

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict Submission to the Review on the Future of All Forms of United Nations Peace Operations

August 2025

As the UN undertakes a strategic review of the future of all forms of peace operations, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict emphasizes the critical role of peace operations, especially child protection advisers, in the protection of children and prevention of grave violations against them in armed conflict. In future iterations of UN peace operations, it is crucial that the UN fully apply lessons learned regarding the protection of children, mainstreaming of child protection throughout UN missions, and the significant role that child protection has played in supporting mission objectives. In this regard, **safeguarding and sustaining child protection capacities across peacekeeping and special political missions, including during transitions and drawdowns, remains essential.**

Future UN peace operations should prioritize continuity, inclusivity, and accountability in child protection, rooted in early planning, sustained resources, and strategic coordination. Future UN peace operations must be equipped to encounter children in the mission area, including children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) and to fulfill safeguarding responsibilities and obligations related to the protection of children. To do so requires **robust training for all personnel, safeguarding measures, clear referral processes for child protection concerns, comprehensive handover protocols, and adequate transfer of child protection functions in the context of transition or withdrawal.**

Key Challenges and Observations

UN peace operations play a vital role in supporting the implementation of the UN's Children and Armed Conflict agenda, including the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM). Through co-chairing the UN's Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs), UN peace operations, and child protection advisers in particular, fulfill responsibilities related to the collection and verification of information on grave violations against children, conducting advocacy on the prevention of grave violations, and advising the whole of mission on child protection concerns, including in peace negotiations and processes. Missions also provide security, logistical support, and access to conflict-affected areas. To continue to do so effectively requires robust mandates, dedicated capacity, including personnel with appropriate expertise, and systematic consideration of child protection concerns as a cross-cutting issue.

In the context of mission withdrawals or transition, appropriate planning, resources, and coordination is essential to maintain these critical functions. However, child protection capacities are often among the first to be compromised during peace operation transitions or drawdowns, leading to significant child protection capacity gaps, verification backlogs, and a decline in dialogue with parties to conflict regarding commitments to protect children, hindering efforts to prevent and respond to grave violations against children and rolling back years of progress. Successor entities, whether UN Country Teams or national authorities, frequently lack the time, resources, and strategic support to absorb critical child protection responsibilities. Transitions also remove critical high-level engagement opportunities, as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) typically have greater access to in-country decision-makers than UN Resident Coordinators, resulting in diminished influence and visibility for child protection priorities. Without early planning, predictable funding, and sustained advocacy, the risks to children escalate, leaving them increasingly vulnerable within evolving peace operations.

Recommendations

- a) **Prioritize child protection within mission mandates and budgeting cycles:**
Child protection should be specifically included in mission mandates. Subsequent budget negotiations should ensure sufficient resources for child protection advisers, safeguarding measures, capacity-building, and community-based protection mechanisms.
- b) **Ensure robust training of all UN mission personnel on child protection roles, responsibilities, and protocols, in line with the DPO's 2017 Child Protection Policy:¹**
All UN peace operations personnel must receive comprehensive training on child protection risks and responsibilities. Child protection focal points must be identified, with clear communication channels to appropriately report on child protection concerns, including grave violations.
- c) **Establish and operationalize handover protocols and safeguard referral pathways:**
Handover protocols should be established and consistently implemented to ensure the shift transfer for CAAFAG to appropriate civilian child protection authorities.² These protocols should remain in place through and beyond transitions.
- d) **Ensure early and integrated child protection planning in mission transitions:**
UN peace operations and UN Country Teams should include child protection transition planning at the outset of any drawdown process. This includes jointly developing integrated transition strategies with benchmarks for sustaining child protection functions and regularly consulting civil society, national authorities, and regional actors.
- e) **Ensure responsible transfer of child protection responsibilities, including those related to the MRM, in the context of mission transitions or withdrawals, consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2764 (2024):**
In cases of mission transitions or withdrawals, **transfer core child protection tasks** to the UN Country Team, embedding CAAC-specific expertise in the Office of the Resident Coordinator, who will serve as Co-Chair of the CTFMR alongside UNICEF. **Strengthen coordination** among UN peace operations leadership, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, CTFMR Co-Chairs, civil society child protection actors, and relevant national authorities to ensure continuity, effectiveness, and sustainability of child protection activities. Adequate resources should be allocated to the UN Country Team to **sustain MRM functions, support the release of children, mitigate risks such as explosive ordnance, and continue to engage with parties to conflict** on action plans and to monitor progress on existing action plans.

¹ https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/1._protection_-_3_child_protection_policy_0.pdf

² See: Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, [Operational Guidance: Negotiating and Implementing Handover Protocols](#), March 2022