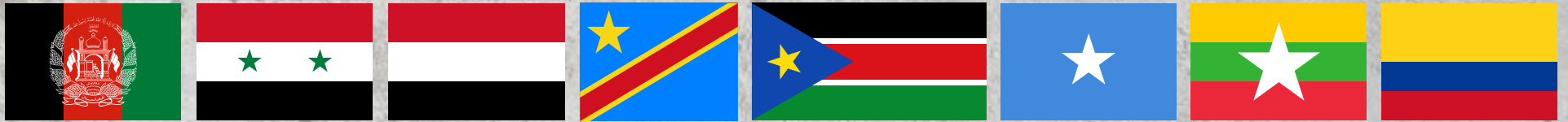


The International Child Soldier Index



What is a child soldier? The term is frequently tossed around in several different contexts, but its concrete definition often eludes the average person. According to Article 38 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, “*state parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities*”. To further cement the international community’s commitment to protecting children from roles in armed conflict, the United Nations added Article 1 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which raises the minimum age of recruitment from 15 to 18. Article 38 and Article 1 of the Optional Protocol have laid down the framework for what can be considered a child soldier under international law.

The concept of a child under the age of 18, let alone 15, picking up a weapon and participating in violent conflict is one that few people can stomach. No child should have to bear the responsibility of fighting for their life, let alone taking the life of another human. As grave as the issue of children in armed conflict may seem, the problem has been somewhat under-reported and under-represented in policy making and public awareness in recent years. With that in mind, this index was created as a resource tool for anyone looking for specific and current information surrounding the issue of child soldiers and child recruitment over the past decade.

This index focuses on several countries across the globe with the highest rates of child recruitment and child involvement in armed conflict. These are not the only countries that use child soldiers by any means, but they are a good representation of countries that involve children in armed conflict (whether under the auspices of the state or non-state actors). It can be used as a starting reference point for researchers or students, who are interested in the subject. Within this index, there are links and reference materials that lead to a more detailed analysis of the problem, as well as general statistics and information that highlight how prevalent this violation of child rights remains. It is vitally important for the readers of this index to understand that while the majority of statistics referenced come directly from the United Nations General Assembly Security Council, these statistics almost certainly reflect only a fraction of the real number, as it is incredibly difficult to track and document every case of child recruitment in countries that are undergoing intense conflict.

It should be noted that the majority of child soldier-related statistics in this index are based on the annual report by the United Nations General Assembly Security Council covering the period between January and December 2020. To find previous reports, please refer to the back of the index where all additional material and links are displayed.



Afghanistan

*Author's note

At the time of creating this index, Afghanistan had not yet been overrun by Taliban forces and was still somewhat stable compared to its current state. The Taliban's capture of Kabul and control of the nation will very likely increase the number of child soldiers in the country in the foreseeable future.

Introduction

To begin this section, here is a direct quote from Patricia Gossman, the Associate Director for the Asia Division at Human Rights Watch, and the former Director of the Afghanistan Program at the International Center for Transitional Justice on Afghanistan, (Information on Dr. Grossman can be found here): <https://www.hrw.org/about/people/patricia-gossman>

When asked whether child soldiers were a fundamental part of the military operations of the Taliban, as well as other actors accused of child recruitment in the country, Dr. Grossmlinkan had this to say,

“All parties to Afghanistan’s armed conflict have recruited and used children, including the Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan Local Police (ALP), and Afghan National Army (ANA), the Taliban, and the Islamic State. In 2020, the UN verified the recruitment and use of 196 boys for use in combat, including in attacks with improvised explosive devices, intelligence gathering,



staffing checkpoints and subjected to sexual violence. This is only a fraction of the actual number most likely, but I would not say at all that using children was a vital component of the power and influence of either side. Rather, it is part of the indoctrination, especially for Taliban, and also children are a cheap commodity-- poor families are more susceptible to having their children recruited.”

Number of child soldiers

- The United Nations verified the recruitment of 196 children for armed conflict within Afghanistan during the period from January to December 2020.
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N2111309.pdf>
- The number of children recruited in Afghanistan for roles in armed conflict increased by 200% between 2019 and 2020.
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N2111309.pdf>
- The number of children recruited in Afghanistan during 2020 is considerably higher than it has been over the past 5 years, with 64 verified cases in 2019, 46 verified cases in 2018, 84 verified cases in 2017, 96 verified cases in 2016, and 48 verified cases in 2015.



Main perpetrators (2020)

1. Taliban - 196 children recruited (UN verified)
2. Jointly by Afghan local police and pro-government militia - 8 children recruited (UN verified)
3. Pro-Government militia - 7 children recruited
4. Afghan National police - 5 children recruited (UN verified)
5. Afghan National Army territorial force - 4 children recruited (UN verified)

Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

- Ratified in 2003. <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

Vancouver Principles

- Not an endorsing member.



Measures being taken to prevent or reduce child recruitment

NATO

- (2021) Active in Afghanistan with the NATO resolute support mission (actively supports the UN and international community's efforts to improve the lives of children in conflict zones. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156399.htm)
- NATO resolute support mission in Afghanistan worked to 'train, advise and assist' the Afghan National Defence and Security force (ANDSF).

United Nations

- (2021) Introduction of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. <https://unama.unmissions.org/mission-statement>
- (2014) Introduced the 'Children not Soldiers' campaign, brought forward by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/children-not-soldiers/>
- (2011) Introduced a series of Action Plans on how to end the recruitment and use of Children in Armed Conflict. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/action-plans/>
- (2011) Afghan government signed a document with the United Nations in 2011 to end the recruitment of child soldiers. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/01/365572-afghanistan-signs-pact-un-prevent-recruitment-child-soldiers>



Syrian Arab Republic (2020)

Introduction

Syria continues to be one of the deadliest places on Earth for children. Due to its complex civil war that has been raging for over ten years, the number of child soldiers in the country remains one of the highest in the world. The large list of perpetrators accused of recruiting children certainly highlights the tumultuous atmosphere in the country and the lack of organization with regard to policy and humanitarian dialogue.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/syria>

Number of child soldiers

- The United Nations verified the recruitment of 813 children in the Syrian Arab Republic in the period between January and December 2020.
- The number of verified cases in the Syrian Arab Republic over the past 6 years has been shockingly high, with an average of 768 children being recruited per year between 2015 and 2020.
- There were 820 verified cases in 2019, 806 verified cases in 2018, 961 verified cases in 2017, 851 verified cases in 2016, and 362 verified cases in 2015.



Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

- Ratified in 2003. <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

Vancouver Principles

- Not an endorsing member. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes.aspx?lang=eng

Main perpetrators

As of December 2020 there were 12 armed groups verified by the UN for using child soldiers

1. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (390 verified cases),
2. Free Syrian Army (FSA) (170),
3. Kurdish People's Protection Units and Women's protection Units (YPG/YPJ) under the Umbrella (a dominant faction) of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (119),
4. Pro government militia (42),
5. Ahrar al-Sham (31),



6. Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H) (30),
7. Internal Security Forces (13),
8. Hurras al-Din (6),
9. ISIL (4),
10. Nur al-Din al-Zanki (3),
11. Army of Islam (3),
12. and Syrian government forces (2).

Measures being taken to prevent or reduce child recruitment

United Nations

- (2020) In conjunction with the SDF, the United Nations introduced a Road Map that was intended to speed the implementation of the 2019 Action Plan. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N2111309.pdf> (page 25)
- (2019) Drafted Action Plan that was signed by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to prevent the recruitment of children, which resulted in the disengagement of 150 children from SDF ranks : <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2019/07/syrian-democratic-forces-sign-action-plan-to-end-and-prevent-the-recruitment-and-use-of-children/>



Geneva Call

- (2016 - Present) Continues humanitarian dialogue with the SDF on how to prevent child recruitment and protect the livelihood of children.
- (2014) The YPG and YPR signed Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment protecting children in armed conflict, which resulted in demobilization of 149 child soldiers from their ranks.

<https://www.genevacall.org/syria-kurdish-armed-forces-demobilize-149-child-soldiers/>

Human Rights Watch

- (2018) Sent a letter to the executive committee of the Kurdistan Democratic Union Party-led Autonomous Administration condemning the pattern of child recruitment found within armed groups, and asked what measures were being taken to prevent this in the future.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/03/syria-armed-group-recruiting-children-camps>

War Child (NGO)

- (2021) Held a series of workshops across the country which featured over 98,000 child participants, and 54,712 adult participants. <https://2020.annualreportwarchild.org/index/our-global-programmes-for-children/the-middle-east>
- These workshops are aimed at using recreational activities and expressive arts to support children who have been a part of armed conflict.
- According to War Child's website, over 97 percent of children (aged 6-17) showed improved mental health and wellbeing after attending the NGO's workshops and programs.



Yemen (2020)

Introduction

Yemen has been the victim of a bloody civil war that began in 2014 and is still going on to this day. The war is one of the most complex conflicts currently in the world, involving several proxy states including Iran and Saudi Arabia. The complexity of the situation has led to Yemen being one of the most dangerous countries in the world for children. Because of this, Yemen also features some of the highest numbers of child recruits in the world.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/yemen>

Child Soldier Statistics

- The United Nations noted a significant decrease in verified cases of children in armed conflict in Yemen in 2020, with 163 verified cases, in contrast to 686 in 2019.
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N2111309.pdf>
- The trend of verified cases in the past six years in Yemen has shown significant improvement in the past year.
- Verified cases in 2015 (762), verified cases in 2016 (517), verified cases in 2017 (842), verified cases in 2018 (370), verified cases in 2019 (686), and verified cases in 2020 (162).



- While the United Nations has only verified 3,340 cases of children being used in armed conflict over the past six years, The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor claimed in a report that the Houthi militia alone have recruited 10,300 children since 2014. <https://fido.nrk.no/864cbeb421432447ccb60b2b4567d20357016dffef30b-45287981ecd04ec21ea/childrenyemenrepen.pdf>
- The above report claims that the Houthis alone have established 52 different recruitment camps to incorporate children into their ranks.

Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

- Ratified in 2004 <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

Vancouver Principles

- Not an endorsing member.

Main perpetrators

1. Houthis (who call themselves Ansar Allah) (115)
2. Yemen Armed Forces (34)
3. Security Belt Forces (10)
4. and unidentified perpetrators (4)



Use of recruited children

- Majority of the verified cases of children in armed conflict in the country (92) were used in combat roles, and a third of these children were victims of other violations during their association with parties to conflict, including killing and maiming.

Measures being taken to prevent or reduce child recruitment

United Nations

- (2019) U.N Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict signed a memorandum of understanding with the Force Commander of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, to emphasize the importance of protecting children and preventing their recruitment. <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/memorandum-understanding-strengthen-protection-children-affected-armed-conflict-yemen>
- (2018) Was involved with the government of Yemen in jointly developing a road map which was meant to revitalize the implementation of the 2014 action plan. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2019_453.pdf



- (2014) Signed an action plan to stop child recruitment in Yemen, that set out concrete steps for the release and reintegration of Yemeni children from their previous military positions within the government, and back into Yemeni society. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2014/05/yemen-signs-action-plan/>

International Labour Organization (Agency of the United Nations)

- (2018) Introduced the Countering the Recruitment & Use of Child Soldiers in Yemen (CRUCSY) Programme. https://www.ilo.org/beirut/projects/WCMS_673403/lang--en/index.htm
- The CRUCSY programme is meant to help prevent future children in Yemen from being recruited, and to reintegrate former child soldiers back into society.
- Programme focuses on the stabilization of war torn areas in Yemen through the use of socio-economic reintegration.



Democratic Republic of the Congo

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo remains one of Africa's most dangerous countries for children and one of its most prevalent producers of child recruits. While there is no single major conflict in the country the way there has been in Syria or Yemen, the country sports hundreds of armed groups who often fight with government forces and one another over territory, resources, and power. For this reason, the DRC has a long list of perpetrators accused of recruiting child soldiers. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo>

Child soldier statistics

The United Nations verified the recruitment of 788 children for use in armed conflict in 2020, a significant increase from the previous year (601 cases of child recruitment verified in 2019). The number of verified cases of child recruitment in 2020 has been the second highest number in the last six years, only second to 2017 where the UN verified 1,049 cases.



Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict:

- Ratified in 2001 <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

Vancouver Principles

- Endorsing member as of April 13 2021.

Main perpetrators

1. Perpetrators were Mai-Mai Mazembe (209)
2. Nyatura (109)
3. Alliance des forces de résistance congolaises (101),
4. Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové (NDC-Rénové) (66),
5. Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (62),
6. Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) (34)
7. Raia Mutomboki (34)
8. Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi (FDLR-FOCA) (29)
9. Other armed groups (143)



Measures being taken to prevent or reduce child recruitment

United Nations

- (2018) Set up seven joint-technical working groups at the provincial level of various Congolese provinces (Kananga and Tshikapa, Kasai Central and Kasai Provinces to name a few) with a focus on child protection issues. <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/1030>
- (2016) The joint-technical working groups (combination of U.N and Congolese government affiliates) validated standard age recruitment for age verification in military recruitment. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1010521/download>
- (2012) Created an action plan that was signed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo's government in 2012 to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2012/10/drc-signs-agreement-to-end-child-recruitment-and-other-conflict-related-violations-against-children/>

Geneva Call

- (2016) APLCS (armed militia group in the DRC) signed the Deed of Commitment protecting children in armed conflict, with Geneva Call and the Canton and Republic of Geneva. <https://www.genevacall.org/dr-congo-child-soldiers-leave-armed-actors-following-geneva-calls-awareness-raising-efforts/>



Romeo Dallaire Institute

- (2021) In collaboration with the Congolese government and the Congolese army (FARDC), the Romeo Dallaire Institute introduced a series of French radio stations and television programmes that focused on informing the general public of the vulnerabilities faced by children within the country. <https://dallaireinstitute.org/drc/>
- Held intensive training sessions with UN peacekeepers and the Congolese army on how to recognize child security and protection as a top priority.

War Child (NGO)

- (2021) Provided integrated programs that allow over 20,000 child participants to receive child protection education, psychological support and livelihood training with the intent of empowering disadvantaged youth and helping them heal their past trauma.
- Provided childcare and hygiene kits to nearly 66,000 households across Fizi province of Democratic Republic of Congo, in collaboration with local NGO KUA and the Fizi Youth Association. <https://2020.annualreportwarchild.org/index/our-global-programmes-for-children/africa>



South Sudan

Introduction

South Sudan is the world's youngest country, after separating from Sudan and becoming its own sovereign state in 2011. Unfortunately it only took the country two years to break into a multi-sided civil war that involved thousands of child soldiers, and killed roughly 400,000 people since 2013. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan> The conflict ended in 2020, but the residual effects and political instability caused by the war can still be felt in the country.

Child Soldier Statistics

- The number of verified cases of child recruitment in South Sudan was at the lowest level it has been since 2015, with 61 verified cases. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1611119.pdf>
- With South Sudan's civil war ending in 2018, the cases of child recruitment quickly followed suit, dropping between 2017 and 2018 by 768 verified cases.
- The trend of cases over the past six years shows the correlation between the height of the South Sudanese Civil War and the highest number of child recruitment cases: 161 cases in 2019, 453 cases in 2018, 1,221 cases in 2017, 1,022 cases in 2016 and 2,596 cases in 2015.



Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

- Ratified in 2018. <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

Vancouver Principles

Not an endorsing member.

Main Perpetrators

1. SPLA-IO (55),
2. South Sudan People's Defence forces (6), and the
3. South Sudan National Police Service (1)



Measures being taken to prevent or reduce child recruitment

United Nations

- (2020) In February of 2020, in collaboration with the government of South Sudan, the Special representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) introduced an action plan to end all grave violations against children, which was signed by parties listed in the annexes of the Secretary General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict, including the South Sudanese government.
<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2020/02/south-sudan-comprehensive-action-plan-to-end-prevent-all-grave-violations-against-children-signed-by-government/>
- (2020) In February of 2020 the SRSG CAAC launched the Act to Protect Children Campaign in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. This campaign gave training to dozens of soldiers on how to focus on protecting children and preventing recruitment into the South Sudanese Armed Forces. <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/act-protect-children-campaign-launched-south-sudan>
- (2019) the United Nations has worked with the South Sudanese government and several armed groups, to create a joint verification committee which is used to screen different barracks around the country and identify and release any soldiers who are considered under age, according to the UN Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child.
<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2020/02/south-sudan-comprehensive-action-plan-to-end-prevent-all-grave-violations-against-children-signed-by-government/>



Romeo Dallaire Institute

- (2020) The Dallaire Institute field office trained over 4,000 security forces and military personnel on how to protect children from violence.
- (2018) Set up a field office in South Sudan with the purpose of introducing training and building a capacity for national military and police so that they could properly protect children's rights and end the recruitment of child soldiers. The Institute also focused on mentoring journalists and women-led organizations on child recruitment prevention.
<https://unmiss.unmissions.org/act-protect-children-campaign-launched-south-sudan>

War Child (NGO)

(2021) Offers an extensive network of programmes country wide, that focus on child protection, non-formal education and livelihood training.

- War Child programmes across South Sudan feature nearly 16,000 child participants and 11 partner organizations <https://2020.annualreportwarchild.org/index/our-global-programmes-for-children/africa>



Somalia

Introduction

Somalia is the only country in this index that has not ratified the Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict *or* the Vancouver Principles. This is shown in the extremely high number of verified child soldier recruitment cases. Much like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia's state of disarray is not caused by a single conflict, but instead by political instability, a large number of armed non-state actors, and most notably Al-Shabab, an Islamist militant group that controls large parts of the nation's countryside and holds considerable power in the nation.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/somalia>

Child soldier statistics

- The United Nations verified 1,716 cases of child recruitment in Somalia during 2020.
- Somalia has had one of the highest rates of child recruitment in the world with 1,495 cases in 2019, 2,300 cases in 2018, 2,127 cases in 2017, 1,915 cases in 2016 and 903 cases in 2015.



Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

- Not ratified or signed. <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

Vancouver Principles

- Not an endorsing member.

Main Perpetrators (According to United Nations Security Council):

1. Al-Shabaab (1407)
2. Government security and police forces (101)
3. Somali National Army (62)
4. Clan militia (47)
5. Regional forces including Jubaland forces (36)
6. Galmudug forces (31)
7. Putland forces (21)
8. Jubaland police (3)
9. Putland police (2)
10. Galmudug Police (1)



Measures being taken to prevent or reduce child recruitment

Somali Federal government

- (2019) The Somali Federal Government began the verification and biometric registration of all Somali National Army personnel, with the purpose of screening all military personnel to prevent children from participating in armed conflict. <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/174> (Page 14)
- (2018) The federal government started the process of drafting a strategy to prevent child recruitment and release current child soldiers. <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/174> (Page 13)
- (2017) The commander of the Somali national army issued a general command order that prohibited child recruitment within the Somali armed forces. <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/174> (Page 14)

United Nations

- (2019) In collaboration with the Somali government, proposed and helped commit to a road map, which was signed by the Minister of Defence and the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict. <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/174> (Page 14)
- (2019) U.N Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, in collaboration with the Somali Minister of Justice and Judiciary Affairs launched the campaign, “Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict” <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/174> (Page 14)



African Union

- (2018) Facilitated a consultative meeting with the purpose of discussing the ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child by the Somalian government. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180803/acerwc-concludes-its-advocacy-mission-ratification-african-union-charter>
- (2018) Organized a workshop which was attended by several key Somali government officials. This workshop was focused on the value of ratifying the OAU/AU treaties, as well as the importance of the contents of the African Children's Charter and the role of the ACERWC in protecting childrens rights in Somalia. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180803/acerwc-concludes-its-advocacy-mission-ratification-african-union-charter>



Myanmar

Introduction

Myanmar became one of the world's most unstable countries after a military coup in February of 2021 ousted the former Secretary of State and replaced her with a military Junta controlled by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces). The coup has plunged the nation into a string of different internal conflicts that has put the livelihood of millions of children and adults at risk. Keep in mind that the child recruitment cases reported in this section were tallied before the coup took place, and thus the numbers in the coming years are likely going to increase, considering that the Tatmadaw were the main perpetrators accused of child recruitment in 2020, and now have complete control of the country. [hrw.org/news/2021/07/31/myanmar-coup-leads-crimes-against-humanity](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/31/myanmar-coup-leads-crimes-against-humanity)

Child Soldier statistics

- The U.N verified an unprecedented increase in instances of child recruitment during 2020, with 790 cases verified.
- The number of verified cases in 2020 was vastly higher than that of previous years, with only 50 cases being verified in 2019, 7 cases in 2018 and 38 cases in 2017.



Main perpetrators

1. Tatmadaw (726)
2. Kachin Independence Army (62)
3. Arakan Army (2)

Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

- Ratified in September, 2019. <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

Vancouver Principles

- Not an endorsing member.

Measures being taken to prevent or reduce child recruitment

United Nations

- (2020) UN Country Task force on Monitoring and Reporting Grave Violations in Myanmar (CTFMR) signed a joint action plan with the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army with the intent of preventing Child Recruitment within the organization's ranks <https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/press-releases/un-ctfmr-signs-joint-action-plan-democratic-karen-benevolent-army-end-use-and>



- (2014) The joint action plan was supplemented with a work plan for compliance which was introduced by the government of Myanmar to accelerate the implementation of the action plan. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Myanmar-Fact-Sheet-September-2016.pdf>
- (2012) Signed a joint action plan in conjunction with the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) to end the recruitment of children into armed conflict. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Myanmar-Fact-Sheet-September-2016.pdf>

Government of Myanmar

- (2019) Enacted the Child Rights Law which criminalizes the six grave violations against children. <https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/press-releases/enactment-new-child-rights-law-government-myanmar-landmark-step-unicef>
- (2018) Invited the SRSG CAAC to introduce a training programme for the Tatmadaw personnel and Government officials on the six grave violations against children and how to prevent them. <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/1243>

Geneva Call

- (2012) Had two non-state actors (The Karenni National Progressive Party and Mon National Liberation Army) sign the Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict. <https://www.genevacall.org/burmese-armed-non-state-actors-become-first-signatories-geneva-calls-children-armed-conflict-deed-commitment/>



Colombia

Introduction

Colombia is one of the only countries in Latin America that has shown a high level of child recruitment over the past decade. This can be attributed to a 52-year-long conflict between the armed guerilla group FARC and the government of Colombia (not to mention several other armed groups and paramilitary factions who were also involved in the fighting). The conflict was supposed to end in 2016 with a peace agreement between FARC and the Colombian government, however other armed groups have filled the power vacuum left by FARC, and thus the country still supports notable levels of conflict and child recruitment. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/colombia>

Child Recruitment Statistics

- The United Nations verified the use and recruitment of 116 children in 2020, a small increase from 2019 (107).
- Cases in the past six years: 107 cases in 2019, 293 cases in 2018, 169 cases in 2017, 230 cases in 2016 and 289 cases in 2015.

Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

- Ratified in 2005. <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>



Vancouver Principles

- Endorsing Member.

Main Perpetrators

1. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) (66)
2. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (22)
3. Unidentified perpetrators (12)
4. Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC) (9)
5. Los Caparros (7)

Measures being taken to prevent or reduce child recruitment

United Nations

- (2018) Held a workshop in conjunction with the Colombian government called “Lecciones aprendidas y buenas prácticas en Prevención del reclutamiento y Atención de la niñez vinculada al conflicto armado”, with a focus on the release and reintegration of children in armed conflict. <https://nacionesunidas.org.co/noticias/entrevista-a-miembros-de-la-onu-en-taller-sobre-lecciones-aprendidas-y-buenas-practicas-en-prevencion-del-reclutamiento-y-atencion-de-la-ninez-vinculada-al-conflicto-armado/>



Colombian Government

- (2020) Launched a project called “Súmate por mí” with the intent of improving the lives of children in Colombia and eliminating the number of children being recruited into armed forces. <https://www.unicef.org/colombia/informes/sumate-por-mi>
- (2019) JEP (Colombian government’s Special Jurisdiction for Peace) opened a mass investigation into cases of child recruitment between 1971 and 2016, with an extremely high impunity rate and a low prosecution rate. <https://colombiapeace.org/what-macro-cases-has-colombias-special-jurisdiction-for-peace-jep-opened/>
- (2016) introduced a (non-successful) peace agreement with FARC, a formerly powerful non-state actor who was accused of recruiting thousands of children into its ranks.

Taller De Vida (NGO)

- (2021) Youth resource centre focused on providing psychological support for Afro-Colombian and Indigenous youth who have witnessed and survived conflict or are at risk of recruitment. <https://tallerdevida.org/nuestra-historia/>
- (2021) Taller De Vida has connected with over 20,000 girls, youth and children, with the focus of healing their trauma and reintegrating them back into their communities. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackieabramian/2021/06/04/taller-de-vida-reintegrate-colombias-former-child-soldiers-into-society/?sh=1a9aff524d54>



War Child (NGO)

- (2021) Introduced several expressive art workshops (including a breakdancing workshop) and six official War Child projects in Colombia, with the purpose of reintegrating former child soldiers back into their communities.
- (2021) Teamed up with several partners including local Colombian NGO Cormepaz to deliver psychological support for children affected by armed conflict and violence.
<https://www.warchildholland.org/country-colombia/>

Conclusion

The point of this index is to shed light on how prevalent child recruitment into armed conflict is on a global scale. The scope of the problem can be seen across continents, with multiple actors responsible for the violations of international law. Regardless of the subdued level of media coverage and public outcry on the issue, the problem remains urgent, and the need to fix it should be a priority. Once a cycle of violence and abuse has affected a child for a long period of time, it is extremely likely the child will grow up to be a perpetrator of the same atrocities they fell victim to. No child should find themselves anywhere near armed conflict, let alone acting as an instrument of it. Hopefully this index will inspire someone somewhere to focus on this problem, and help find a solution to it.

Additional Information and resources

United Nations General Assembly Security Council Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict links for past 6 years:

These annual reports are the main source of child soldier statistics in this index. As it has been mentioned before, these numbers are likely a tiny fraction of the true data, especially considering that the U.N is only one institution that does not have the organizational skills or capacity to note down every instance of child recruitment at any given time, in any given place. If you are wishing to find earlier years of this report (2014 down) simply search for the title “United Nations General Assembly Security Council Children and Armed Conflict, Report of the Secretary General” and then the year in which you desire.

- (2020) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N2111309.pdf>
- (2019) https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/15-June-2020_Secretary-General_Report_on_CAAC_Eng.pdf
- (2018) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1918621.pdf>
- (2017) <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/children-and-armed-conflict-report-of-the-secretary-general/>
- (2016) <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/72/361>
- (2015) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1611119.pdf>

United Nations General Assembly Security Council Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict - Country Specific Documents:

- Democratic Republic of the Congo: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/1030>
- Mali: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/1105>
- Myanmar: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/1243>
- Nigeria: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/652>
- The Philippines: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/777>
- Somalia: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/174>
- South Sudan: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/1205>
- The Sudan: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/614>

Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica:

- This resource is the National Center for Historical Memory of Colombia, which was created to be used as a tool of reparation for the people of Colombia who have endured the long and bloody conflict within the country, including children and child soldiers. The center focuses on publishing testimonies of people affected by the conflict to highlight the atrocities committed during the original conflict.
https://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/?page_id=19523

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

- Link to more information on the Optional Protocol, its origins, its endorsing members and all 13 articles that it is made up of:
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>

Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers

- The Vancouver Principles which were mentioned throughout this report are a series of 17 principles that each endorsing member will commit to, with the intent of protecting children and preventing child recruitment. The Principles were introduced in 2017 and were co-created by the Romeo Dallaire Institute and the Canadian Government: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng

Writing and Research: Geoffrey Pearson

Design: Ambrose Pottie <https://bellwoodspress.com>

Flags: <https://VectorFlags.com>