

Lesson

1.1



Children in Armed Conflict

The Lesson



Starting Module 1: Conceptual Framework and Lesson 1.1

OVERVIEW

By the end of the three modules of this training course on child protection, learners should be able to:

identify violations, understand the framework, take appropriate action

Module 1 looks at the child protection conceptual framework in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Lesson 1.1 will focus on the specific impact of armed conflict on children, the reasons why conflicts disproportionately affect children, and the violations and threats against children that United Nations military personnel are likely to encounter in mission areas. Learners will also learn to identify the six grave violations against children.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define "child" and explain why children are most at risk during armed conflict
- Describe the relationship between children and armed conflict, and protection of civilians
- Summarize the changing nature of conflict and its impact on children
- Describe the six grave violations against children
- Explain gender concerns and the vulnerabilities that boys and girls face

ACTIVITIES

1. Film: *A Child's Fate*, and discussion
2. Case study: Testimonies from a boy and a girl

HANDOUTS (FOR LEARNERS)

1. Six grave violations against children
2. Gender dimensions of the six grave violations against children
3. Case study on gender: Testimonies from a boy and a girl
4. DPO-DPPA Handbook for Child Protection Staff in United Nations Peace Operations (2023)

SLIDE 1: REINFORCEMENT TRAINING PACKAGE ON CHILD PROTECTION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS MILITARY



REINFORCEMENT TRAINING
PACKAGE ON CHILD
PROTECTION FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS MILITARY

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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

- Welcome to the training on Child Protection for the United Nations Military. Over the following days, you will learn about the child protection mandate and what it means for you in your daily operations as a United Nations military personnel.

Child protection is defined as the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children. You, as United Nations military personnel, have a specific role to play in child protection, and you must know how to engage with children when you encounter them in the course of your operations.

The training is structured around the following three modules and nine lessons:

Module 1: Conceptual Framework

- Lesson 1.1: Children in Armed Conflict
- Lesson 1.2: Roles and Responsibilities of Mission Components and External Partners


Module 2: Legal Framework

- Lesson 2.1: Legal Framework
- Lesson 2.2: Child Protection Framework


Module 3: Operational Framework

- Lesson 3.1: Interacting with Children
- Lesson 3.2: Military Component Child Protection Roles and Tasks
- Lesson 3.3: Military Component Child Protection Action and Response
- Lesson 3.4: Force Headquarters Child Protection Focal Point
- Lesson 3.5: Military Child Protection Focal Points in Sectors, Units and Team Sites

SLIDE 2: MODULE 1, LESSON 1: CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT



Module 1, Lesson 1
CHILDREN IN
ARMED CONFLICT

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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

- This lesson will focus on the specific impact of armed conflict on children. You will learn why conflict disproportionately affects children, and become familiar with the common violations and threats that you are likely to encounter in your mission areas. You may encounter children used as combatants, raped, torn from their families or maimed. A firm understanding of the impact of conflict on children will help you to be more alert to the protection needs of, and threats and violations against, children in armed conflict.

SLIDE 3: LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Learning Objectives

- **Define** “child” and **explain** why children are most at risk during armed conflict
- **Describe** the relationship between children and armed conflict, and protection of civilians
- **Summarize** the changing nature of conflict and its impact on children
- **Describe** the six grave violations
- **Explain** gender concerns and the vulnerabilities that boys and girls face

NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Upon completion of this lesson, learners will have a better understanding of the critical importance of child protection in peacekeeping operations today.


- Lesson 1.1 comprises five learning objectives. By the end of the lesson, learners will:
 - Define who is a child (*Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 1*)
 - Describe what makes children especially vulnerable during conflict, and their unique protection needs
 - Summarize the changing nature of conflict and the impact that current conflict situations have on children
 - Describe the six grave violations against children, as defined by the Security Council, and discuss their role as United Nations military personnel in recognising, reporting and responding to those violations
 - Explain the similarities and differences among concerns relating to girls and boys in times of armed conflict

SLIDE 4: WHO IS A CHILD?

Who is a Child?

Article I of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states:
 “A child means every human being
 below the age of 18 years...”

**For all United Nations peacekeeping personnel,
 a child is any person under the age of 18 years**


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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: In United Nations peacekeeping operations, every person under 18 years old should be treated as a child.

🗨 Article 1 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states:

“A child means every human being
 below the age of 18 years, unless, under the law
 applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”

The simplified and common understanding of that definition is that a child is a person below the age of 18. For United Nations peacekeeping personnel, a child is any person under the age of 18 years.

In some cultures, and according to the laws of some host States in which we are deployed, a child enters adulthood once he/she gets married, becomes a parent or earns his/her own income. Maturity is defined by the social role a person assumes, rather than by age. However, peacekeeping personnel must adhere to the internationally accepted definition of a child, as stated above. When in doubt, apply the highest standard of protection, and assume that the person is a child.

SLIDE 5: FILM: A CHILD'S FATE – CHILD PROTECTION AND PEACEKEEPING



NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: This film was made to support this training course. Children are particularly vulnerable to grave violations and threats during armed conflict and United Nations peacekeeping personnel have a responsibility to protect them.

☞ *The film, A Child's Fate, is intended to engage learners in a discussion on child protection. Learners will understand the gravity of the situation faced by children in conflict zones around the world and that they, as military personnel, play a vital role in protecting children. The film will also bring learners to consider the protection needs of children in conflict situations.*

🗨️ You are about to watch a 12-minute film developed by DPO entitled "A Child's Fate". It depicts the horrors that children are exposed to in conflict. It issues a call to action and explains why peacekeeping personnel must take action. The film also shows how every mission component has a role to play in child protection. Finally, it introduces the child protection specialists deployed in peacekeeping missions.

As you watch the film, reflect on the following questions, which we will discuss subsequently:

- What threats do children face during armed conflict?
- Why are children more at risk than adults during armed conflict?

🎥 Show the film, *A Child's Fate* (<https://youtu.be/gNFnRIGPzSM>).

SLIDE 6: CHILDREN ARE VULNERABLE

Children are Vulnerable

- What threats do children face during armed conflict?
- Why are children more at risk than adults during armed conflict?



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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

**Group Discussion**

Ask the questions on the slide and facilitate discussion among the learners.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

While many children prove remarkably resilient when faced with extremely difficult circumstances, in general, children are disproportionately affected by armed conflict owing to the following reasons:

1. **Children can be more easily influenced and may not fully understand the consequences of their actions.**

For example, children may be lured into joining an armed force or armed group, thinking they will be obtaining “employment” or protection from violence. Children have also been used as “suicide bombers”, carrying explosives hidden in their bags or clothing, without knowing it.

2. **Children depend on family, community and government structures for protection and care.**


Those structures are generally destroyed or have collapsed during conflict. That is why displaced or unaccompanied children are at greater risk of exploitation or abuse during conflict.

3. Children are still growing/in the process of development.

Violence from armed conflict poses several risks to the healthy development of children. For example, denial of access to basic services, including adequate nutrition, has a more serious long-term effect on children, particularly babies and younger children, than on adults. Traumatic and other negative experiences and influences during conflict (such as indoctrination) carry more consequences for children than adults.

SLIDE 7: THE NATURE OF ARMED CONFLICT IS CHANGING

The Nature of Armed Conflict is Changing

Internal armed conflict	Regional conflict		
Ethnic and sectarian violence	Number of armed groups has increased		
Proliferation of weapons	Rape and violence as tools of war		
		Civilians are targeted	Civilian and child casualties

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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Today's conflicts disproportionately impact children.

Let us explore some of the characteristics and trends that define armed conflict today:

- There are few international conflicts these days; most conflicts today are internal conflicts – independence struggles, separation struggles, ethnic and/or religious struggles, civil war within the borders of one country

- Such conflicts often spill over into other countries – causing waves of refugees or internally displaced persons or the spread of armed groups – and, in turn, affect the entire immediate region
- One key dynamic of conflict that impacts children today is the deliberate action on the part of armed groups to achieve a strategic advantage – using grave measures, such as launching attacks on villages and raping civilians, including children. In addition, the frequency with which children are abducted and/or recruited for use as combatants is alarming
- War takes place in and around villages; schools and hospitals serve as easy targets, making civilians, including children, especially vulnerable

SLIDE 8: THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN

The Devastating Impact of Conflict on Children



PEACE & SECURITY CONCERNS

- Six grave violations
- Trafficking
- Illegal detention
- Torture and war crimes
- Human rights violations



HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS

- Lack of food, water, shelter
- Displacement, separation, trauma
- Loss of education, training, livelihood
- Loss of opportunity

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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: The consequences and impact of conflict on children can be placed into two categories of concern: peace and security, and humanitarian and development.

- Let us look more closely at the impact of war and conflict on children. The consequences of conflict on children can be divided into two categories of concern:
 - Peace and security
 - Humanitarian and development

- Peace and security impacts include physical threats, exploitation and abuse. Examples of such impacts include the killing of children in shelling and crossfire situations, injury to children by landmine and explosive remnants of war, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, detention and torture of children. United Nations peace operations play a key role in addressing the peace and security concerns of children.


Humanitarian and development impacts may involve food distribution, water points, refugee camps for shelter, temporary schools, medical facilities, among others. Those matters are normally addressed by international or local humanitarian and development agencies.

Cooperation and coordination efforts from all relevant actors are needed in order to fully respond to the devastating effects of conflict on the lives of children. That will be explored in more detail in lesson 1.2 and module 3.

SLIDE 9: THE SIX GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN

The Six Grave Violations Against Children

- **Killing and maiming**
- **Recruitment and use**
- **Rape and other forms of sexual violence**
- **Abduction**
- **Attacks on schools or hospitals**
- **Denial of humanitarian access**

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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: These six (categories of) grave violations against children are considered the most atrocious. All United Nations military personnel must know of and be able to recognize and report on these violations.

- The six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict were identified for priority attention because they constitute especially serious violations that have severe consequences on the lives of children, and for their suitability for monitoring and verification.

The six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict are breaches of international law (the legal basis for taking action in response to such breaches will be covered in module 2). Reports on these grave violations are submitted to the Security Council and the alleged perpetrators can be brought to justice and sanctioned.


United Nations military personnel are expected to report and respond to these violations. You, must therefore be fully aware of them and be able to recognize them appropriately.


- ☐ Handout: Six Grave Violations against Children

SLIDE 10: DEALING WITH THE SIX GRAVE VIOLATIONS

Dealing with the Six Grave Violations

- Security Council resolution 1612 (2005)
- The grave violations are against international law
- Reports of violations are sent to the Security Council
- **United Nations peacekeepers contribute to reporting on these violations**



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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: The six grave violations identified by the Security Council require specific attention by UN peacekeeping personnel.

- The Security Council established a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) with the adoption of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), to gather accurate, timely,

objective and reliable information on the six grave violations against children. More information about the guidelines for monitoring and reporting will be covered in module 3.

- After broad consultations within the United Nations, the Security Council identified six *categories* of acts that warrant priority attention. When carried out by armed forces or armed groups in a situation of armed conflict, these acts constitute grave violations. United Nations military personnel must be aware of and be able to recognize these grave violations. Let us examine each one of them in detail.


☞ *Discuss with learners the gender considerations of the six grave violations as you examine each one.*

☐ Handout: *Gender Dimensions of the Grave Violations against Children*


SLIDE 11: KILLING AND MAIMING

Killing and Maiming

Any action that results in the death of or serious injury to one or more children, including:



- Shelling
- Crossfire
- Cluster munitions
- Landmines
- Unexploded ordnances (UXOs)
- Suicide bombs
- Torture



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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Killing and maiming are acts that result in the death of or serious injury to a child or children.

- Killing and maiming are acts that result in the death of or serious injury to a child or children, including scarring, disfigurement or mutilation.

In warfare today, hundreds of thousands of children are often killed and injured during military operations from crossfire, aerial bombardment and shelling. Although often intentional, killing and maiming can also result from wounds caused by detonation of landmines, cluster munitions, improvised or other indiscriminate explosive devices. One worrying trend is the increase in suicide attacks and the use of children to carry them out, which has led to the death of or serious injury to several children. Torture and physical ill-treatment have also caused the killing and maiming of children.

Examples


1. Sometimes children are maimed deliberately. Between 1999 and 2002, during the civil war in Sierra Leone, the rebels instituted a policy of cutting off the hands, legs and arms of captured soldiers and civilians, including children. The limbs of hundreds of children were amputated or children were used to carry out the maiming of others.
2. In 2022, the highest numbers of grave violations verified by the United Nations were the killing and maiming of children. A total of 8,631 children were killed and maimed, with the use of explosives remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and mines representing 26 percent of the methods used to kill and maim children:
 - Central African Republic: 80 children killed and maimed (47 boys, 33 girls)
 - Democratic Republic of the Congo: 409 children killed, 290 maimed (445 boys, 254 girls)
 - Mali: 245 children killed and maimed (172 boys, 59 girls, 14 sex unknown)
 - South Sudan: 80 children killed and maimed (61 boys, 17 girls, 2 sex unknown)
3. Between 2015 and 2017 in Iraq, Da'esh used torture and physical ill-treatment such as executions, amputations, and physical mutilation of children to ensure obedience, instil fear and exert control, and as a form of revenge and intimidation.

☞ *Provide or solicit other examples, if time permits.*


SLIDE 12: RECRUITMENT AND USE

Recruitment and Use

A child associated with an armed force or group (sometimes referred to as a “child soldier”) refers to any person below the age of 18 years who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to:



- Fighters
- Cooks
- Porters
- Messengers
- Spies
- For sexual purposes

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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Recruitment and use of any person below 18 years by an armed force or an armed group in any capacity is prohibited.

☛ Tens of thousands of boys and girls are recruited and used by armed forces or groups in conflict situations in countries around the world. As a United Nations military personnel, you are likely to encounter children carrying guns and wearing uniforms. However, it is important for you to know that children – boys and girls – are assigned wide-ranging functions in armed forces or armed groups, not limited to direct participation in hostilities. Recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups in any capacity is prohibited.

A child associated with an armed force or group (CAAFAG) refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to [...] fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes (see *Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, 2007*).

It is important to understand that armed forces and armed groups may use children for a number of functions. For example:

- Direct combat on front lines
- Intelligence operations, as spies
- Reconnaissance, as scouts (especially as children are seldom viewed with suspicion)

- Decoys or saboteurs
- To man checkpoints
- Communication purposes, as couriers or messengers
- Other – as porters, cooks, cleaners, etc.
- Enslavement or sexual purposes, as sex objects or “bush wives”

🗨️ The abbreviation CAAFAG is used to refer to a child associated with an armed force or armed group in any capacity. “Child soldier” is a commonly used term, however, learners must understand that a child does not have to carry a weapon to be considered as a child associated with an armed force or armed group.

Throughout this training course, we will use “CAAFAG” to refer to children recruited or used by an armed force/group in any capacity.

🗨️ *Provide or ask learners for examples of situations involving CAAFAG, and discuss factors contributing to the recruitment and use of children in a specific peacekeeping mission context, if time permits.*

The association of children with actors in armed conflict is often rooted in systemic vulnerabilities, such as:

- Poverty and/or inability to meet basic needs
- Lack of educational opportunities, safe or decent employment or livelihood opportunities
- Need for protection from abuse, neglect or domestic violence
- Violence, abuse, discrimination or marginalisation by communities or authorities
- Presence or control by an armed group in a particular geographic area
- Harassment or attacks by an armed force or group
- Being targeted for oppression, exclusion and marginalisation due to religious, social or ethnic differences
- Desire for revenge, or wish to defend family and community
- Desire for power, status, respect and adventure
- Craving for belonging or purpose
- Impact of other compounding humanitarian crises

SLIDE 13: RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence

Any violent act of a sexual nature committed against a boy or girl under the age of 18 years, including:



- Rape
- Sexual slavery
- Forced prostitution
- Forced pregnancy
- Enforced abortion

Girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence during armed conflict



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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Sexual violence against children is one of the most horrific violations. Although girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence in times of conflict, boys are also at risk.

- Rape and other forms of sexual violence against children are human rights violations, and may amount to grave breaches of international humanitarian law. If committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population, sexual violence can constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Girls and boys who experience sexual violence often suffer from negative health consequences, such as physical injuries, psychological trauma and adverse sexual and reproductive health conditions, such as sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Child victims of sexual violence can also face stigma and rejection by their families and communities. Boys who suffer sexual violence may feel emasculated; girls may perceive themselves or be perceived to be dishonoured and impure.

GIRLS

Girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence during conflict, including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage by armed forces or armed groups. Sexual violence also has long-term consequences on the economic future of

girl victims. Extreme deprivation, unemployment and loss of contact with families and communities create conditions whereby girls may be trafficked for sexual exploitation. Girls who become pregnant as a result of rape and for children born of such violence in conflict are particularly vulnerable to further exploitation, abuse, stigma, or abandonment.

BOYS

Boys may also be victims of sexual violence in conflict, including as a form of ill-treatment in detention settings. Boys may experience trauma from being forced witnesses or perpetrators of sexual violence. They may be forced to commit rape, either directly by their commander or indirectly through peer pressure. Boys are also recruited into sexual slavery.

Examples

1. Bacha Baazi (dancing boys) is a practice in Afghanistan that is a form of sexual slavery and child prostitution, in which boys are sold to wealthy or powerful men – including military and political leaders – for entertainment and sexual activities. Sexual violence has also been strategically perpetrated against boys in conflicts in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Syria. Cases include rape, gang rape, forced nudity, and other forms of inhuman or degrading treatment which often occur while boys are held in detention.
2. Across contexts such as in the Central African Republic, women and girls continue to suffer ongoing attacks and threats of sexual violence in the course of livelihood activities. Women and girls engaged in agriculture, gathering firewood or returning home to retrieve essential items after displacement, were raped and in some cases abducted and held by armed groups. Displaced women and girls were attacked by armed group fighters in and around the groups' bases and checkpoints. A total of 75 girls were victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence in 2022.
3. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, armed groups continue to use sexual violence as a tactic to assert control over natural resources and territory, and as a tool of collective punishment for perceived collaboration with other armed groups or State forces, during abductions and raids on villages. In 2022, a total of 284 children (283 girls, 1 boy) were subjected to sexual violence, involving rape, gang rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery.

SLIDE 14: ABDUCTION

Abduction

The unlawful removal, seizure, capture, apprehension, taking or enforced disappearance of a child, either temporarily or permanently, for the purpose of any form of exploitation, including:

- Recruitment
- Taking children hostage
- Retaliation/Intimidation
- Enforced disappearance
- Sexual purposes
- Forced labour
- Other



NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: In times of conflict, children are particularly vulnerable to abduction. In many cases, the abduction of children is the precursor to other grave violations.

- The image on the slide shows liberated girls awaiting treatment for their injured feet at St. Joseph's Hospital in Kitgum, Uganda. The girls were forced to work as porters and domestic slaves for the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda.

Abducting children is illegal under international law; it may constitute a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In times of conflict, children are often abducted during raids on villages and in ambushes, from camps for internally displaced people or farms, on their way to or from school or the market; or while gathering firewood, water or shepherding. Children may be forcefully abducted, either temporarily or permanently, for purposes ranging from recruitment by armed forces or armed groups, retaliation/intimidation including for political reasons, hostage taking to obtain ransom or surrender of a family member, enforced disappearance, forced labour, sexual slavery or trafficking across borders.

Examples

1. One of the most notorious situations involving widespread abduction of children took place in northern Uganda, where the number of abductions was estimated

to have reached 25,000 or more over two decades of war. Tens of thousands of abducted children were made to serve the Lord's Resistance Army. During the conflict, girls and young women were vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, not only at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army, but by government soldiers as well.

2. In 2022, the majority incidents of abductions of children by armed groups in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mali, were for the purposes of recruitment and use. A total of 79 children (40 boys, 39 girls) were abducted in CAR, 730 children (469 boys, 261 girls) in the DRC, and 109 children (90 boys, 19 girls) in Mali. Among others, the children were used as porters and for sexual purposes.

SLIDE 15: ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS OR HOSPITALS

Attacks on Schools or Hospitals

- Physical attacks and threats on buildings (targeted/indiscriminate)
- Attacks or threats against school children
- Attacks or threats on personnel, doctors, nurses or teachers (including killing, maiming, harassment, coercion, abduction)
- Looting and wanton destruction of buildings
- Military use of schools and hospitals



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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Attacks on schools or hospitals are considered grave violations owing to the negative impact they have on children.

- Under international humanitarian law, schools and hospitals are protected civilian objects, and therefore benefit from the humanitarian principles of distinction and proportionality.

In recent conflicts, schools and hospitals have come under increasing attack in efforts to discredit the Government or to instil fear in the population. Armed forces and armed groups also use schools or hospitals as bases or storage areas, which may lead to targeting of those facilities and put children at risk of attack. Teachers, nurses, doctors and related protected personnel may come under personal attack in order to make the institutions less effective. Abductions also take place in schools.

Conflict has a compounding effect to children's access to education and health services. Short-term loss of education may lead to the loss of several key years of education, which could significantly affect future employment prospects for children. Violence against health care services during conflict may significantly increase malnutrition, diseases and mortality rates among children.


Examples

1. In Mali, since 2017, the insecurity related to attacks and threats of attacks on schools and education personnel led to the withdrawal of teachers and closure of schools. By the end of 2022, threats of violence to schools by armed groups forced over 1,000 schools to close. Attacks on schools involved destruction and burning of schools and school equipment, assault on and killing of education personnel, lootings, threats against school personnel and students, and abduction of education personnel.
2. There have been more than 100 incidents of attacks on hospitals by armed groups in Mali since 2017. These involved threats and abduction of protected personnel, attacks on health-care facilities, looting of medications, carjacking of ambulances and other health centre vehicles, and improvised explosive device attacks against ambulances and medical convoys by armed groups.

SLIDE 16: DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Denial of Humanitarian Access

Blocking free passage or timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons in need, (including children):



- Attacks against humanitarian workers
- Attacks against humanitarian facilities and assets
- Looting of humanitarian aid
- Denial of access for service delivery
- Restricting movement of humanitarian personnel/supplies

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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Children are the first to perish from famine and disease; denial of humanitarian access to children is a grave violation.

- Denial of humanitarian access to civilians, including children, and attacks against humanitarian workers are prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocols, and may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes. Moreover, humanitarian access to civilians is a principle of customary international law.

Humanitarian access is crucial in situations of armed conflict where civilians, including children, are in desperate need of assistance. Denial of humanitarian access includes blocking the free passage or timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons in need, including children, as well as deliberate attacks against humanitarian workers. Humanitarian access is usually denied or hampered by parties to the conflict for security or political reasons. In many parts of the world, humanitarian assistance is sometimes interrupted because of ongoing fighting.

Example


1. In Mali, humanitarian access continues to be gravely hampered, particularly in the central and northern regions owing to armed groups attacks on villages, counter-terrorism operations and intercommunal clashes. During the period from April 2020 to December 2022, there were some 400 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access, which included carjacking, threats and physical violence against humanitarian personnel, resulting in abduction, killing and injuries; break-ins into humanitarian premises; looting of valuables; burning of vehicles of humanitarian organizations; and restrictions on movement, affecting NGOs and United Nations entities. The denial of access to basic services and restrictions on freedom of movement, including difficulties in gaining access to village markets, fields and pastures, and health care, made already vulnerable groups, notably children, more vulnerable. The use of siege tactics against villages by armed groups also interrupted school activities.


SLIDE 17: DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY FOR ACTUAL OR ALLEGED ASSOCIATION WITH ARMED FORCES OR ARMED GROUPS

Deprivation of Liberty for Actual or Alleged Association with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

Any form of detention/imprisonment/placement of a child in a public or private custodial setting, from which this child is not permitted to leave at will, by order of any judicial, administrative or other public authority on the basis of the child's:

- Actual or alleged association with an armed group, or a group designated as terrorist
- Actual or alleged association of family members
- On national security grounds





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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Where a child is detained or deprived of his/her liberty by reason of his/her actual or alleged association with a party to conflict, this should be documented and reported as an issue of concern related to the recruitment and use of children.

- Aside from the six grave violations against children, the detention of children for their actual or alleged association with parties to the conflict, including those groups designated as terrorists by the United Nations, is another concerning trend affecting children. Children's association with armed actors and involvement in hostilities puts them at a heightened risk of detention.

Many children are detained because they appear to be of fighting age or come from communities perceived to be sympathetic to opposition forces, or because their family members are suspected of involvement with such forces. Children charged with national security offences have also been detained for online postings that are perceived as supporting armed groups designated as terrorists.

Detention conditions are often poor with inadequate sanitation, food and healthcare. Children have no access to education, recreation or rehabilitation; and are vulnerable to sexual violence, torture, ill-treatment and other violations.

Examples


1. In 2022 almost 3,000 children were detained for actual or alleged association with armed groups, or for national security reasons:
 - Iraq: 936 children (927 boys, 9 girls) are in detention on national security-related charges, including for their actual or alleged association with armed groups
 - Somalia: 176 boys were detained for their alleged association with armed groups
 - Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mali: 11 boys were detained by national authorities for their alleged association with armed groups in CAR, 117 children (97 boys, 20 girls) in the DRC, and 30 boys in Mali
2. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, between 2014 and 2022, more than 1,000 children have been arrested, captured and detained by national authorities for their alleged association with armed groups, or on national security grounds. Children reported poor detention conditions and, in some cases, inhumane treatment, including torture and sexual abuse. Most detained children were held in temporary detention facilities and some, in long-term correctional facilities.

SLIDE 18: GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN CHILD PROTECTION

Gender Considerations in Child Protection

- The experiences of girls and boys in armed forces and groups differ, including methods of recruitment, identification, and reintegration
- Tasks assigned to girls and boys can differ based on their distinct gender roles within their societies
- Women and girls face a higher risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence during armed conflict



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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

Key Message: Girls and boys are often more vulnerable to certain kinds of threats and violations based on their distinct gender roles within their societies.

- Boys are at significantly greater risk of recruitment by armed forces or armed groups as compared to girls in most conflict contexts. However, boys and girls may be assigned tasks that are based on gender, for e.g., boys are used in combat roles; girls as cooks, cleaners, sexual slaves, or child brides. The children may have multiple roles at any one time and their roles are likely to change during the period of their association. Girls are often sexually abused and may be forced to be the “wives” of commanders and soldiers. Often the girls become pregnant and bear the soldiers’ children.

Girls tend to be disadvantaged in accessing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) assistance. They may be easily overlooked and mistaken as combatants’ wives or dependents, especially because many are too embarrassed or afraid to speak up, or the combatants may refuse to release them into transit care facilities. They may also have different needs in the reintegration process owing to

their different experiences. Peacekeeping personnel should therefore pay special attention to the distinct needs of girls and boys in DDR efforts.

Social reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups might be difficult as these children have lost their ties to family and community. Girls formerly associated who attempt to reintegrate into their communities may face stigma. This may be compounded if the girl has had a child as a result of her association with the armed force or group. Boys returning from conflict also risk rejection by their communities, and may be perceived as a threat.

- Peacekeeping personnel should be keenly aware of the gender differences relating to girls and boys.

For example:

- Women and girls are disproportionately affected by rape and other forms of sexual violence during conflict. They are more vulnerable to sexual violence while walking to and from schools, or carrying out the daily livelihood activities, such as collecting firewood or water. Boys are frequently subjected to sexual violence particularly as a form of ill-treatment in detention settings
- Boys tend to be more often targeted for actual or alleged association with armed forces or armed groups, which may put them at risk of physical attack, as well as illegal detention and torture. When in detention, both boys and girls are often subjected to disproportionate types of violence and exploitation. While girls are at high risk of rape and strip searches during interrogations, boys are also subjected to such violence.
- Boys also have a greater risk exposure to being killed or maimed by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices while working (e.g., herding cattle) or playing.
- The consequences of attacks on schools have long-term implications for boys and girls regardless of their gender, although the destruction and closure of schools can worsen pre-existing gender inequalities of educational access for boys and girls. For example, children who have been affected by rape and other forms of sexual violence, including forced marriage, or who were forcibly recruited and used may face stigma, discrimination and exclusion, which may impede the continuation of their education. When adolescent girls drop out of school, they usually take on domestic labour and family care responsibilities, while boys are likely to drop out of school to find work and support their families or join armed forces or armed groups for security or protection.

Case Study: Gender

- Testimonies from a girl and boy
- Consider some of the factors that can increase the risk of a child being recruited by armed forces/groups during armed conflict
- Reflect on the differences in the experiences of girls and boys associated with armed forces/groups



NOTES (FOR TRAINER)



Activity: Comparison of testimonies (10 minutes)

Handout: Testimonies from a Boy and a Girl

INSTRUCTIONS

Hand out the testimonies of the boy and girl, and display slides 19 and 20. Have a male learner read the boy's testimony aloud and a female learner read the girl's testimony aloud. Facilitate a 5-minute open-group discussion, solicit views/comments from about five to seven learners. If necessary, note the responses on a flip chart. You can use the discussion questions below to solicit responses.

AIM

Learners should think about the specific vulnerabilities that girls and boys face in situations of armed conflict.


LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the factors and risks that contribute to the recruitment of children by armed forces or armed groups
- Identify that one child may be affected by multiple violations, so that trauma is exacerbated
- Explain the different experiences of boys and girls associated with armed forces or armed groups

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss the testimonies taking into account the following questions:

1. Which factors put Emile and Lucie at risk of being recruited by the armed group during the conflict?
2. How has the fact that they were children at the time of the conflict increased their vulnerability?
3. How do the experiences of Emile and Lucie differ owing to their different gender roles?

 *The following responses highlight some of the factors that put girls and boys at risk during conflict:*

SUGGESTED RESPONSES

Vulnerability factors

Children lack the maturity to make an informed decision as to whether to join an armed force or group and can be more easily influenced than adults. Both, Emile and Lucie appear to have been forcibly recruited by the armed groups. However, once he joined, Emile was indoctrinated with the armed group's ideology and subsequently led operations against other armed groups. Lucie stayed with the armed group in order to avenge the death of her friend. The recruitment of all children – whether they are forced to join or are driven to join by other factors, is prohibited under international law.

Lucie and her female friends were taken because they were young girls who could be given to soldiers as wives, or as sexual slaves to reward them. Girls are especially chosen for this. Becoming pregnant then increases their dependency on the soldier. The girls may have nowhere/nobody else to turn to. They are stigmatized and will not be able to go back to their community or the community of their “husband's” family.

The

Traumatic experiences – like the ones experienced by Emile and Lucie – can have more severe and long-term effects on children as they are still in the process of physical and intellectual development.

Gender considerations

The threats and violence that girls and boys face during and after conflict are often different based on their distinct gender roles within their societies. Emile, like many boys, was mainly used by the armed group for fighting and support tasks, such as spies and bodyguards. Girls may serve various purposes within an armed force or armed group, including as active combatants, and are often at greater risk of sexual violence, used as sex slaves, or forced to be the “wives” of commanders and soldiers. Lucie was used by the armed groups as a combatant, and suffered sexual violence.

Some girls also become pregnant and bear the soldiers' children. They may refer to their abductor, the soldier, as their “husband”. As a result, they may easily be

overlooked and mistaken as the soldiers' dependents. This illustrates some of the challenges in identifying girl victims during formal disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts. It is crucial that peacekeeping personnel pay special attention to the distinct needs of girls and boys during the DDR process.

The consequences for girls and boys can be long-lasting and particularly difficult. In some cases, communities shun rape victims and children born of rape. They may also be rejected by their "husband's" family.

The stigma associated with sexual violence and the fear of rejection by their family and community is such that many girls and boys are too embarrassed or afraid to speak up.

- 🗨️ Why are children most vulnerable during armed conflict? Why do children need special protection in conflict and post-conflict settings?
[This was already discussed after the film, *A Child's Fate*.]

While many children prove remarkably resilient when faced with extremely difficult circumstances, in general, children are disproportionately affected by armed conflict owing to the following reasons:

1. **Children can be more easily influenced and may not fully understand the consequences of their actions.**
For example, children may be lured into joining an armed force or armed group, thinking that they will be obtaining "employment" or protection from violence. Children have also been used as "suicide bombers", carrying explosives hidden in their bags or clothing, without knowing it.
2. **Children depend on family, community and government structures for protection and care.**
Those structures are destroyed or have collapsed during conflict. That is why displaced or unaccompanied children are at greater risk of violence, exploitation or abuse during conflict.
3. **Children are still growing/in the process of development.**
Violence in armed conflict poses several risks to the healthy development of children. For example, denial of access to basic services, including adequate nutrition, has a more serious long-term effect on children, particularly babies and younger children, than on adults. Similarly, traumatic and other negative experiences (such as indoctrination) and influences during conflict carry more consequences for children than adults.

- 👉 Refer to the examples above (slide 18) for additional points to illustrate gender differences in the experiences of girls and boys affected by armed conflict, if necessary.

- 🗨️ **Differences in the experiences of girls and boys affected by armed conflict**

In refugee and internally displaced persons settings throughout the world, women and girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence because they usually have to leave the camps to carry out their daily livelihood activities, such as collecting firewood or water. For example, in the Central African Republic, women and girls often walk several kilometres away from the camps to find firewood, or to return home to retrieve essential items after displacement. That puts them at increased risk of sexual violence by armed groups, national military or police forces and others who act in a climate of impunity.

In some conflict contexts, boys have greater freedom of movement and spend more time outside the house, including to go to school, which places them at higher risk of being caught in crossfire, exposed to attacks on schools and becoming victims of explosive remnants of war. For example, in Afghanistan, most victims of anti-personnel mines and other explosive remnants of war are boys between the ages of 8 and 15. In the Afghan society, boys usually assume roles that require them to be outdoors, such as herding cattle. Boys also tend to be targeted for actual or alleged association with armed forces or armed groups, which may put them at risk of physical attack, as well as illegal detention and torture.

SLIDE 20: TESTIMONY OF A BOY


Testimony of a Boy

Emile was recruited into an armed group when he was 15 years old

"I am the oldest of three children. Our father died, and our mother has been working in the fields to help our family get by. One day, when I was 15, I was coming home from school with my friends who lived in the same village as me, and as we were crossing a fruit plantation, I heard someone calling my name. I stopped to see who it was, and a boy, who was about 10 years old, suddenly appeared, coming out of the plantation. He kept me amused by telling me nonsensical stories and asking strange questions. I told my friends to go home, saying that I would follow them. A few minutes later, four armed men appeared and forced me to go with them, knocking me about and striking me with a whip. That is how I found myself recruited into an armed group.

During my time with the armed group, I was brainwashed with their ideology and received training in military intelligence, armed robbery, weapons, livestock theft and intimidation methods for robbing people on the road or in the fields, or abducting them. I started as a cook, was promoted to bodyguard of the camp commander and was eventually made responsible for leading operations on a national road. Sometimes, I was sent with other children to support joint operations with other armed groups. There were times when I cried, especially when I thought about my mother and my two brothers, but I couldn't leave the bush because all the paths out were watched by members of the armed group. One day, during an operation to steal livestock, I took an opportunity to lay down my weapon and my military shirt. I left them on the roadside and reported to MONUSCO."

Testimony from *International Committee of the Red Cross: Testimonies of Former Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (IRRC No.911), 2019*

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SLIDE 21: TESTIMONY OF A GIRL

Testimony of a Girl

Lucie was recruited by an armed group when she was 11 years old. She is now 16 years old

“Five years ago, I joined an armed group in the eastern part of the DRC. I was no longer studying. One day, armed men came into my aunt’s shop where I worked. They drank all we had and then asked me to go with them to their base so that they could pay me. I asked two of my friends to accompany me. When we got there, they locked us up for two days. The armed group was preparing to fight and told us that we could choose between becoming soldiers and dying. We had no choice but to become soldiers. When night came, fighting broke out, and we fought all night. One of my friends who had come with me was killed. I was very angry and decided to stay with the group to avenge my friend.

One day, we were engaged in a clash with another armed group in the bush; we had run out of ammunition. Some members of our group had been captured. Twelve children, including me, decided to try to escape to the nearest village. However, we were intercepted by another group. We were beaten and locked up at this armed group’s camp and then quickly incorporated into its ranks. I continued to take part in fighting with this new armed group.

It wasn’t easy being a girl in an armed group. Sometimes the boys protected us from the violence meted out by the adults, but the commanders took advantage of night patrols to sleep with the girls. They intimidated us, and if you refused to sleep with them, they would kill you and then go back to the camp and say you had been killed in the fighting. One day, when my commander sent me into the town to find food, I took the opportunity and escaped again. I went to the government forces. I was ready to leave the armed group and join the regular army, but they said that I was not old enough. I was transferred to a transit and orientation centre to be demobilized.”



SLIDE 22: TAKEAWAYS

Takeaways

- A child is anyone under the age of 18 years
- Children face specific risks during armed conflict
- The nature of conflict has changed and severely affects children
- There are six (categories of) grave violations against children
- Protection needs of boys and girls may differ



Summary

Takeaways from Lesson 1.1:

- A child is anyone under the age of 18 years
- Children face specific risks during armed conflict
- The nature of conflict has changed and severely affects children
- There are six (categories of) grave violations against children
- Protection needs of boys and girls may differ

SLIDE 23: REFERENCES (1/2)

References (1/2)

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SLIDE 24: REFERENCES (2/2)

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SLIDE 25: QUESTIONS

Questions



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NOTES (FOR TRAINER)

- ☞ *Allow sufficient time for questions to be asked/answered. Actively encourage questions from learners.*

