

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENSURING CHILD PROTECTION IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS & TRANSITIONS – July 2025

The upcoming *Review on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations* presents a crucial opportunity to **reinforce the highest standards of child protection, safeguarding, and risk mitigation in all peacekeeping operations that have been developed over many decades.**

All peacekeeping forces will inevitably encounter vulnerable children, including children associated with armed groups, also called ‘child soldiers’. It is critical that all peacekeeping operations and transitions are prepared with **robust training, safeguarding measures, clear referral processes for child protection concerns, and comprehensive handover protocols** (agreements that ensure the swift transfer of children to child protection actors for appropriate support and reintegration assistance).

HEIGHTENED RISKS TO CHILDREN IN PEACEKEEPING CONTEXTS

In many peacekeeping contexts, the destruction of critical infrastructure, health and education facilities dismantles the social fabric, leaving children particularly vulnerable amid the breakdown of protective structures. Accompanying hunger and displacement make children and communities exceptionally vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.

The recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts within peacekeeping contexts [remains alarmingly prevalent](#). Many of these children have been abducted and forcibly recruited by armed actors, while others have suffered rape, sexual violence, and exploitation. **These children are victims of grave violations of their rights and must be treated accordingly. Rules of engagement and codes of conduct concerning children associated with armed groups must be explicitly defined to prioritize child protection.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Protection of children must be at the core of any mission’s approach

- a. The Council must learn from the past by ensuring close adherence to over 20 years of protection precedents and minimum standards within peacekeeping and humanitarian contexts.
- b. In listed contexts, missions must be mandated and resourced to enhance relevant monitoring and reporting systems including the Children and Armed Conflict Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, and monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements (MARA) on conflict-related sexual violence.
- c. Mission mandates should incorporate provisions related to monitoring, reporting, and supporting accountability mechanisms. Peacekeeping missions can assist in strengthening national justice systems to address grave violations against children. This may include capacity-building for local judicial institutions, assisting in evidence collection, and supporting accountability mechanisms.
- d. The Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) must be applied to all UN supported missions, supported by proper civilian resourcing to ensure monitoring and implementation.
- e. Robust preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) measures, in line with the Secretary General’s Bulletin on Special Measures for PSEA, must be put in place to ensure appropriate conduct, as well as a survivor-centered response to any allegations.
- f. Peacekeeping operations should coordinate closely with humanitarians and prioritize creating conditions which facilitate a principled humanitarian response.

- g. Any mission must have clear mechanisms for the meaningful involvement of communities and national civil society in decision making, as well as feedback and complaint channels.

2. The highest standards of child protection and gender capacity and training must be integrated into all missions

- a. It is critical that any new mission mainstream and integrate principles and obligations on child protection and gender-based violence prevention and response across all operational decisions, activities and processes of operations, including a Do No Harm safeguarding process.
- b. All deploying troops must have comprehensive pre-deployment safeguarding and child protection training, as well as continued in-mission learning.
- c. All missions must be prepared to encounter and support survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Deploying troops should have robust SGBV prevention and response training, which takes into account the unique vulnerabilities and experiences of males as well as females, children of different ages, experiences, and marital statuses as well as adults experiencing sexual violence.
- d. Dedicated gender and child protection experts must be included in the mission.

3. Any peace keeping operation must be prepared to encounter recruited children

- a. Rules of engagement must be clearly defined and carefully tailored to protect recruited children.
- b. Missions should work closely with UNICEF and child-focused NGOs to establish a set of handover protocols in line with international standards and align with referral pathways to appropriate child protection actors.
- c. A careful balance must be struck between holding children accountable for potentially criminal acts and recognizing them as victims of coercion or adverse circumstances. Eventual justice processes should recognize that many children in armed groups have been exploited, manipulated, or forced into criminal activities and follow international standards, like those set out by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which emphasize rehabilitation and reintegration rather than punitive measures.

4. Child Protection Capacities must be preserved during UN Mission Transitions in line with Security Council Resolution 2764 (2024)

- a. Child protection capacities in United Nations peace operations must be smoothly and responsibly transferred to UN country teams during mission transitions or withdrawals.
- b. Child protection must be mainstreamed into all relevant activities in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations with the aim of sustaining peace and preventing conflict.
- c. Member States should support and fund this process in their national capacity after mission transition.