷ These measures are inspired by administrative reparation programmes but do not replace the obligation of states or other duty-bearers to provide full, comprehensive reparations.
69. IRM projects are co-created with survivors. Therefore, survivors are involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. IRM can take diverse forms, depending on survivors' choices. Individual measures may include compensation, medical care, psychosocial support, housing, or legal aid. Collective measures have ranged from the creation of survivor centres and commemoration initiatives to publications and podcasts sharing survivors' stories. Whenever possible, survivors are also engaged as project staff, reinforcing recognition and ownership. IRM also carry an important advocacy function, serving as models for survivor-centred reparation policies and demonstrating to states what is both possible and urgently needed.
70. Between 2022 and 2024, the Association of Detainees and Missing of Sednaya Prison (ADMSP), the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), and the Global Survivors Fund (GSF) implemented an IRM project with and for Syrian survivors of detention in the southeast of Türkiye.¹⁰⁸ A total of

¹⁰⁷ See GSF, 'How we work: Act' <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/how-we-work/act-in-the-interim/>.

¹⁰⁸ For further information on the Interim Reparative Measures Project for Syrian survivors in Türkiye see: <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/our-work/syria/>.

821 survivors received livelihood, medical, and psychosocial support through the project, which was co-created with survivors at every stage.

71. Survivor participation began even earlier, during the Global Reparations Study country report, where they provided essential insights that shaped the overall reparative strategy. Throughout the project, survivors co-designed both individual and collective IRMs. Each survivor developed their own reparative plan with a caseworker, while collective measures were shaped through workshops and interviews where survivors identified shared harms and priorities. Together, they chose to develop advocacy tools – including a website with podcasts, articles, and videos – that continue to share survivor stories and highlight life after IRM support. This co-creation approach ensured that survivors were not only participants but also decision-makers throughout design, implementation, and evaluation.
72. Survivors described the project as a turning point in their lives, providing recognition, dignity, and the chance to rebuild. As one survivor explained: *"What I want to say, you give us all so much optimism!"*¹⁰⁹ The IRM had a measurable impact: survivors' overall quality of life scores rose significantly, alongside improvements in physical, psychological, and environmental wellbeing. Survivors repeatedly linked economic support with renewed confidence and dignity. They were able to transform their lives by starting or investing in their own businesses. One survivor mentioned: *"Thanks to the project, I now have my own business and feel more appreciated by people as a woman who works hard to help her family."*¹¹⁰
73. Psychosocial support provided to them proved to be as equally transformative. Survivors spoke of regaining their humanity and resilience after years of detention. One survivor shared: *"Reparation was essential, it gave me more self-confidence."*¹¹¹ Another noted: *"Thanks to the support of the Family Center, I felt like a human... I was very broken, but thanks to them, I became human."*¹¹²
74. The project also fostered solidarity and strong bonds among survivors, countering the isolation and stigma many experienced. As one survivor reflected: *"After participating in the project, we are no longer afraid to mention that we are detainees... our self-confidence has increased and we are no longer marginalized."*¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ GSF, 'Impact Evaluation: Final Report, Syrian Survivors of Detention in Türkiye, 2022–2024' (unpublished, on file with GSF, 2025).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

75. Education and family wellbeing were frequently highlighted as among the most meaningful outcomes of the IRM project. Survivors reported being able to support their children's schooling and even address special educational needs. One survivor noted: *"My daughters, because of the support, I educated them outside Türkiye in dentistry. It was the biggest impact."*¹¹⁴
76. While survivors were clear that justice remains out of reach without accountability for perpetrators, they emphasised that the IRM project provided recognition and dignity in the present. As one put it: *"Doing such a project is an acknowledgment from them that there are people who were detained. This, for me, is an achievement. There's someone who acknowledged us, and it's an external acknowledgment."*¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.