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UNICEF Topic #2 - Child Recruitment by Armed Groups

Child recruitment by armed groups is a grave violation of international law and a persistent issue in many conflict zones. In 2023, the United Nations verified 32,990 grave violations against 22,557 children across 26 conflict zones, with recruitment and exploitation being among the most prevalent violations.[1] Children recruited by armed groups are often subjected to forced labor, sexual exploitation, and participation in combat, but understanding how and why children are recruited is essential for creating effective prevention policies.

Recruitment typically follows several steps: identification, targeting, manipulation, and integration.[2] Children are often identified in vulnerable communities: those struggling with displacement, poverty, or family instability.[3] Armed groups may offer incentives such as food, shelter, protection, or a sense of belonging. Recruitment often relies on psychological manipulation, peer pressure, coercion, and threats to families.[4] Once recruited, children are integrated into group hierarchies, trained for specific tasks, and socialized to adopt group ideologies. Understanding these steps allows governments and humanitarian organizations to design interventions before recruitment occurs,

For example, in Haiti, escalating gang violence has led to increased recruitment in neighborhoods with limited government presence.[5] Armed groups target children through promises of safety and social support, preying on those already displaced. As of October 2025,

[1] United Nations, *Children and Armed Conflict Report*, 2023.
[2] Save the Children, *Understanding Child Recruitment in Armed Groups*, 2022.
[3] Human Rights Watch, *Haiti: Child Recruitment by Gangs*, 2024.
[4] UNICEF, *The Recruitment and Use of Children in Conflict*, 2023.
[5] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affai rs (OCHA), *Haiti Humanitarian Update*, 2025.

approximately 680,000 children have been displaced due to violence; with over 300 confirmed cases of child recruitment by armed groups in the past year.

International agreements like the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) clearly prohibit the recruitment of anyone under 18.[6] However, these protections are frequently ignored, and perpetrators often avoid accountability. Political interests, lack of state control, and issues of national sovereignty complicate enforcement, leaving children highly vulnerable.

To guide your discussion, consider these questions:

- How do armed groups identify and target children in vulnerable communities?
- What recruitment tactics, coercion, manipulation, or incentives are most effective for armed groups?
- How should governments or NGOs intervene to disrupt recruitment before it occurs, especially in areas they cannot fully control?
- How can authorities realistically prevent recruitment where armed groups provide basic necessities?
- Should international pressure, sanctions, or community-based interventions be prioritized over military action in stopping recruitment?

The exploitative use of children by armed groups is a serious crime under international law and requires urgent attention. Even though rules exist to prevent it, conflicts make enforcement very difficult, leaving children unprotected. This committee now has an important

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[6] UN Treaty Collection, *Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*, 2000.

role: to turn our discussion into real policies that protect these children immediately and create long-term changes to end this harmful practice worldwide.

I encourage you to reach out with any questions as you explore this topic. With focused research, you'll gain a clear understanding of the issue and your country's stance. Be sure to consider different perspectives and evaluate your sources.

You're welcome to email me at **ytangir@mail.yu.edu** if you need clarification or any help. I'm confident that, together, we can have thoughtful and productive debates. Please note that all work should be your own; AI tools should not be used to generate content for your papers. The goal is to develop your own critical thinking, research, and writing skills so that our discussions reflect your individual understanding.

Best of luck,

Yael Tangir

Chair, UNICEF

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