



FACT SHEET

CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED GROUPS AND FORCES CENTRAL AFRICA

It is estimated that some 250,000 children, boys and girls under the age of 18, are today involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide. Thousands of children have been recruited in the Central African region (Chad, Central African Republic and Sudan).

Reasons For Recruitment

Some children are abducted or forcibly recruited; others are driven to join by poverty, abuse and discrimination or to seek revenge for violence against them or their families. Children are more likely to become child soldiers if they are separated from their families, displaced from their homes, living in conflict areas

For the purposes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, UNICEF defines a 'child soldier' as any child, boy or girl, under the age of 18, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity. This includes, but is not limited to, cooks, porters and messengers. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage. The definition, therefore, does not only refer to a child who is carrying, or has carried, weapons. (Based on the 'Cape Town Principles', 1997).

with limited access to education and are vulnerable to recruitment by armed forces and groups. Children may 'voluntarily' take part in warfare, not realizing the dangers and abuses they may be subjected to. While mainly boys are recruited, girls may also be caught up by armed forces and groups where they face a significant risk of sexual exploitation. The breakdown of governments during conflict makes it very difficult to identify and influence those recruiting and using children for combatant and non combatant roles.



The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC): Anyone under the age of 18 cannot be used in conflicts or recruited into armed groups. Governments may accept volunteers from the age of 16, but they cannot compulsorily recruit anyone under 18. The Optional Protocol came into force in February 2002 and has been ratified by 132 Member States. Over 80 States Parties have deposited declarations prohibiting recruitment below the age of 18. The Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups, adopted in February 2007, further strengthen the child protection framework that ensures accountability and the global fight against impunity for crimes against children; they have been officially endorsed by 84 Member States. The International Criminal Court in The Hague can prosecute non-government armed groups who recruit children under 15 years old. Chad and Sudan have signed and ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. Cameroon and Nigeria have signed, but have not yet ratified. CAR and Niger have neither signed nor ratified.

REPUBLIC OF CHAD

Chad is one of the poorest countries in Africa with more than half of the population living on less than one dollar a day. Landlocked between the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the north, Sudan to the east, the Central African Republic to the south, and Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger to the west, it was ranked at 173 out of 177 countries on UNDP's Human Development Index in 2008. The country has a population of 10,154,300 inhabitants growing at the rate of 3.1 per cent per year. More than half of the population is 15 years old or less. Chad has faced instability nationally and regionally over the past few decades. This led to a series of armed conflicts in the east of the country and the capital, N'Djamena. There has also been a spillover from the conflict in neighbouring Sudan. Consequently, there have been serious violations of children's rights with recruitment of children and use of them by armed groups and forces.

- According to Chad's Ministry of Defence 7 to 9 percent of those released from rebel groups in 2009 were minors.
- Over 800 children have been demobilized since 2007.
- Reports indicate that children were recruited not only by rebel groups and Chadian forces, but also by the Sudanese armed groups, including the Janjaweed, the Movement for Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and the Liberation Army of Sudan.
- Statistics of demobilisation of children since 2007 also reveals that the Chadian armed forces have recruited minors (4,4% have been demobilised).
- The Armée nationale tchadienne (ANT), the Ministry of



©UNICEF Chad/2010/Sweeting

Defense sent out orders to commanders of armed and security forces to grant access to military camps to UNICEF, and the International Committee for the Red Cross for monitoring and verification. The Government also initiated and allowed joint verification visits by the UN agencies to military barracks and training centres in Abéché (eastern Chad), Moussoro in western Chad, Mongo and Koundoul in central Chad

- Children have been released from the following armed groups: Front pour le Salut de la République (FSR); Front uni pour le changement (FUC); Mouvement national pour le redressement (MNR); Rassemblement des forces pour le changement (RFC); Conseil démocratique et révolutionnaire (CDR); Union des forces révolutionnaires (UFR); Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement (UFDD); Union des forces démocratiques pour le changement (UFCD); Union des forces démocratiques (UFD); Front populaire pour la renaissance nationale (FPRN); and Union pour le changement démocratique (UDC)
- These actions were taken following a cooperation agreement signed between UNICEF and the Chadian Government in May 2007 for the development and implementation of activities aimed at preventing recruitment, withdrawal and reintegration of all children associated with armed forces and armed groups in Chad.

UNICEF Chad activities related to rehabilitation and reinsertion of former child soldiers has been funded by: Government of France, Government of USA, Government of Spain, Government of Japan, Government of United Arab Emirates, CIDA- Canada, UN CERF Fund, UNICEF French and USA National Committees, ECHO.

UNICEF Chad In Action

- Support to the Ministry of Social Action for the withdrawal process, transitional care and rehabilitation of children withdrawn from armed forces and groups and develop mechanisms for border monitoring.
- Participation in joint missions with the Government to verify the presence of children in military sites of the Chadian National Army (ANT);
- Co-chairing with MINURCAT Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations of child rights in accordance with Resolution 1612 of UN Security Council.
- Capacity building of military on child rights and support for the process of identification of minors. Support to the Ministry of Social Action for the process of withdrawal and sustainable reintegration of children from armed forces and groups and developing mechanisms for monitoring the eastern border with Sudan.
- In order to strengthen mechanisms to deal with cross border recruitment UNICEF Chad and the Government of Chad jointly organizes the regional conference with Sudan, CAR, Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger: "Ending Recruitment and Use of Children in Armed Forces and Groups: Contributing to Peace, Stability and Development".

REPUBLIC OF SUDAN

Sudan's recent history since independence in 1956 has been marred by conflict. Africa's longest civil war, between the north and south Sudan, spanned five decades although there was a period of relative peace in the 1970s. During the last 20 years of the conflict at least two million died and millions more were displaced. The conflict finally ended in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Thousands of children were caught up in the north-south war. In recent years there have also been armed uprisings in the east of Sudan and there's the ongoing conflict in the western region of Darfur which started in 2003. There have been serious violations of children's rights with the recruitment of children by the rebel movements and armed forces.

- 6,500 children associated with armed groups/forces in North Sudan including some 4,500 children in Darfur. Approximately 1,200 children still linked to the SPLA (the Sudan People's Liberation Army).
- Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) and Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), a total of 1,098 children have been released from armed forces and groups and returned to their families in north Sudan.
- Reports indicate that children have been recruited by rebel groups (including amongst others the Justice and Equality Movement and the factions of Sudan Liberation Army), pro-government militia as well as the Sudan Armed Forces in Darfur, since the conflict started in 2003.
- Since the Darfur Child DDR Programme started in July 2009 about 300 children have been registered and released out of a list of 2,000 names submitted by participating armed groups.

UNICEF Sudan In Action

- UNICEF is working with the leadership of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) to get them to agree to the adoption of an Action Plan to end recruitment and use of child soldiers extended to pro-government militia groups.
- More than 1,200 children demobilized with UNICEF support in Southern Sudan since 2005
- Since March 2008, 320 children with the SPLA were registered in the child DDR programme, of which 274 are receiving psychosocial support, 95 attending schools and 42 attending skills training.
- Three Interim Care Centres (ICCs) for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups established in the Warrap, Northern Bahr-el-Ghal and Lakes states of Southern Sudan.
- UNICEF helped to push through the Federal Child Act for Sudan's northern states which was finally passed in December 2009 by the National Assembly. The Child Act of 2009 explicitly prohibits the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. This is a major achievement.
- Action plan signed by the SPLA in Southern Sudan and the UN to end the use of children in armed groups and forces and the association of children with the SPLA. This agreement also grants the UN access to military barracks
- Child Rights Unit established within the Sudan Armed Forces. UNICEF has helped create a core group of trainers on child rights from SAF and from the National Council for Child Welfare (NCCW). This core group works regularly for SAF officers and cadres throughout northern Sudan, including Darfur.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC



©UNICEF CAR/2007/Holtz

Landlocked and encircled on three sides by countries in the midst of long-running wars, the often overlooked Central African Republic (CAR) has been suffering from more than a decade of armed conflict, combined with fierce poverty. Most residents of the country's North, especially women and children, have been severely affected by conflict between the Government and armed groups. With limited access to education and income-generating options, many children from poor families are left with few alternatives and resort to joining armed groups and forces. While others are being forcefully recruited by armed groups and forces.

- At least 1,500 children are or have been associated with armed groups and forces in CAR.
- Since 2007, approximately 1,150 children associated with armed groups have been demobilized and reintegrated into their communities and families.
- Recruitment of children by armed groups has significantly decreased, possibly as a result of the peace process and 2008 political dialogue and decrease in armed clashes between the rebel groups and the national army. However, 350–500 children are thought to still be associated with various armed groups, including the APRD (*l'Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la République et la Démocratie*), the UFDR (*Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement*) and local self-defence

- Among the initial 450 children associated with the UFDR that were released in April and May 2007, around 75 per cent were boys aged between 13–17 and 75 per cent indicated to have participated in military operations and combat for a period of nine months to a year on average. Some 10 per cent of the children were as young as 10, and were used mainly for logistical support.
- The DDR process with the APRD was launched in 2009, following their signature of the 2008 Libreville Peace Agreement with the Government and a visit by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy.

UNICEF CAR In Action

- Since 2007 in collaboration with partner organizations including the *Danish Refugee Council (DRC)* and the *International Rescue Committee (IRC)*, UNICEF CAR has assisted the 1,150 demobilized boys and girls with psycho-social support, multidisciplinary care, education, income-generating activities and assistance for their reintegration.
- The Prevention, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programme focuses on entire communities, benefiting to date approximately 95,000 vulnerable children and young people, including former child soldiers, survivors and victims of sexual and gender-based violence and children from ethnic minorities, who participated in psychosocial activities, peer-support groups, football, volleyball and other play activities, and one-to-one or group sensitisation sessions on children's rights.
- UNICEF and BINUCA (Bureau Intégré des Nations Unies in the country) co-chair a monitoring and reporting task force for the monitoring at national level of child rights violations in accordance with UNSC 1612 and 1882/1888, as well as the production of the first report to the Security Council.
- Approximately 1,500 armed actors, local authorities and international peacekeepers received training on child rights, prevention of under-age recruitment and the protection of children separated from fighting forces as well as sexual abuse and exploitation, including the UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882, to increase their compliance to protecting children during armed conflict.

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

More than half of Nigerians (72 million) live with less than a dollar a day. Regional and rural-urban differentials in poverty are high. Northern regions experience the greatest poverty, the northeast most of all, where close to 80% of the population lives in poverty. An estimated 44.9% of the population is under 15 years of age, while only 3.4% is 65 years and older.

In 2009, the security situation deteriorated in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, with displacement of communities and disruption of programmes. Confrontations between the armed groups and the military became increasingly common. Human rights groups report that armed clashes between the Joint Task Force (JTF, combined troops of the army, navy, air force and the mobile Police) and armed groups often resulted in the death of bystanders, including children. Investigations were rarely carried out and the exact number of deaths and injuries among children is difficult to track.

Communal conflicts and unrest continue to take a considerable toll on the lives of children in Nigeria. According to Human Rights Watch, more than 12,000 people, including children and women, have died in inter-communal clashes since the end of military rule in 1999. There have been two major communal conflicts (ethnic/religious conflicts) in the North in 2010. Reports from media and human rights organizations suggest children were being used and forced to actively participate in communal conflicts and civil unrest in the past. The exact number of children affected is not known.



- Nigeria has signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2000 but not yet ratified it.
- Through Child Rights Act (2003) and state Child Rights Laws, Nigeria prohibits the recruitment of children below the age of 18 years into the armed forces. However, there are two exceptions. In the Jigawa Northern state and Akwa-Ibom Southern state the definition of the child is set as 15 years and 16 years respectively.
- A 60-day amnesty deal by the Nigerian government for armed groups in the Niger Delta came into effect in October 2009. Under the programme, more than 6,000 armed group members turned in their weapons. There have been no

@UNICEF/Nwosu/2008

no reports of children participating in the amnesty programme. On 30 January 2010, the main armed group called off its cease-fire with the government and the fragile peace in the Niger Delta seems to be in danger of unravelling.

- In Bauchi, northern Nigeria, during violence in late December 2009, there were at least 19 children (between the ages of 5 and 15 years) detained by Police due to their association with the clashes.
- In Jos, northern Nigeria, many youths, including children, were mobilized to participate in clashes in March 2010. The bulk of the children were reportedly street children/*Almajiri*. Over 40,000 displaced people were scattered in 12 camps, in some of those camps, up to 90% of the population were women and children.

UNICEF Nigeria In Action

- UNICEF works closely with the National/State Emergency Management Agency (N/SEMA) and civil society organizations such as Red Cross/Crescent to provide humanitarian response and recovery support to the affected populations as well as to assist the establishment of concrete measures for crisis prevention and mitigation.

- UNICEF in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission, Nigeria Bar Association and human rights NGOs provides legal and other assistance to children in conflict with the law, including conflict affected children. In the Niger Delta region, a detention monitoring project is being developed.
- UNICEF supports the establishment and development of Child Protection Network in order to monitor, report and respond to child protection violations – including conflict-related cases.
- UNICEF in collaboration with Ministry of Education is conducting a situation analysis of street children system.

THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

Cameroon is a low middle-income country with well-endowed human resources but poverty rate is still high: 40 per cent in 2007, according to the results of the third household expenditure survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and published in 2008.

In this regard, of the 7.2 million who are poor, 3.6 million are children under the age of 18. There is a high rate of under five mortality with the level of 144 deaths for one thousand live births, far from the target of 75 deaths for one thousand live births defined by the MDGs. The country has become a safe haven for people fleeing Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad. There are a total of 101,317 refugees, 87,080 from the CAR and 8,429 from Chad.



©UNICEF Cameroon/Asselin/2009 Refugees from Central African Republic, Garga Sarali, near Bertoua, Cameroon.

UNICEF Cameroon in Action

8.000 refugees have been sensitized on child rights and children vulnerabilities in the East Region where we have mainly CAR refugees. Youth clubs have been established in Mandjou, Boulembe and Garoua Boulai which are host communities of the East Region with CAR refugees. Skills training and psychosocial support have been provided to 200 vulnerable refugee children. Concerning Chadian refugees, 31 separated children and 21 unaccompanied children, 6 children heading households and 84 mistreated children have been identified and reunified with relatives before closure of their camps in Kousseri near the Chadian border in the Far North region of Cameroon.

There are unconfirmed reports of kidnappings of refugee children from the Central African Republic for ransom by armed groups moving across the eastern border mostly at night. It is reported that these children are used by armed groups to seek ransom. Police authorities are still to investigate these reports.

Local communities have welcomed their neighbours with open arms. However, it is putting an additional strain on local resources and services such as hygiene, sanitation and healthcare. UNICEF in partnership with other UN agencies supports vital services for refugees.