

Module 7



Prevention

Module at a Glance

Overview

This module outlines the distinct roles and responsibilities of child protection staff in the prevention of grave violations against children. Learners will understand how to identify and analyse conflict-related threats and risks to children and devise prevention and mitigation strategies in response. They will also learn the importance of taking advantage of the mission's internal mechanisms, such as early warning systems, and engaging local actors in their prevention efforts, including parties to conflict and local communities.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Explain their specific roles and responsibilities in relation to prevention
- Identify threats and risks to children in a mission area
- Describe how to leverage and contribute to a mission's early warning systems
- Effectively communicate with parties to conflict and local communities on prevention

Module Outline

Duration: 180 minutes (3 hours)

The Module	
Intro slides	Slides 1-2
Roles and responsibilities in relation to prevention	Slides 3-8
Identifying threats and risks to children in a mission area	Slides 8-15
Mission's early warning systems	Slides 16-19
Effective communication with parties to conflict and local communities on prevention	Slide 20
Learning Activities	
Learning Activity 7.1 Group discussion: Experiences of child protection staff of prevention	Page 9
Learning Activity 7.2 Scenario-based exercise: Identifying risks to children that you should focus on	Page 13
Learning Activity 7.3 Scenario-based exercise: Communicating with local actors on prevention	Page 27
Additional information	Page 33 + Separate file

The Module



Children continue to suffer from alarmingly high rates of grave violations in conflicts, both in your mission area and around the world. While your work often tends to concentrate on monitoring, reporting and responding to violations that have already been committed, it is important to remember your critical role in preventing these violations from occurring in the first place, both in the short and long term.

This session focuses on the prevention of grave violations against children. Some of the questions that we will explore are:

- What are the potential threats and risks to children in mission areas? Which ones should you prioritize and why?
- What do you do in response to identified threats and risks to children? How do you involve the mission and other actors, including parties to conflict and local communities, in prevention efforts?

Slide 1: Introduction to Module 7 - Prevention



Module 7: PREVENTION

Slide 2: Learning objectives

Learning objectives

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Explain their specific roles and responsibilities in relation to prevention
- Identify threats and risks to children in a mission area
- Describe how to leverage and contribute to a mission's early warning systems
- Effectively communicate with parties to conflict and local communities on prevention



Specialized Training Materials for Child Protection Staff in
UN Peace Operations

2

- At the end of this module, you will be able to:
 - Explain your specific roles and responsibilities in relation to prevention
 - Identify threats and risks to children in a mission area
 - Describe how to leverage and contribute to a mission's early warning systems
 - Effectively communicate with parties to conflict and local communities on prevention.



Ask learners how they would define 'prevention' in the context of the mission's child protection mandate.

Learning Outcome 7.1

Roles and responsibilities in relation to prevention

Slide 3: What is prevention in child protection?

What is prevention in child protection?

Prevention aims to identify and address threats and risks of grave violations against children *before* they occur.



Specialized Training Materials for Child Protection Staff in
UN Peace Operations

3



As you are presenting this definition, make sure to refer back to some of the points learners made when coming up with their own definition of 'prevention'.

- In the context of child protection in United Nations peace operations, prevention aims to identify and address threats and risks of grave violations against children *before* they occur. There are several points worth noting in this definition:
 - Both risk assessment and preventative (or mitigating) measures are essential components of this definition. Only assessing risks would not qualify as prevention; it would also require actions to address these risks.
 - Prevention does not become redundant if violations have already occurred. On the contrary, if an armed force or group is already committing violations, it is critical to take preventative measures to stop further violations.

- It is also important to note that prevention and response are separate but closely linked areas or work. For example, effective responses to violations, including the provision of services to children, are essential to prevent further violations, such as re-recruitment of children.



Ask learners if they agree/disagree with this definition or if they have any questions or comments they would like to share.

Some learners may ask about accountability for grave violations against children, which is closely related to prevention. Judicial and non-judicial accountability actions can indeed contribute to prevention by deterring potential perpetrators and addressing underlying grievances. However, accountability also involves providing remedies and redress for the children and their communities for past violations. For more information, please see *Conflict Dynamics International, [Children in Accountability Framework. A Framework for Advancing Accountability for Serious Violations against Children in Armed Conflict](#), June 2015.*

Slide 4: Threats and risks to children (examples)

Threats and risks to children (examples)

- Unusual presence of a group of children at the market
- Lack of adequate educational opportunities
- Weak rule of law and impunity
- Planned occupation of a school by armed force/group

- Let us take a closer look at threats and risks to children. This slide lists some examples:

- Unusual presence of a group of children at the market
 - Lack of adequate educational opportunities
 - Weak rule of law and impunity
 - Planned occupation of a school by armed force/group
- In what ways do you think these threats and risks are the same or different?

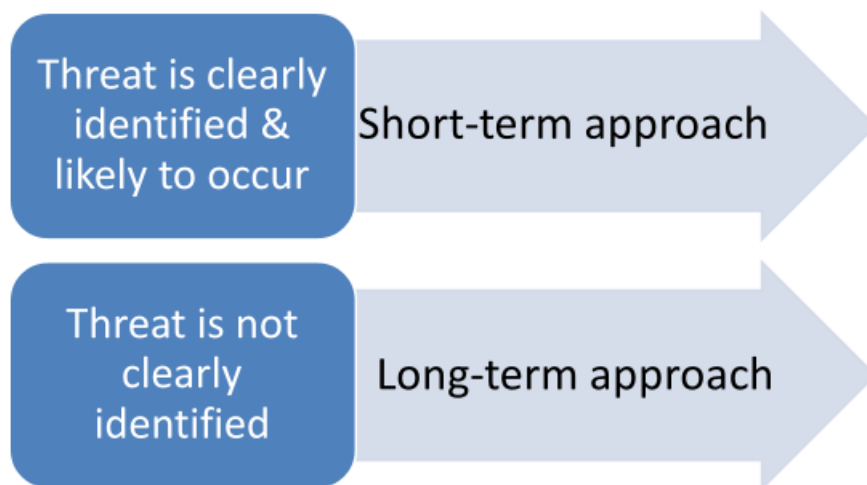


Ask a few learners to share their responses. This exercise gives them a first opportunity to think about threats and risks and the various ways they can analyse them.

- One way to categorize these four threats/risks is as follows: While a) and d) are specific, clearly identified threats, b) and c) are latent threats that are more general and not as clearly identifiable. The prevention response would need to differ in each case.

Slide 5: Short- and long-term prevention approaches

Short-and long-term prevention approaches



- Depending on whether or not a threat is clearly identified, the mission and its partners would need to take a short- or long-term approach to prevention. So, for example, in the case of the planned occupation of a school by armed forces or groups, the threat is clearly identified, which means that the mission would need to initiate an immediate or rapid response. What are some of the potential responses that could be undertaken together with other relevant mission components?
- Possible responses:
 - Support mission leadership to engage in political dialogue with the specific armed force or group to stop the occupation of the school.
 - Warn local authorities and partners in the location and identify protection responses with them.
 - Increase mission patrols at specific times around the school.
- In contrast, weak rule of law and impunity would call for more long-term approaches. What could some of potential responses be?
- Possible responses:
 - Advocate with national, regional and international authorities to ensure that perpetrators of conflict-related violations committed against children are held to account and brought to justice.
 - Provide technical assistance and support to the host government and other actors to strengthen laws, policies and systems on child protection and reinforce the rule of law in the host country.
- As child protection staff, you play an important role in guiding and supporting the mission to devise both short- and long-term approaches to prevent violations against children.



For examples of short- and long-term prevention approaches and actions, see table 16 in section 8.1.1 of the Handbook.

Learning Activity 7.1

Group discussion: experiences of child protection staff of prevention

Slide 6: Group discussion: experiences of child protection staff of prevention

Group discussion

- What are you doing to prevent grave violations against children?
- What do you think you should you be doing?
- What keeps you from taking these actions?



 Specialized Training Materials for Child Protection Staff in UN Peace Operations

6



This discussion aims to increase learners' awareness of how they are already contributing to prevention through their day-to-day activities as child protection staff. Compared to their work on violations that have already been committed – which is more visible and tangible – some learners may not even realize the impact of their ongoing prevention work or the opportunities and challenges for increased engagement in this area.

TIME: 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Split participants into small groups (e.g., 3-4 people).
- Ask groups to take 20 minutes to discuss the following questions (see slide above):
 - What are you currently doing to prevent grave violations against children?
 - What else do you think you should be doing?
 - What keeps you from taking these actions? What are the challenges?

- During the debrief, ask each group to summarize the main outcomes of their discussions. It is important to emphasize that prevention requires dedicated, sustained action – it does not just happen on its own. You can encourage learners to be more deliberate in taking actions to prevent grave violations against children and proactively look for opportunities to make a difference. If they have not already done so, they can include 'prevention' in their strategic and work plans (see chapter 9: Planning, monitoring and evaluation).

Slide 7: What is your role in preventing violations against children?

What is your role in preventing violations against children?



 Specialized Training Materials for Child Protection Staff in UN Peace Operations

7

- Recent international normative developments, such as the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2427 (2018) and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, have drawn renewed attention to the critical importance of prevention in implementing the child protection mandate in United Nations peace operations.
- As child protection staff, you have a vital role and responsibility to work with the mission and its partners to recognize and address threats and risks to children, based on your specific mandate and the mission's overall prevention efforts. In fact, your prevention-related responsibilities cut across all of your five core functions, as the graphic (above) illustrates. For example, as you monitor and report on grave violations, you also identify potential threats and risks to children.



Ask learners to give you a few more examples to illustrate how they can use each of their five functions to prevent violations against children (see examples below).

Core functions	Prevention actions (examples)
Mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training/sensitization of peacekeepers • Contributing to early warning systems
Monitoring and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying risks and threats • Sharing analysis of identified risks and threats in reports
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocating for national prevention plans • Advocating for accountability and justice for children
Engaging with parties to conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and/or sensitization with parties • Working on action plans or other commitments
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information with partners on threats and risks • Coordinating with partners on prevention actions

Learning Outcome 7.2

Identifying threats and risks to children in a mission area

Slide 8: Identifying risks to children that you should focus on

Identifying risks for children that you should focus on



 Specialized Training Materials for Child Protection Staff in
UN Peace Operations

8

- There are many different threats and risks that children face in conflict contexts. This can make it challenging to identify the most important ones. What makes this process even more complex is that multiple risks may be present at the same time.
- The following exercise gives you an opportunity to test and improve your ability to identify, assess and prioritize risks.

Learning Activity 7.2

Scenario-based exercise: identifying risks to children that you should focus on



The goal of this exercise is to give learners the opportunity to test and improve their ability to identify threats and risks. It also aims to demonstrate the need for child protection staff to be deliberate and strategic when identifying which threats and risks to focus on, based on their specific mandate.

Please note that you should conduct this scenario-based exercise before telling learners what risks they are expected to focus on. This approach of learning-by-doing will provide them with a more challenging and engaging experience, which they are more likely to remember later on.

TIME: 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Introduce the exercise:
 - We will be looking at different examples of potential threats and risks to children. For each of them, ask yourself, is this a risk that you as a child protection staff member should focus on? Why?
- Put up each slide and ask one learner to read aloud the scenario.
- Call on a few learners to share their response. Below are some points you may want to share in the discussion:
 - Keeping your specific mandate in mind can help you focus attention and resources.
 - Having additional contextual information, such as background on the actors involved or patterns of previous violations, is essential to assess the nature and impact of a risk. For risk assessments, always try to consult with colleagues within the mission or partners, especially if you are not familiar with the location and/or the actors involved.

Slide 9: Example 1: Is it a risk to children on which you should focus?

Example 1:

Is it a risk to children that you should focus on?

An NGO partners witnessed 5 boys accompanying members of armed groups in their pick-up truck, on the way to a mine company. According to the partner, the children perform small tasks for the company in exchange for food.



- Suggested response: While it is not clear whether the boys have already been recruited and are being used by the armed group, their close proximity to the soldiers poses an immediate threat to them that requires an urgent response by the mission. Depending on the conflict context, there may also be links between mining and armed groups, for example if armed groups are exploiting mines to finance their activities. In these cases, the mere presence of children in and around mines should be considered a potential risk factor.

Slide 10: Example 2: Is it a risk to children on which you should focus?

Example 2:

Is it a risk to children that you should focus on?

UNPOL reports an increased presence of street children in the city, some of whom have engaged in criminal behaviors. According to UNPOL, the State police routinely arrest these children when crimes are committed in areas where they are known to gather.

- Suggested response: This is not a risk on which you should focus. While there are risks for children in this scenario, these appear not to be directly related to the six grave violations or the conflict. The programmatic responses needed to address the root causes of children living on the street (e.g., livelihoods opportunities, reducing vulnerability, etc.) are beyond the scope of the child protection component's mandate and resources. However, it is important for UNPOL to provide guidance and mentoring to the State police to ensure that these children are treated in accordance with international juvenile justice norms and standards.

Slide 11: Example 3: Is it a risk to children on which you should focus?

Example 3:

Is it a risk to children that you should focus on?

Community chiefs have shared concerns with the mission about disappearances of children, which they believe may be linked to the recruitment drive by armed groups. The Protection Working Group indicated that they will follow up on the concern.

- Response: The sudden disappearances could indicate potential grave and conflict-related violations against children, including abduction, and recruitment and use. In this case, you should alert your contacts to verify the report and gather more information. If verified, you can work with the Protection Working Group and other partners on potential protection and prevention strategies. Given the imminent nature of the issue, the situation would require a rapid response by the mission. *Note: We will be talking about early warning and rapid response later in this training.*

Slide 12: Which risks to children should you focus on?

Which risks to children should you focus on?

Risks resulting in:

- Any of the six grave violations;
- Other conflict-related child protection priorities
- Protection issues for children related to United Nations peace operations

- The previous exercise highlighted the need for child protection staff to be deliberate and strategic when identifying risks and deciding which ones to act on. You should focus only on those threats and risks that relate to:
 - Any of the six grave violations.
 - Other conflict-related child protection priorities, such as those identified by the mission or the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR). This could include, for example, the detention of children for alleged association with armed groups or the trafficking of children.
 - Protection issues for children associated with UN peace operations and their personnel, such as use of child labour by United Nations peacekeeping personnel or the impact of United Nations military operations on children.
- You should also determine whether the risk is clearly identified and likely to occur. If this is the case, it would qualify as a threat, which would require a rapid response by the mission. We will talk more about this later in the session in the context of early warning systems.

Slide 13: Different types of risk factors

Different types of risk factors

Armed forces/groups



UN Mission



Local context



The specific vulnerabilities of children



- Now that you know how to identify relevant threats and risks for children, let us dive a bit deeper into analysing them.



Ask learners: What are some of the questions you could use to analyse or better understand a risk?

- Here are some potential analytical questions you can use to complement their responses:
 - What causes or increases conflict-related risks for children, particularly risks related to the six grave violations?
 - How likely is the risk to occur?
 - What impact is the risk likely to have on children?
 - Is it a clearly identified, specific risk (i.e., threat) that requires urgent action?
- One way for child protection staff to systematically analyse risks within their mission area or a specific location is to consider **different types of risks**. You could ask yourself: What is the risk due to? Or what does it relate to?

Based on this analytical framework, risks may relate to:

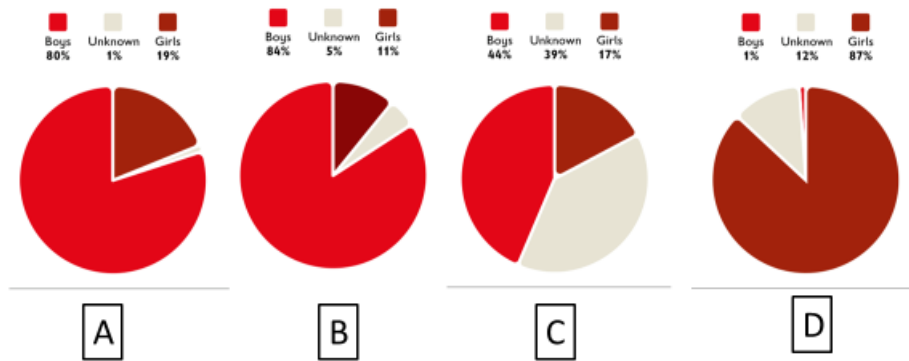
- Armed forces or groups
 - The mission and its personnel (often linked to exploitation or abuse)
 - The local context
 - The children themselves (based on their specific vulnerabilities)
- For example, armed forces or groups could pose a risk because their members are unaware of relevant child protection laws and standards or are unwilling to respect children's rights.
 - Some situations may also include multiple types of risks. For example, in addition to an armed group's ignorance of or disregard for children's rights, some children may be at increased risk of recruitment because they are separated from their families.



Ask learners to provide 1-2 examples for each type of risk. You can refer them to table 17 in section 8.2 of the Handbook for other potential risk factors, as well as possible prevention or mitigation strategies.

Slide 14: Global data on grave violations

Which graph depicts which grave violations?



- Another critical component in your risk analysis is to ensure that it is not only child-sensitive but also gender-sensitive. This means that the analysis accounts for the different roles and characteristics that society attributes to children based on their

gender. This may differ across sociocultural contexts.

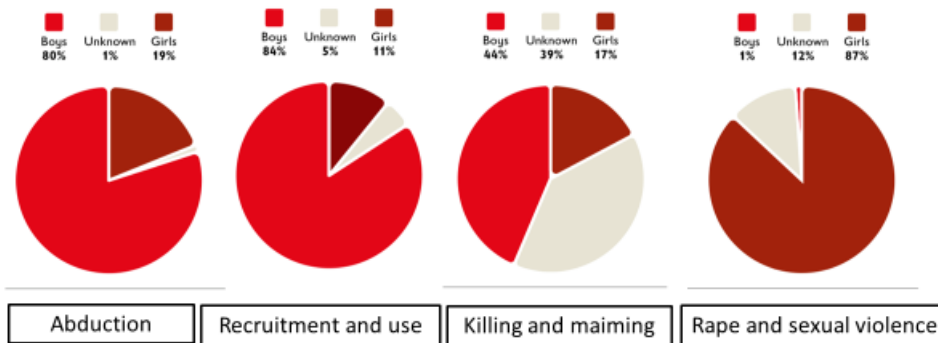
- To illustrate this point let us take a look at the four pie charts on the slide (above), which break down four of the six grave violations by sex – abduction, recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and sexual violence. The data is based on analysis of verified cases from the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children in armed conflict from 2018 conducted by Save the Children for its report *Stop the War on Children 2020: Gender Matters (2020)*. Which of these pie charts do you think represents each of the four grave violations against children? Why?



Give participants a few minutes to reflect on the graphs and then ask some of them to share their responses and rationale, before moving to the next slide.

Slide 15: Global data on grave violations

Global data on four grave violation
(disaggregated by sex)



Ask learners whether any of this data is surprising to them or if they have any other observations.

- As we are considering risk analysis, it is important for you to remember that the risks may not be the same for all children; these may differ based on their age, gender, sexual orientation, separation from parents/caregivers, disabilities and/or other

factors.

- A child's gender may influence the types and levels of risks they face in their communities and determine which prevention and protection strategies may be most effective for them. So, you should always ask yourself: Does the child's gender (i.e., socially constructed roles and characteristics of girls and boys) affect their risks? How?
- When conducting a gender analysis, be careful not to fall into **gender stereotypes**. Just because a violation affects – or appears to affect – boys or girls to a lesser or greater extent does not mean that this is the case for all children (e.g., it's important not to overlook girls in efforts to release and reintegrate children associated with armed forces or groups, or boys in efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence).
- Finally, it is worth noting that there is still a lack of sex-disaggregated data on the six grave violations, particularly on “denial of humanitarian access” and “attacks against schools and hospitals”. Part of your task is to make sure that those involved in monitoring and early warning processes, including other mission components, members of the CTFMR, and local communities, are diligent about disaggregating protection data (at least by age and sex).



For more information and analysis on gendered analysis of the six grave violations, you can refer learners to the Save the Children report or the resources for gender listed in the Handbook (sect. 8.7), including OSRSG-CAAC, Gender Dimensions of the Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict (2022), available at https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/UN_Gender-Dimensions-Grave-Violations-Against-Children-WEB-2.pdf.

Learning Outcome 7.3

Mission's early warning systems

Slide 16: Prevention and mitigation measures

Prevention and mitigation measures

Type of risks	Risk factors	Prevention/mitigation measures
Risks related to ARMED FORCES/GROUPS	• •	• •
Risks related to the MISSION	• •	• •
Risks related to CHILDREN	• •	• •
Risks related to LOCAL CONTEXT	• •	• •



- As we discussed at the beginning, prevention is incomplete unless there is a response to the identified threat or risk to children. In selecting the most effective prevention or mitigation measure, you should consider whether the risk is clearly identified and qualifies as a threat requiring a rapid response, or whether it is a more general risk requiring a more long-term response.
- You can also consider what is causing or increasing the risk to children. Earlier, we discussed the different types of risks; you can use this as an analytical framework to develop prevention or mitigation strategies. For example, if you have a risk that relates to armed forces or groups, you could ask yourself: What are the factors that enable and/or allow the actor to commit grave violations against children? Is it a lack of knowledge of child protection, a disregard for children's rights, an absence of organizational regulation systems or other factors? The risk factors you identify, will determine the prevention and mitigation strategies you develop.



Ask some learners to share risk factors for their mission area and come up with some prevention strategies that they could take in response. These could be strategies that they have already applied or that they believe could be effective in the future. You can refer learners to table 17 in section 8.2 of the Handbook for additional examples of risk factors and potential prevention and mitigation strategies.

Slide 17: Early warning mechanisms

Early warning mechanisms

- Gather, share and trigger responses to information on any **serious and credible threat** from non-State armed groups and/or State authorities that may put at risk the **physical integrity of civilians**, including children.

- As you are considering different prevention measures, it is important to bear in mind that you are not able or expected to prevent or mitigate grave violations against children on your own. Prevention requires coordination with colleagues within the mission and engagement with relevant external actors, such as parties to conflict, national authorities, UN entities, regional and sub-regional organizations, international and national NGOs, civil society organizations and local communities.
- Missions are increasingly using early warning systems as a prevention tool. These systems are designed to gather, verify and trigger responses to information on serious and credible threats from non-State armed groups and/or State authorities that may put at risk the physical integrity of civilians, including children. By systematically tracking risk indicators, the mission can mobilize partners and resources to prevent imminent violence in a timely manner. Early warning systems operate differently in each mission context and sometimes even within the mission

area.



Ask participants about their understanding and experiences with early warning systems:

- How does their early warning system work? Who is primarily responsible for managing it?
- To what extent does it include grave violations against children and other child protection concerns?
- Are they actively engaging with the mission's early warning system to prevent violations against children? If so, how?

Slide 18: How early warning (EW) systems work

How EW systems work



Ask a learner who is more familiar with the mission's early warning systems to explain how they work. For example, what happens if a Community Alert Network or CAN, which consists of community members who agree to share alerts with the mission, learn about a possible threat to children?

- Based on the learner's explanations, you can fill in some of the missing information:
 - The CAN decides if there is a serious threat from armed forces or groups

that puts children at risk. If this is the case, they share an **alert** with the mission – for example, through the UN military component.

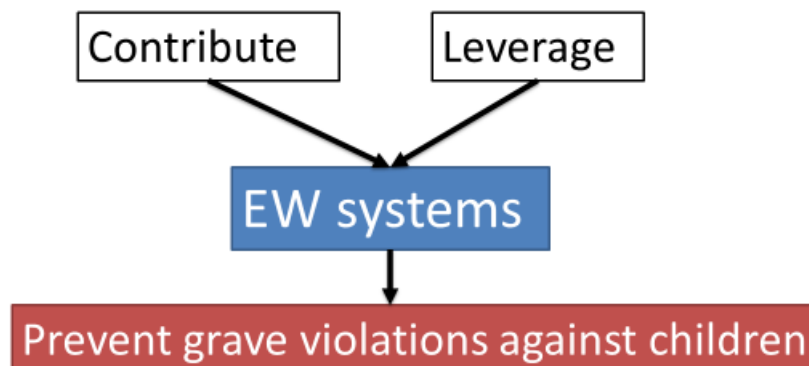
- After the mission receives the alert, staff need to verify the information through other sources to establish its credibility. Once it is verified, it is considered an **early warning**.
- All early warnings (i.e., verified alerts) require a **rapid response** by the mission (e.g., deploying joint protection teams, conducting a monitoring field mission).



Check if learners understand how early warning systems are supposed to work or if they have any questions. For further information, refer them to section 8.7 in the Handbook for additional resources. In particular, DPO POC Handbook (2020), pp. 95-100, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/dpo-poc-handbook> provides detailed guidance and examples of early warning systems.

Slide 19: What is your role in EW systems?

What is your role in EW systems?



- Child protection staff should engage with EW systems in two ways:
 - By **contributing** to information gathering through their monitoring and

reporting activities. This could include the monitoring of grave violations against children already committed (as a potential indicator of increased levels and/or other forms of violence), as well as detection of threats of grave violations that are likely to occur.

- By **leveraging** the data and analysis shared through EW systems to prevent or mitigate grave violations from being committed against children.



Learners can find more information on specific actions they can take to ensure the mission integrates child protection into its EW systems in the Handbook (section 8.3). Make sure you highlight the importance of making full use of non-confidential MRM data in early warning systems and when identifying threats and risks (as was the case in DRC with MONUSCO's work on engaging with armed groups to release children and prevent further violations).

Learning Outcome 7.4

Effective communication with parties to conflict and local communities on prevention

Learning Activity 7.3

Scenario-based exercise: communicating with local actors on prevention



This scenario-based exercise is intended to strengthen the learners' capacity to communicate with parties to conflict and local communities to prevent grave violations against children. It emphasizes the importance of building trusting relationships with each of these actors, both for protecting children and, even more so, for preventing future violations.

First, let the groups come up with their own ideas for each of the scenarios. Then, when they are sharing their responses, you can go through the key considerations for each of these situations (see bullet points after each slide below). This approach of learning-by-doing will provide them with a more challenging and engaging experience, which they are more likely to remember later on.

TIME: 60 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Divide learners into small groups (3-4 participants) and distribute the handouts with the instructions and scenarios.
 - Handout – Instructions: Scenario-based activity on engaging with local actors on prevention
- Briefly review the instructions with them. The tasks are as follows:
 - Step 1: Carefully read through each scenario.
 - Step 2: Discuss how you as a child protection staff member should respond in this scenario. What are key points you should make to the people you are speaking to, and why?
 - Step 3: Be prepared to report key responses to this scenario to the rest of the groups in 30 minutes (approx. 10 min/scenario). You will have 3-5 minutes for your presentation.

- Give the groups 30 minutes to work on the exercise and then ask them to report back. Make sure to emphasize that – just like in real life - there is not one right or wrong answer; there are always some trade-offs involved.
- Afterwards, go through each scenario and invite each group to share their responses. Provide feedback and inputs based on the key considerations for each scenario listed below.

Scenario 1: During a field mission to a remote location, you meet with members of the local Community Alert Network (CAN). The Community Liaison Assistant (CLA), who has set up the meeting and is translating told you earlier that the members are eager to talk to you as they have some important information to share. However, your schedule for this mission is extremely tight, and you only have 10 minutes available to talk to them.

After brief introductions, one community member starts talking in his native language, while looking you directly in the eyes. The CLA translates: “We’ve told your military colleagues about our concerns many times... Our young people are roaming around on the street – they have no education, no jobs, no hope. Some parents are coming to us with questions, ‘Why can’t our kids join armed groups? It is better than the life we can offer them.’ All of this has been really hard on us and our community. What should we do? Is there anything the UN can do to help?”

- Here are some key considerations for child protection staff on how to handle this situation:
 - Empathize with the concerns of the community members and stress the critical role they can play in influencing parents who come to them for guidance (i.e., letting parents know about their children’s right to education and the potential of education to lift children and families out of poverty; alerting parents to the serious risks to children of joining armed groups, including trauma, injury and even death).
 - Encourage community members to advocate with local authorities, child protection agencies and other actors to make sure that these children receive proper education and training and are cared for. Working alongside these actors, community members can help prevent children and youth from joining armed groups or criminal networks.
 - Explain that your focus is on protecting children (under the age of 18) from the most serious violations in conflict situations, including recruitment and use by armed forces or groups. The network may not be aware of the mission’s child protection mandate, and this may help them understand

how you and your colleagues can best support them. Make sure to ask community members whether children in their communities have already joined the armed groups, because in that case child protection actors could take further concrete actions.

- Find out what the network has already done to address the risk (e.g., talking with the children/youth, parents, local authorities) and what else they think would be needed to dissuade parents from encouraging their children to join armed groups. Instead of telling them what to do, this shows them that you respect the critical role that community members play in child protection, while also identifying ways the mission and its partners can potentially reinforce these local initiatives.
- Find out who the network has been communicating with in the mission – besides the Community Liaison Officer – and if they are in touch with any of your other contacts. This will make it easier for you to fill in missing information and follow up with the network, if needed.
- Based on the outcomes of your discussion, consider arranging sensitization sessions for children/youth and parents in this location. However, bear in mind that these sessions require planning and preparation, as well as repeated touch points – not one-off meetings – to be impactful. In this situation, you would likely need locally based partners, either within the mission or external, to conduct sensitization activities given that you are not based in this location.



For further information on sensitization of communities, refer learners to Handbook, section 8.5.

Scenario 2: At a training session with members of a non-State armed group, one participant comes up to you afterwards and asks you if it is ok for young girls to be doing chores around headquarters. He has seen a few girls working there recently. You let him know that this would indeed be a child protection concern and decide to follow up on this.

The local village leaders confirm the information about the girls later on. They did not realize that this would be a problem. All of you agree that it would be best to raise the issue directly with the commander. Even though he is still new to the position, his predecessor was very supportive of the child protection work and you expect him to be receptive to your concerns.

The meeting starts off well. When you introduce yourself and explain your role, you see the commander nodding in agreement. He is also visibly pleased hearing about the good collaboration with his predecessor. However, when you share your concerns about the alleged

incident, the commander's demeanour changes; he starts fidgeting with his mobile phone and looking out the window. When you give him a chance to respond, his voice is low and threatening: "Why are you talking to me about this?! Are you accusing me of something? I am a father myself and would never do anything to harm children. I don't know where you get this information from, but trust me, none of this is true."

- Here are some key considerations for child protection staff on how to handle this situation:
 - Stay calm and avoid getting into an argument with the commander on whether the information you provided is true or not, which may further aggravate him. For example, you can emphasize how much you appreciate the commitment and the practical steps his armed group has taken to protect children. You can also tell him that you shared this information because you want to build a trusting relationship with him and are confident that you can work together on solutions for child protection concerns.
 - Explain that it is your role to verify any alleged incident of recruitment and use of children and you would appreciate his support in this regard. Let the commander know that he can share information about the case with you at a later stage, too. He may be aware of the situation and needs more time to calm down and reconsider his decision to deny the accusation.
 - Clarify why this is a potential violation or risk: Even if girls or boys are acting in support roles for an armed force or group, such as cooking or spying, and are not involved in active fighting, they would still be considered to be associated with the armed force or group. These children would therefore need to be released immediately by the armed force or group without any conditions. It is important to provide this information as the commander and his group may not be aware of the international normative framework regarding the protection of children in armed conflict.
 - Do not expect to come up with a solution by the end of the meeting. This situation will likely require follow-up actions, including monitoring and verification of the alleged incident and possible mobilization of 'allies' (both within the mission and externally) to facilitate engagement with the armed group and/or explore other 'pressure points' for encouraging the commander to collaborate. Changing an armed actor's organizational culture and systems to prevent grave violations against children takes time and often requires repeated engagements.



For more practical tips on engaging with parties to conflict, see section 8.4.2 of the Handbook.

Scenario 3: A couple of months ago, you and your child protection colleagues supported the identification and release of 19 children formerly associated with State armed forces, most of whom were between the ages of 15 and 17. You immediately shared detailed information with child protection partners to facilitate the reintegration of the children.

However, when you and your civil society partners visit the brigade for a follow-up monitoring visit, you are surprised to learn from the commander that some of the formerly associated children have come back to the barracks and want to re-join to army. The commander shakes his head in disbelief as he speaks: “And we are the ones they complain to. They say that they have not received any support from the UN, and that their families don't want them back either. I called your NGO friend the other day and they told us just to be patient. They don't have any reintegration programmes in this area right now.... But what are we supposed to do? We can't send the children away. They have nowhere else to go!”

- Here are some key considerations for child protection staff on how to handle this situation:
 - Thank the commander for sharing the information with you and emphasize the urgency of the case. While you may feel frustrated yourself about the lack of reintegration programmes, focus on finding practical solutions rather than putting blame on other actors.
 - Inform the commander that the children are not allowed to join the armed forces under any circumstances, in accordance with international (and potentially also national) law. If any of them have formally or informally joined the armed forces again, they must be immediately released.
 - Find out more about the children and their current situation (e.g., how many are there? Are they safe? Where do they sleep? What do they eat?) and ask to talk to them directly to verify and complement the information provided. Talking to the children will also give you and, more importantly, your civil society partners an opportunity to talk with the children about the risks of re-joining the armed forces and to discuss alternatives with them.
 - Find out if the civil society partners who are accompanying you are aware of the situation and whether they may be able to assist in providing temporary accommodation and care for these children, or if they can help identify other partners for support.



For more practical tips on engaging with parties to conflict, see section 8.4.2 in the Handbook.

Ask learners to reflect: What was the most important thing you learned in this session? How did your understanding of 'prevention' change today? How are you planning to apply these lessons to your work?

Slide 20: Takeaways

Takeaways

- Child protection staff have a critical role in preventing grave violations.
- Threats and risks for children may vary in terms of their specificity, causes, likelihood, impact, and other factors; different children may face different types of threats and risks.
- Child protection staff should leverage and contribute to the mission's early warning system.
- Effective communication on prevention requires building trusting relations with parties to conflict and local actors.
- All prevention efforts require coordination within the mission and with other external actors, including United entities and local actors.



Specialized Training Materials for Child Protection Staff in
UN Peace Operations

20



Review these takeaways.

Learning Activities

Additional information for each learning activity is in a separate file. It includes:

Number	Name	Methods
Learning Activity 7.3	Instructions: Scenario-based activity on engaging with local actors on prevention	Handout