

# TRAUMA, VIOLENCE PREVENTION, AND REINTEGRATION: LEARNING FROM YOUTH CONFLICT NARRATIVES IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

This fact sheet presents findings from the RESOLVE Network research report, "[Trauma, Violence Prevention and Reintegration: Learning from Youth Conflict Narratives in the Central African Republic](#)," by Pauline Zerla. In the decade since a new cycle of violence began in the Central African Republic (CAR), youth have been involved extensively in waves of conflict ranging from forced recruitment into nonstate armed groups to participation in localized community-based armed groups. This case study examines reintegration as a lens for understanding how trauma, violence prevention, and peacebuilding interconnect.

Specific questions arise concerning the ways in which trauma shapes peacebuilding and social cohesion. Experts recognize that violence prevention and reintegration programming are key to these initiatives. Yet, our understanding of the ways in which trauma interacts with reintegration and social cohesion in fragile contexts is limited. To address this knowledge gap, this case study focuses on the connections between trauma and reintegration by asking how conflict-affected youth experience trauma, reintegration, and violence prevention in CAR following the signing of a peace agreement in 2019. While not generalizable, the findings presented here are instructive for other contexts facing similar dynamics and/or building out their own violence reduction and reintegration initiatives, including in areas impacted by violent extremism.

For more, see: Zerla, Pauline. [Trauma, Violence Prevention and Reintegration: Learning from Youth Conflict Narratives in the Central African Republic](#). RESOLVE Network, 2024.

## KEY FINDINGS



**Reintegration is viewed as a temporary means of violence reduction:** For conflict-affected youth, reintegration is seen as temporary violence reduction rather than a long-term transition toward peace.



**Reintegration is experienced as a struggle to survive:** Struggles to survive dominate daily life. Reintegration is primarily seen as an attempt to meet everyday socioeconomic challenges that otherwise impede the development of strong and peaceful communities.



**Everyday trauma shapes reintegration, violence prevention, and peacebuilding efforts:** Trauma prevents communities from moving forward and ex-combatants are seen as requiring support in order to “leave war behind.” The physical reminders of these traumatic events and stigma emanating from them can further hinder reintegration and violence prevention.



**Community and individual trauma are mutually reinforcing:** Everyday social issues, economic struggles, and trauma are connected. Financial insecurity and stigma bring to the surface the trauma of war.

# POLICY CONSIDERATIONS



## For the International Community:

- Address community needs linked to recruitment and recidivism among children and youth formerly associated with armed groups, such as education interventions, mental health and psychosocial support, and violence prevention (including conflict-related sexual violence).
- Prioritize transitional justice, social cohesion, and peacebuilding programs; particularly those that emphasize mixed approaches and address community and youth grievances.
- Support local leaders and civil society organizations leading violence prevention efforts, interventions for women and girls, and community-based mental health and psychosocial support approaches.
- Consider localized approaches to conflict analysis supported by creative and narrative research methods.
- Integrate increased awareness of human rights violations within programming and create spaces for community members to offer experiences and views of current programmatic approaches.



## For the CAR Government:

- Prevent recruitment of children and human rights violations against women and children, as well as strengthen support provided to victims of nonstate armed group violence.
- Address challenges and delays in the implementation of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Repatriation programs (DDRR) across CAR to respond to community calls for justice, mitigate recidivism risks, and prevent further waves of violence.
- Expand DDRR programming scope and scale to encompass youth who have participated in UN Community Violence Reduction projects.



## For Policy Research and Academia:

- Examine the role of families and communities in prevention, recruitment, and reintegration in Central Africa and beyond.
- Conduct interdisciplinary research that links reintegration with transitional justice; specifically exploring what reintegration and transitional justice mean to Central African communities and the ways in which reparations play a role.
- Explore micro-level conflict impact through individual narratives of community members or other creative and participatory research methods.
- Extend research focus to the study of reparations, transitional justice, and forgiveness.
- Examine research approaches that support victims participating in research without causing further trauma.

## RESOLVE NETWORK

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