
UNICEF

UNICEF works for a world in which every child has a fair chance in life and believes that all children have a right to survive, thrive and fulfill their potential – to the benefit of a better world. UNICEF is present in 190 countries, making it the world’s leading advocate for children. Most of the work UNICEF does is in the field. Each country office ¹ works through a unique individualized program of cooperation that is developed in partnership with the host government. These programs last five years and focus on practical ways to realize and advocate for the rights of children. The needs of children are analyzed in a situation report that is produced by UNICEF Regional Offices ² at the beginning of the program and worked on for the five-year duration of the program.

The Innocenti Research Centre in Florence and Offices for Japan and Brussels is another key component in UNICEF’s success. They assist with fund-raising and liaison with policy makers. UNICEF also has 36 National Committees ³ that share UNICEF’s mission and raise funds to promote children’s rights. These National Committees operate as independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and raise one-third of UNICEF’s resources. A 36 member Executive Board made up of government representatives advises on and monitors UNICEF’s work. The Executive Board establishes policies, approves programs, and decides administrative and financial plans and budgets. Members of the Executive Board are elected by the United Nations Economic and Social Council for three-year terms.

Global policy on children is created at headquarters in the USA, Switzerland, Denmark, Italy, Belgium, and Japan. UNICEF works with a wide array of governments, NGOs, and other UN bodies to create a world were every child has a fair chance and implement

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¹ Countries that are home to UNICEF Field Offices can be found at: http://www.unicef.org/about/structure/index_field.html
² There are 7 UNICEF Regional Offices: that can be found at http://www.unicef.org/about/structure/index_regional.html
³ http://www.unicef.org/about/structure/index_natcoms.html
these global policies throughout the world. UNICEF believes in building a protective environment for children, and this includes ending the use of child soldiers. In addition to creating a protective environment, UNICEF believes strategies to prevent re-recruitment must be implemented, and the framework must be strengthened for former child soldiers to return to their families and communities. UNICEF calls upon governments and NGOs commit to advocacy on behalf of children at community, national, and international levels to give children a voice. UNICEF advocates for the protection of former child soldiers and social reintegration programs that include: educational training, vocational training, and psychosocial counseling. Since the mid 1980’s, UNICEF has been focused on advocating and securing the release of children from armed forces and other combatant groups in: Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Uganda. UNICEF continues to work towards guaranteeing all children the rights they are entitled to and continues to work with various UN bodies such as the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to do so.

What is a child soldier?

Armed conflict happens all over the world on a daily basis, and in some conflicts warring parties use child soldiers. A child soldier is defined as any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or an armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children (boys and girls) used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes.

Most of the world bans the recruitment of any person under the age of 18 into armed conflict. While the voluntary recruitment of 16 and 17 year olds is generally internationally legal, it is not considered good practice. These standards are outlined in the United Nations' International Human Rights Law. Child soldiers are soldiers that have been recruited at an unlawful age, or forced into participating in armed conflict. Some child soldiers are 10 or younger, which is considered a war crime under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These standards are outlined in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the
Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which was adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by the General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263. The Statue of the International Criminal Court (2002) also deems making the conscription, enlistment or use of children under 15 in hostilities by national armed forces or armed groups a war crime.

**How do children become soldiers?**

Children are desirable for violent groups because they are easily manipulated, intimidated and brainwashed. Children are more likely to become child soldiers when separated from their families, when they are displaced from their homes, if they live in combat zones, or if they have limited access to education. Children can also take extreme risks in battle, which makes them valuable fighters, especially when they are under the influence of drugs. Seeing a child on the opposite side often confuses the opponent’s forces on the battlefield.
“Forced recruitment” accounts for the vast majority of child soldiers. Children who are forcefully recruited are usually abducted from their homes or schools and beaten into submission. Others children are sold into war by their parents or other guardians due to extreme poverty. In all cases children are faced with extreme violence and witness the unthinkable atrocities of war.

Child soldiers are almost exclusively from communities that suffer from extreme poverty. Orphans are much more likely to be recruited, and some forced recruits become orphans in the process. In some cases, abductors violently force children to kill their own parents when they are taken. Armed groups have also raided orphanages to abduct all the children to be used as child soldiers. Children who attend school are much less likely to be recruited; some children stay at school overnight to make sure they are not kidnapped.

There are also parents who are forced to sell their children into war for money or because they are being threatened. Armed groups sometimes demand a certain number of children from a village as a whole. Villages usually comply to avoid being attacked or raided by the armed group, and will give into the demands for children in order to protect the rest of the village and residents.
Those who “chose” to join an armed group usually come from extremely poor backgrounds and volunteer for a variety of reasons. These children often believe that joining an armed group are their best or only option.

Some join armed groups for regular meals, housing, and the promise of protection. Because many of these soldiers come from impoverished areas, their parents may not be able to provide for them, and some do not have any parents or family.

Some recruits are forced to maim or kill a family or community member to prove their worth. This turns their friends and family against them, making it much more difficult for them to return and assimilate to normal life. Some of the violent groups that currently use child soldiers also use this strategy on adults.

Another factor in recruitment of child soldiers is discrimination, if a child or their family member is discriminated against or attacked for religious, ethnic or tribal reasons, armed groups can use this as a recruitment tool. Violent groups take advantage of vulnerable children by creating a false sense of belonging within the armed force.

If their communities are being attacked, some children will join the violence to defend the community or to exact revenge on an opposing group who has harmed their community in the past.

**How many child soldiers are there?**

- Average age of a child soldier: 14
- Number of conflicts that involve child soldiers: 23
- Percentage of soldiers who are girls: 40
- Number of groups that use child soldiers: 59
- Number of child soldiers in the world today: 300,000

Despite international efforts, the total number of child soldiers has remained constant for 25 years. CSPTA is working to change this.
Today there are an estimated 300,000 child soldiers in the world, and girls make up just under half all child soldiers. Many child soldiers are used as dispensable pawns by violent groups and are put in the most dangerous situations. Child soldiers are used as human shields and abused in a multitude of ways which leads to a high rate of child soldier deaths. Unfortunately, the estimated amount of children soldiers of 300,000 has not decreased in 25 years despite extensive work done to try to solve this global issue.
Where and how are child soldiers used?

Child soldiers are primarily used in Colombia, Central Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. Girls are typically forced to perform sexual acts, and are doled out to high ranking commanders and leaders within the groups, or given as a sexual reward to adult soldiers. Many of these girls are horribly beaten, and can be forced into sexual acts or marriage at a very young age.

Child soldiers are used other capacities. Those infighting roles are used in regular combat (usually as advance troops), as suicide bombers, minesweepers or human shields. Other child soldiers are used as cooks, bomb makers, messengers, sex slaves, porters, maids or even spies. Many groups, state and non-state, use child soldiers.

Child soldiers are primarily used in Colombia, Central Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. On 20 July 2015, the Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was published. This report outlines 23 situations of conflict, which occur in 14 countries. These countries with documented recruitment and use of child soldiers include: Afghanistan, Myanmar, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Iraq, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Thailand, and Yemen.
Columbia

The Colombian government has been fighting a civil war against rebel groups since 1964. It has been relatively low intensity, fighting mostly paramilitary groups and guerilla attacks. In Colombia, between 7,500-14,000 child soldiers are used by the rebels, and have been nicknamed “little bees”. The UN has confirmed 343 cases of recruiting child soldiers in 22 departments, 1 out of 4 soldiers are female. Many of these children serve in combat, make landmines and spy for the government.

In this conflict, 81% of the recruits are “voluntary” and joined for a perceived better life. Some girls have been lured into “volunteering” to join the rebels with new clothes or other material items. The FARC, the main rebel group, announced in February of 2015 that they would discontinue the recruitment of those under the age of 17. The international community is concerned about whether they will live up to their commitment.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has one of the worst track records with child soldiers. Currently, there are an estimated 30,000 child soldiers fighting in the DRC.

The government of DRC has also recruited child soldiers in the past, but committed to end this practice in October 2015 by signing an action plan with the United Nations. One armed group, The Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma is led by Adolphe Onusumba. Onusumba claims all of the children serving him have joined voluntary, and they have a better life in his group because they are able to become educated and be safe.

The Child Soldiers Global Report disputes this claim, and states child soldiers under Onusumba have been kidnapped, and many have been forced to, kill, rape or cannibalize their relatives and friends. It is a common practice for kidnapped girls to be used as sexual slaves to commanders. In some opposition forces, child soldiers make up half of the members.
Republic of South Sudan

When fighting broke out in Juba, the capital of The Republic of South Sudan, there were devastating effects for children. The conflict was started due to political issues, but an ethnic dimension quickly affected the situation.

In 2014, there were 514 verified incidents of recruitment and use of children, which affected 16,307 children. The majority of those affected in South Sudan are boys. The Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) is the force most associated with the use of child soldiers. The South Sudan National Police Service, South Sudan Wildlife Service, the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA), and other regional groups are also associated with the use of child soldiers.

UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict have made progress in this area. In 2001, more than 3,500 child soldiers had been demobilized in phase one of the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process, receiving support from community centers, but there are been continued reports about the use of child soldiers. In 2009, the Government of South Sudan signed an action plan with the United Nations, committing to prevent and end the use of child soldiers, which was renewed in 2013. The Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities signed between South Sudan and opposition forces in 2014 also includes the ending the usage of child soldier
Sources:


