

RELEASE AND REINTEGRATION:

Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups

Situation overview

The conflict that began in December 2013 continues to affect the lives of millions. Violence is widespread and human rights violations are common. Insecurity and active hostilities continue despite the signing of peace agreements by the parties to the conflict. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and Sudan People's Liberation Army - in Opposition (SPLA-IO) have signed a commitment to end violations against children, but grave violations continue to be reported through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, including killing, maiming, abduction, sexual violence, and recruitment.

Since the start of the 2013 conflict, over 19,000 children have been reported to be associated with armed forces and groups. In 2017, the conflict expanded and reports of killing, recruitment and use of children and denial of humanitarian access increased in the Greater Bahr el Ghazal and Greater Equatoria regions. The spread of violence across the country continues to stretch UNICEF's and partners' capacity to respond and is creating conditions for further family separation, psychosocial distress, and risk of injuries or death associated with conflict.

Release of children to date: UNICEF has supported three releases in the former Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), now Boma State. In December 2015, the South Sudan Democratic Army (SSDA) Cobra Faction released 1,750 boys and five girls in the GPAA of Jonglei State as part of an exercise in which the SSDA Cobra Faction was integrated into the SPLA. A second release was carried out in October 2016, in which an additional 145 children were released from the Cobra Faction and SPLA-IO and provided with social and economic reintegration services.

In May 2018, UNICEF South Sudan and UNMISS supported the National DDR Commission in facilitating the release 210 children (207 boys; 3 girls) from the SPLA-IO and the National Salvation Front (NAS) in Pibor, Boma State. This was the third release of children supported by UNICEF since 2015, bringing the total number of released children across Boma State to 2,110 (2,103 boys; 7 girls).

In alignment with the peace agreement that was signed by the government of South Sudan and the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM), as well as additional agreements made by the government and the SPLA-IO in an effort to attain peace, in February 2018, UNICEF supported the release and reintegration of 348 children (248 boys; 100 girls) associated with the SSNLM and SPLA-IO in Yambio, Western Equatoria State. Due to the high volume of children in need of reintegration services across the county, children were released in two additional phases to include 248 children (137 boys; 111 girls) released in Bakiwiri in April 2018, and 149 children (98 boys; 51 girls) released in Asanza in August 2018.

UNICEF is currently supporting the National Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Commission with continued advocacy and resources at both the national and state levels to support the release of an additional 215 children in Western Equatoria whose association with armed groups has been verified.

In 2017-2018, UNICEF has provided reintegration support to an additional 101 children (99 boys; 2 girls) in Juba and Bentiu who were informally released or escaped from armed forces or groups.

Situation of children



19,000

children estimated to have been recruited and used in armed forces or armed groups – documented by U.N. Monitoring and Reporting mechanisms.



2,700

violated incidents of grave violations against children reported, affecting over **81,000** children

Results of UNICEF supported community-based reintegration programming since December 2013



2,990

children formally or informally released from armed forces/groups provided with social and economic reintegration services



34%

of children released in Western Equatoria were under the age of 14



49,808

people reached with safe water in GPAA



15,231

children newly enrolled in schools in GPAA



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Community-Based Reintegration Programming Across South Sudan

UNICEF supports the National DDR Commission and local ministries in providing released children with access to reintegration services to include family tracing and reunification, psychosocial support, education, vocational training and economic strengthening opportunities. UNICEF partners with civil society and international NGOs to provide holistic services that will facilitate successful and sustainable reintegration of previously released children, and build the protective capacities of children and communities to reduce the risk of (re)recruitment.

Case management and family reunification: All released children are provided with access to interim care and subsequently reunified with their families. During reunification, children receive three-month's worth of food rations and various necessities, including civilian clothing, blankets, cooking utensils, and fishing gear. Follow-up visits continue for released children to ensure they are not re-recruited, facilitate access to services, address protection issues that arise, and monitor their transition back to their families. Children who are unable to safely return to their families are placed in a family-based care arrangement and provided continued support to identify a long-term care arrangement.

Social development: UNICEF and partners engage youth in social development activities to reduce inter-communal violence and the likelihood of children (re)joining in hostilities. This begins with intensive psychosocial support for two months following their release to promote healing and normalcy, followed by on-going support and engagement at youth centers.

In addition, children participate in activities and clubs that aim to build valuable life skills, build peace, and bridge social capital.

Socioeconomic reintegration: UNICEF is working through partners to improve livelihoods and income generating opportunities for released children and other vulnerable children/households. Children receive hands-on vocational training and apprenticeships in a wide range of activities that include animal health care, beekeeping, soap making, tailoring, hairdressing, and leather work. Additionally, vulnerable children and households are provided with economic strengthening activities to include agriculture, inclusive of cash crops and vegetable production, livelihoods such as fishing, poultry or small animal husbandry, and/or income generation through small business enterprises.

A total of 106 previously released children have been enrolled into Tindoka Vocational Training Centre in Yambio, where they will participate in locally supported trades to include tailoring, carpentry, masonry, and electrical wiring. Children who successfully complete the program will receive apprenticeships and/or material support to start up small-scale businesses.

Education: UNICEF aims to provide released children with access to formal education and alternative education programs such as ALP as ensuring access to quality education is key to successful reintegration and preventing recruitment.

UNICEF is supporting 34 schools across Boma, Jonglei State, reaching 15,231 children and adolescents (38 per cent girls)

with access to education. A total of 586 previously released children are currently enrolled in education services, while others are enrolled in vocational and livelihoods trainings.

UNICEF has signed a new partnership with ACROSS, who will be rehabilitating and re-establishing Pibor Secondary School, which will provide advanced academic opportunities for 200 children who have completed primary school.

UNICEF and its implementing partner World Vision have scaled up education activities to enroll children released from armed groups in Yambio. Since the last release in early August, 294 children (198 boys; 96 girls) have been enrolled into primary school and 35 children (30 boys; 5 girls) into secondary school.

WASH: In targeted areas where recruitment and use is known, UNICEF works to ensure that communities have access to safe and sustainable water supplies throughout the year to reduce population movement, as seasonal migration influences access to education and often contributes to inter-communal conflict. UNICEF has reached nearly 50,000 people with safe water across Boma. Following the release in Yambio, UNICEF has upgraded water and sanitation facilities at both of the UNICEF support interim care centers hosting released children.

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More information on the situation in South Sudan and UNICEF response, including the latest situation reports, can be found at www.unicef.org/southsudan

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