




“Our Strength Is In Our Youth”:

Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups
in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

2014 – 2017



© United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), January 2019

The report, *Our Strength Is In Our Youth: Child Recruitment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2014-2017*, is the product of staff of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), most particularly the Child Protection Section. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its Secretary-General.

This publication enjoys copyright under Protocol 2 of the Universal Copyright Convention. Nevertheless, organizations, governmental authorities or Member States may freely photocopy any part of this publication for exclusive use within their research and training institutes. However, no portion of this publication may be reproduced for sale or mass publication without the express consent, in writing, of the Child Protection Section, MONUSCO.

Any comments or questions concerning this publication may be addressed to:

Legal Affairs
United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)
12 Av. des Aviateurs
Kinshasa - Gombe
Democratic Republic of the Congo

E-mail: monusco-legal@un.org

Photo credit: Richard Mosse

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
INTRODUCTION	12
MANDATE & METHODOLOGY	14
PART I: THE STATE OF CHILD RECRUITMENT IN THE DRC	18
Before: How and Why Armed Groups Recruited Children	20
Hotspots: Where Children were Most at Risk of Recruitment from 2014 to 2017	21
Persistent Perpetrators: Which Armed Groups Recruited the Most Children from 2014 to 2017	24
Push Factors: Why Children Volunteered for Armed Groups	25
<i>Revenge & Self-Defense: To "Save My People"</i>	26
<i>Economic Survival Strategy: To "Eat Meat Every Day"</i>	26
<i>Physical Survival Strategy: To Stay Alive</i>	26
<i>Family & Peer Pressure: To "See My Friends in the Bush"</i>	27
<i>Political Ideology</i>	27
Pull Factors: Why Armed Groups Recruited Children	28
<i>Boost Ranks: "Our strength is in our youth"</i>	29
<i>Loyal Fighters: To Fight for Our People</i>	29
<i>Cheap Labor: To Carry the Loot</i>	29
<i>Magic: To "Become Bulletproof"</i>	29
<i>Proof of Power: To Punish, Extort and Control Communities</i>	29
The Trigger Violation: Abduction	30
Re-Recruitment: The Revolving Door	32
During: Life as a Child Soldier in the DRC	34
The Boys & Girls Recruited by Armed Groups	35
<i>Age</i>	36
<i>Sex</i>	37
<i>Nationality</i>	38
<i>Initiation Rites</i>	38
Children's Roles in Armed Groups	39
<i>Combatants</i>	39
<i>Support Roles</i>	40
Violations Triggered by Child Recruitment	41
<i>Sexual Violence</i>	41
<i>Killing & Maiming</i>	41
After: How Children Were Separated from Armed Groups	42
Escape: "More suffering than happiness in the bush"	43
<i>Why, How, & To Where</i>	43
Voluntary Release by Armed Group Commanders	44
Surrender & Demobilization	45
Capture and Arrest by State Agents	46
<i>Treatment of Detained Children by State Agents</i>	46
Starting the Next Chapter: Healing & Returning Home	46
PART II: IN DEPTH PROFILES OF THE TOP PERPETRATORS OF CHILD RECRUITMENT (2014-2017)	48
FORCES DÉMOCRATIQUES DE LIBÉRATION DU RWANDA - FORCES COMBATTANTES ABACUNGUZI (FDLR FOCA)	52
How & Why Children Were Recruited by FDLR FOCA	54
Life Inside FDLR FOCA	59
How Children Were Separated from FDLR FOCA	62
NYATURA	66
How & Why Children Were Recruited by Nyatura	68
Life for Children Inside Nyatura	74
How Children Were Separated from Nyatura	76
KAMUINA NSAPU	80
How & Why Children Were Recruited by Kamuina Nsapu	82
Life Inside Kamuina Nsapu	88
How Children Were Separated from Kamuina Nsapu	93
RAYIA MUTOMBOKI	96
How & Why Children Were Recruited by Rayia Mutomboki	98
Life Inside Rayia Mutomboki	102
How Children Were Separated from Rayia Mutomboki	106
MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE	110
How & Why Children Were Recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe	112
Life Inside Mayi Mayi Mazembe	116
How Children Were Separated from Mayi Mayi Mazembe	120
FORCES DE RÉSISTANCE PATRIOTIQUE EN ITURI (FRPI)	124
How & Why Children were Recruited by FRPI	126
Life Inside FRPI	131
How Children Were Separated from FRPI	136
NDUMA DEFENSE OF CONGO - RÉNOVÉ GUIDON (NDC-RÉNOVÉ)	142
How & Why Children Were Recruited by NDC-Rénové	144
Life Inside NDC-Rénové	150
How Children Were Separated from NDC-Rénové	154
CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS	159
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	160

Acronyms

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces	GA	General Assembly
ANR	Agence Nationale de Renseignements	HRDDP	Human Rights Due Diligence Policy
APCLS	Alliance des Patriotes pour un Congo Libre et Souverain	ICC	International Criminal Court
CAAC	Children and Armed Conflict	ICCN	Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature
CNRD	Conseil National pour le Renouveau et la Démocratie	MARA	Monitoring and Reporting Arrangement
COB	Company Operating Base	MONUSCO	United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DRC
CPS	Child Protection Section	NDC-Rénové	Nduma Defense of Congo – Rénové
CTF	Country Task Force	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
DDR	Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration	PKM	PK Machine Gun
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo	POC	Protection of Civilians
ESMG	Energized Sub-Machine Gun	SMG	Sub-Machine Gun
FARDC	Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo	SRS	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
FDLR FOCA	Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda – Forces Combattantes Abacunguzi	RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenades
FDLR RUD	Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda – Rally for Unity and Democracy Urunana	UN	United Nations
FRPI	Forces de Résistance Patriotique en Ituri	UPDI	Union des Patriotes pour la Défense des Innocents
		USD	United States Dollar



FOREWORD

Six thousand children recruited by armed groups in the DRC is a statistic. A single boy or girl recruited is a tragedy. What we must never forget is that behind every statistic is a personal story of a nine-year-old boy or a fourteen-year-old girl being forced to witness, undergo and sometimes perpetrate atrocities.

As the saying goes, you can take the child out of the conflict, but it takes much longer to take the conflict out of the child. From small indignities, to hunger and illness, to shattering abuse, the months and years girls and boys spend in armed groups can carry lasting physical and psychological impact. Girls associated with armed groups more often than not survive rape, sexual slavery, or forced marriage to the very men who abduct them. Many girls find themselves pregnant or caring for their own small children, bearing stigma and rejection by their communities for affiliations most did not choose. Full rehabilitation of child survivors can take decades, even when resources are available. But that investment is worth it: One child released from an armed group could be the next Nelson Mandela.

Why is MONUSCO focusing on armed groups? Because it is armed groups that perpetrate this violation, no longer the Government. In fact, the Government has achieved a remarkable success: I congratulate the Government on ending child recruitment into its own ranks. As an FARDC General put it: “Zero tolerance for children in our army is in our blood now. It is irreversible”.

We welcome the support given to MONUSCO by the Government to communicate with armed groups and militia to stop and prevent child recruitment by their elements. As I write, MONUSCO is engaging with 30 armed group commanders with the aim of irreversible behavior change.



Engaging with armed groups to release children from their ranks is also a crucial entry point for the Mission with these actors. Establishing contact with armed groups on child combatants can open the door, advancing broader, even more sensitive, peace discussions. We hope to generate the same willingness on the part of armed groups to delist children from their ranks as the DRC's national army has shown. Our efforts so far are yielding encouraging results.

However, for those who resist, continuing to enlist children and perpetrating grave abuses against our most vulnerable members of society, they must know that these serious crimes will not go unpunished. Behind every recruited child is a perpetrator. As a judge, I know that, in the long run, there is no greater power than justice. For three years now, MONUSCO has supported Congolese military justice actors to prosecute these perpetrators, but too little progress has been made. Twelve perpetrators are behind bars awaiting trial, and only three have been tried and condemned. Compare this to the six thousand boy and girls recruited between 2014 and 2017. It simply is not enough: The adults who recruit boys and girls need to be brought to justice. Not tomorrow, today. A strong message must be sent: "Recruiting boys and girls is a crime under Congolese law. It is a war crime if the child is under 15 years of age. You will be brought to justice. There is no haven here for you." We urge the Government of the DRC to work incessantly in bringing to justice perpetrators of this horrendous crime against the future of this country. MONUSCO stands ready to support you in these efforts.

This report is an appeal to our consciences to be as brave as the children who survived life in the bush. We must act to end child recruitment with the same urgency as if these were our own children and to rally to their sides with all the political will and resources that we, as members of the international community, can muster. Join me.

Leila Zerrougui

Special Representative of the Secretary-General

United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO)

IN 17 YEARS OF UN MONITORING

51,000 GIRLS AND BOYS

WERE SEPARATED FROM ARMED FORCES
AND ARMED GROUPS

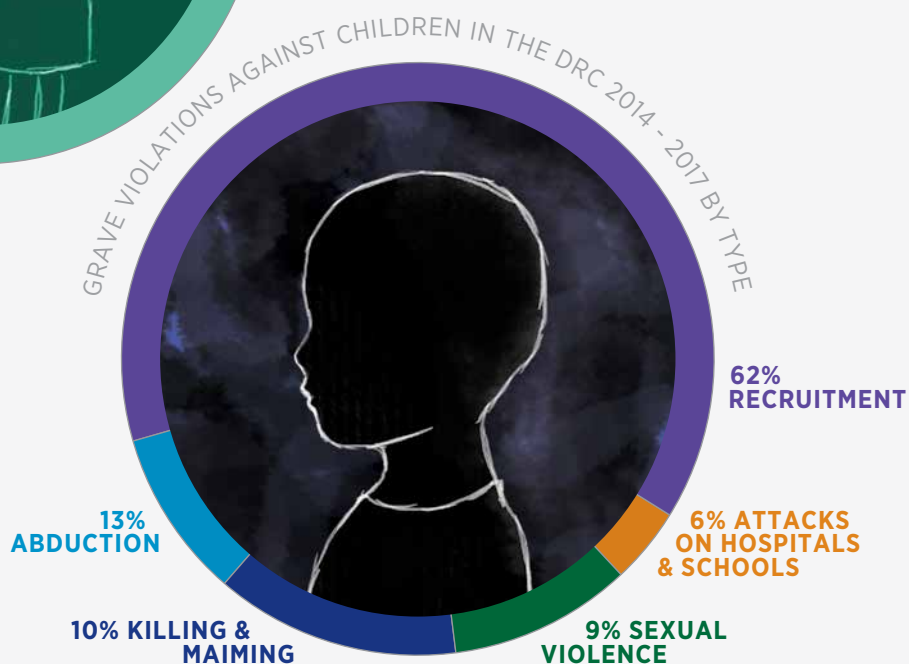
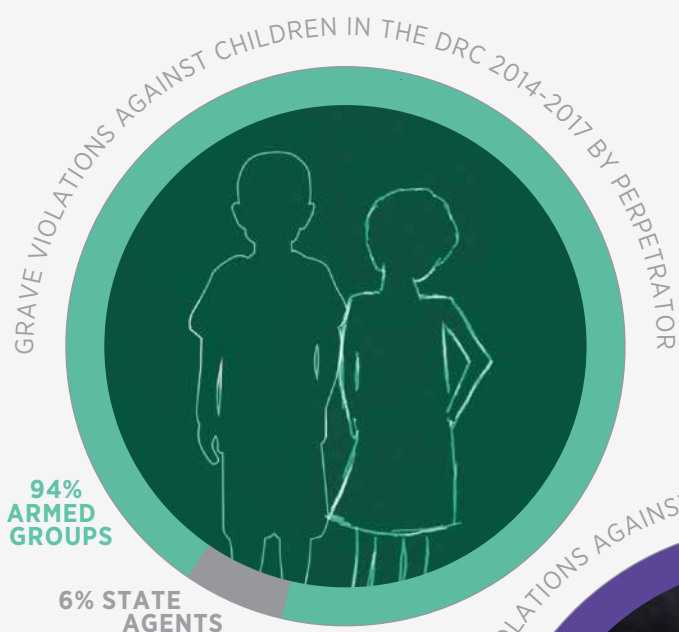
FROM 2014 - 2017

NO LESS THAN

49 ARMED GROUPS

RECRUITED NO LESS THAN

5,619 BOYS & 549 GIRLS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Setting the Scene: Why issue this report now?

In 2017, the Forces Armées du République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) was certified by the United Nations (UN) as no longer recruiting children within its ranks and “de-listed” from the Annexes of the Secretary-General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, a blacklist for those responsible for committing violations against children. This was an extraordinary achievement that took whole-hearted commitment and years of hard work by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

With this achievement as the backdrop, MONUSCO is now turning to armed groups to foster a similar change in mindset to end child recruitment amongst all actors in the DRC. The central aim of MONUSCO’s Child Protection Section (CPS) is now to secure armed group commanders’ genuine commitment to release children and never recruit again. This report is but one part of the Mission’s reorientation toward this goal.

This report focuses on only seven armed groups for two simple reasons. First, these groups are the most persistent perpetrators on the UN Secretary General’s blacklist of parties to conflict responsible for recruiting large numbers of children. Second, MONUSCO has had access to these groups, enabling the UN to document the children they recruited. This second factor is crucial to verifying and monitoring child recruitment. In turn, this gives the Mission an accurate sense of the scale and character of each group’s child recruitment and opens the door to direct engagement with commanders to secure the release of children. Consider the armed groups profiled in this report as among the targets of phase one in the Mission’s efforts to end child recruitment in the DRC. Already in 2018, the Mission is engaging with more than 30 factions of these groups, resulting in the release of more than 444 children.

There are, however, other armed groups which are not profiled in detail in this report but that are known to be egregious offenders of international law. Such groups include the Allied Democratic Front (ADF), Mayi Mayi Yakutumba, Mayi Mayi Apa na Pale, and the Bana Mura militia, among others, all of which are known to recruit children and commit other violations. The challenge is that MONUSCO rarely has enough access to territory controlled by these groups in order to fully monitor and verify the violations they perpetrate or to engage with them to release children from their ranks. These armed groups will be the Mission’s phase two targets.

On est ensemble - La lutte continue.

Between 2014 and 2017, 6,168 children were separated from armed groups and militia in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and hundreds more are believed to still be among their ranks. This report demonstrates that child recruitment is not just devastating for the individual child, but has a long-term impact on families, communities and social cohesion across the DRC. Above all, it is a severe threat to Congolese national security. Progress has been made in decreasing child recruitment through national and local awareness-raising campaigns, engagement with armed group commanders, and holding perpetrators accountable, but a concerted and targeted effort from the Government, UN, civil society and donors is needed to eliminate child recruitment from every corner of the DRC.

Globally, the DRC has one of the highest rates of child recruitment.¹ Between 2014 and 2017, the UN documented 6,168 children (549 girls, 5,619 boys) recruited by 49 different armed groups or militia.² While many groups were small-time recruiters, 72% of all child recruitment was perpetrated by just 10 armed groups. This report profiles the top seven of these perpetrators: FDLR FOCA, Nyatura, Kamuina Nsapu, Rayia Mutomboki, Mayi Mayi Mazembe, FRPI, and NDC-Rénové.³

Nationally, child recruitment decreased by 50% over the past four years, however regional analysis showed an exponential increase in child recruitment in the Kasais, where conflict broke out in 2016 and 2017. Nevertheless, North Kivu remained the epicenter of child recruitment and was the site of 75% of all cases documented from 2014 to 2017. On average, 30% of all children recruited by armed groups were under the age of 15, 9% were girls, and 99% were Congolese.⁴ With land borders on eight countries and a ninth across Lake Tanganyika, the DRC saw low but steady levels of cross-border child recruitment from Rwanda, South Sudan, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, Central African Republic, and Kenya.

The first chapter in children's experience of recruitment began before ever setting foot in a training camp. Child recruitment rarely resulted from a single factor. Rather, a complex cocktail of push and pull factors came into play. Children's agency in the decisions that led them to armed groups cannot be overlooked. Approximately a quarter of children recruited by the top seven perpetrators joined voluntarily. However, these children were frequently under contextual duress, taking what was at the time the only viable option available. Broadly categorized, push factors that drove children to volunteer included revenge and self-defense of their ethnic group, economic and physical survival, family or peer pressure, and political or other ideologies. Likewise, the pull factors that motivated commanders to recruit children included boosting ranks, securing cheap labor and loyal fighters, securing magical protection, and exerting control over communities. For the three quarters of children who were forcibly recruited, the most common method of recruitment was abduction, a violation in its own right. Indeed, child recruitment was the purpose of 70% all child abductions documented by the UN since 2014. Moreover, where child recruitment was endemic, as in North Kivu, children who escaped from armed groups lived with the near-constant fear of re-recruitment. Among the top perpetrators of child recruitment, at least 3% of children – almost exclusively boys – were re-recruited by the same or other armed groups.⁵

The second chapter of a child recruitment – life inside an armed group – began with a child's initiation. In many communities across the DRC, magic is perceived to be real and a part of the fabric of daily life. This powerful patchwork of animistic beliefs carried over to the culture and practices of many armed groups, such as Kamuina Nsapu, NDC-Rénové, and Mayi Mayi Mazembe. These groups performed elaborate initiation rituals to sanctify children with protective powers and to “transform” mundane objects into weapons. Children were not just objects of magic but subjects wielding its powers. In the East, the role of witchdoctor, known as *féticheur* or *kadogo dawa*, was frequently played by young boys, whose youth and virginity were believed to fortify their protective powers.

An average of 31% of children, predominantly but not exclusively boys, fought on the frontlines. Girls were more a more common sight on the frontlines in recent years, jumping from 1% of child combatants in 2014 to 34% in 2017, due to the high numbers of girl combatants used by Kamuina Nsapu. In fact, the national increase in the use of children as combatants from 18% of all children recruited in 2014 to 51% of those in 2017 was strongly influenced by Kamuina Nsapu's use of 88% of its children as fighters. Despite gendered stereotypes of the child soldier as a boy with a gun, 69% of children recruited and used by armed groups in the DRC since 2014 never saw battle. They performed the invisible labor of looting food, collecting water and wood, cooking and cleaning, manning checkpoints, collecting taxes, carrying belongings and weapons from camp to camp, carefully logging new recruits and ammunition supplies, or “marrying” commanders.

Just as abduction facilitated children's recruitment, child recruitment served as a gateway to other violations. At least 56% of all girls recruited since 2014 disclosed experiencing rape, sexual slavery, or forced marriage at the hands of their recruiters and their comrades. These rates were far higher for girls recruited by the top perpetrators, including 92% of all girls recruited by FRPI. While 95% of sexual violence survivors were girls, 5% of boys also disclosed similar experiences, a figure considered to drastically underrepresent the real scale of such violence against boys for reasons related to cultural perceptions of gender roles and stigma. Hand in hand with high rates of child combatants came the risk of death and injury during hostilities. While statistics remain elusive, children's testimonies point to significant child casualties, particularly in the Kasais.

The third and final chapter of child recruitment was children's separation from armed groups, which came in a wide variety of ways broadly categorized into escape, arrest or capture by State agents, voluntary release, and surrender or demobilization. The vast majority – 67% – of all children recruited by the top perpetrators fled, with boys and girls escaping at roughly equal rates. Children fled in the direction of safety, wherever it could be found, whether in regional capitals, home villages, local NGOs, clergy, or MONUSCO military bases, where 10% of all children recruited by the top perpetrators sought safety.

At least one in ten children recruited by the top perpetrators were captured or arrested by authorities for their association with armed groups, with higher rates of detention documented among children associated with armed groups openly opposed to the Government, like FRPI, Kamuina Nsapu, or FDLR FOCA. Boys were more than twice as likely as girls to be detained. Conditions of detention were universally poor, as was treatment of detained children. Only 9% of all children recruited by the top seven perpetrators were voluntarily released by their commanders. This scenario was more likely for girls than boys, with 16% of all girls released. Even fewer – 8% of all recruited children – surrendered to the FARDC or were demobilized with the support of MONUSCO, with roughly equal rates seen among boys and girls. Surrenders were usually linked to political processes, with children surrendering from FRPI during bright spots in negotiations with the Government and children in Kamuina Nsapu demobilizing en masse after concerted outreach.

With a child's escape, release or demobilization from armed groups or release from detention, often with the assistance of the MONUSCO Child Protection Section, the third chapter of his or her experience as a child soldier closed. These boys and girls then began the next chapter of civilian life, living in UNICEF partners' transitional care while families were traced and the process of healing physically and emotionally began.

Ultimately, it is only through grasping and addressing the micro-patterns in child recruitment, rather than blunt national trends, that tailored engagement, prevention and response can make a discernable impact on ending child recruitment. This report leaves us with these lessons:

- Child recruitment entails complex and compounding violations.
- Targeted communication with armed groups can ebb the tide.
- Prosecution of perpetrators can send a powerful prevention message.

Taking on board these lessons, we can and must take targeted and strategic action. We recommend:

The Government of the DRC:

- Facilitate the work of the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting regarding engagement with armed groups operating in the DRC to develop action plans to end and prevent all violations and abuses against children, including the multiple violations linked to child recruitment;
- Release all children held in detention for alleged association with armed groups to MONUSCO as they are not criminally liable under Law No. 09/001 on the Protection of the Child, end detention and ill-treatment of children on this allegation, and expedite the distribution of Attestation de Sortis to all children formerly associated with armed groups to ensure children receive them in a timely manner and on an equal basis.
- Put an end to impunity by swiftly bringing all perpetrators of child recruitment and use, as well as sexual violence, to justice and hold them accountable, as such acts are prohibited and criminalized by Law No. 09/001 on the Protection of the Child, which was adopted on 10 January 2009 and which includes recruitment and use of children by national armed forces or non-State armed groups; and

Armed group commanders:

- Immediately and without preconditions release all children – boys and girls under age 18 – in your ranks and take concrete actions to end prevent child recruitment and use by any member of your group in the future, including via abduction or for the purpose of sexual violence;
- Publicly express your commitment to ending and prevent all grave violations against children, including but not limited to child recruitment and use, and swiftly develop, adopt and implement road maps in line with UN Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), and subsequent resolutions.

Donors:

- Commit necessary funds to support holistic and sustainable child demobilization and reintegration, and the fight against impunity for perpetrators of child recruitment and use.
- Support designated child protection capacity in MONUSCO, including via secondment.

4,059
CASES FROM THE
TOP 7 PERPETRATORS

2,109
CASES FROM OTHER
PERPETRATORS

FROM 1 JANUARY 2014
TO 31 DECEMBER 2017

6,168
TOTAL DOCUMENTED
AND VERIFIED CASES
OF CHILD
RECRUITMENT



INTRODUCTION

Armed groups committed 94% of all grave violations against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from 2014 to 2017, and, of these, 62% constituted child recruitment, making recruitment and use by armed groups the greatest threat to children in the context of the conflict.⁶ In the 17 years that the United Nations (UN) has monitored grave violations against children linked to the conflict in the DRC, 51,000 girls and boys were separated from armed forces and groups.⁷ With 49 distinct armed groups and militia documented as recruiting no fewer than 5,619 boys and 549 girls between 2014 and 2017, child recruitment in the DRC defies convenient categories. Daunting as these numbers may be, they are an understatement: These are only the children who are visible to the international community by virtue of being separated from armed groups by the UN and its partners.

Child recruitment and use is not a generic violation. It is a deeply personal violation, with no boy or girl enduring the same indignities as another. Nor is it an isolated violation, as it can last weeks, months or years and can precipitate a wave of other violations such as rape, killing, maiming, ill treatment and forced commitment of atrocities. The impact lasts long after a child is recruited and ripples outward, affecting communities that have lost their children and fear violence partly perpetrated by children or by adults who were once child soldiers themselves. Even once separated from armed groups, children live in constant fear of re-recruitment at nearly any time.

Considered an international peace and security issue by the UN Security Council since 1999, child recruitment is inextricably linked to the conflict dynamics in the DRC.⁸ It is a conflict multiplier, adding to armed groups' strength in numbers, and perpetuating violence by inculcating young recruits with narratives of collective loss, victimhood, injustice, toxic masculinity, and ethnic land claims, training the next generation to fight rather than study, build a business or raise a family.

This report addresses both the personal and the political by blending testimonies of children formerly associated with armed groups with data analysis to inform results-based strategies to target top perpetrators of child recruitment and use. Designed to walk the reader through a child's experience in an armed group, Part I of this report highlights children's agency and ingenuity, and compares trends among armed groups' diverse *modi operandi* in three chronological sections: 1. Before, 2. During, and 3. After Recruitment. Part II includes detailed profiles of the top seven armed groups responsible for recruiting the most children from 2014 to 2017. Taken together, its findings aim to arm UN, Government of the DRC and other actors with the information necessary to tailor interventions to help end child recruitment in the DRC, one armed group after another.



MANDATE & METHODOLOGY

The Children & Armed Conflict Mandate

In 1996, the UN Secretary-General received a groundbreaking report on the impact of armed conflict on children from his expert, Graça Machel. The UN General Assembly (GA) responded with Resolution 51/77 (1996), giving the UN Special-Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict a mandate to serve as the leading UN advocate for all children affected by armed conflict.⁹

The Security Council followed shortly thereafter to craft the mandate on children and armed conflict (CAAC), including the mandate's mechanisms and tools established in resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012), 2143 (2014), and 2225 (2015). The landmark Resolution 1612 (2005) created the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to collect timely and reliable information on violations committed against children by parties to the conflict, as well as the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC). In the

DRC, the Country Task Force (CTF), which is co-chaired by the MONUSCO Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSRG) and the UNICEF Country Representative, monitors and reports on the six grave violations covered by the MRM: Recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

MONUSCO Child Protection Section

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) is mandated to:

Take fully into account child protection as a crosscutting issue throughout its mandate and to assist the Government of the DRC in ensuring that the protection of children's rights is taken into account, inter alia, in DDR processes and in SSR as well as during interventions leading to the separation of children from armed groups in order to end and prevent violations and abuses against children;¹⁰

As the Mission's resident experts on CAAC, the Child Protection Section (CPS) separates children from armed groups, releases them from detention, serves as a bridge for boys' and girls' access to child DDR, psychosocial and family reunification services from UNICEF partners, and analyzes trends to inform prevention

and response strategies. In addition to the above mandates, CPS is also guided by the UN Policy on the Mainstreaming of the Protection of Children in UN Peacekeeping (2017).¹¹

Ensuring a Whole-of-MONUSCO Effort to Protect Children

CPS ensures that MONUSCO's Protection of Civilians (POC) mandate translates into all of MONUSCO's components protecting children. Key in-mission partners serve as extended "eyes on the ground". With civilian components, CPS partners with the Joint Human Rights Office to investigate violations, implement the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) and support justice for victims, and with the Senior Women Protection Advisor to monitor and report on sexual violence in conflict. Other key civilian partners include the Justice Support Section's Prosecution Support Cells to fight against impunity for perpetrators of grave violations against children, the Security Sector Reform Section to build the capacity of State security agents through training, and the Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)

Section to raise awareness in communities about the risks of child recruitment and to separate children.

With uniformed components, CPS collaborates with UNPOL's Serious & Organized Crime Unit on the use of children by armed groups in illicit activities such as natural resources, and works with the Force to implement the Force Commander's Directive on Protection of Children by MONUSCO Force (2017), and analyzing intelligence to support engagement with armed group commanders. A cornerstone of this collaboration is training Brigade-level Gender & Child Protection Focal Points, officers and contingent members on how to protect children during tactical and strategic operations

Protection & Prevention

CPS maintains the trusted relationships necessary to prevent and respond to grave violations against children at the highest levels – advocating with senior Government and military officials, ensuring parties to conflict vacate schools, securing access to hidden detention cells, and training state security forces on age assessment procedures

so that the Government is equipped to screen children out from its own recruits. Raising awareness among remote communities of the risks of child recruitment is also key to fostering behavior change and preventing child recruitment in the long term.

Engagement with State & Non-State Parties to Conflict

CPS is uniquely positioned to engage politically with all parties to the conflict – whether state or non-state actors – to end violations against children, most critically child recruitment. It was through engagement that, in 2012, the Government of DRC signed an Action Plan to halt and prevent child recruitment and sexual violence; it was through engagement that the FARDC undertook a top-to-bottom change in its recruitment practices and was

de-listed from the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict in 2017. Engagement with the worst perpetrators of recruitment among armed groups can help bring an end to child soldiering. CPS's direct engagement with armed group commanders is bearing fruit and paving the way for a change in their modus operandi, e.g. securing the release of children, both those abducted and those recruited voluntarily.

Fight Against Impunity

Child recruitment has been prohibited under Congolese law since 2009.¹² However, the law was not implemented until November 2014, when the first arrest warrant for a perpetrator of child recruitment, Cobra Matata the former leader of FRPI, was issued following advocacy from CPS. Since July 2016, CPS has implemented a project to support the Congolese authorities in specifically targeting child recruiters, with funds from the Belgian Government.

The project includes training jurists, supporting joint investigations and mobile courts, identifying and protecting child victims, and technical advice to military prosecutors.

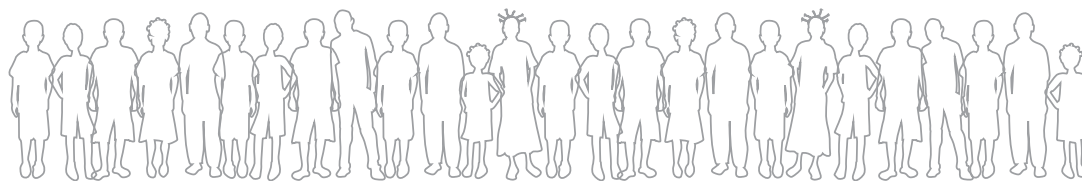
Scope & Methodology

This report covers the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2017. Its results are based on data analysis of 6,168 UN-verified cases of child recruitment, which occurred during this four-year period and which were documented by the UN Country Task Force (CTF) before 21 February 2018. Of these, 4,059 case notes of children recruited by the top seven perpetrators of child recruitment (Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda-Forces Combattantes Abacunguzi (FDLR FOCA), Nyatura, Kamuina Nsapu, Rayia Mutomboki, Mayi Mayi Mazembe, Forces de Résistance Patriotique en Ituri (FRPI), and Nduma Defense of Congo – Rénové (NDC-Rénové)) were individually reviewed.

All data in this report is disaggregated by sex and all significant differences (e.g. of 10% or more) between boys and girls are noted in the text. Where no distinction is made between boys and girls, it can be assumed that the rates of a particular lens of analysis are similar for boys and girls. All cases were verified by the CTF in individual interviews conducted by trained child protection staff with children formerly associated with armed groups, under the standards of the MRM.¹³ This report does not include unverified allegations nor does it include cases of children recruited prior to 1 January 2014 who were separated after that date.

The scope of this report is limited to the conflict-related violation of child recruitment and use, and therefore the report's geographic scope is limited to conflict-affected provinces to which the UN has access, namely Ituri, Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika.

Limitations include the restricted capacity of the UN and partners to verify all allegations reported, particularly in the Kasais. The data may be strongly influenced by MONUSCO's presence in and greater access to areas near urban centers and MONUSCO offices/bases, particularly in North Kivu. Security, logistical and human resources constraints notably limited MONUSCO and UN actors' access to more rural areas or provinces, such as Maniema or more isolated areas of North and South Kivu, as well as the Kasais. Finally, stigma among girls formerly associated with armed groups and boy survivors of sexual violence likely diminished the numbers of girls associated with armed groups and cases of sexual violence against both girls and boys that could be documented.



Definitions

This report applies the definitions set out in the Paris Principles¹⁴:

Child recruitment: The compulsory, forced and voluntary conscription or enlistment of children into any kind of armed force or armed group.

Child associated with an armed force or group: Any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.

Endnotes

¹ In 2017, the DRC had the fourth highest rate of child recruitment globally, following Somalia, South Sudan and Nigeria. See United Nations, Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, UN Doc. S/2018/465.

² All cases were documented by the UN Country Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, including MONUSCO CPS, JHRO and UNICEF partners.

³ Statistics that refer to "top perpetrators" refer to statistics among children recruited by these seven armed groups.

⁴ See UNICEF, Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, February 2007, Section 2.1, page 7.

⁵ Note that this is likely an under-estimate given that data on re-recruitment only began to be collected in 2017.

⁶ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN Doc. S/2018/502, 25 May 2018. The UN Country Task Force monitors six grave violations: Child recruitment, sexual violence, killing

and maiming, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

⁷ This report is limited to conflict-related violations against children and as such is limited to conflict-affected provinces to which the UN has access, namely: Ituri, Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika.

⁸ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1261 (1999), UN Doc. S/RES/1261, 30 August 1999. See also Resolution 1379 (2001), UN Doc. S/RES/1379, 20 November 2001.

⁹ For information on the CAAC mandate and the Office of the SRSG-CAAC, see www.childrenandarmedconflict.org.

¹⁰ United Nations Security Council, UN Doc. S/RES/2409 (2018), 27 March 2018, OP 38, see also 36(ii)b, 37(i)b-d.

¹¹ United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Department of Field Support, and Department of Political Affairs, Policy on the Mainstreaming of the Protection of Children in UN Peacekeeping, Ref. 2017.11, 1 June 2017.

¹² Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Loi No. 09/001, Loi portant Protection de l'Enfant, 25 May 2009, Articles 53(b) and 162. The crime of child recruitment or use carries a penalty of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment.

¹³ For verification standards, see United Nations, MRM Guidelines and Field Manual, June 2014, available at <http://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/>.

¹⁴ UNICEF, Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, February 2007, Section 2, page 7.

PART I:

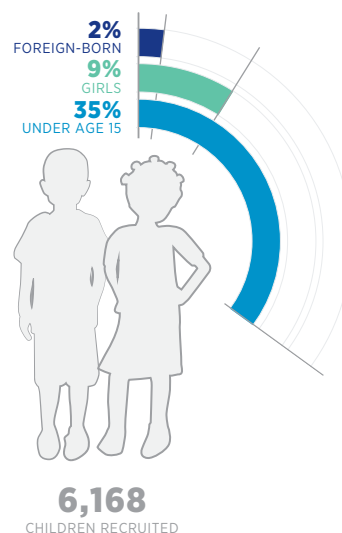
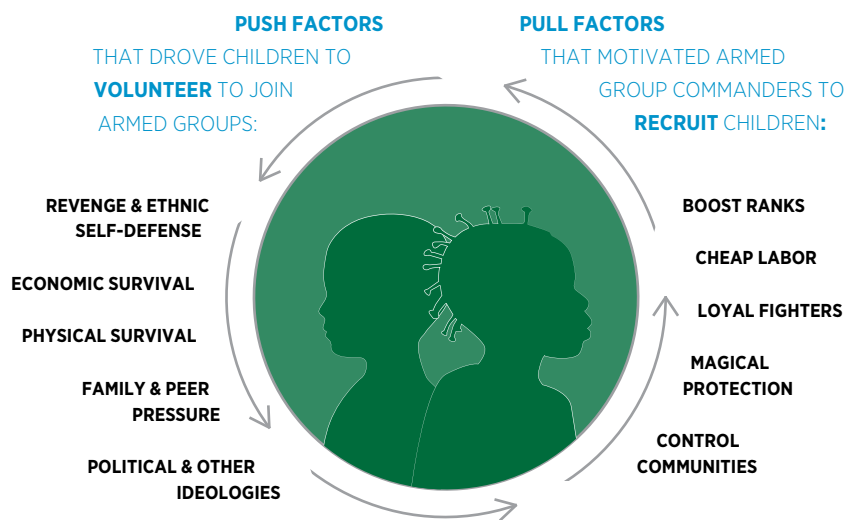
THE STATE OF CHILD RECRUITMENT IN THE DRC



With 49 armed groups or militia documented as recruiting children across at least 10 provinces spanning nearly the size of Western Europe, no single child recruited by an armed group in the DRC had the same experience. Nor were the reasons and ways that armed groups recruited and used children identical.

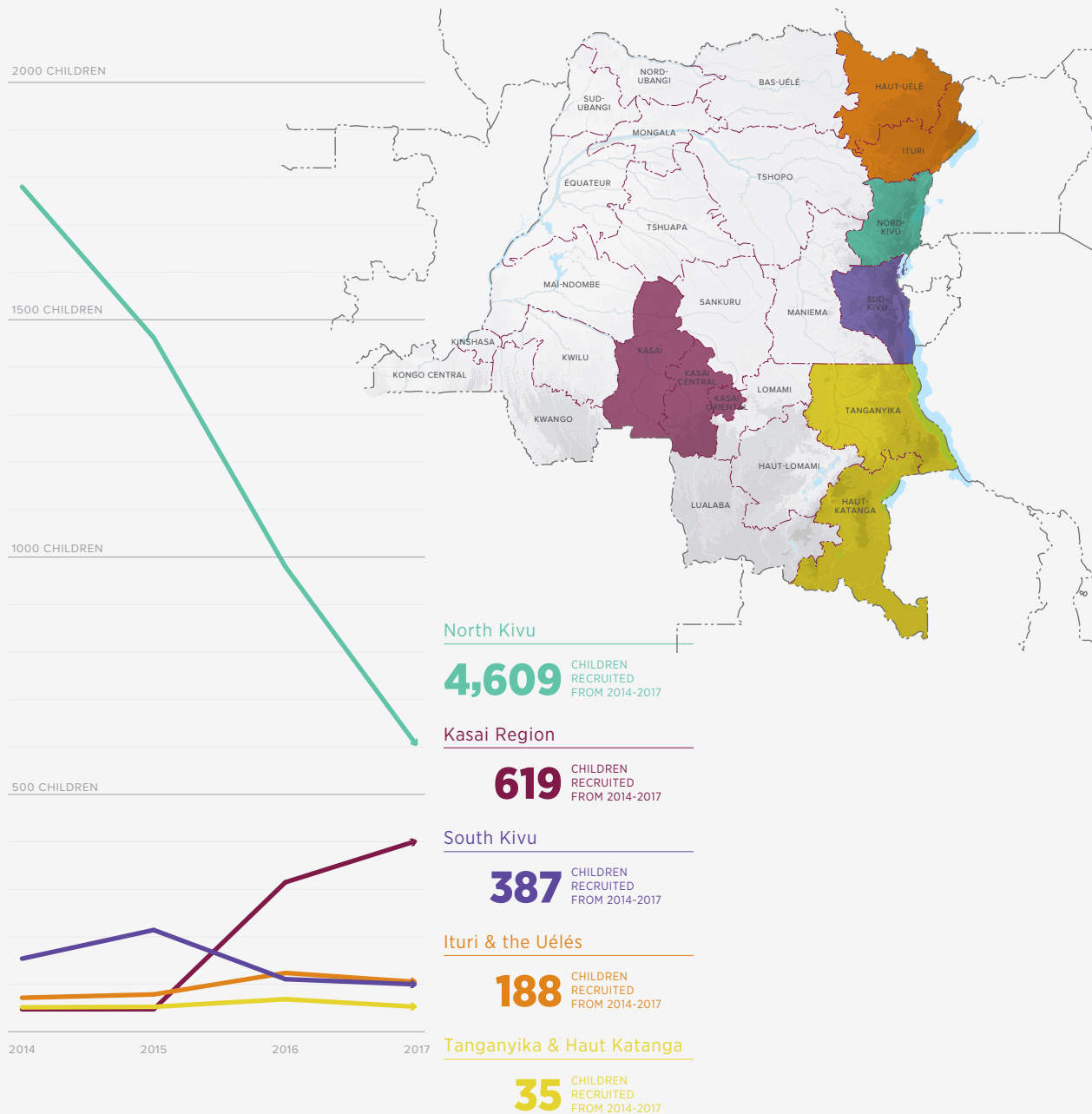
Understanding the diversity of, as well as patterns in, child recruitment by armed groups including their motives, means and methods, and children's experiences before, during and after recruitment – as told to child protection staff – is essential. Trends emerge more coherently when analyzed through the lens of regional, provincial and ethnic divides. It is only through grasping and addressing the micro-patterns in child recruitment,

rather than blunt national trends, that tailored engagement, prevention and response can make a discernable impact on ending child recruitment.



BEFORE:

HOW AND WHY ARMED GROUPS RECRUITED CHILDREN



Hotspots: Where Children were Most at Risk of Recruitment from 2014 to 2017

Child recruitment has mirrored the conflict, with recruitment hotspots often foretelling the conflict's next frontline. Two divergent regional trends are clear: The 68% decrease in child recruitment in the East from 2,085 in 2014 to 670 in 2017 being nearly overshadowed by the exponential surge in child recruitment in the Kasai region from zero in 2015 to 379 in 2017. In fact, this one and a half year period in a single region made up 10% of all children recruited and used in the DRC since 2014.

North Kivu

Despite a steady decrease, 75% - more than 4,600 - of all children recruited in the DRC since 2014 were recruited in North Kivu. Why? A combination of factors, including the long-standing nature of the conflict that diminished protective factors, like weakened family or community structures, increasing familial links to armed groups, parental death, displacement and low levels of school attendance. As these protections faded, the conflict was fueled by one of the highest concentration of armed groups in the DRC, the province's heterogeneous ethnic map, years of tit-for-tat reprisals, fast-shifting fault-lines between commanders, and the intensity of FARDC operations, which depleted armed groups' ranks. The province's five territories - Rutshuru, Masisi, Walikale, Lubero and Beni - each served as epicenters of child recruitment, with the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) claiming Beni, Mayi Mayi Mazembe in Lubero, and a host of the top recruiters - FDLR FOCA, Nyatura, Rayia Mutomboki, NDC-Cheka, NDC-Rénové, APCLS - and smaller contenders dueling over natural resources and mineral-rich land in Petit Nord. The political aims of some of these groups, like the FDLR FOCA, further complicated the conflict dynamics in North Kivu. To note, however, the UN was also better placed to document cases more systematically in North Kivu than in other provinces due to its more extensive presence in the province.

South Kivu

Compared to North Kivu, a fraction - just 6% - of all of the children recruited and used by armed groups in the DRC were recruited in South Kivu, but this still amounts to 387 boys and girls recruited by Rayia Mutomboki, Nyatura, and Mayi Mayi Yakutumba factions. In 2015, child recruitment in South Kivu, predominantly in Kalehe and Shabunda (adjacent to North Kivu) and Uvira (adjacent to Burundi), peaked, the latter of which may have been linked to the electoral violence in Burundi. In 2017, recruitment also picked up under Mayi Mayi Yakutumba as its coalition grew beyond Fizi Territory, and consolidated control in southern Shabunda Territory and southeast Maniema and northern Tanganyika Provinces.

Ituri¹⁶ & the Uélé

In Ituri, child recruitment remained at a steady simmer on par with South Kivu, with 6% (355 boys and girls) of all child recruitment cases occurring in the province due to consistent FRPI recruitment. In years past, circa 2011, former Province Orientale, now Haut Uélé and Bas Uélé, was a hotspot for LRA recruitment. But, by 2015, children recruited by LRA dwindled to single digits, reflecting the group's embattled status. In late 2017, inter-ethnic violence between Hema and Lendu communities raised concerns about possible recruitment of children however no cases were documented.

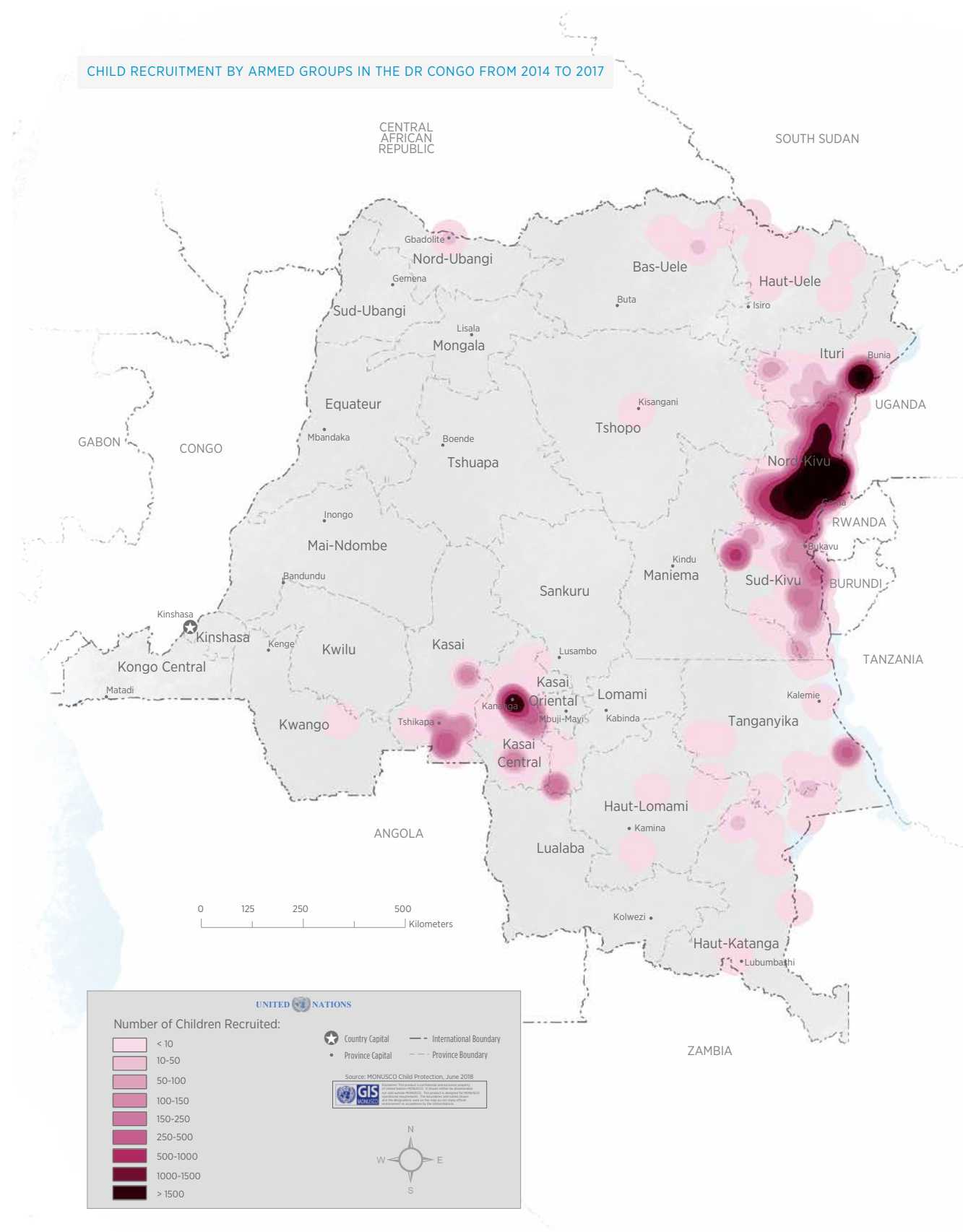
Tanganyika & Haut Katanga¹⁷

Another past hotspot for child recruitment, former Katanga Province now Tanganyika and Haut Katanga provinces, saw lower levels of child recruitment - just 1% (68 boys and girls) of all children recruited - as Mayi Mayi Kata Katanga faded away between 2014 and 2015. However, ethnic violence between Twa and Luba militia, as well as Mayi Mayi Yakutumba's increasingly bold moves, made Tanganyika an emerging hotspot of child recruitment in 2017.¹⁸

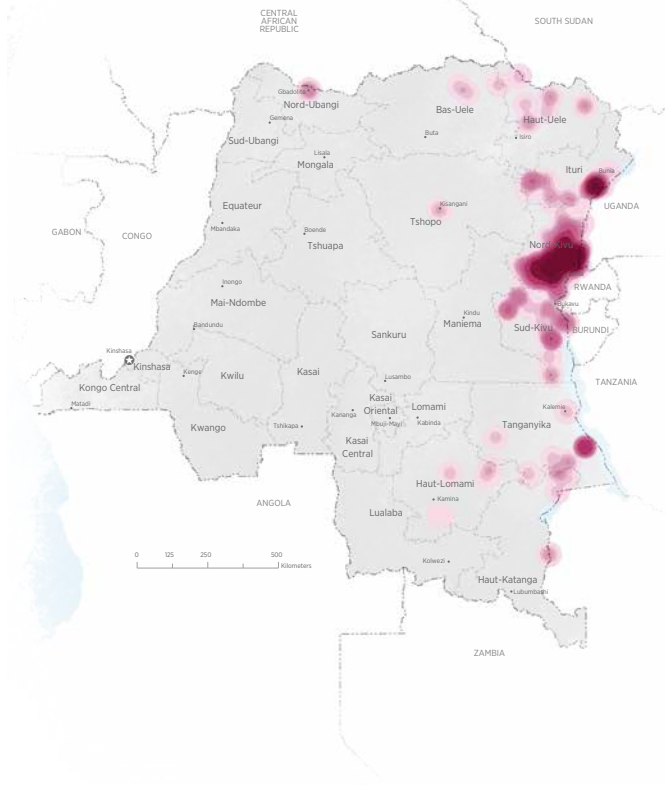
Kasai Region¹⁹

In 2016, conflict erupted in the Kasais, where child recruitment jumped from zero in 2015, to 266 children recruited in 2016, and again to 379 children in 2017, before declining again in 2018.²⁰ Due to security and logistical constraints, allegations of recruitment and use of over 2,000 girls and boys by Kamuina Nsapu and other militia, including the Tshokwe-based Bana Mura, have yet to be verified. It is estimated that children may make up to 60% of Kamuina Nsapu's ranks.

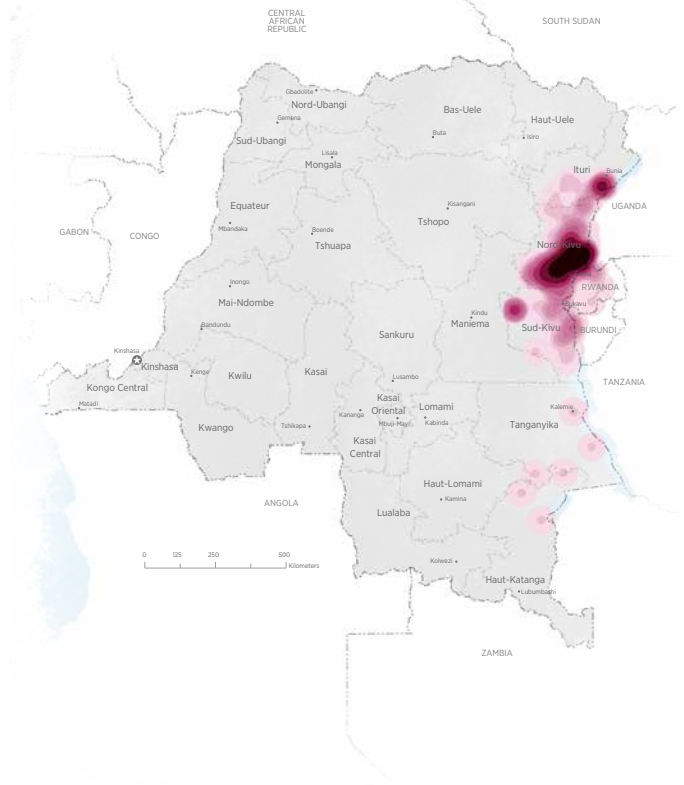
Hotspots: Where Children were Most at Risk of Recruitment from 2014 to 2017



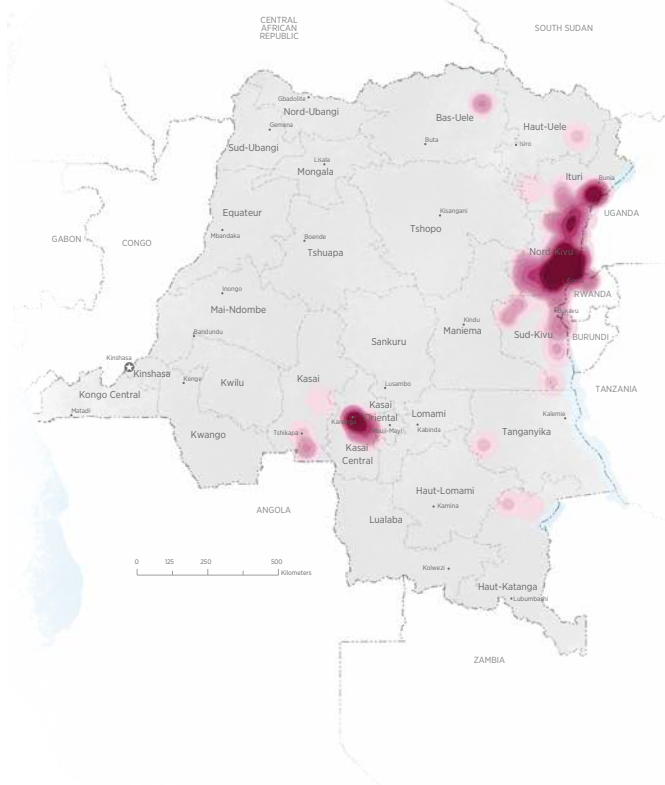
CHILD RECRUITMENT IN 2014



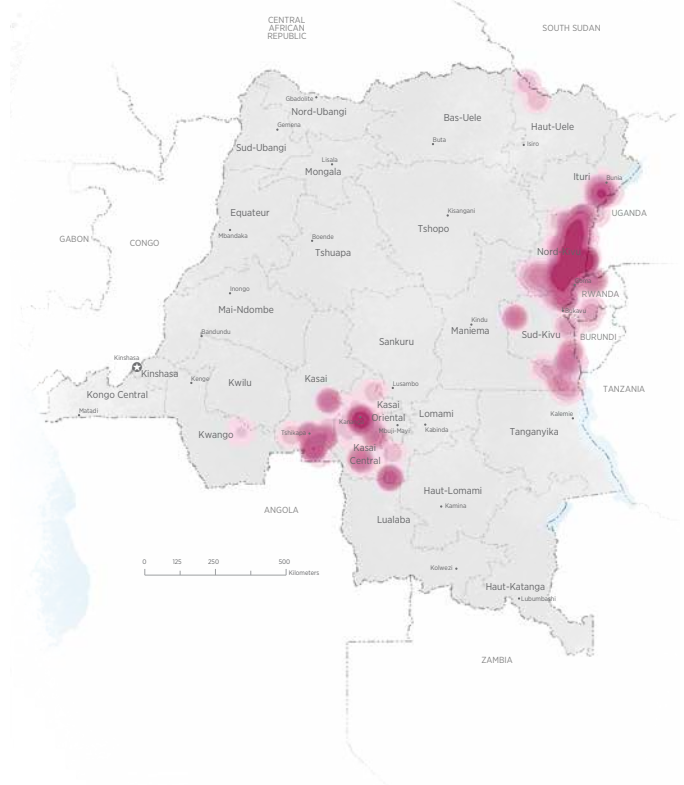
CHILD RECRUITMENT IN 2015



CHILD RECRUITMENT IN 2016



CHILD RECRUITMENT IN 2017



Persistent Perpetrators: Which Armed Groups Recruited the Most Children from 2014 to 2017

An indication of the complexity of child recruitment in the DRC was the sheer number of perpetrators: 49 distinct armed groups, militias or unidentified armed elements were found responsible for child recruitment and use from 2014 to 2017. Twenty-three of these groups were small-time recruiters, recruiting fewer than 25 children each over these years. By contrast, 72% of all children in the DRC were recruited by just 10 perpetrators.²¹

Part II of this report profiles the top seven of these armed groups:



Push Factors: Why Children Volunteered for Armed Groups²²

Children's agency in the decisions that led them to armed groups cannot be overlooked. Approximately a quarter of children joined the top seven perpetrators voluntarily. The push factors that made belonging to an armed group in the DRC palatable to a child included a host of entirely rational and emotional reasons. That said, these decisions were not made in a vacuum. Rather, children were under contextual duress, taking what was at times the only viable option available in communities otherwise mired in poverty and security vacuums. Nevertheless, by virtue of their age, children can neither fully consent to nor be held responsible for their voluntary recruitment. That responsibility sits squarely on the shoulders of their recruiters.



Revenge & Self-Defense: To “Save My People”²⁴

Both in the East and the Kasais, one of the most salient reasons boys joined armed groups or militia was to avenge the death(s) of family members and protect their communities from opposing armed groups of another ethnicity or from the Government. In Mayi Mayi Mazembe at least 32% of all children who volunteered justified their decision as a way to protect their Nande community from Hutu-based groups. In just one of hundreds of cases, three brothers joined NDC-Rénové after FDLR FOCA killed their parents, wanting “vengeance one day.”²⁵ Seizing on the compelling argument of ethnic identity, commanders systematically used this rhetoric to lure children into their ranks, as when Rayia Mutomboki General Ngoa bequeathed an AK-47 to a boy with a blessing to “fight for his community.”²⁶

Provincially, the difference was in how children and their recruiters defined the enemy. In North and South Kivu, children predominantly believed the enemy to be armed groups of opposing ethnicities, whereas in Ituri and the Kasais, children joining FRPI and Kamuina Nsapu fought the State, whether in the form of FARDC, PNC, elements perceived – rightly or not – to be “Rwandan soldiers,” or ethnic militia viewed as siding with the Government. Notably, revenge and self-defense was a gendered push factor expressed exclusively by boys in the East. Only in the Kasais did girls use the language of revenge or ethnic self-defense as a justification for joining Kamuina Nsapu.

Economic Survival Strategy: To “Eat Meat Every Day”²⁷

Poverty cannot be underestimated as a factor that primes children for recruitment in the DRC, where 77% of the population lived on less than 2USD per day in 2016, and nearly 2 million children suffered from severe acute malnutrition in 2017.²⁸ When a child’s next meal came from an armed group commander, the risk of recruitment was often worth the guarantee of sustenance. Among armed groups that lack strong ideologies, like Nyatura or Rayia Mutomboki, economic incentives – promises of salaries, free schooling, loot, meat, a “good life” – were particularly persuasive, especially when another child already in the armed group made the argument, as was common practice in FRPI, FDLR FOCA and Nyatura. In a typical case, a 14-year-old boy joined Nyatura when a friend told him, falsely, that each new recruit would receive 30 USD.²⁹ Some armed groups that played on this vulnerability gave children reason to believe in

misleading financial promises, like the ADF, which promised two boys, ages 16 and 17, jobs as moto-taxi drivers, gave them new SIM cards and sent 20 USD in mobile money to facilitate their travel.³⁰

The promise of a job was powerful enough to persuade children to traverse borders. In 2017, for example, two 17-year-old Tanzanian boys crossed into DRC, through Burundi and back into the DRC on the false promise of mining jobs, only to have their passports confiscated and be forced into the Cheik Abouhamza Islamic group, reportedly a member of Mayi Mayi Yakutumba’s coalition.³¹

Physical Survival Strategy: To Stay Alive

In the volatile DRC, physical protection is a rare commodity and one of the most precious promises an armed group can make to children facing life-or-death situations. Children fled threats in their home lives, such as the furious parents of a pregnant girlfriend, the police pursuing children for petty crimes, or an abusive teacher or parent. For example, a 13-year-old boy felt that his stepmother's abuse was more terrifying than joining Nyatura.³² This push factor was most common in FRPI, where the loss of a parent, abuse or altercations at home drove 8% of all children associated with the group to volunteer themselves.

Threats also came from the armed group itself, forcing children to think fast to save their own lives. Joining an armed group at gunpoint was not a choice at all.³³ It was an act of self-preservation. This was the case when FLDR FOCA gave a 16-year-old boy and his parents the choice between volunteering their son, paying 850 USD – an impossibly large sum for the vast majority of Congolese – or all be killed.³⁴ These threats were not empty, as an 11-year-old boy in NDC-Cheka learned when he watched the commander of NDC-Cheka order his combatants to shoot and kill another child for resisting recruitment.³⁵ While such threats were universal among the top perpetrators, Kamuina Nsapu deployed them most systematically when, in 2017, recruiters

forced entire villages to join the militia en masse. A 13-year-old boy watched his recruiter decapitate and carry around the head of the local chief, which, he said, “created great fear in the other chiefs and they could not resist our recruitment.”³⁶

For children living in territory effectively ruled by an armed group, death threats also came under the guise of imposing law and order. For example, NDC-Rénové elements ambushed two brothers, ages 8 and 15, on their way to a market in Walikale Territory, North Kivu. The combatants demanded that the boys show a token proving payment of the armed group's so-called security tax, which only the older brother had in his pocket. Angered by this apparent disobedience, the NDC-Rénové elements ordered the older boy to choose between joining the armed group or killing his little brother. Having witnessed the decapitation of two other children for not paying the tax, he quickly chose to join, saving his little brother's life.³⁷

Other times, a child's split-second choice to seek protection in the ranks of a militia was a result of happenstance. When Kamuina Nsapu arrived in Nganza, villagers fled and a 13-year-old boy found himself alone and unable to find his parents; he quickly adhered to the militia rather than face it.³⁸

Family & Peer Pressure: To “See My Friends in the Bush”³⁹

In armed groups that operated in family structures, like FDLR FOCA, children were regularly recruited by their immediate family members and some were born into the group, never experiencing life outside the bush. FDLR FOCA was unique among armed groups in drawing girls and younger boys into its ranks with the promise of mothering by women associated with the armed group.

Other groups simply maintained strong links with the communities they controlled and recruited children from across their family networks. For instance, a commander phoned his 15-year-old cousin, promising to pay her school fees if she served as an escort.⁴⁰ Cheka's rival, NDC-Rénové, recruited a 14-year-old boy when his father, a senior commander, told the boy that “studies are useless in the DRC.”⁴¹ In Ituri, the number one reason boys volunteered to join FRPI was peer pressure

from friends already in the group: 14% of all children recruited by and 39% of child volunteers for FRPI cited this justification as their reason for joining the group. Peer and family ties to FRPI compounded other push factors, like poverty, as in the case of a 14-year-old boy who volunteered to join his uncle, a FRPI witch doctor, to “have a better life” and protect his family from harassment.⁴²

Hundreds of kilometers to the west, parents were sending their children to join Kamuina Nsapu, often paying for their children's initiation rites, like the 8-year-old girl recruited by her mother, a Kamuina Nsapu member herself.⁴³ Peer pressure was also a powerful push factor for teenagers, with groups of children deciding together to join Kamuina Nsapu and children inside FDLR FOCA convincing friends to join up.

Political Ideology⁴⁴

While certain armed groups operating in the East, such as the FRPI or FDLR FOCA, articulated political demands, children associated with them rarely cited political or ideological motivations for volunteering, despite the reported increase armed commanders' use of anti-Government rhetoric in 2016

and 2017. By contrast, 22% of the children who volunteered for Kamuina Nsapu vociferously cited abuses by State agents and the goal of overthrowing the national and provincial governments as their motivation to join the militia.

Pull Factors: Why Armed Groups Recruited Children



Boost Ranks: “Our strength is in our youth”⁴⁶

From a strictly pragmatic perspective, there were rational and operational reasons that armed groups in the DRC recruited children, most concretely because boys and girls could quickly multiply a fighting force. Children associated with Rayia Mutomboki, for example, were well-aware of the reasons why commanders held recruitment rallies just before launching

attacks or after tough losses, referencing their worry that the group was going to disappear or die out. One 15-year-old boy recounted how, in 2015, a Rayia Mutomboki commander ordered each household in his village in Walikale to “free” one person, adult or child, to build up his “team.”⁴⁷

Loyal Fighters: To Fight for Our People

Armed group commanders often expected children with blood ties to the group’s members to be loyal to their cause on the basis of their collective history, suffering and desire for vengeance. This pull factor was clearest in FDLR FOCA and Kamuina Nsapu. Take for example the 13-year-old Rwandan boy recruited by his father, a FDLR FOCA combatant, despite his mother’s return to Rwanda.⁴⁸ This expectation also extended to the wider community, tribe and ethnicity of an armed group, hooking neatly into the very desire for revenge and

self-defense that pushed children to volunteer. Armed group commanders and recruiters were savvy in calling in the favor of ethnic loyalty when persuading children to join, whether one-on-one (as in FDLR FOCA) or in massive recruitment rallies (as in Rayia Mutomboki). This closely inter-relates to groups’ need for fearless fighters. Emotional attachment and a sense of obligation to family members, friends, commanders and the ubiquitous “us” boosted children’s willingness, at least initially, to fight against a perceived evil “them.”

Cheap Labor: To Carry the Loot

Armed groups, like FDLR FOCA and Nyatura, that used children predominantly in support roles, including criminal activities such as illicit mining, recruited children partly for their cheap labor. Children cost less to feed, clothe, and shelter than adults, but they work just as hard, if not harder, and are easier to manipulate. This line of thinking made FDLR FOCA’s trademark child recruitment tactic seem more logical: Pillage a village, abduct the children, force them to carry the heaviest

loot for kilometers into the bush, threaten to kill them if they try to return home, and use them as cheap labor: domestics, cooks, babysitters, porters, or miners who eat half of what a man eats and demand less too. While most ubiquitous among FDLR FOCA, other armed groups, including Nyatura, Rayia Mutomboki, and NDC-Rénové, all with their eyes on natural resources, employed similar methods.

Magic: To “Become Bulletproof”⁴⁹

Armed groups with deeply held beliefs in magic and the protective powers possessed by virgins specifically targeted younger boys and girls to restore the group’s magic to its full power. These children, in their roles as witchdoctors or fétisheurs, were sent to the frontlines to protect and heal combatants injured during battle. A 12-year-old girl recruited

in 2015 by Rayia Mutomboki reported that the group was specifically targeting girls younger than 13 for recruitment to strengthen the group’s ability to “become bulletproof.”⁵⁰ NDC-Rénové, Mayi Mayi Mazembe and Kamuina Nsapu placed high value on petite young boys and girls, with strict rules that they keep their virginity to retain their powers.

Proof of Power: To Punish, Extort and Control Communities

Armed groups that controlled territory in the absence of the State, like NDC-Rénové, Nyatura and FDLR FOCA, used child recruitment as a control mechanism, punishing or extorting families and villages into submission. In this way, child recruitment became a means of exerting power over territory. For instance, a 16-year-old girl’s mother could not afford to pay a tax to Nyatura; that night, the group abducted the girl and within two weeks she was “married” to her abductor.⁵¹



I was visiting my uncle and when out to his field when I ran into men from MAC. They really intimidated me and made me go with them, carrying a goat. Now I know why they took me: Their fétisheur was looking for an assistant, a boy who had not yet slept with a girl. From then on, there was not a minute that I was very far from the fétisheur.⁴⁵

Sex: Male
Age: 9

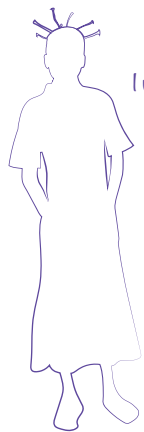
Location: Walikale Territory, North Kivu
Recruited by: MAC

The Trigger Violation: Abduction

Child recruitment in the DRC cannot be fully understood without addressing its most common trigger: Abduction. Child recruitment was the purpose of 70% all child abductions documented by the UN since 2014. On average, the top seven child recruiters in the DRC abducted 27% of their child soldiers. Certain armed groups, particularly those with specific ideologies, like the ADF, or those which valued children for their labor, like Nyatura, had higher rates of abduction and fewer volunteers. FRPI, Nyatura, NDC-Rénové and Rayia Mutomboki employed the tactic most often: 30-40% of these groups' child soldiers endured abduction as a gateway to recruitment. The exception to this rule was Kamuina Nsapu, which physically abducted just 5% of its children, instead employing other tactics – political and ethnic rhetoric, promises of magical protection, and death threats – to recruit children.

This is no coincidence. Abduction is simpler than convincing a 14-year-old and can easily be combined with other activities. Almost every armed group that recruited children in the DRC since 2014 used abduction as a recruitment mechanism. National trends across all perpetrators show that while child recruitment decreased, child abductions increased, however this may have been impacted by the UN Security Council's addition of abduction as a listable violation in 2015, meaning that the UN was more closely monitoring this violation from 2015 onward.⁵² Nevertheless, among the top seven perpetrators, the trend in abduction matched the trend in child recruitment, year for year.

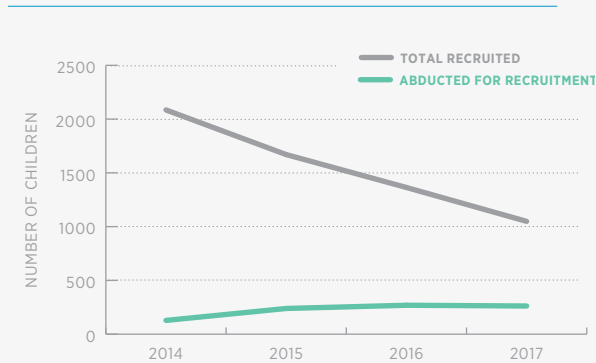
Abductions fell into two categories: Targeted or opportunistic. Four of the top seven recruiters (FDLR FOCA, Nyatura, NDC-Rénové and Rayia Mutomboki) carried out targeted abduction missions, typically combined with looting to maximize the booty transported back to camp. One 16-year-old boy recruited by NDC-Rénové in 2016 was abducted, sprayed with "medicine" to protect him from bullets and forced to march straight to the frontlines carrying ammunition.⁵³ Rayia Mutomboki was highly strategic in targeting locations – schools, markets, mines – and times – market days, after school – to carry out their abductions.⁵⁴ All armed groups appeared to carry out opportunistic abductions, abducting unlucky children who happened to cross their paths.



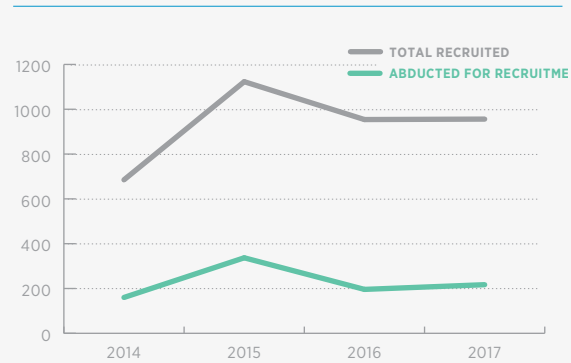
I was farming with my little sister when three men and a woman carrying guns took us. We walked for hours carrying things they had stolen from villages. My little sister was sick and she could not walk very fast, so they left her behind part-way. There were two other boys with us who they had taken but I did not know their names. I do not know how far we walked but it took us the rest of that day, all night and the whole next day. When we got to the camp, they made me take care of the commander's baby.

Sex: Female Location: Haut Uélé
Age: 15 Recruited by: LRA

CHILD RECRUITMENT VIA ABDUCTION BY ALL PERPETRATORS



CHILD RECRUITMENT VIA ABDUCTION BY TOP PERPETRATORS



Abduction was a gendered violation, inherently linked to the nature of the roles that boys and girls played once inside armed groups, including, for the latter, as “wives.” Among the top perpetrators, girls were on average 7% more likely to be abducted than boys, however, in the starkest example, FRPI targeted girls nearly exclusively, with 81% of all girls recruited by FRPI abducted, compared to just 20% of all boys recruited by the group. It is no coincidence that FRPI also had the highest percentage of girls among its child soldiers (27%), and that these girls disclosed the highest rate of sexual violence (93%) among top perpetrators. In a typical example, a 14-year-old girl was the only person abducted from her village during a FRPI pillaging raid. Upon arrival in the camp, the reason why was made clear when she was presented to her “husband.”⁵⁶

Living in the milieu of multiple armed groups made children more vulnerable to such abductions. This was the case for a 9-year-old boy who was separated from his parents while fleeing clashes between Mayi Mayi and Nyatura, unluckily crossed paths with FDLR FOCA and was abducted into the group.⁵⁷

Resistance was often futile. Families and chiefs who attempted to negotiate, usually on behalf of girls, were threatened. In the words of one Rayia Mutomboki commander who refused to leave a child with his parents: “There will be bullets.”⁵⁸ Even after children were abducted, some groups, such as NDC-Rénové, abducted and imprisoned alleged child “spies” in cells inside their camps for up to two weeks, before offering all prisoners to the non-choice of formally joining the group or being strangled to death.⁵⁹



“On the night of 14 December 2014, the ADF killed everyone in my village, including my mother. The fighters didn’t kill me – They just took me into the jungle with them and a few other women and children. We walked for days and they made me carry heavy things. They spoke another language that I didn’t understand. The men carried RPGs and AK-47s but I never saw them fight.

About a month later, I managed to escape. Even though I was very sick, I walked through the jungle until I reached a main road. There, I met another FARDC soldier, who took me to Beni town. Now I am back together with my aunt.”⁵⁵

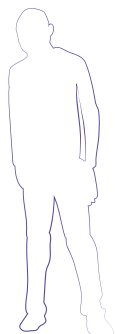
Sex: Female Location: Beni Territory, North Kivu
Age: 12 Recruited by: ADF

Re-Recruitment: The Revolving Door

Where child recruitment was endemic, as in North Kivu, children who escaped from armed groups lived under the near-constant threat of re-recruitment. While data on re-recruitment was not systematically collected until 2017, among the top seven perpetrators, an average of 3% of children – almost exclusively boys – were re-recruited by the same or multiple armed groups. Nyatura re-recruited the most children, with at least 8% of its child soldiers having been recruited in the past.⁶¹ These figures are, however, likely an under-estimate.

Re-recruitment is a euphemism that belies the deadly risks children shouldered by escaping from armed groups. Four days after a boy reunited with his family, 10 FDLR FOCA elements tied up and beat the Chief of Mpati IDP Camp until he agreed to hand over the boy and four other former child soldiers, killing one and re-recruiting the rest.⁶² With armed groups maintaining a tight grip on their territory, children who dared to return home were regularly re-recruited by their original recruiters or their former commanders, sometimes within days of reuniting with their families. This risk prevented many children from returning

home at all, choosing to be displaced rather than risk being discovered and punished by their recruiters. Children went to great lengths to avoid re-recruitment, e.g. a 13-year-old girl who fled far from both Rayia Mutomboki and from her home village, or the 17-year-old boy who faked severe malaria each time his former commander came looking for him.⁶³ Yet, in a region with a plethora of armed groups, some children evaded their original recruiters only to be recruited anew by other armed groups: For one 16-year-old boy, FDLR FOCA was the third armed group to recruit him.⁶⁴



I was first recruited by FDLR FOCA back in 2013 from a nearby mining site but I escaped and returned to my family. A month after I reunified with them, I returned to the mining site to look for work. Unfortunately, the same men who recruited me before recognized me. They tore up my *attestation de sortie* [demobilization certificate] and forced me to go back to their camp with them. My commander beat me so badly to punish me.⁶⁰

Sex: Male
Age: 16

Location: Masisi Territory, North Kivu
Recruited by: FDLR FOCA



DURING:

LIFE AS A CHILD SOLDIER IN THE DRC

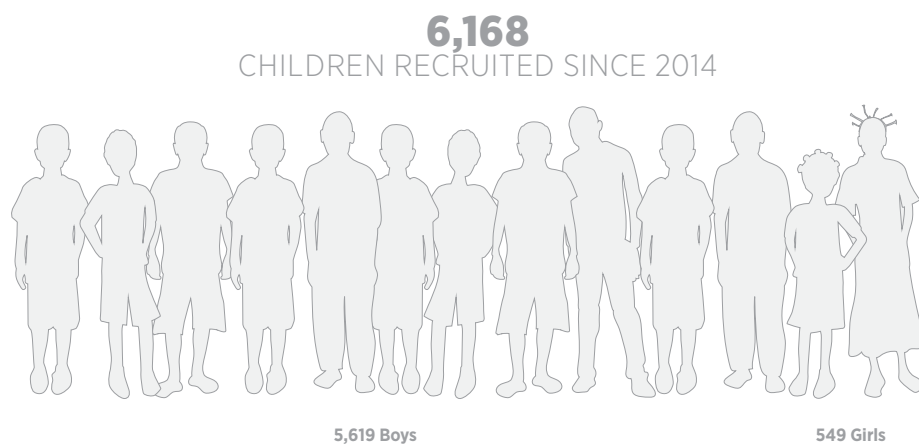


The Boys & Girls Recruited by Armed Groups

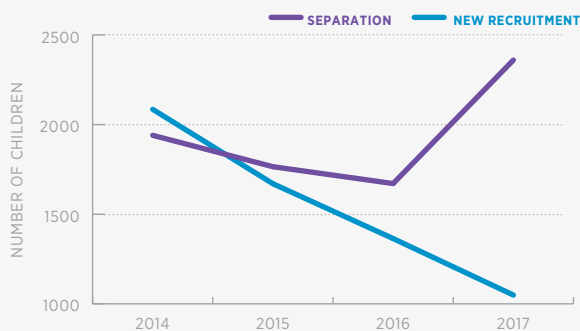
The sheer scale of child recruitment in the DRC must be recognized: Since 2014, the UN verified armed groups' recruitment of 6,168 children (549 girls, 5,619 boys). To put this in perspective, in 2017, the DRC had the fourth highest number of child soldiers globally and has consistently been among the five countries where the UN documents the most child soldiers.⁶⁵

Despite this disheartening news, the trends were encouraging. Nationally, from 2014 to 2017, separation of children from armed groups increased by 22% while new recruitment decreased by 50%. This means more children left armed groups than entered them. Putting aside for a moment the increase in child recruitment in the Kasais, in the East, child recruitment decreased by 68% over this four-year period. However, an important caveat is that, given that children can spend years in armed groups, child recruitment figures for 2016 and 2017 will likely adjust upward over time as more children recruited in those years are separated and documented.

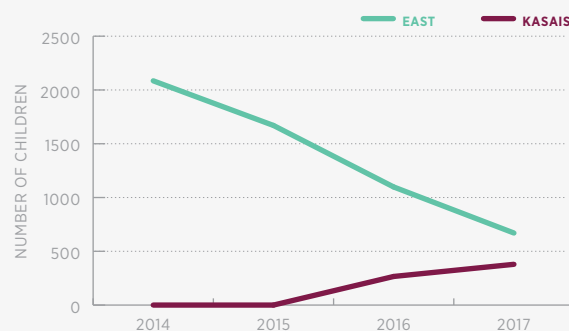
While beyond the time period covered by this report, it is important to note that the high figures in the Kasais did not last into 2018. While the risk of resumption of conflict and child recruitment remains in the Kasais, the pattern currently indicates that it was an acute instance of unprecedented recruitment in 2016-2017, rather than a long-term trend, as seen in the East.



CHILDREN ENTERING & LEAVING ARMED GROUPS



CHILD RECRUITMENT BY REGION



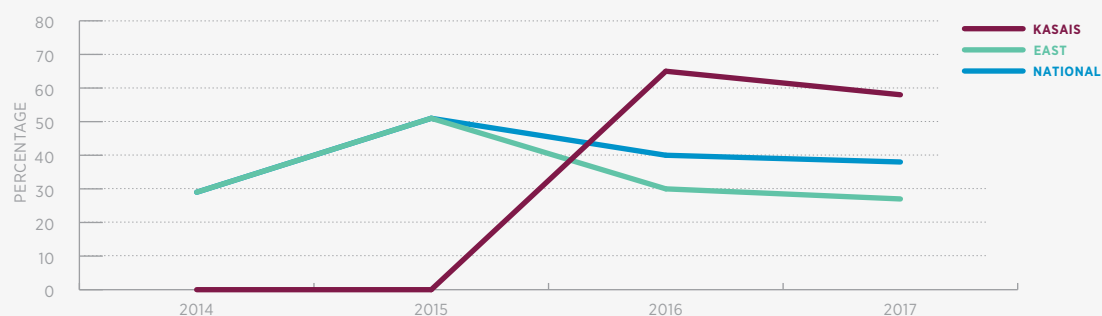
Age

More than a third (2,171) of children recruited since 2014 were under the age of 15, a war crime under international law.⁶⁶ Regional analysis showed a relatively positive story in the East, with the rate of children under age 15 dropping from 50% of all child soldiers in 2015 to 28% in 2017. In the Kasais, however, younger children comprised 60% of all children recruited by Kamuina Nsapu, making it essentially a child army and driving up the national average of child soldiers under age 15. However, Kamuina Nsapu was not the only group to recruit very young children. For instance, the ADF also abducted and used very young children, including one 6-year-old boy who was born in “Madina,” the group’s headquarters, and was taught to assemble and disassemble weapons.⁶⁷

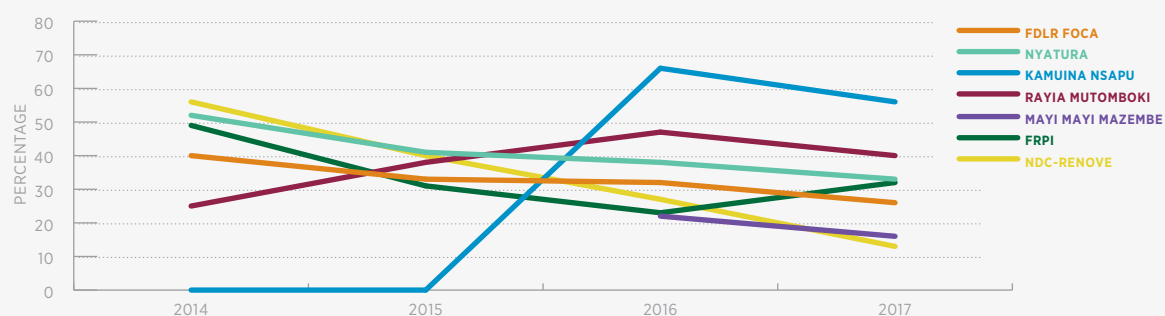
A glance at the rates of children younger than 15 among the top seven perpetrators paints a similar picture, with Kamuina Nsapu outranking armed groups in the East. However, in four of the six top perpetrators in the East, rates of children under age 15 remained steady or dropped, with significant drops seen in NDC-Rénové from 56% in 2014 (while allied with NDC-Cheka) to 13% in 2017.

Notably, girls recruited by the top perpetrators were more likely than boys to be younger than 15-years-old. For instance, Rayia Mutomboki recruited twice as many under-15-year-old girls than boys.

CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN AGE 15 AS A % OF ALL CHILDREN RECRUITED BY REGION



CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN AGE 15 AS A % OF ALL CHILDREN RECRUITED BY TOP PERPETRATORS



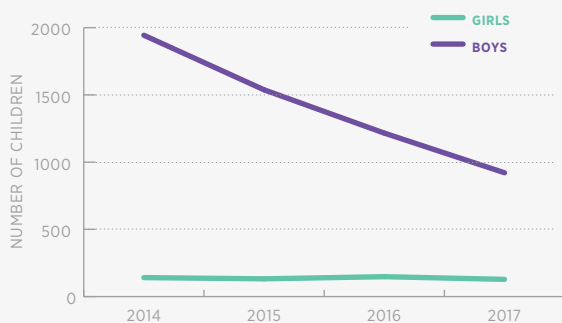
Gender⁶⁸

An average of 9% of children recruited since 2014 were girls, primarily in the Kasais, North Kivu and Ituri provinces. While the numbers of boys recruited by armed groups dropped, the numbers of girls documented as associated with armed groups steadily increased from 7% in 2014 to 12% in 2017. This relative increase may be due to two different reasons: Either a decrease in the recruitment of boys and an increase in girls whereby girls actually do make up a greater proportion of children in armed groups, or, alternatively, the increased visibility of girls associated with armed groups following UN campaigns to encourage them to come forward and claim the child DDR benefits they are entitled to, thus allowing them to be documented. Regardless of the reason, the fact remains that girls in armed groups are consistently under-reported, due to stigma and barriers to accessing child DDR programs that obscures their visibility to the UN and prevents their documentation.

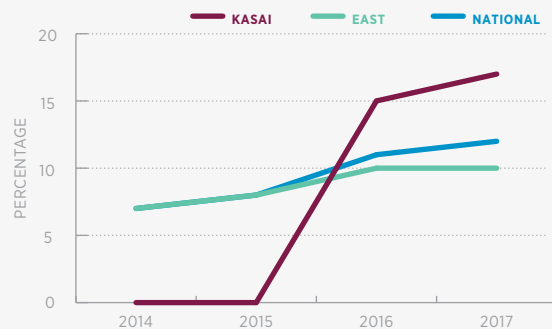
Regionally, high numbers of girls were overtly targeted by Kamuina Nsapu in the Kasais, again skewing the national trend upward.

However, raw national and regional figures must be read in conjunction with data that is specific to each armed group. For example, while the overall rate of girls documented in armed groups in the East hovered in the single digits, in Rayia Mutomboki, the percentage of girls documented by the UN jumped from 3% to 40% between 2014 and 2017, and in FRPI girls made up 27% of all children documented as recruited and used.

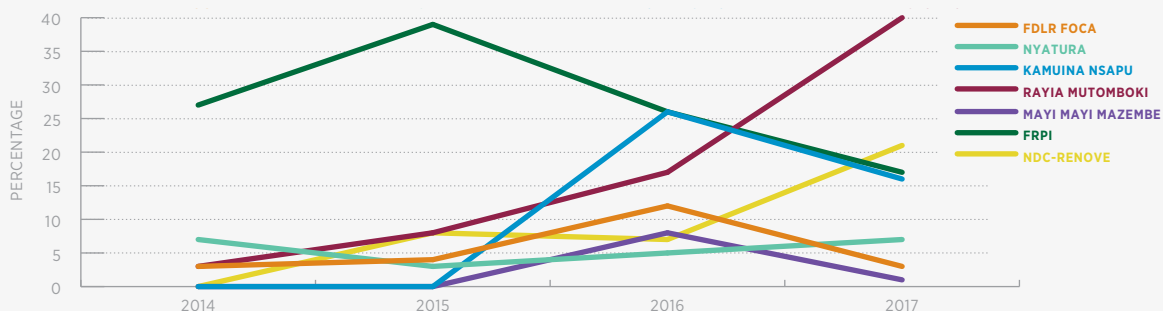
NATIONAL TRENDS IN CHILD RECRUITMENT BY GENDER



GIRLS AS A % OF ALL CHILDREN RECRUITED BY REGION



GIRLS AS A % OF ALL CHILDREN RECRUITED BY TOP PERPETRATORS



Nationality

Just as conflicts and armed groups are not necessarily contained by borders, neither are the children ensnared in them. With borders on eight countries and a ninth across Lake Tanganyika, the DRC sees low but steady levels of cross-border recruitment. While the vast majority of children recruited and used in the DRC were Congolese, children recruited by both Congolese and foreign-armed groups also came from Rwanda (32), South Sudan (26), Burundi (25), Uganda (10), Tanzania (3), Central African Republic (2), and Kenya (1). During the 2015 Burundian refugee crisis, Burundian children were recruited in refugee camps in Rwanda, trained in the DRC, and sent to fight in Burundi. In 2017, the cross-border child recruitment trend

expanded geographically, with Tanzanian children from as far as Dar es Salaam documented as recruited by Congolese armed groups, in this case Mayi Mayi Yakutumba, for the first time.

Cross-border recruitment tended to be one of two types: False promises of schooling or employment, like the Tanzanian boy deceived by his uncle, a Mayi Mayi Yakutumba recruiter, with a job offer in the DRC, or an ideological, religious or ethnic link, as was the case among Muslim children typically recruited in Uganda by ADF and Hutu children recruited by FDLR FOCA in Rwanda.⁶⁹

Initiation Rites

Each armed group formed its own culture and children were absorbed into its daily rhythms. Some groups, like FDLR FOCA or Nyatura, scarcely initiated children beyond a “welcome” beating from other children, an introduction to cannabis or other drugs and alcohol, and brief military training. Physical abuse was a common experience for new recruits. One 14-year-old boy said that when he first joined Rayia Mutomboki, he was “mistreated like I could never have imagined.”⁷⁰ Other armed groups, like the ADF, first “re-educated” children in the group’s beliefs in training camps separate from headquarters. For instance, children arrived in ADF training camps strictly regulated by morning-noon-and-night prayers, mornings in school studying Arabic and the Quran, followed by weapons training and an afternoon soccer game; only after completing their training could children proceed to Madina, the ADF’s headquarters.⁷¹

To understand children’s experiences in armed groups, it is essential to consider that magic is perceived to be real and is a part of the fabric of daily life for many communities across the DRC. This powerful patchwork of animistic beliefs carried over to the culture and practices of many armed groups, particularly in North Kivu and the Kasais. These groups, including Kamuina Nsapu, NDC-Rénové, Mayi Mayi Charles and Mayi Mayi Mazembe, tended to perform more involved initiation rituals, sometimes repeated throughout a child’s association to refresh his or her magical protections and powers. In fact, children were

not just objects of magic but subjects wielding its powers. In the East, the role of witchdoctor, known as *féticheur* or *kadogo dawa*, was frequently played by young boys, whose youth and virginity fortified their powers. One 15-year-old boy used as a *féticheur* by Mayi Mayi Lafontaine was severely punished after being accused of having sex, which was forbidden to *féticheurs*.⁷² When a child arrived in Rayia Mutomboki or Mayi Mayi Mazembe, for example, they would first be tattooed, usually by another child *féticheur*.

The most elaborate initiations, known as baptisms, were performed by Kamuina Nsapu, with reportedly hundreds of children and adults receiving magical protective powers at nighttime ceremonies held around *tshiota*, sacred fireplaces. In 2016, it was also common practice in the militia to lacerate children’s abdomens and shoulders, deeming those children whose wounds healed to hold the strongest powers. Children sincerely believed that this initiation could protect them from bullets. As one boy said, “It is clear that this baptism can change a child’s spirit and push him to commit odious crimes in battle with soldiers.”⁷³

Children's Roles in Armed Groups

Combatants

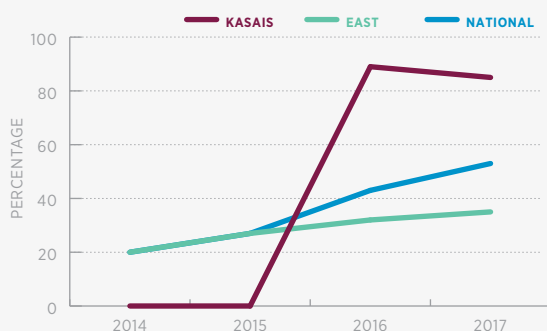
On average, 31% of all children recruited in the DRC since 2014 fought on the frontlines. The use of children as combatants increased nationally from 18% of all children recruited in 2014 to 51% of those in 2017. This increase, however, was skewed by Kamuina Nsapu's use of 88% of its children on the frontlines. In the East, the increase in armed groups' use of child combatants was steady but not nearly commensurate with the levels seen in the Kasais.

This is in line with the tactics of certain armed groups that emerged in 2016 and 2017, such as Mayi Mayi Mazembe and Mayi Mayi Yakutumba, which used over 50% of associated children as combatants. Kamuina Nsapu sent girls as young as 4 years old as human shields, spurred on by the belief that the girls' magical powers made them invulnerable to bullets and would protect other combatants. Children in the militia as young as 10 fought in hand-to-hand combat and claimed to have beheaded multiple – up to 25 – FARDC soldiers and PNC officers, who also believed that the children's magic was real.⁷⁴

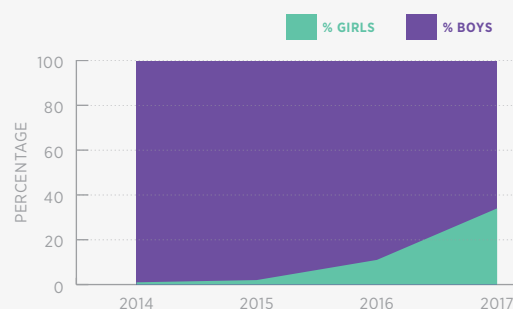
Armed groups' relative levels of organization and wealth were reflected in children's testimonies of battles. The wealthier armed groups, like NDC-Rénové – a group known to control significant gold mining assets in North Kivu – armed their child soldiers with RPGs, SMGs and AK-47s. Those with fewer resources, like Mayi Mayi Mazembe and Kamuina Nsapu, sent children to fight armed with stones, spears, bows and arrows, and magical weapons, like sticks that children believed “became guns” or rocks that “transformed into bombs.” Likewise, children in more organized groups, like FRPI, rattled off battalion names and formalized chains of command up the rank system.

Combatant status, while typically gendered was not exclusively so. Whereas the vast majority of child combatants were boys, girls made up 13% of all child combatants used by armed groups since 2014. Notably, this percentage jumped from 1% (4 girls) in 2014 to 34% (167 girls) in 2017, predominantly due to the high numbers of girls used on the frontlines in the Kasais. Certain armed groups, like Kamuina Nsapu and NDC-Rénové, deployed girls regularly to the frontlines. In one case that reveals the complex realities and multiplicity of violations endured by girl combatants, NDC-Rénové abducted a 17-year-old girl from a funeral in Lubero Territory, North Kivu, forcing her to carry stolen goods on the way to their camp. During her first month of military training, the girl was forced into sexual slavery by her commander. Four months later and well into her second trimester, the girl fought against Mayi Mayi Mazembe and FARDC, sustaining a bullet wound to the stomach and losing the pregnancy.⁷⁵

% OF CHILDREN USED AS COMBATANTS BY REGION



% OF CHILDREN USED AS COMBATANTS BY GENDER



Support Roles

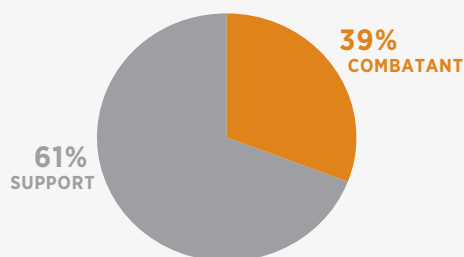
Despite the gendered stereotype of the child soldier as a boy with a gun, 69% of children recruited and used by armed groups in the DRC since 2014 never saw battle. The stories of these 4,032 girls and 2,622 boys are the hard grind of the invisible work that made battle possible: looting food, gathering water and wood, cooking, sweeping the commander's hut, collecting taxes, carrying ammunition and belongings from camp to camp, carefully logging new recruits or ammunition supplies, "marrying" the commander and being raped in his bed. Nevertheless, such roles placed children at risk of violations both from their comrades and commanders, and of enemy attacks on rear bases.

Some armed groups, especially Rayia Mutomboki, assigned children more fluid support roles, for example with a child serving both as spy and ammunition porter during battle, whichever was required by operational necessity. These semi-combatant roles, which put children in close proximity to fighting without technically taking part in it, ranged from bodyguard and escort to witchdoctor or féticheur, and spy. For example, one 13-year-old boy, a favorite of Rayia Mutomboki General Birikoriko, accompanied the General to the frontlines to administer "medicine" and tattoos from a special bag filled with

protective "Mayi Mayi gris gris."⁷⁸ Unique to Rayia Mutomboki was also a system of promotion, in which children could move up from domestic to escort and eventually to combatant through hard work and catching a commander's eye.

Notably, for FRPI, flexibility in children's support roles took on new meaning, with some children's experience of recruitment resembling a part-time job: Children associated with FRPI regularly reported living with their families and rotating into the bush for a few hours, days or weeks at a time.

CHILDREN'S ROLES IN ARMED GROUPS



I was working in my family's field when two men appeared and forced me to follow them into the bush. They brought me to a FDLR RUD camp, where I stayed for six months. They trained me but not in military things – They trained me to be a spy. They let me go home but told me that if I did not give them good information, they would kill my whole family.⁷⁶

Sex: Male Location: Rutshuru Territory, North Kivu
Age: 12 Recruited by: FDLR RUD



When I was taken away by the man from FRPI, I was supposed to be studying in the 5th grade, but I had not been to school for a few months because my parents couldn't pay my school fees. He forced me to marry him and cook for him too. About a year later, my husband decided to surrender, so I did too. Now I am pregnant.⁷⁷

Sex: Female Location: South Irumu Territory, Ituri
Age: 16 Recruited by: FRPI

Violations Triggered by Child Recruitment

Alongside the precursor of abduction, recruitment predisposed children to a host of concurrent violations that stained their lives in armed groups. The threat of everyday violence was omnipresent. Rather than occurring in isolation, these violations were intersectional, blending into and compounded each other as well as playing on a child's preexisting vulnerabilities. Some violations took place in a single incident. For example, during confrontations between Nyatura and Rayia Mutomboki, a 12-year-old girl fled with her family and was stopped at a Rayia Mutomboki roadblock. The combatants killed the girl's father, and abducted her and her mother. In the camp, the girl watched her mother be taken away by General Maachano's escort as a sex slave.⁷⁹

Sexual Violence

Both girls and boys survived sexual violence while associated with armed groups. While 95% of all verified sexual violence cases against children recruited by armed groups since 2014 affected girls, 5% of these cases affected boys. Considering the barriers to children's disclosure of sexual violence, these 310 girls and 16 boys represent an underestimate of the actual scale of sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups against children within their ranks, particularly for boys who rarely disclose such experiences. While it is challenging to precisely document trends in sexual violence inside armed groups, the Monitoring and Reporting Arrangement (MARA) on conflict-related sexual violence affecting both children and adults showed an increase in verified cases of sexual violence from 2016 to 2017.⁸⁰

At least 56% of all girls recruited since 2014 disclosed experiencing rape, sexual slavery, or forced marriage at the hands of their recruiters and comrades. Among some of the top perpetrators, rates of sexual violence against girls were far higher: A full 92% of all girls recruited by FRPI reported experiencing rape, forced marriage or sexual slavery, as did 75% of girls in NDC-Rénové and 73% of girls in Nyatura. Case after case told the stories of girls subjected to sexual violence. For instance, a 13-year-old girl used as a sex slave and cook for a Nyatura colonel, or a 15-year-old girl who was abducted and held in a shack to sexually service rank and file elements until she became pregnant, or a boy formerly associated with Nyatura who recalled how girls had abortions in his camp.⁸¹

Kamuina Nsapu, which valued virgin girls' magical powers, had far lower rates of sexual violence, with just 8% of girls disclosing rape. However, girls in the militia reported more subtle forms of sexual humiliation. For example, girls reported being forced by Kamuina Nsapu to walk semi-naked in front of combatants during clashes against national security forces, allegedly "catching bullets" in their skirts and serving as human shields. However, the same belief in the power of virginity that protected girls inside Kamuina Nsapu, placed them at risk of sexual violence from the militia's opponents. When arrested by State agents during military operations, some of these girls were raped as a way to destroy their magical powers.⁸²

Sexual violence did not exclusively affect girls, with at least 16 boys reporting that they survived rape and other forms of sexual violence while associated with armed groups. While cultural taboos and traditional gender norms prevented many boys from disclosing experiences of sexual violence, it is suspected to be far more common than these figures would indicate. Nyatura, in particular, is known to use rape against boys in its own ranks as an intimidation tactic.⁸³

Killing & Maiming

Hand in hand with high rates of child combatants came the risk of death and injury during hostilities. While statistics remain elusive, children's testimonies point to significant child casualties, particularly among children in Kamuina Nsapu. The majority – 57% – of child casualties documented by the UN in the Kasais from 2016 to 2017 were killed or maimed by the FARDC and were directly targeted on suspicion of membership in the militia. This high rate of targeted killings of children for alleged association may be, in part, a result of the militia's massive scale of child recruitment, such that simply being younger than 18 and of Luba or Lulua ethnicity put children at elevated risk of being presumed to be associated with the militia and targeted by FARDC. Children in the militia also listed dozens of children they watched die in combat.⁸⁴ This included the 16-year-old boy who was the sole survivor of a battle in Luebo and the 10-year-old boy who killed 5 soldiers after seeing FARDC kill his friends.⁸⁵ At least 30 children independently reported witnessing a large number of children (estimated 60) killed in Moma village, Luiza Territory, Kasai Central in May-June 2017, now allegedly buried in a mass grave 2km from Moma.⁸⁶

In the East, boys and girls who escaped from armed groups were at high risk of being re-recruited and killed or severely injured as punishment. For instance, in 2015 in Walikale Territory, North Kivu, NDC-Cheka elements killed a boy for escaping and left his body on the ground as a warning and as a stamp of authority over the community.⁸⁷ Notably, boys were predominantly targeted for re-recruitment, rather than girls.

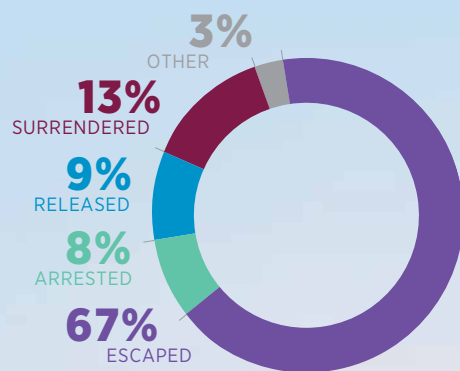
AFTER:

HOW CHILDREN WERE SEPARATED FROM ARMED GROUPS

After days, weeks, or years, some children eventually left armed groups. Those who did were documented and their experiences are reflected here. However, an unknown number of boys and girls remain within armed groups, yet to be separated.

For those children who managed to leave, this occurred in a wide variety of ways, broadly categorized into escape, arrest or capture by State agents, voluntary release by armed group commanders, surrender or demobilization.

SEPARATION OF CHILDREN RECRUITED BY TOP PERPETRATORS



Escape: “More suffering than happiness in the bush”⁸⁸

On average, 67% of all children recruited by the top seven perpetrators ultimately escaped, with boys and girls escaping at roughly equal rates. That is to say, 2,836 boys and girls risked their lives to leave these armed groups. In the East, escape was the number one means of children’s separation. For instance, 90% of all children recruited by Nyatura escaped, as did 87% of children recruited by FDLR FOCA. Notably, the numbers of children who escaped FDLR FOCA spiked in 2015, when FARDC operations put FDLR FOCA under intense pressure and nearly 500 children seized the opportunity to flee.

Why

Given the number of children who volunteered to join armed groups, disillusionment with the unrealized promises of their recruiters spurred children to escape. While a handful of children reported playing and eating plenty of food in armed group camps, most children who escaped FDLR FOCA, Nyatura and Rayia Mutomboki in the East fled the hardship of life in the bush. Harsh punishments, abuse, witnessing the deaths of friends and family, and realizing that magic could not shield them from bullets also propelled children to escape.⁸⁹ Lastly, children cited guilt for taking part in atrocities and seeing the suffering of villagers as reasons for leaving armed groups or militia.⁹⁰

How

Quick, opportunistic thinking increased a child’s chance of successful escape, such as a 14-year-old boy hiding in a toilet while his unit moved from one village to the next,⁹¹ a 16-year-old boy faking illness to be temporarily sent home,⁹² another changing his SIM card to avoid being traced, and a fourth giving his weapon to a friend for safekeeping before slipping away.⁹³

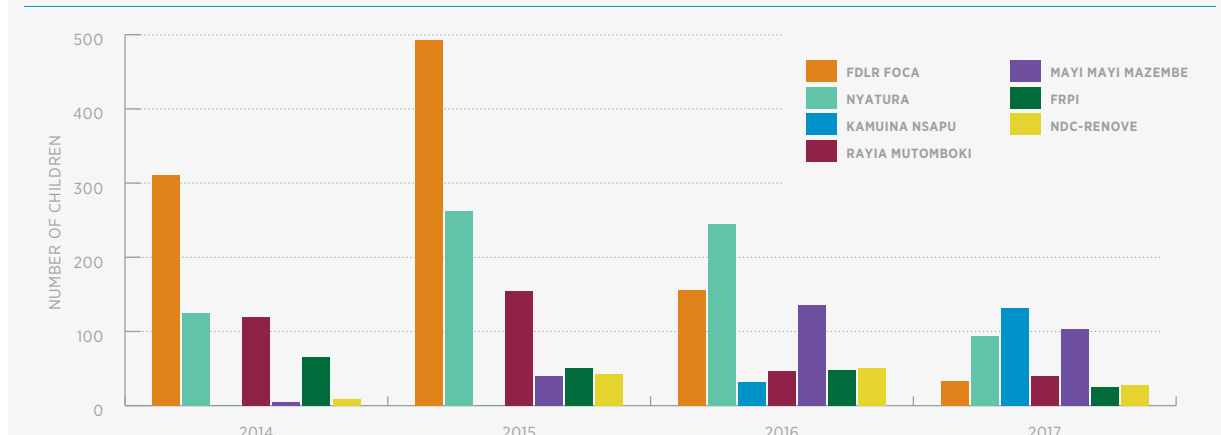
Escaping children were not always alone and many had helping hands along the way. A 14-year-old girl escaped Rayia Mutomboki with the help of another child soldier, her commander’s escort.⁹⁴ Others bumped into an older sister in the marketplace who secreted them away or managed to phone a priest who sent a motorbike to an agreed meeting spot.⁹⁵ Children also fled together, like the two boys who were abducted together by NDC-Rénové escaping together during a FARDC attack in 2017.⁹⁶ Not all children who attempted to escape together managed to succeed. For example, a 13-year-old boy who escaped from FRPI in 2014 worried about the 14-year-old friend who he left behind while fleeing.⁹⁷

To Where

Children fled in the direction of safety, wherever they believed it could be found. For children escaping Kamuina Nsapu that meant heading toward regional capitals like Kananga or Tshikapa; for children from Rayia Mutomboki, it meant seeking out local NGOs known to work with former child soldiers.

An average of 10% of children recruited by the top perpetrators fled to MONUSCO bases, including 22% of children recruited by FDLR FOCA and 18% recruited by Nyatura. This occurred predominantly in 2014 and 2015, when the MONUSCO Force’s laydown accommodated more static bases in far-flung locations.⁹⁸ For instance, when a 17-year-old boy was sent on a pillaging mission, he met an acquaintance and asked to be hidden overnight. Early the next day he made his way home but his parents were worried about retribution, so he left in search of MONUSCO, eventually guided there by a local leader.⁹⁹ In North Kivu, children expressly sought out MONUSCO bases as safe zones despite nearby risks, with three 17-year-old boys escaping Mayi Mayi Mazembe and walking for a week to reach a MONUSCO base in Mavivi, Beni Territory.¹⁰⁰ Notably, the children who escaped to MONUSCO bases were almost exclusively boys, with just two girls reporting that they sought safety from the Force. Girls were far more likely to seek out family and NGOs as alternative sources of protection.

CHILDREN ESCAPING FROM THE TOP PERPETRATORS



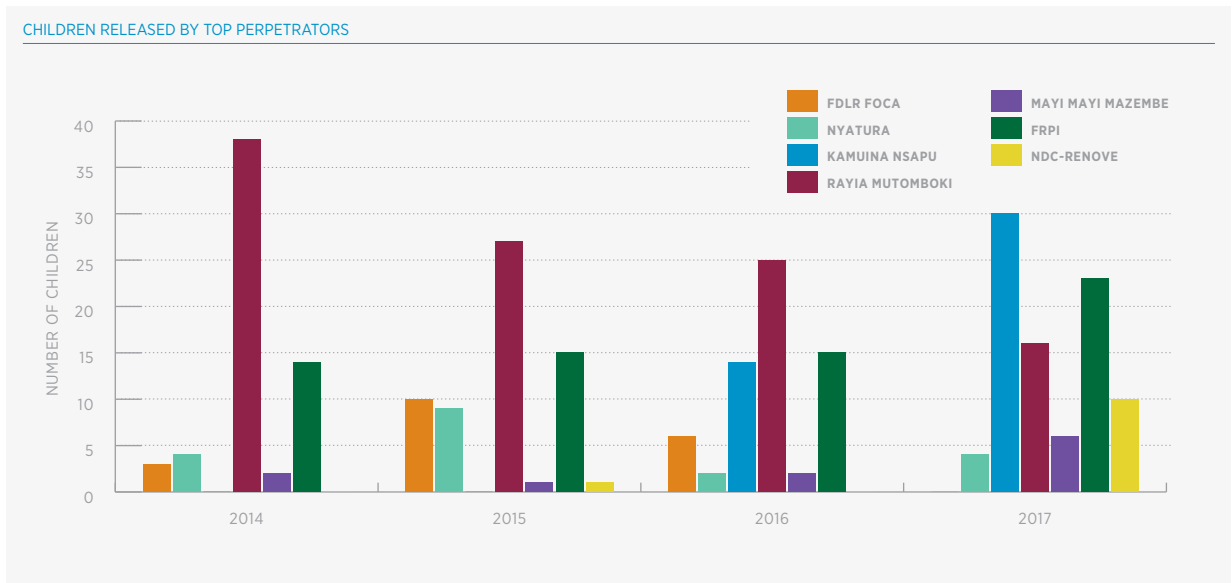
Voluntary Release by Armed Group Commanders

Just 9% of all children recruited by the top seven perpetrators were voluntarily released by their commanders. Notably, girls were more likely than boys to be released, with 16% of all girls recruited ultimately being released.

FDLR FOCA, Nyatura and Mayi Mayi Mazembe freed a meager 2% of the children they recruited, pointing to the tight grip they maintained on their elements. In the East, the most common reasons children reported that commanders agreed to their release were mourning children's immediate family members, bribes, children's severe illness, and the impact of direct awareness-raising by NGOs or the UN.

Many armed group commanders in the East, like those in FDLR FOCA, Nyatura, Rayia Mutomboki, NDC-Rénové and Mayi Mayi Yakutumba, consistently accepted bribes from family members desperate to release their children. These ranged from crates of beer to 100 USD raised by desperate parents. For children who volunteered to join armed groups such as Mayi Mayi Yakutumba, ransom negotiations were tougher and the bounty price paid by families was often higher than it would have been had the children been abducted by the armed group.¹⁰¹

By contrast, of the 303 children documented as recruited and used by FRPI, 22% were released by their commanders, partly as a result of its tentative engagement with MONUSCO CPS, ongoing negotiations with the Government, and the group's partial demobilization in late 2014. Some Rayia Mutomboki commanders were also open to awareness raising from NGOs and ultimately voluntarily released 19% of the 555 children documented as recruited by the group. Remarkably, this included one commander who sensitized other commanders after being convinced of the downsides of recruiting children. Likewise, 7% of the 634 children documented as formerly associated with Kamuina Nsapu were released by chiefs after outreach from MONUSCO to encourage the militia to demobilize.



Surrender & Demobilization

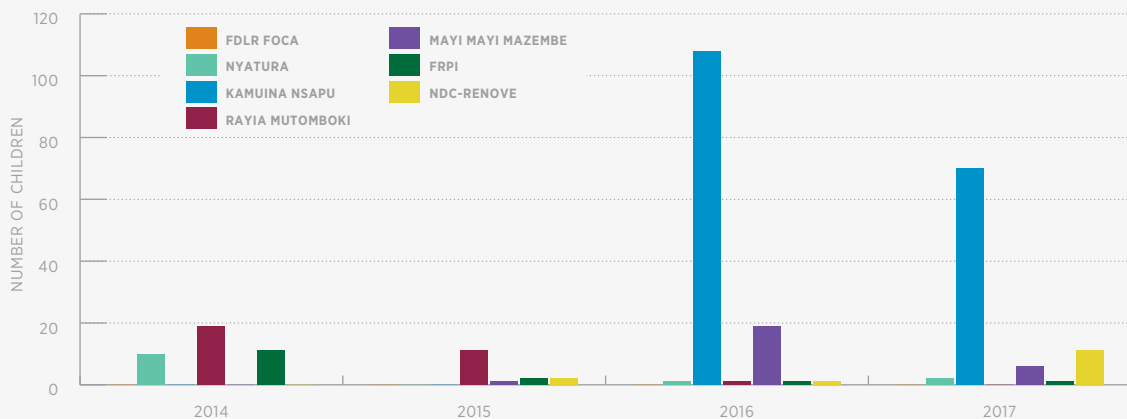
Eight percent of all children recruited by the top perpetrators either surrendered to the FARDC or were demobilized with the support of MONUSCO CPS and DDR, with boys and girls surrendering at roughly equal rates. Notably, children who surrender to the FARDC are subsequently handed over to MONUSCO for documentation and enrollment in child DDR programs, however some children who surrender are subsequently arrested or detained.¹⁰²

The majority of these children belonged to Kamuina Nsapu, which had the highest rate of child surrender/demobilization among the top seven perpetrators: 28% of the 634 children recruited by the militia surrendered or demobilized.

MONUSCO CPS, DDR and Civil Affairs in-person and radio messages encouraging the militia's demobilization proved themselves influential in swaying children to surrender, as for example the 11-year-old boy who surrendered with his chief after hearing MONUSCO DDR messages in April 2017.¹⁰³ Between August and October 2017, a snowball effect took hold, with

hundreds of children recruited by Kamuina Nsapu surrendering at a time – far more than could be individually documented. In just one MONUSCO mission launched on 8 September 2017, CPS separated 157 children, including 32 girls, ages 5 to 17; four days later, 134 more children, including 27 girls were demobilized.¹⁰⁴

SURRENDER / DEMOBILIZATION OF CHILDREN RECRUITED BY TOP PERPETRATORS



Capture and Arrest by State Agents

At least one in ten children recruited by the top perpetrators in the DRC were arrested and detained by authorities for their association with armed groups, whether they were captured on the battlefield, were apprehended just after their escape from an armed group, or once they reached home, often after being identified by other community members.

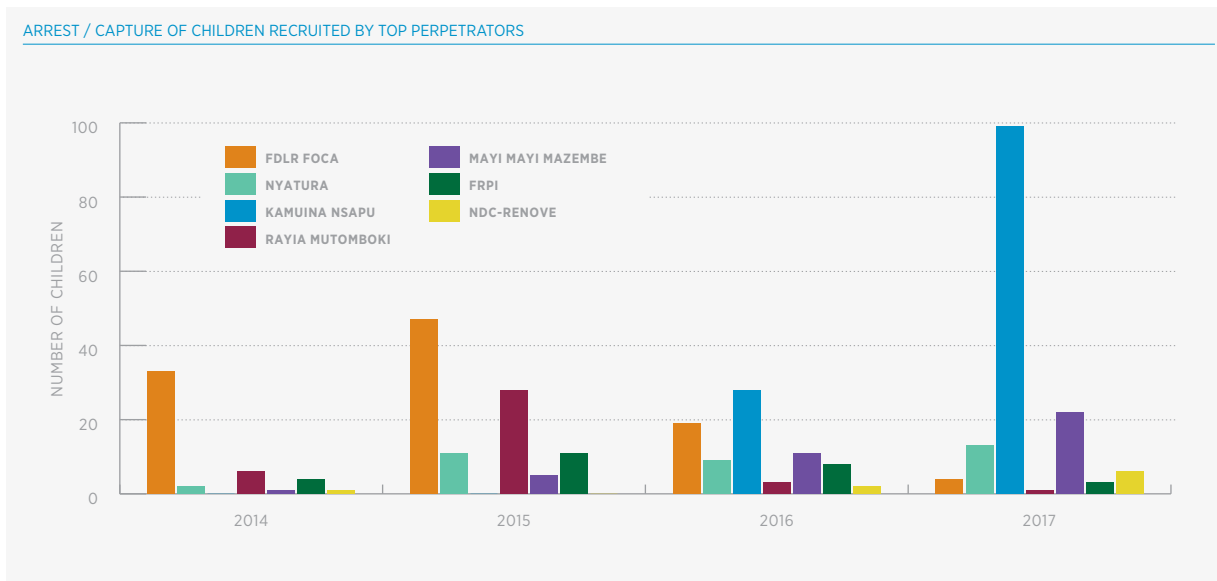
Notably, children associated with armed groups openly opposed to the Government, like these three armed groups, saw higher rates of detention. For instance, 20% of all children documented as recruited and used by Kamuina Nsapu and 9% of all children recruited and used by FRPI and FDLR FOCA were captured or arrested. Furthermore, boys were more than twice as likely as girls to be captured or arrested.

Treatment of Detained Children by State Agents

Nationally, State authorities first detained and then handed over more than 800 children (775 boys, 25 girls) to the UN. While most children were handed over within days, at least 95 children were detained for as long as 30 days and up to one year, in violation of the Action Plan signed in 2012 by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the United Nations to end and prevent child recruitment and use,

sexual violence and other grave violations against children, as well as directives issued in 2013 by the Minister of Defence and the Agence Nationale de Renseignements (ANR, National Intelligence Agency).

Conditions in detention facilities, whether Kananga Prison, the T2 Intelligence Detention Center in Goma or the Angenga military prison in Mongala Province, were universally poor as was treatment of children in detention. A 15-year-old boy from FDLR FOCA told CPS that he was beaten with bricks and hung from a wall in T2 military detention, and a 14-year-old boy arrested for association with Kamuina Nsapu had his thumb cut off with a machete and was left with at least 22 machete scars across his body, including his head and face.¹⁰⁵ Children were regularly held with adults or in isolation cells, and denied food, water and family visits.



Starting the Next Chapter: Healing & Returning Home

Thus began boys' and girls' next chapter, returning to civilian life and living in UNICEF partner transitional care while families were traced and the process of healing physically and emotionally began. Despite the thousands of children who leave armed groups each year and need these basic services to fully reintegrate into their communities, the demand for child

DDR services consistently outstripped the resources available. According to UNICEF, at the end of 2017, more than 8,000 children awaited such support, putting them at high risk of re-recruitment and raising a clarion call to the donor community.

Endnotes

- ¹⁶ Including former Oriental Province, which was eliminated in the 2015 revision of provincial boundaries.
- ¹⁷ Including former Katanga Province, which was eliminated in the 2015 revision of provincial boundaries.
- ¹⁸ Restrictions to humanitarian access in Tanganyika limited the number of cases verified by the UN, however, allegations suggest that the trend is increasing.
- ¹⁹ Including Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Lomami and Sankuru Provinces.
- ²⁰ Note that while the UN had no presence in the Kasai prior to 2016, no allegations of child recruitment were received from partners in the region in 2014 or 2015.
- ²¹ Note that figures in this report may differ from the Secretary-General's Report on Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2014-2017 (forthcoming) due to database revisions and the inclusion of cases documented in January and February 2018.
- ²² Note that this list of push factors is not exhaustive and refers to reasons shared by children separated from the top seven perpetrators of child recruitment. However, children in other groups such as the ADF may cite difference factors, such as religious beliefs.
- ²³ Figures include children recruited under Guidon's command while affiliated with NDC-Cheka and who remained with his faction after the split.
- ²⁴ 234489, see also 240780
- ²⁵ 197776
- ²⁶ 133669, 145974 see also 180790
- ²⁷ 211401
- ²⁸ UNDP, Human Development Report Country Profile: Congo (Democratic Republic of), 2016. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/COD> and http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/COD.pdf. OCHA, Overview: Democratic Republic of the Congo, November 2017. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA-DRC-Overview-Nov2017.pdf>
- ²⁹ 148485
- ³⁰ 218344
- ³¹ 256012
- ³² 163435
- ³³ 237516
- ³⁴ 262013, see also 148144
- ³⁵ 137843
- ³⁶ 261208
- ³⁷ 204316
- ³⁸ 234862
- ³⁹ 228517
- ⁴⁰ 219972
- ⁴¹ 219960
- ⁴² 169198
- ⁴³ 255786
- ⁴⁴ 251391
- ⁴⁵ 236670
- ⁴⁶ 260501
- ⁴⁷ 158604
- ⁴⁸ 192187. Boy's father encouraged him to surrender to MONUSCO prior to Rayia Mutomboki attacks.
- ⁴⁹ 154279
- ⁵⁰ 154279
- ⁵¹ 220743
- ⁵² UN Security Council, Resolution 2225, UN Doc. S/RES/2225, 18 June 2015.
- ⁵³ 260753
- ⁵⁴ 163449
- ⁵⁵ 120194
- ⁵⁶ 159059
- ⁵⁷ 256866
- ⁵⁸ 237604, 260636, 180791
- ⁵⁹ 238467
- ⁶⁰ 121169
- ⁶¹ These are likely to be underestimates given that data on re-recruitment was not systematically collected until 2017 and these figures are based on manual review of narrative case summaries, which rely on self-disclosures of prior recruitment.
- ⁶² 187687
- ⁶³ 260658, 256599, 120743, 260786
- ⁶⁴ 163648, see also 167489, 219002, 256289
- ⁶⁵ Following Somalia, South Sudan and Nigeria. See United Nations, Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, UN Doc. S/2018/465.
- ⁶⁶ United Nations General Assembly, Rome Statute, 17 July 1998, Article 8(2)(xxvi).
- ⁶⁷ 189372
- ⁶⁸ For a detailed look at recruitment of girls, see MONUSCO, Invisible Survivors: Girls in Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2009 to 2015, 25 November 2015. Available at: https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/151202_girls_in_armed_groups_2009-2015_english_final.pdf
- ⁶⁹ 246105,
- ⁷⁰ 237504
- ⁷¹ 254762
- ⁷² 205182
- ⁷³ 261215
- ⁷⁴ 232290, 232657, 232383, 234484. 234502, 236264, see also 232657.
- ⁷⁵ 254761, see also 256466
- ⁷⁶ 220418
- ⁷⁷ 145890
- ⁷⁸ 260657
- ⁷⁹ 181082
- ⁸⁰ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, UN Doc. S/2018/250, 23 March 2018. This may either be due to an actual increase in conflict-related sexual violence or in increased reporting of such cases.
- ⁸¹ 196968, 122369, 220289, 220342, 258698, 256800, 256317
- ⁸² 240888
- ⁸³ 180789, 180797, 180803, 180804, 180875, 180878, 75090, 759091, 75092, 75093
- ⁸⁴ 235146, 243766, 256097
- ⁸⁵ 239125, 259883
- ⁸⁶ 244220, see also 244267 children witnessed FARDC killing up to 14 children in Masuika, where there are mass graves.
- ⁸⁷ 133370
- ⁸⁸ 1256512
- ⁸⁹ 260561, see also 260717, 260074, 251260, 251378
- ⁹⁰ 255789, 260899, 261015
- ⁹¹ 220291
- ⁹² 180776
- ⁹³ 238223, 133385, 256872
- ⁹⁴ 154284
- ⁹⁵ 268604
- ⁹⁶ 251513
- ⁹⁷ 133990
- ⁹⁸ Closure of MONUSCO bases due to budgetary constraints and the shift to protection through protection is expected to affect children's possibilities for safely escaping from armed groups.
- ⁹⁹ 133382
- ¹⁰⁰ 270730
- ¹⁰¹ 255203
- ¹⁰² Note that the 8% figure of children who surrendered or were demobilized does not include children who were subsequently arrested or detained. All children who were arrested or detained by State agents – whether they arrived in detention after surrendering or by other means – are included in the following sub-section Capture & Arrest by State Agents.
- ¹⁰³ 260381, see also 260590, 239765, 240794, 256017, 256018, 260889
- ¹⁰⁴ 246652
- ¹⁰⁵ 195470, 244253

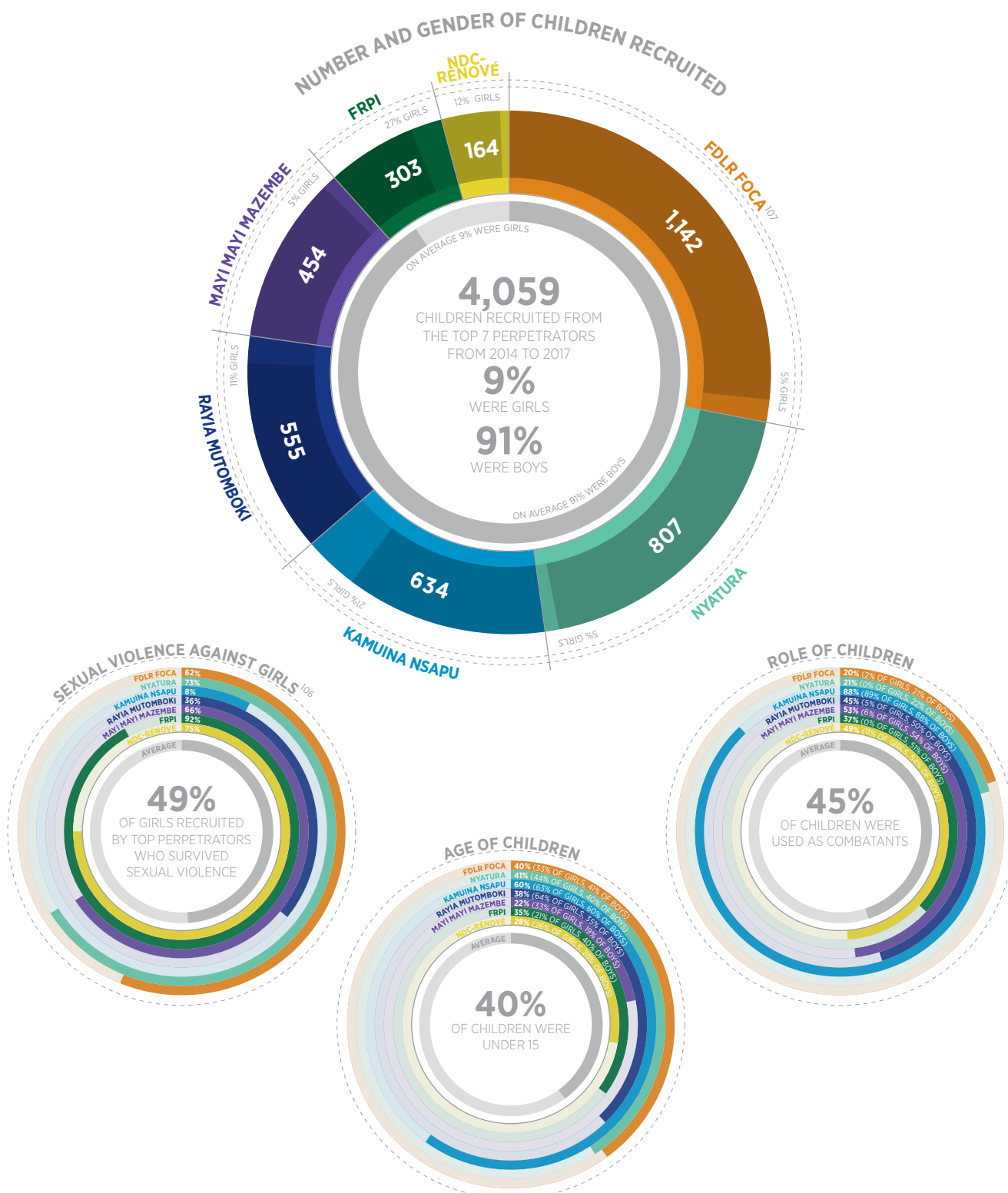
PART II:

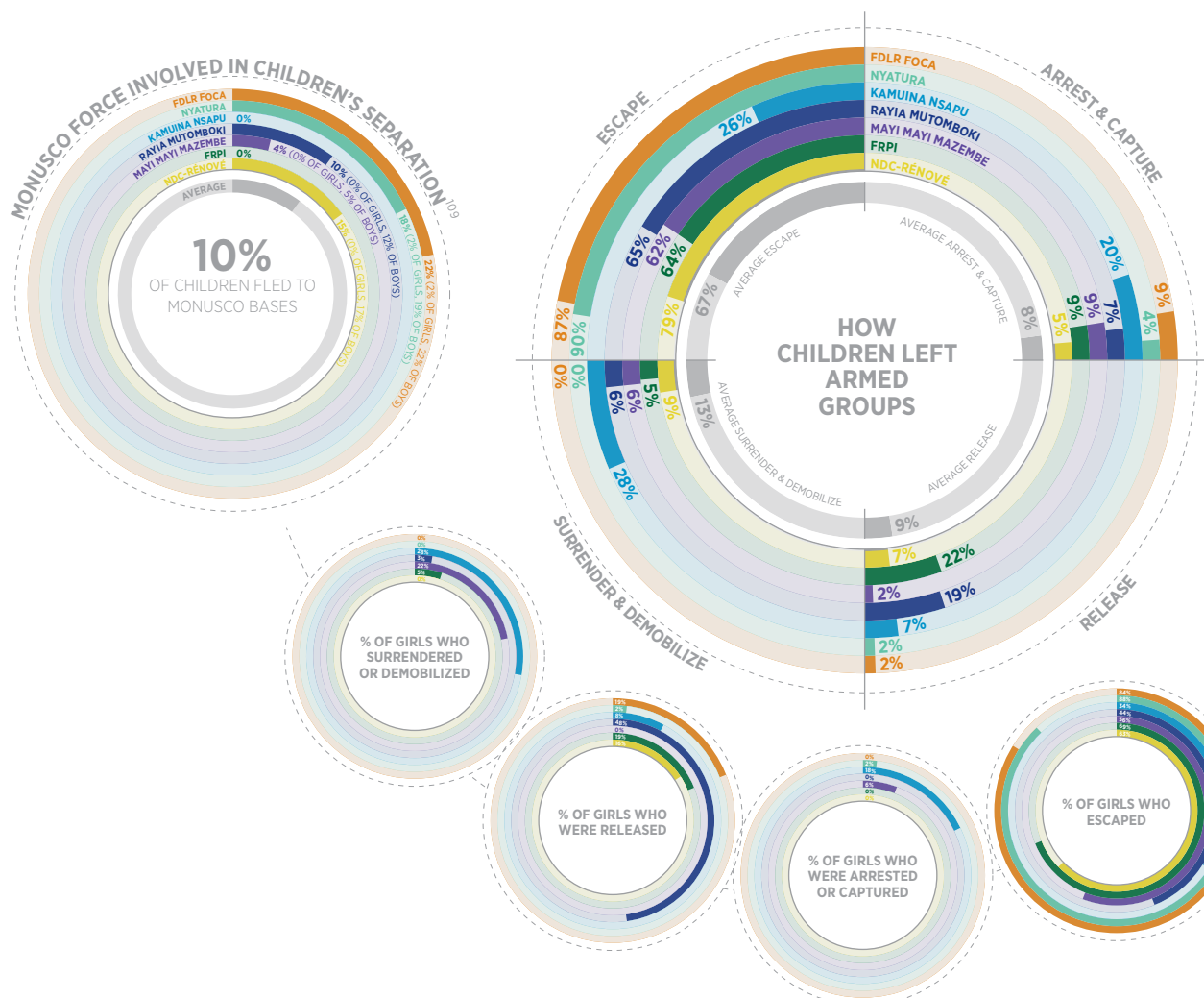
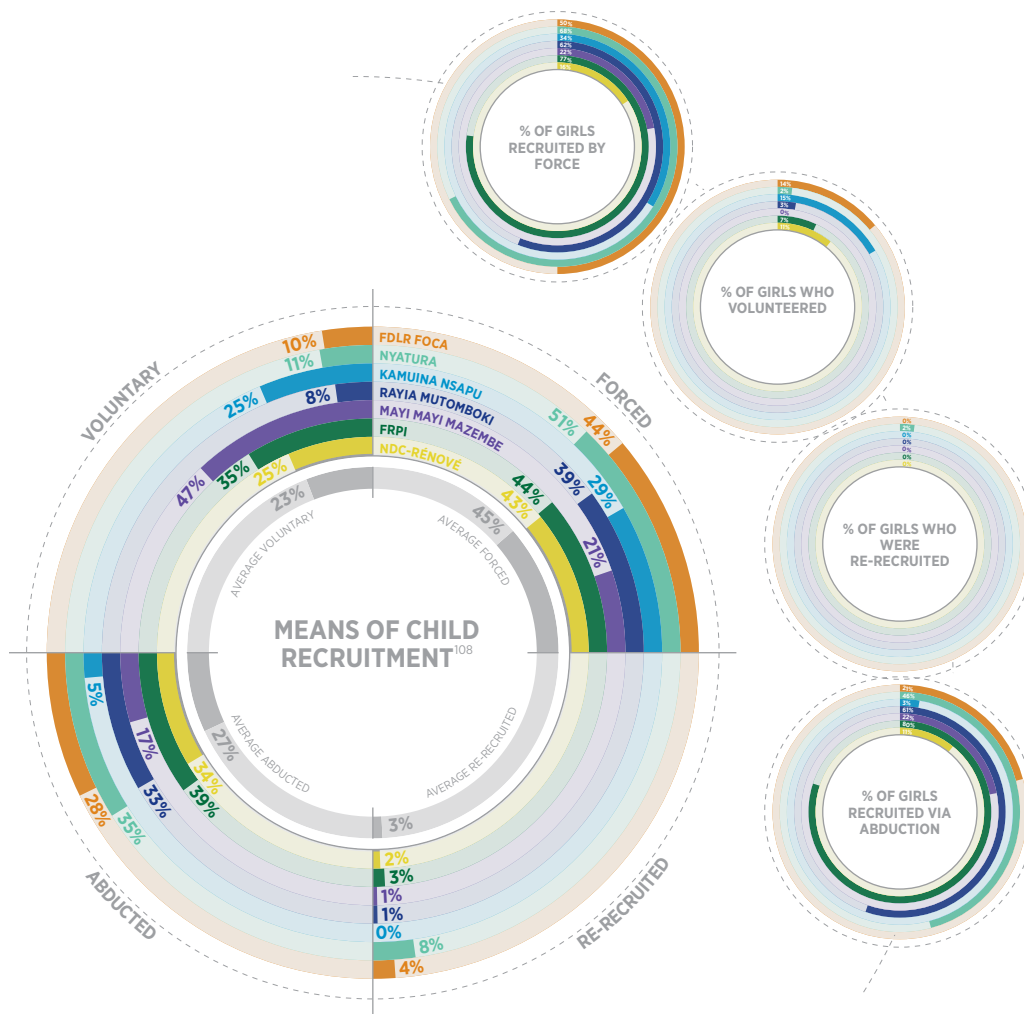
IN DEPTH PROFILES OF THE TOP PERPETRATORS OF CHILD RECRUITMENT (2014-2017)



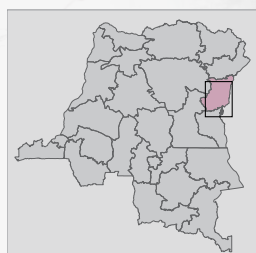


Part I's analysis of the differences and commonalities between the top seven perpetrators comes from the Part II's seven in-depth profiles of the top perpetrators of child recruitment in the DRC from 2014 to 2017. Mirroring Part I's Before, During and After Child Recruitment structure, each profile examines children's lives inside armed groups and each group's modes of recruitment.





FORCES DÉMOCRATIQUES DE LIBÉRATION DU RWANDA - FORCES COMBATTANTES ABACUNGUZI (FDLR FOCA)



TERRITORY

North Kivu (Rutshuru, Lubero),
South Kivu (2014 only)

CHILDREN RECRUITED

Total: 1,142¹¹¹
Trend: Decrease (Peak 2015)
Girls: 5% / Boys: 95%
Abducted: 28%
Sexual Violence against Girls: 63%
Under 15: 40%
Combatants: 20%
Re-Recruited: 4%

MOTIVE

Regime change in Rwanda; Control of natural resources

ETHNICITY

Hutu

PRIMARY MEANS OF RECRUITMENT

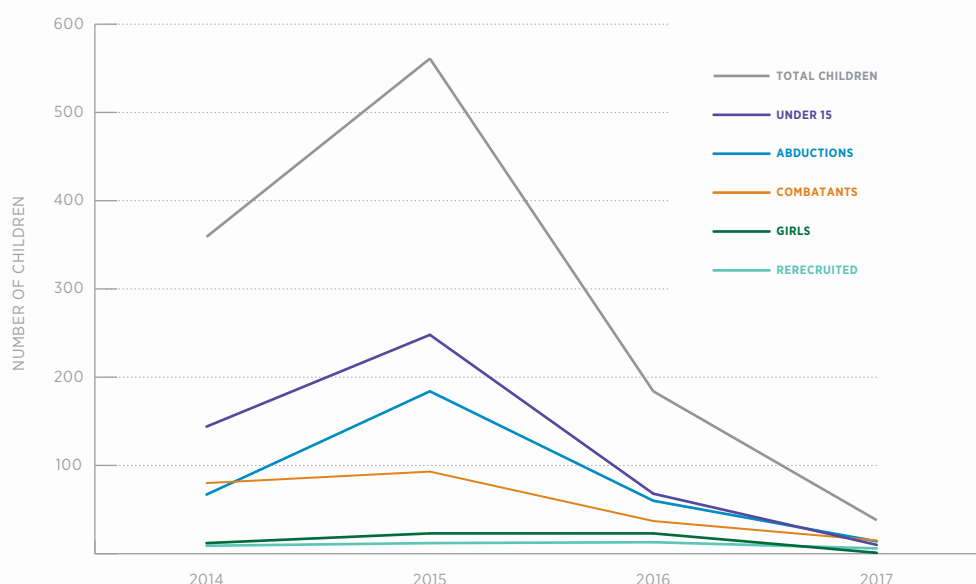
Forced (44%) via abduction (28%); Voluntary (10%)

PRIMARY PUSH FACTORS AMONG VOLUNTEERS

Family/Peer Pressure (47%); Economic (40%); Self-Protection (18%); Revenge/Ethnic Defense (7%)

PRIMARY MEANS OF SEPARATION

Escape following radio awareness-raising and before FARDC operations (87%, with 22% escaping to MONUSCO); Arrested/Captured (9%)

TRENDS IN CHILD RECRUITMENT BY FDLR FOCA

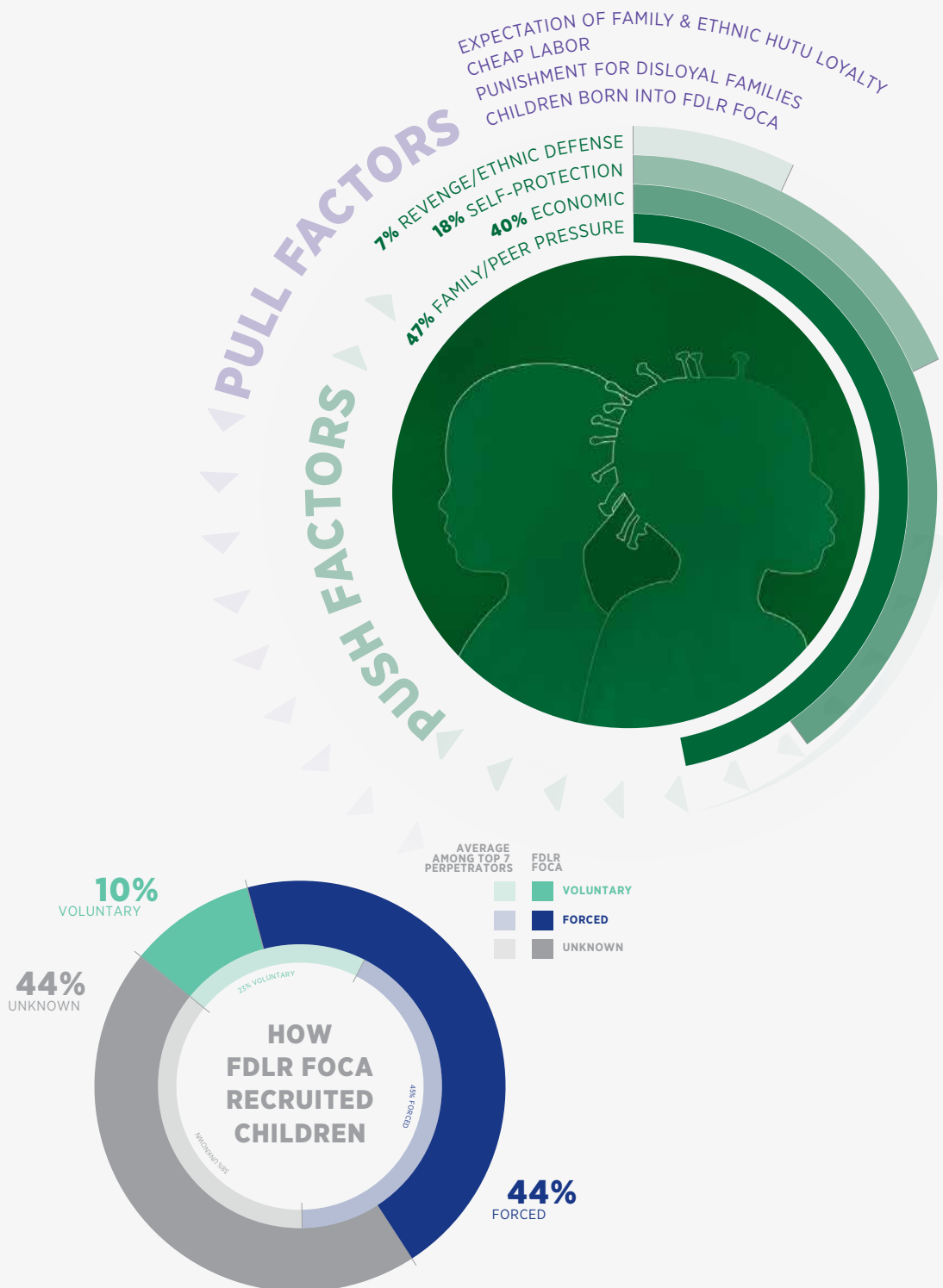
The Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda Forces Combattantes Abacunguzi (FDLR FOCA) is a primarily Hutu-based armed group that traces its origins to the Rwandan genocide.

Politically motivated by regime change in Rwanda and relatively organized compared to rival armed groups, the FDLR FOCA operates in family structures and actively funds its activities via charcoal smuggling, illegal taxation and natural resource extraction in Virunga National Park. The FDLR FOCA was targeted by the FARDC's SUKOLA II operations, and engaged in frequently clashes with Hunde, Tembo, Nande and Nyanga armed groups, e.g. Mayi Mayi Mazembe UPDI and NDC-Rénové, most often in Rutshuru Territory as well as in other parts of North Kivu. Notably, some Nyatura factions, e.g. those

led by John Love and Dominique Ndaruhutse, receive significant support from the FDLR FOCA and continue to collaborate closely with the group, particularly by targeting state security forces in Rutshuru Territory. In May 2016, internal divisions resulted in a split within the FDLR FOCA and the formation of the breakaway faction, the Conseil National pour le Renouveau et la Démocratie – Ubwiyunge (CNRD - Ubwiyunge).¹¹⁰

I. BEFORE:

HOW & WHY CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED BY FDLR FOCA



Push Factors: Why Children Volunteered for FDLR FOCA

Family & Peer Pressure

Family and peer pressure was remarkably high among children volunteering to join FDLR FOCA: 47% of all child volunteers (5% of all children recruited by FDLR FOCA) cited family or peer influence as the predominant push factor. This appeared to be an intentional strategy, with children already associated with FDLR FOCA convincing other children to join the cause.¹¹² The children most susceptible to their friends' and families' persuasion were those for whom poverty, unemployment and inability to pay school fees made life in FDLR FOCA appear to be a more viable option: One 14-year-old boy was deceived by a friend's promises that he would make more money in FDLR FOCA.¹¹³

Survival Strategy: Economic Support

The temptation of a 50USD monthly salary and regular meals was a strong one for children in the DRC, particularly in Rutshuru Territory in North Kivu.¹¹⁴ With 40% of child volunteers citing economic concerns as their reason for joining, FDLR FOCA recruiters played on children's most basic human needs: food, shelter, and clothes. Recruiters, for example, bought one boy juice and cookies to convince him to join,¹¹⁵ and an 11-year-old boy joined after friends bragged that they had so much good food that they gained weight.¹¹⁶ Inability to pay school fees after a parent's death was a preexisting factor in many children's lives that made them more vulnerable to persuasion and contributed to their decision to join FDLR FOCA, with one boy reporting that a commander in his village recruited him while continuing to pay his school fees.¹¹⁷

Survival Strategy: Physical Protection

Because FDLR FOCA operates in family structures, its promise of protection had a different character than other armed groups, prompting 18% of child volunteers to join up. When the threat to a child was at home, the hope of mothering by women associated with FDLR FOCA drove some children to join. For instance, during the 2015 Christmas holidays, a FDLR FOCA commander's wife persuaded one 12-year-old boy to join the group to escape his mother's abuse.¹¹⁸ Parental death also made belonging to a family inside the FDLR FOCA safer than remaining outside. A 10-year-old orphan living in Rutshuru with her grandmother was one such case: The wife of a FDLR FOCA element,¹¹⁹ a friend of the girl's late mother, persuaded her to join, enticing her with promises of care and clothing.¹²⁰

Children's impulse for survival also kicked in when faced with a threat from FDLR FOCA itself and they were given a false choice between two bad options. One 15-year-old boy who was regularly forced to transport FDLR FOCA's loot calculated that joining the group would be safer than the constant threat of portering for it.¹²¹ Sometimes the choice was simply about staying alive, e.g. the 11-year-old boy who was caught in a clash between FDLR FOCA and FARDC, and happened to flee in FDLR FOCA's direction.¹²²

Revenge & Defense of Child's Family & Hutu Community

For teenage boys who voluntarily joined FDLR FOCA, avenging the daily violence that plagued their communities was a significant motivator for 7% of child volunteers. The enemy could be general, e.g. the boy who joined FDLR FOCA to protect his family from "robbers" who stole his family's goats and beat his parents, or the boy who wanted to protect his family from Mayi Mayi Mazembe attacks.¹²³ For others, vengeance was more personal, e.g. for the boy who joined after his mother was killed by Nyatura in 2014.¹²⁴ The word "revenge" was predominantly used by boy volunteers, not girls. Likewise, it was predominantly boys who were pushed by their families to join FDLR FOCA, e.g. the boy whose family members asked him to enlist to "take revenge against the Nande tribe."¹²⁵

Pull Factors: Why FDLR FOCA Recruited Children

Expectation of Family & Ethnic Hutu Loyalty

More so than other armed groups operating in Eastern DRC, FDLR FOCA lives and operates in family structures, with whole families living together in camps or nearby villages. This fosters an expectation that children related to FDLR FOCA members will be loyal to their cause. Children were routinely recruited by immediate family members associated with the group, e.g. a 10-year-old boy recruited by his uncle in Rutshuru.¹²⁶ Indeed, children and parents – usually in father-son pairs – were occasionally recruited together.¹²⁷

The expectation of tribal loyalty – an extension of family loyalty – was also a powerful pull factor, with FDLR FOCA recruiters informing parents that their children were “working for the Hutu ‘Nation.’”¹²⁸ One 17-year-old boy was abducted by FDLR FOCA on suspicion of belonging to a Nande Mayi Mayi armed group, but, when his abductors checked his ID card and discovered that he was Hutu, they recruited him.¹²⁹

Cheap Labor

Children were regarded as a cheap, plentiful source of labor by many armed groups but particularly by FDLR FOCA, which had a distinctive pattern of forcing children to carry booty pillaged from their own homes or fields. With looting as one of its major means of subsistence, FDLR FOCA frequently used children to carry bananas, juice, mattresses, goats, maize, and other plundered goods.¹³⁰

Punishment for Disloyal Families

Children’s testimonies suggested that FDLR FOCA regarded child recruitment as a way to manipulate or punish families that did not fall in line with the group’s demands. This was the case for a 16-year-old boy recruited alongside his father because his father broke a contract the group.¹³¹ In rare cases, children were also regarded as commodities, e.g. the 15-year-old boy “given” by his father to a FDLR FOCA sergeant to pay off a debt.¹³²

Children Born into FDLR FOCA

Given its long history and reliance on family structures, it is estimated that many children were born into FDLR FOCA, particularly those born to Rwandan parents and now coming of age. However, these same factors, as well as the fact that the group reportedly fiercely defends its own children but not those who are newly recruited or abducted, make it less likely for children born into the group to be separated and documented by the UN. The vast majority of documented children began their lives outside of FDLR FOCA. In rare cases, children born into FDLR FOCA did leave and their stories were starkly different: One 16-year-old boy was born in Lubero Territory to Rwandan refugee parents who fled to Masisi Territory, North Kivu in 1994. When his father died during clashes with FARDC in Masisi in 2015, the boy fled, despite having spent his entire life in the bush with his father and FDLR FOCA combatants, with not a day spent in school.¹³³

Trigger Violation: Abduction

Alongside recruitment by immediate family members, one of the hallmarks of FDLR FOCA child recruitment was its polar opposite: Abduction. Almost one third of all children recruited by FDLR FOCA (28%) were abducted. The majority of these children (167) were abducted in 2015, when both child recruitment and abductions by the group more than doubled. This suggests that, when threatened by the launch of Sukola II, FDLR FOCA turned to children to fill its ranks.

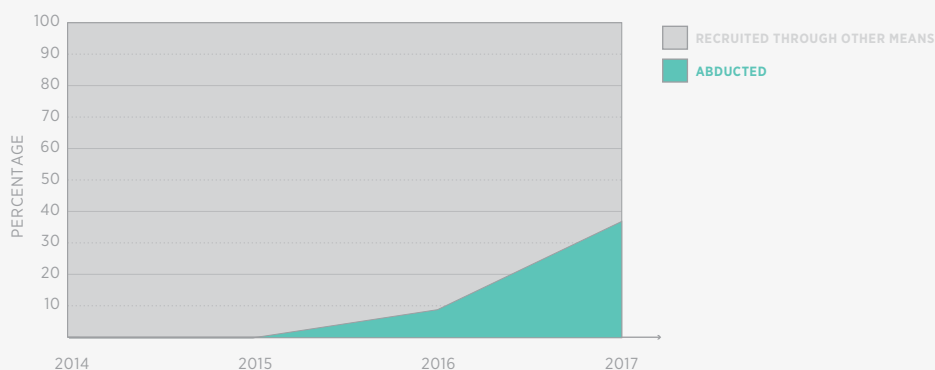
FDLR FOCA abductions almost exclusively occurred during looting expeditions. The pattern was painfully predictable: FDLR FOCA pillaged a village or fields, those not fast enough to flee – both children and adults – were abducted, forced to carry loot to FDLR FOCA camps, and threatened with death if they attempted escape.¹³⁴ This most frequently occurred when children were in isolated areas, e.g. farming plots or walking to school, or in groups, e.g. while playing football, making them easy targets.

Living in proximity to FDLR FOCA camps or commanders' home villages elevated children's risk of abduction. In December 2015, a 12-year-old boy had the misfortune of crossing paths with a FDLR FOCA commander on his way home from his family's vegetable field, just adjacent to the commander's field; after forcing the boy to carry his banana crop back to camp, the commander threatened to shoot the boy if he tried to return

home.¹³⁵ Sometimes recruiters allowed abducted children to leave the FDLR FOCA camp but this brought its own risks. One boy, forced to carry rice to a camp far from his village, could not find his way home and so, rather than become lost alone in the bush, stayed with FDLR FOCA.¹³⁶

Abductions also coincided with other violations, such as sexual violence or maiming, e.g. scars left by the ropes used to tie abductees' hands.¹³⁷ In one case, FDLR FOCA targeted three siblings while they farmed their family's plot; the elements raped the two sisters and recruited their 13-year-old brother.¹³⁸

CHILD RECRUITMENT AND ABDUCTION BY FDLR FOCA



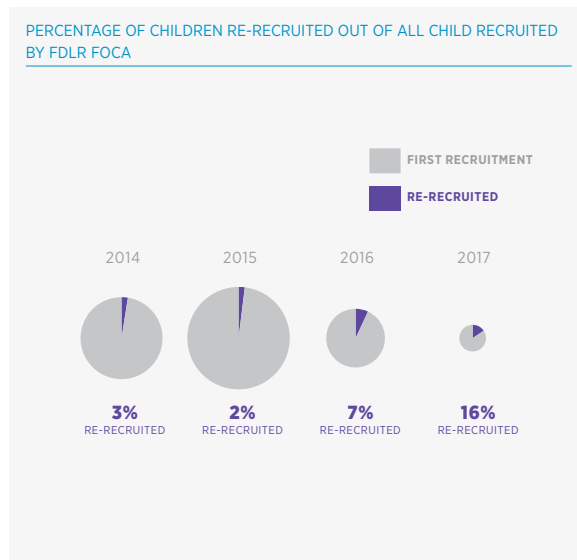
Re-Recruitment

In at least 4% of all FDLR FOCA child recruitment cases, a child was recruited for the second, third or fourth time.¹³⁹ Boys were the exclusive targets of the group's re-recruitment, with no girls reporting multiple cycles of recruitment. Notably, re-recruitment by FDLR FOCA was on the rise, with 3% of children reporting re-recruitment in 2014 compared to 16% in 2017.

For one boy, re-recruitment came just one day after he reunited with his family.¹⁴⁰ For others, the very same recruiter who first recruited them found them again, days, weeks, months or years after going through the child DDR process.¹⁴¹ In some cases, children revolved through multiple Hutu-majority groups, such as Nyatura.¹⁴² While escaping was enough of a justification to be re-recruited, possession of FDLR FOCA "property" was also used as a pretext for re-recruitment. This was the case for a 16-year-old boy re-recruited for the third time ostensibly because he fled with an AK-47,¹⁴³ and another for possession of a uniform.¹⁴⁴ FDLR FOCA's grip on certain villages and IDP camps made children who had recently escaped easy to identify. One 16-year-old boy was spotted by a FDLR element four days after reunifying with his family; informed that his former escort was hiding nearby, the boy's former commander immediately re-recruited him with threats of whipping.¹⁴⁵

Children escaping FDLR FOCA heard stories of re-recruitment and, out of fear, did not return home at all or returned briefly only to flee again.¹⁴⁶ One 17-year-old boy escaped FDLR FOCA, went through the child DDR process, and reunited with his family in Rutshuru Territory in 2014, but fled when he heard rumors of a plan to re-recruit him. His intuition was right: The same day that the boy fled, four FDLR FOCA elements came to his village looking for him, telling his father to hand the boy over.¹⁴⁷

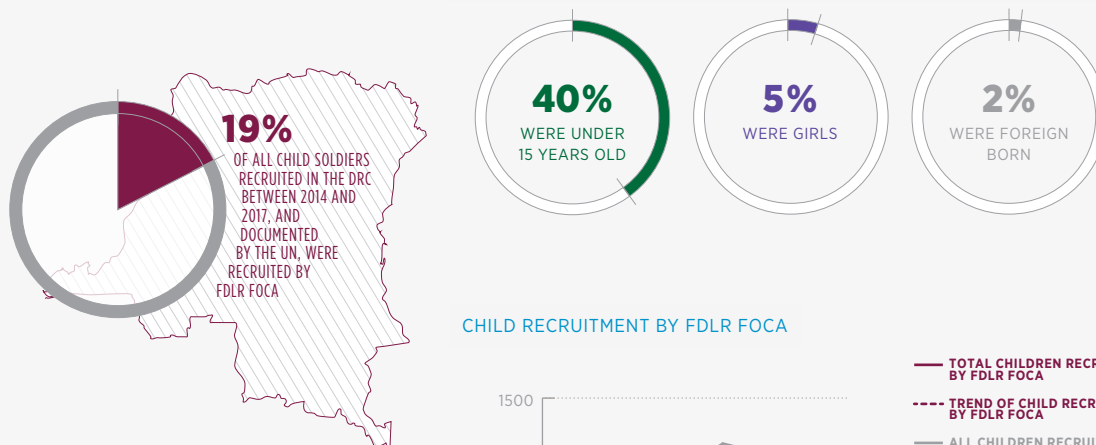
Perhaps because the national DDR process has targeted FDLR FOCA since December 2014, the group appeared to be acutely aware of the protection provided by demobilization documents known as "attestations de sortie" and either targeted children who did not have their documents¹⁴⁸ or destroyed children's documents while re-recruiting them.¹⁴⁹



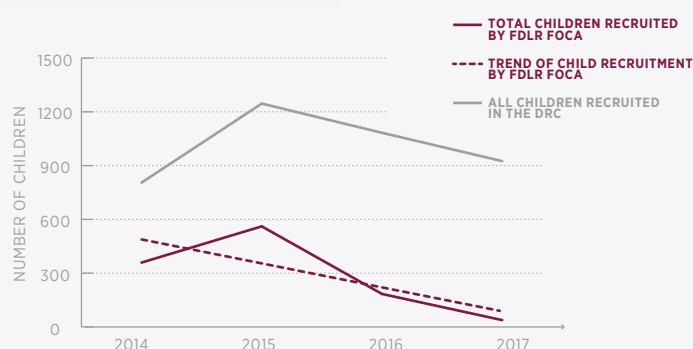
II. DURING:

LIFE INSIDE FDLR FOCA

THE PROFILE OF A CHILD RECRUITED BY FDLR FOCA FROM 2014-2017



CHILD RECRUITMENT BY FDLR FOCA



The Girls & Boys Recruited by FDLR FOCA

One in five children (19%) recruited in the DRC since 2014 were recruited by FDLR FOCA. On the whole, FDLR FOCA was the top recruiter of children, recruiting 30% more children than the second top perpetrator, Nyatura.

However, the trend was a downward one, with a peak in 2015 that corresponded to the launch of the FARDC's SUKOLA II Operation. That year, FDLR FOCA was forced to leave its long-held strategic positions, both due to the FARDC operations in December 2015 and to pressure from local armed groups, primarily NDC-Rénové and Mayi Mayi Mazembe/UPDI. These operations caused significant disarray within the FDLR FOCA, and the group may have sought to bolster their ranks with more child recruitment, while also trying to offset defections and surrenders.

Age

Of the 1,084 boys and 58 girls documented as recruited by FDLR FOCA, 40% were younger than 15 years old, with the youngest 9 years old.¹⁵⁰ This is one of the highest rates of under 15s among armed groups in the East, second only to Nyatura. However, in recent years, fewer and fewer young children were recruited by FDLR FOCA, with the percentage of all of its child recruits who were under 15 years old dropping from 44% in 2015 to 26% in 2017.

Gender

By comparison, an average of 5% of these children were girls, which is relatively low among other armed groups operating in Eastern DRC. There was, however, a notable spike in girls among child recruits in 2016 to 12%, the same year that overall child recruitment numbers dropped by more than half. This points to the likelihood that the 2015 spike in FDLR FOCA's overall child recruitment reflected a need for boys to fight, rather than girls in support roles. That said, given the unknown but likely significant numbers of children born into FDLR FOCA who do not leave the group, approximately half of which can safely be presumed to be girls, it is believed that the actual numbers of girls in FDLR FOCA is far higher than those documented here.

Nationality

Just 2% of children recruited by FDLR FOCA were cross-border recruitment cases from Rwanda. While the group's roots may have begun in Rwanda, most of the children FDLR FOCA recruited were Congolese, with a handful of children born to Rwandan parents in Congo.¹⁵¹

Life for Children Inside FDLR FOCA

Initiation Rites & Daily Life

Unlike many of its rival armed groups, FDLR FOCA had few “initiation rites” as such. While one child reported drinking liquor and smoking marijuana, alcohol and drug use in the FDLR FOCA was also not as predominant as in other armed groups.¹⁵²

Role: Combatant

FDLR FOCA, like Nyatura, used a relatively small percentage of its children to fight: 20% of all children recruited by FDLR FOCA reported serving in combat. However, this figure belies an increase in child combatant status from 17% in 2015 to 39% in 2017, suggesting that although fewer children were recruited overall in recent years, a steady supply of fighters was a priority. Notably, FDLR FOCA exclusively used boys as combatants, unlike its opponent NDC-Rénové: Just one girl reported fighting for FDLR FOCA.

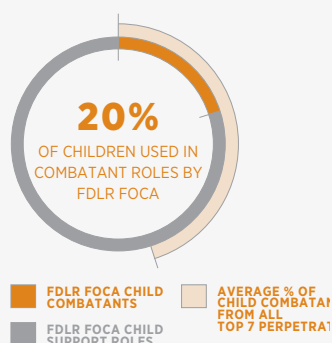
All children – even those who ultimately worked as domestics – received military training lasting from two days to one-week, including on how to operate AK 47s, RPGs and SMGs. This appeared to be an “insurance policy,” in case those in support roles might be called on to fight as a last resort. However, those children destined for the frontlines received more extensive training of up to one month. Those who did see combat fought against FARDC, Nyatura, M23, APCLS, NDC-Cheka and, after the group’s internal split, CNRD. Child combatants were not exclusively used to fight, but instead rotated between multiple functions, as did one boy who served as an escort, guard and combatant who fought against FARDC over Christmas and New Years in 2015.¹⁵³ FDLR FOCA escorts and bodyguards also fell into a grey zone between combatant and support roles. One boy, for example, was used as an escort and was forced to use a Kalashnikov if he felt that his commander’s life was in danger.¹⁵⁴

Role: Support

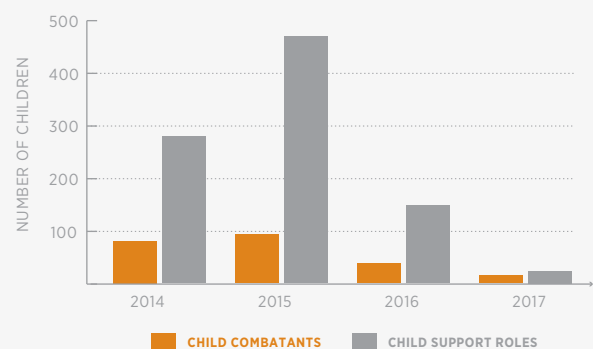
Ninety-nine percent of girls recruited by FDLR FOCA were used in support roles, as cooks, domestics and babysitters for commanders’ wives.¹⁵⁵ The babysitter role was, for the most part, unique to FDLR FOCA and resulted from the fact that the lives of fighters and families closely intermingled. For example, a 14-year-old girl was persuaded by her cousin to join FDLR FOCA as a babysitter when his wife was due to have a baby at his base in Walikale Territory.¹⁵⁶ The role was regarded as so necessary – or children as so expendable – that girls were abducted to carry babies from one base to the next.¹⁵⁷

While girls most typically filled support roles in FDLR FOCA, because the group only used 20% of its children as combatants and its family structure entailed the presence of very young children, boys also played non-traditional support roles, including as babysitters. Boys were also charged with more typical support roles: Secretaries, logisticians, looters, cooks, and domestic servants. Boys were frequently used as spies, with one 11-year-old boy tasked to identify wealthy villagers (e.g. those with pigs, goats, etc.) before looting raids.¹⁵⁸ Critically, boys were also active in FDLR FOCA’s illicit activities, including as “tax” collectors to extort villagers for monthly “lala salama” (“sleep well”) taxes on market days or at roadblocks, and producers of charcoal in Virunga National Park.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, children played a central role in the natural resource extraction that pumped money into the FDLR FOCA’s coffers.

CHILDREN'S ROLES IN FDLR FOCA FROM 2014-2017



CHILDREN'S ROLES IN FDLR FOCA OVER TIME



Violations Triggered by Recruitment: The Risks Children Faced in FDLR FOCA

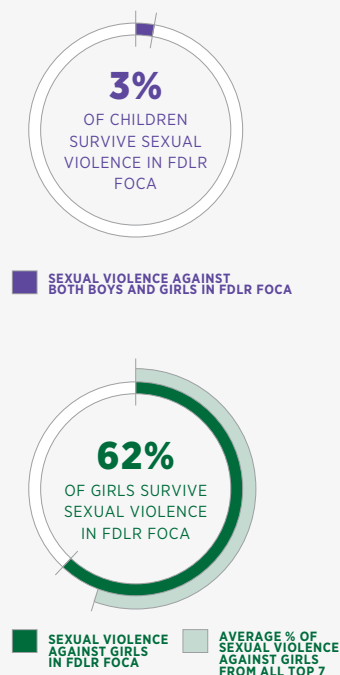
Sexual Violence

At a glance, sexual violence reported by all children – boys and girls – recruited by FDLR FOCA was relatively low at 3%. However, looking just at the experience of girls tells a different story: Out of 57 girls separated from FDLR FOCA, 62% reported being used as concubines or forced to marry their commanders, with one girl “set up” by other FDLR FOCA wives in a violent mirroring of the group’s family structures.¹⁶⁰

Killing & Maiming

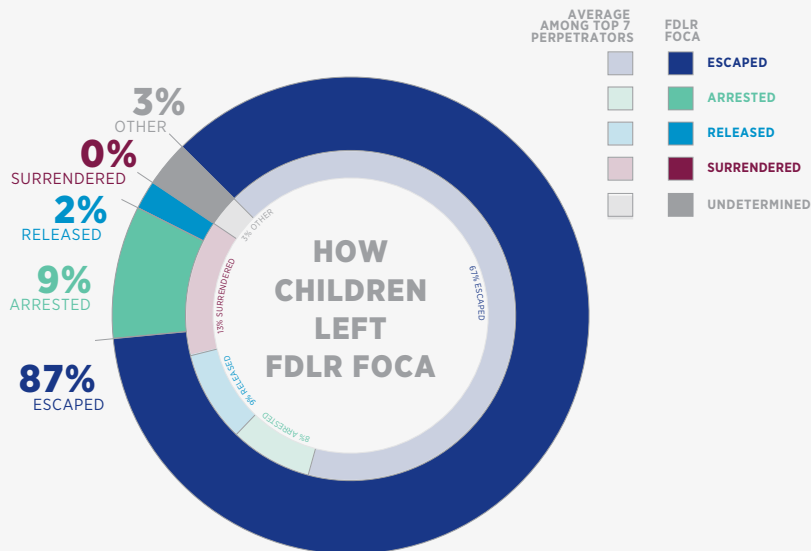
Boys associated with FDLR FOCA reported witnessing the deaths of other children, including one boy who claimed that, in his first battle against NDC Cheka at Rushihe, Masisi Territory, up to 50 children died.¹⁶¹ Once separated, children shared their emotional distress after witnessing the deaths of so many people, children and adults alike.¹⁶² Like all combatants, children were at risk of severe injuries, as was the case for a 16-year-old boy who sustained bullet wounds to his right arm during clashes with the FARDC; while the FARDC evacuated him to a hospital, his arm had to be amputated.¹⁶³

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN RECRUITED BY
FDLR FOCA FROM 2014-2017

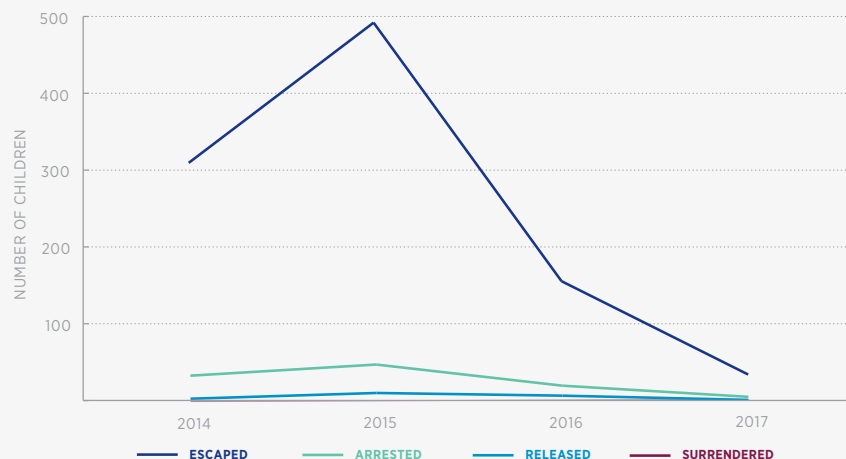


III. AFTER:

HOW CHILDREN WERE SEPARATED FROM FDLR FOCA



HOW CHILDREN LEFT FDLR FOCA OVER TIME



Escape

Like most armed groups, the most common way children left FDLR FOCA was by escape: 87% of all children associated with the group who managed to leave did so by escaping. Notably, this included both children who were abducted and those who “volunteered” to join the group, implying that the child’s original reasons for volunteering did not prove worth the struggle of life within FDLR FOCA.

FDLR FOCA was well aware of children’s impulse to escape and attempted to thwart defections through threats: One 14-year-old boy considered escaping but changed his mind when told that, if he returned to his village, his community would kill him.¹⁶⁴ A commander told another that his parents would be killed if he escaped.¹⁶⁵ These threats, however, did not altogether prevent children from escaping, an indication of the levels of hardship and desperation children endured inside FDLR FOCA. For one

boy, the motivation to escape the group was strong enough to compel him to walk 120km from Bambo to Mubambiro DDR camp.¹⁶⁶

Why

The most common reasons children gave for escaping was mistreatment by their commanders, extremely difficult living conditions in FDLR FOCA camps, and forced labor.¹⁶⁷ For those who were lured with false promises of financial riches, disillusionment set in and prompted their escape. One boy lived near a FDLR FOCA base and joined for the money and free food. However, he decided to escape when he realized that “everything we took [while looting] was for the commander.”¹⁶⁸

Children fleeing FDLR FOCA reported that radio messages were highly influential in their decision to escape, particularly in Rutshuru Territory. This included both local radio and MONUSCO’s Radio Okapi.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, one 16-year-old boy credited a Radio Okapi message directed specifically at FDLR FOCA for his decision to approach a MONUSCO base at Bambo.¹⁷⁰ Children in FDLR FOCA are also open to NGO awareness-raising, though not to the extent of Rayia Mutomboki. For example, a 13-year-old boy, escaped in August 2016 after meeting a community sensitizer who told him that “his place is at home and at school, not in an armed group.”¹⁷¹

How

Like children associated with other armed groups, those escaping FDLR FOCA were strategic, usually making their move when far from their commanders or when commanders were distracted or inebriated. Escapes occurred most frequently at night, when commanders were on operations, when the child was sent to the market for cigarettes or beer, or to collect water or wood. Children quickly seized opportunities when they arose: Another child escaped during his commander’s girlfriend’s birthday party.¹⁷² Others took advantage of commanders’ willingness to give them permission to visit family members, perhaps a result of its own family-based structure. This was the case for a 16-year-old boy who asked permission to visit his dying father and never returned.¹⁷³

Clashes with FARDC – especially, children reported, during Sukola II in 2014 and 2015¹⁷⁴ – with other armed groups, or MONUSCO also gave children the motivation and opportunity to escape. Rumors of upcoming operations increased the likelihood that children would take the risk of escaping. For instance, when a 15-year-old boy heard about an upcoming FARDC operation targeting FDLR FOCA, he decided to escape despite the fact that he had been in the armed group for three years already.¹⁷⁵

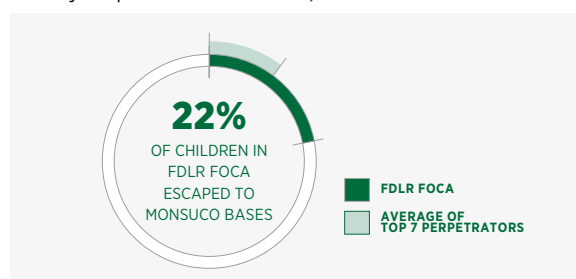
While some children escaped on their own, family members, other children and even strangers helped children escape FDLR FOCA. One boy joined voluntarily but quickly realized it was “a lie” after witnessing people beaten and killed. He escaped when a stranger killed his boy-commander with a machete and told the boy to escape.¹⁷⁶ In another case, a 13-year-old boy was sent to the market and happened upon his older sister, who helped the boy escape.¹⁷⁷

Children often made multiple attempts, despite the harsh punishments doled out when they were caught: One 11-year-old boy was caught and severely beaten with stick after his first attempt to escape, before succeeding on his second try.¹⁷⁸

To Whom

More than any other armed group, children from FDLR FOCA fled to MONUSCO bases: 22% of all children recruited by FDLR FOCA escaped by approaching a MONUSCO base. MONUSCO bases, particularly Kitchanga, were clearly well known among boys associated with FDLR FOCA. Children reported viewing the Mission’s bases as safe zones, with many boys approaching them on their own, or on the suggestion of trusted adults or peers.¹⁷⁹ However, this was almost exclusively the case among boys, with just one girl seeking safety from MONUSCO base. In a typical example, when an Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) park ranger spotted two FDLR FOCA-associated boys drawing water, he helped them escape to

the MONUSCO Company Operating Base (COB) in Kiwanja.¹⁸⁰ A 13-year-old boy’s father, himself a FDLR FOCA combatant, told the boy to approach the MONUSCO COB in Masisi Centre when the threat from Rayia Mutomboki became serious; his father was apparently aware that approaching MONUSCO could facilitate the boy’s repatriation to Rwanda, where his mother lived.¹⁸¹



Arrest by Congolese Authorities

Relative to their peers in the East, children associated with FDLR FOCA had high rates of arrest or capture as their means of separation. At least 9% of all children recruited by FDLR FOCA – over 100 children – found themselves in detention and all of these children were boys.¹⁸²

Arrest during or following combat with FARDC was a common scenario. One 14-year-old child was arrested and detained for one month after FARDC ambushed his unit in Masisi in October 2016.¹⁸³ Others escaped the group independently, only to be intercepted by FARDC, ANR, or PNC on their way home.

Second to children from Kamuina Nsapu, children from FDLR FOCA reported the next highest levels of ill treatment during

arrest and detention – beating, solitary confinement, and deprivation of food, water, visitors and sanitation facilities. Boys formerly associated with FDLR FOCA also reported longer than average periods of detention lasting multiple months, often in several different detention centers. For instance, one 13-year-old boy was stabbed with a bayonet in his face, arms and back, and seriously beaten by the FARDC elements who arrested him, before being transferred to the Sukola II detention center.¹⁸⁴

Release

While not unheard of, release of children by FDLR FOCA commanders was a rarity. The group's commanders released just 2% of all children recruited, with the majority of these being girls. In fact, 19% of girls recruited by FDLR FOCA were ultimately released by their commander, compared to 1% of boys. The reasons that commanders agreed to release children from their ranks appeared to be threefold: Mourning family members – again a nod to FDLR FOCA's own family basis, medical treatment, or bribery.

In one remarkable case, a 16-year-old boy who was recruited by his own father, an FDLR FOCA colonel, was released by his father's escort after the boy's father was killed during fighting in December 2015. The boy then approached a MONUSCO base in Nyanzale, Rutshuru Territory.¹⁸⁵ In another case, a 14-year-old boy's commander released him after receiving news that the boy's mother had died.¹⁸⁶

Among those children released for medical treatment, girls were most likely to benefit. This points to the often-overlooked physical risks that girls faced from sexual violence.¹⁸⁷ Take the case of one 16-year-old girl who was abducted from the fields and was used as a "wife" of a FDLR FOCA captain. One month later, she was pregnant. Her "husband" gave her medicine to trigger a miscarriage, which made her seriously ill. The girl was transferred to a health center and ultimately was released to her parents care.¹⁸⁸

FDLR FOCA was remarkably amenable to bribes and financial incentives offered by families in exchange for releasing their children. Like Nyatura, families' payment of bribes to release children from FDLR FOCA was extensive, but, unlike Nyatura, the prices demanded were not high enough to characterize abduction of children for recruitment purposes as kidnap for ransom or a concerted financial strategy. Bribes paid by children's parents and family members ranged from 10USD, a goat and a case of beer for two 13-year-old girls to 160USD for a 13-year-old boy.¹⁸⁹

Finally, while uncommon for FDLR FOCA, boys were occasionally released on the battlefield, as was one 16-year-old combatant who was released by his commander during FARDC Sukola II operations in Rutshuru Territory in February 2015.¹⁹⁰

Endnotes

¹⁰⁶ Percentage of girls who disclosed sexual violence, not all children recruited (i.e. Boys) due to very low disclosure rates among boys.

¹⁰⁷ Data includes children documented as recruited by FDLR FOCA and the general term FDLR. This does not include children recruited by CNRD or FDLR RUD.

¹⁰⁸ The remainder of cases not covered by forced or voluntary methods of recruitment are “unknown recruitment methods/reasons.”

¹⁰⁹ Figures based on MONUSCO Child Protection case analysis. Force figures may differ. Note that this refers only to Force, not DDR.

¹¹⁰ This analysis does not cover recruitment by CNRD, though it may include children originally recruited by FDLR FOCA who remained with CNRD following the split (e.g. 123421).

¹¹¹ Children frequently refer to FDLR FOCA simply as “FDLR.” This analysis includes cases reported on in Annual Reports under “unidentified FDLR” and “FDLR FOCA.”

¹¹² 123498, see also 190203, 219963, 220533, 123231, 129946, 148258, 148274, 148789

¹¹³ 148280

¹¹⁴ 257023, see also 178977

¹¹⁵ 237282, 73258

¹¹⁶ 133384

¹¹⁷ 178730, see also 247742, 148804, 178931, 220027, 149093

¹¹⁸ 180124

¹¹⁹ “Element” refers to a member of an armed group, whether combatant or support. It is used primarily in reference to adults, whereas child elements are referred to as child soldiers, children (formerly) associated with armed groups or recruited children.

¹²⁰ 187900, see also 122621

¹²¹ 122726

¹²² 148277, see also 220022

¹²³ 123421, 148259 and 148269

¹²⁴ 135649, see also 180065

¹²⁵ 123671

¹²⁶ 122615, see also 134343 and 159391 by fathers, 74010 and 220706 by brothers, and 220415 by cousin.

¹²⁷ 123321

¹²⁸ 220428

¹²⁹ 260894

¹³⁰ 122661, 148276

¹³¹ 123416

¹³² 207412

¹³³ 236534

¹³⁴ 132824, 131421

¹³⁵ 180859

¹³⁶ 148269

¹³⁷ 133384

¹³⁸ 123435

¹³⁹ This is likely an underestimate due to the fact that data on re-recruitment was not systematically collected until 2017 and this figure is based on case-by-case analysis.

¹⁴⁰ 245521, see also 117995

¹⁴¹ 14511, see also 145351, 146120, 187265, 187687, 17346, 192166, 207206, 159189, 122624

¹⁴² 122714, see also 214028

¹⁴³ 187214

¹⁴⁴ 187265

¹⁴⁵ 190937, see also 193427

¹⁴⁶ 110346, see also 134173, 134172, 220024, 122647, 134453, 197420, 128274, 129871, 130501

¹⁴⁷ 149467

¹⁴⁸ 122653

¹⁴⁹ 212951

¹⁵⁰ 260688

¹⁵¹ 123050, 144731

¹⁵² 135428, 256757

¹⁵³ 173206

¹⁵⁴ 134159

¹⁵⁵ 121887

¹⁵⁶ 189976, see also 189977, 189977

¹⁵⁷ 122728, see also young boys playing this role as in 97507

¹⁵⁸ 220024

¹⁵⁹ 70843

¹⁶⁰ 123232, 220339, 220395, 220528, 238233, 238358, 189673, 197460, see also girls ages 11, 12 in 197782

¹⁶¹ 159583, see also 230178, 147209, 204434

¹⁶² 256850

¹⁶³ 147209, see also 230178, 237066

¹⁶⁴ 180120

¹⁶⁵ 238243

¹⁶⁶ 220435, 220437, see also 220441

¹⁶⁷ 148271

¹⁶⁸ 179893

¹⁶⁹ 73149, see also 73030

¹⁷⁰ 122653, see also 122725

¹⁷¹ 220025

¹⁷² 220015, see also 122623

¹⁷³ 237277, see also 176687, 123233

¹⁷⁴ 122113

¹⁷⁵ 105541, see also 122164, 122725

¹⁷⁶ 122284

¹⁷⁷ 198911

¹⁷⁸ 83977

¹⁷⁹ 230178, 230543

¹⁸⁰ 187716

¹⁸¹ 192187

¹⁸² This figure is likely an underestimate, as children may be arrested following escape and documentation.

¹⁸³ 213959

¹⁸⁴ 217816

¹⁸⁵ 173870

¹⁸⁶ 230548, see also 148791 in which a commander friend of the child's father releases the boy.

¹⁸⁷ 220397, 220284, 220347

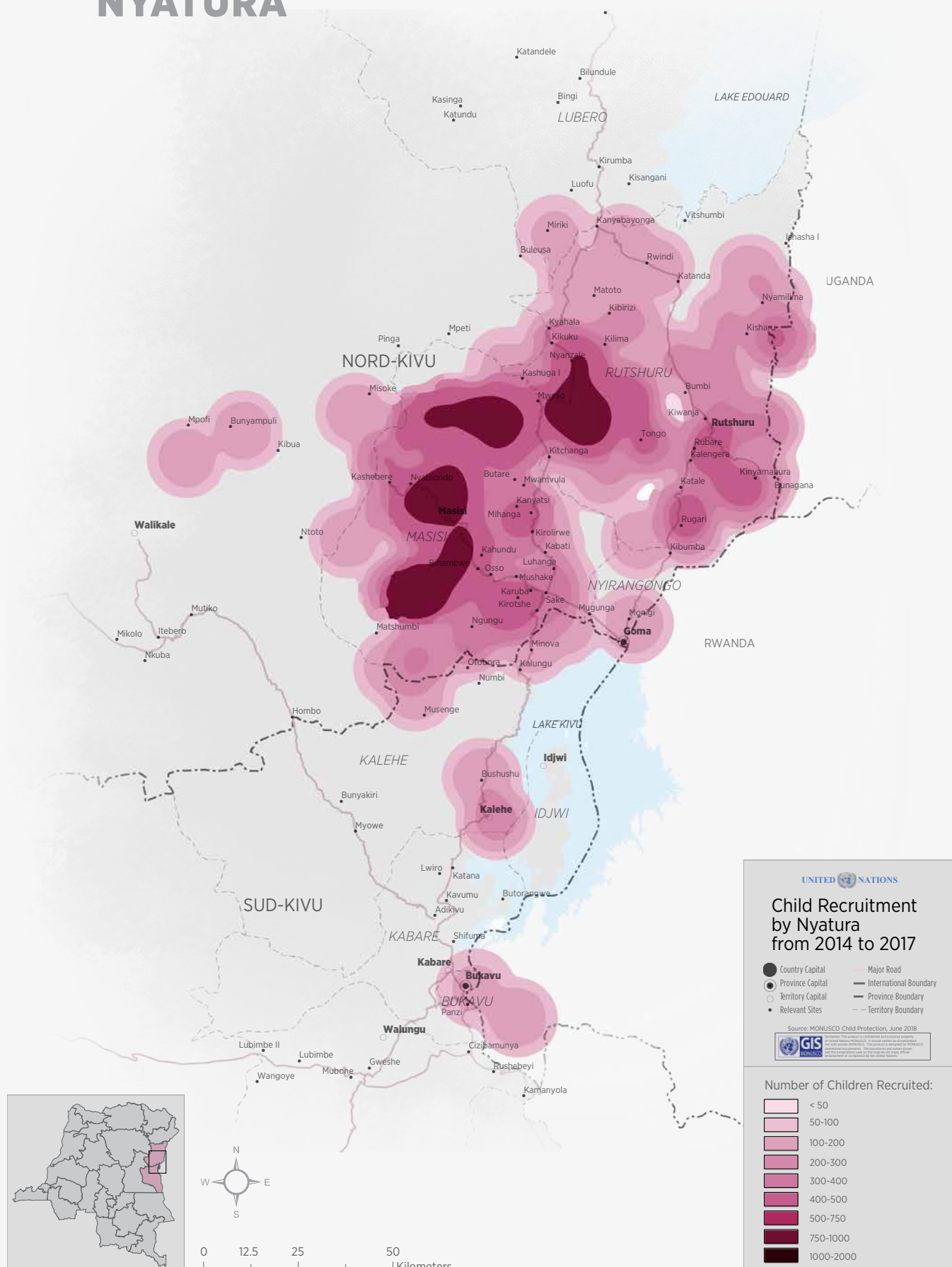
¹⁸⁸ 220438

¹⁸⁹ 148787, 189973, 189979 and 217780, see also 134716, 220319, 196507

¹⁹⁰ 122065

IN-DEPTH PROFILE:

NYATURA



TERRITORY

North Kivu (Rutshuru, Masisi),
South Kivu (Kalehe)

CHILDREN RECRUITED

Total: 807
Trend: Steady (Peak 2015)
Girls: 5% / Boys: 95%
Abducted: 34%
Sexual Violence Among Girls: 83%
Under 15: 41%
Combatants: 21%
Re-Recruited: 8%

MOTIVE

Hutu self-defense; Control of natural resources; Taxation

ETHNICITY

Hutu

PRIMARY MEANS OF RECRUITMENT

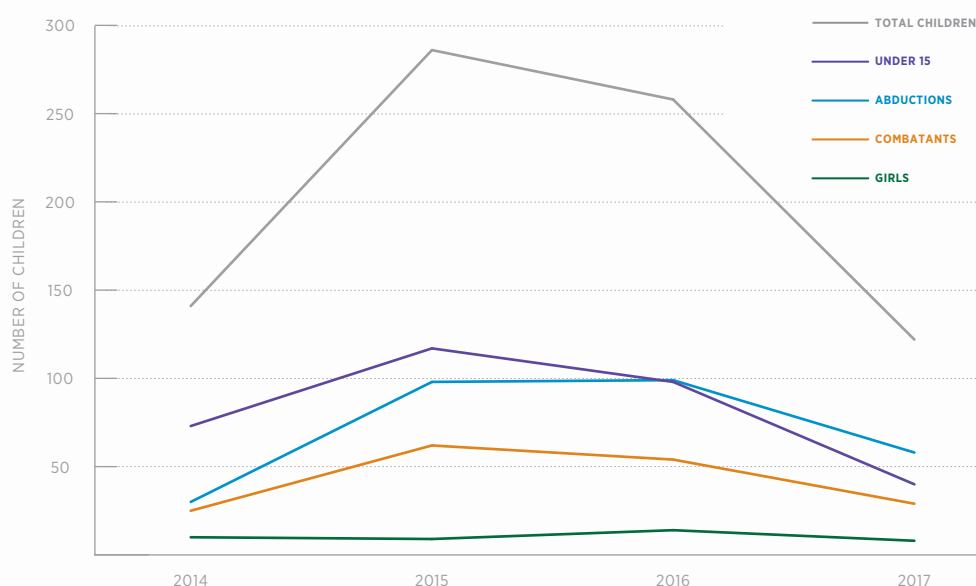
Forced (51%); Voluntary (11%)

PRIMARY PUSH FACTORS AMONG VOLUNTEERS

Family & Peer Pressure (38%); Economic (29%);
Self-Protection (23%); Revenge/Ethnic Defense (7%)

PRIMARY MEANS OF SEPARATION

Escape (90%, 18% to MONUSCO); Arrest (4%); Release (2%)

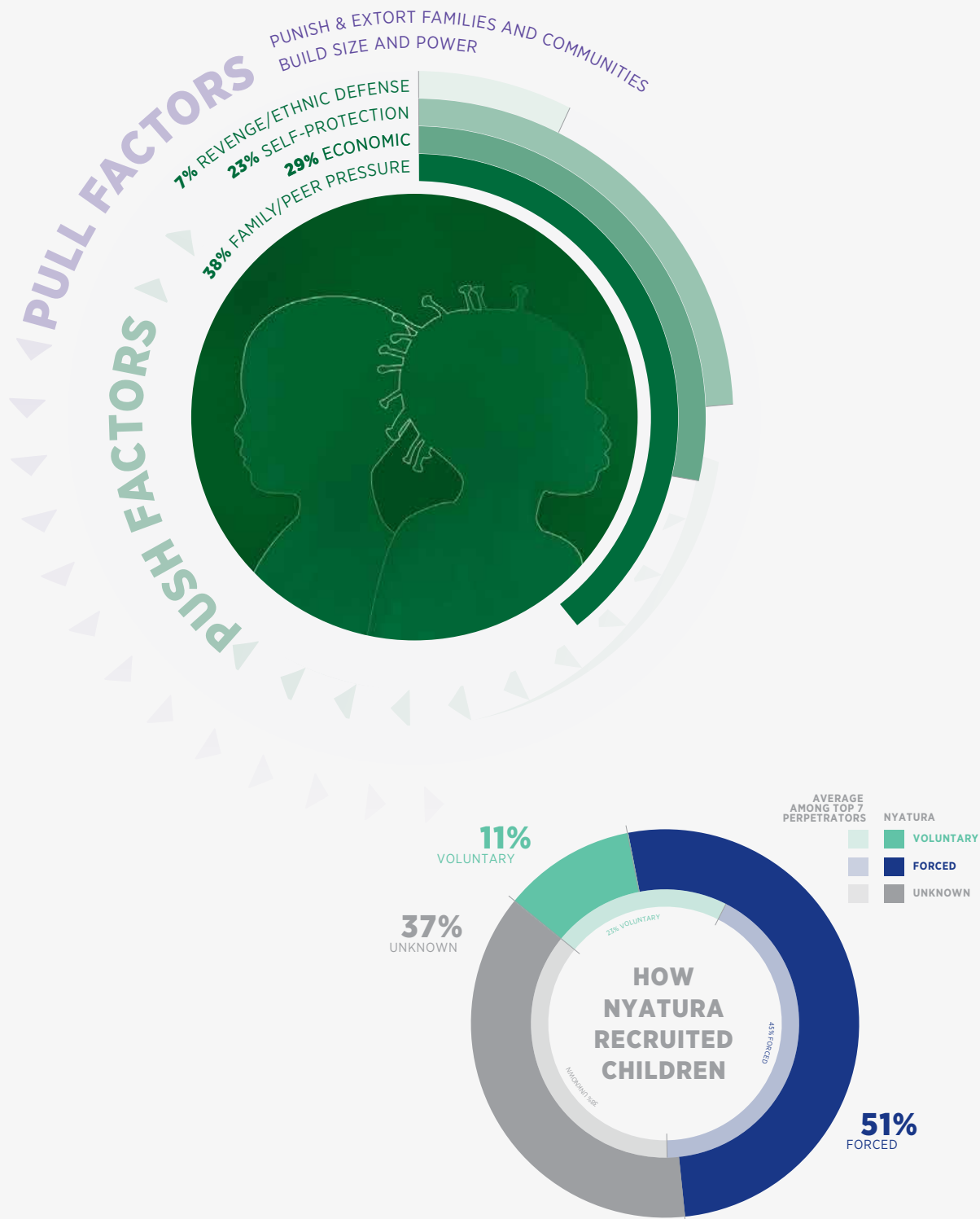
TRENDS IN CHILD RECRUITMENT BY NYATURA

Nyatura has become an umbrella term for local Congolese Hutu militias, operating primarily in North Kivu (Masisi, Rutshuru) and South Kivu (Kalehe) since 2011, although their origins can be traced back to 2008-09. As such, 'Nyatura' should not be regarded as a single, homogenous group, but rather as a range of Congolese Hutu armed spoilers, who collaborate with other Hutu-majority groups in varying degrees. All factions share similar stated objectives to 'defend' Hutu populations, mainly against Hunde, Nande and historically Tutsi armed groups, often in areas with weak state security presence. Nyatura groups are community-based, and may also fight the FARDC, as well as consistently engaging in predatory activities targeting the local population and,

illegal natural resource exploitation. Nyatura factions generally have low levels of organization and have proved themselves to be fractious. The groups are characterized by their loose structures, fluid alliances, and frequent breakaway factions. This remains the case today, where the split of the CNRD from FDLR FOCA in May 2016 forced a reconfiguration of Nyatura alliances and exacerbated inter-Hutu armed group rivalries in Masisi and Rutshuru territories. However, some factions, like Nyatura Domi and John Love, are better organized and actively collaborate with FDLR FOCA. Nyatura sources its finances from illegal taxation primarily.

BEFORE:

HOW & WHY CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED BY NYATURA



Push Factors: Why Children “Volunteered” to Join Nyatura

Family & Peer Pressure

Similar to FDLR FOCA, family members and peers were key enablers of children joining Nyatura.¹⁹¹ Among the 11% of child recruits who opted to volunteer for Nyatura, 38% did so under the influence of their parents, siblings or friends. For example, one 16-year-old boy was visiting his brother, a Nyatura element, when his brother begged him to stay and help him fight.¹⁹² Women associated with Nyatura targeted girls, another similarity with FDLR FOCA's use of mother figures as recruiters. This was the case for a 12-year-old girl deceived by a Nyatura-affiliated woman, who used her as a domestic and cook. However, far fewer girls “volunteered” for Nyatura than FDLR FOCA; rather, most were abducted into the group.¹⁹³ Relative to FDLR, the use of family and peer recruitment by Nyatura was less fervent and targeted. Friendly familiarity with and regular casual exposure to Nyatura elements had an equally significant impact on children joining Nyatura as active peer recruitment did for FDLR FOCA. For instance, children and combatants rubbed shoulders while frequenting a store where a child worked, or during the happenstance of a 13-year-old boy visiting his cousin while his cousin's friend, a Nyatura element, was also visiting.¹⁹⁴ This may be due to the fact that Nyatura is community-based and is viewed as a part-time duty of able-bodied community members, with men often on standby from their normal jobs in case of clashes and boys attending school in the morning while manning checkpoints in the afternoon.

Survival Strategy: Economic Support

One third of all children who volunteered for Nyatura made a basic economic calculation to guarantee their income, status, and, in some cases, survival. One 17-year-old boy wanted to join Nyatura because he believed that, with his good grades and high academic level, he would have the chance to earn a high rank.¹⁹⁵ In a classic better-on-the-inside-than-the-outside calculus, others simply volunteered to avoid being harassed by the group for “taxes” every day.¹⁹⁶

Frequently, family circumstances just prior to a child's choice could tip the scales toward Nyatura, whether the death of a parent, abuse, rejection by a step-parent, or inability to pay school fees.¹⁹⁷ For example, one 16-year-old boy was first abducted and recruited by Nyatura after the group attacked his village and killed his parents. He escaped and reunited with his uncle but rejoined because the poverty at home was worse than in the bush.¹⁹⁸

Nyatura played on these vulnerabilities, with recruiters making financial or material propositions to the children most vulnerable to them: One 16-year-old boy was swayed by promises that “every day [he] would eat meat.”¹⁹⁹

Survival Strategy: Physical Protection

One quarter of child volunteers judged that Nyatura could meet not only their economic needs but also their need for physical protection. Indeed, many children who “volunteered” for Nyatura did so to save their lives. Sometimes a child was under threat at home, like the 16-year-old searching for protection after an altercation with his neighbors.²⁰⁰ Sometimes the threat came from Nyatura itself, e.g. the 14-year-old boy who found himself with nowhere to go during clashes between Nyatura and another armed group, and turned toward Nyatura²⁰¹ or the pair of 15-year-old boys who were beaten by Nyatura elements on commander's orders until the boys agreed to join.²⁰²

Revenge & Protection of Family or Community

Hutu self-defense motivations played a minor role in just 7% of children who volunteered for Nyatura, a reflection of the group's less clearly articulated motivations. For example, one 14-year-old boy was persuaded by his friends to join Nyatura to fight Mayi Mayi groups threatening his community in Kitchanga.²⁰³ Children joining Nyatura for reasons of self-defense appeared to define their community more narrowly – e.g. a 17-year-old boy joining to protect his village from harassment of opposing Nyatura groups²⁰⁴ – compared to child volunteering for FDLR FOCA who proclaimed to fight for the Hutu “Nation.”

Avenging the death of a parent, particularly a father, also led boys to volunteer.²⁰⁵ Notably, the fact that the father was a member of a different armed group mattered less than the fact that Nyatura was fighting the same enemy. For example, one 15-year-old boy volunteered for Nyatura to avenge the death of his father, an APCLS combatant killed by the FARDC.²⁰⁶

Escape Punishment

On rare occasions, boys would join Nyatura to avoid punishment for a crime, such as rape, or a social transgression.²⁰⁷ A 16-year-old boy who had impregnated a girl and was being pursued by her family judged it safest to join Nyatura, where he hoped to find refuge.²⁰⁸

Pull Factors: Why Nyatura Recruited Children

Build Size and Power

Since 2015, inter-armed group clashes, pitting Nyatura factions against Nande-majority groups in Rutshuru Territory, have been a consistent feature of the conflict. Child recruitment appears to remain a consistent tactic in bolstering the strength of Nyatura in such clashes.

According to children interviewed, Nyatura commanders clearly judged that recruiting children was an easy way to increase its size and power either after heavy losses or defections in battle, or when preparing for operations.²⁰⁹ Children, particularly those abducted, were remarkably articulate about this reason for their recruitment, describing active recruitment campaigns, particularly in the Katoyi area of Masisi Territory, North Kivu in 2014 and 2015.²¹⁰ A 15-year-old boy who volunteered during a Nyatura recruitment campaigns was well aware that its purpose was to “strengthen the ranks of Nyatura.”²¹¹ Recruitment campaigns took the form of speeches and house-to-house searches for boys and young men, e.g. two 16- and 17-year-old boys taken along with a group of 50 others from their village in Rutshuru.²¹² Occasionally, campaigns were subtler, e.g. a Nyatura recruiter in Rwankere who invited children for interviews in his office.²¹³

Most frequently, these campaigns took the form of abductions. This was the experience of a 13-year-old boy who was abducted when Nyatura rounded up all the young boys and some adults in his village.²¹⁴ Sometimes recruitment drives, abductions and looting took place all at once: Three birds, one stone. This was the case for a 15-year-old boy who was abducted during a nighttime looting and recruitment raid on his village; when his father attempted to intervene, the man was shot dead.²¹⁵

Punish & Extort Families and Communities

Like many armed groups that control territory in the absence of the State, Nyatura commanders used child recruitment as a control mechanism, punishing or extorting families into submission. For example, a 14-year-old displaced boy was recruited because his father refused to perform the mandatory community work ordered by Nyatura elements controlling Kazinga, Masisi Territory, North Kivu.²¹⁶ Moreover, State security presence remains weak or absent in areas dominated by Nyatura groups, e.g. outside Nyanzale. This lack of military pressure allows Nyatura to continue to abduct and recruit children, for the most part with impunity.

Trigger Violation: Abduction

Since 2014, Nyatura groups abducted at least 275 children just for the purpose of their recruitment. This figure – a conservative reading of children’s cases – amounts at least one in three children recruited by Nyatura becoming associated via the preliminary violation of abduction. Similar to other top perpetrators, the trend in abduction by Nyatura clearly mirrors the group’s overall rate of child recruitment, with a surge in 2015. Ninety-three percent of all abductions of children perpetrated by Nyatura were for the purpose of recruitment and use.

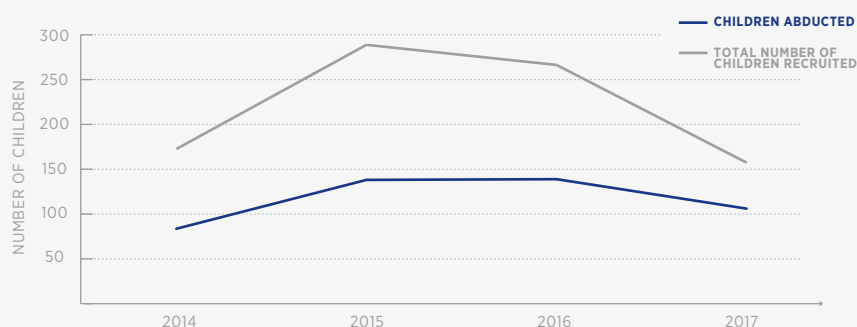
Nyatura abductions followed the FDLR FOCA model of abduction via forced portering. For instance, Nyatura elements abducted a 15-year-old boy from his home during a looting raid on his village. They forced him to carry items looted from his home to Nyatura positions in Mukengwa, after which he was not allowed to return home.²¹⁷ Abductions by Nyatura affected both boys and girls, whereas volunteering or deception by family and friends was an almost exclusively male phenomenon. This is a notable difference from FDLR FOCA, for which both boys and girls were “deceived” into volunteering. Abductors were predominantly combatants or looters, however, in at least one case, men in civilian clothing abducted children.²¹⁸

Nyatura appeared to specifically target students for abductions, perhaps because their journeys to and from school made them easy targets: When Nyatura elements abducted two 14-year-old boys on their way home from school, they also burned their schoolbooks, as if to remind the boys that their lives as students were over.²¹⁹

Parents, grandparents and other family or community members present during abductions were known to plead with Nyatura to not take their children, offering whatever items of value they might have. For example, a 16-year-old boy was tied up and taken away after his abductors refused all the gifts offered by his grandfather.²²⁰ If the offer was not good enough, Nyatura frequently threatened to kill the family member for good measure before taking the children.²²¹

Sometimes, abduction was a last resort after Nyatura’s earlier attempts to cajole children into volunteering failed. In February 2017, a woman in Nyatura was advocating for the girls and women in a 15-year-old girl’s community to join the armed group. The older woman picked out the girl, offering her a “special gift” if she volunteered. Three days after the girl refused the gift, the woman, accompanied by armed Nyatura combatants, abducted the girl.²²² Any attempts by abducted children to escape during their forced march or on arrival brought harsh punishment, with children bound and beaten.²²³

CHILD RECRUITMENT AND ABDUCTION BY NYATURA 2014-2017



Re-Recruitment

Of the top perpetrators of child recruitment in the DRC, Nyatura had the highest rate of re-recruitment: At least 8% of children, mostly boys, associated with Nyatura were recruited multiple times. This may be a function of the tight grip that Nyatura had on Hutu and other communities in territory under its control, where combatants intermingle regularly with civilians and keep close tabs on families. This made it easy to pluck children from their homes, as was the case for the 15-year-old boy re-recruited the day after he escaped to his family.²²⁴ Children were personally known not only to their commanders but also to their original recruiters, who kept an eye out for their “army.” One 16-year-old boy reunited with his family but, one month later, was re-recruited by the same perpetrator while looking for work at the same mining site where he was first recruited in Rubaya, Masisi Territory, North Kivu. The recruiter recognized and abducted him after tearing up his “attestation de sortie,” the official document that protects children formerly associated with armed groups from arrest by authorities.²²⁵

Re-recruitment by Nyatura appeared to function as a revolving door. Children passed in and out of Nyatura more frequently than other armed groups, with some children re-recruited – both forcibly and voluntarily – up to four times over as many years. For example, a 15-year-old boy was first recruited in 2013, escaped and was re-recruited again in late 2013, escaped a second time and, after his mother died, voluntarily re-joined Nyatura in 2014 because he found “life outside too difficult,” before finally escaping for a third time.²²⁶

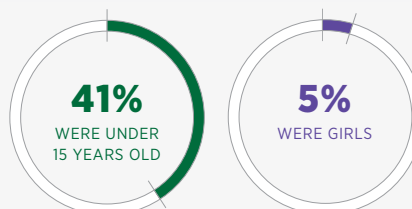
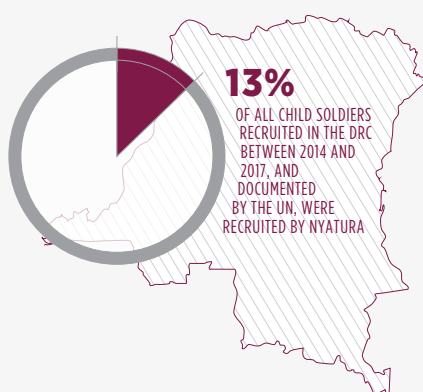
The merry go round of re-recruitment brought children in and out of Nyatura as well as other armed groups, usually those dominated by the same ethnicity, with many children also passing through the ranks of FDLR FOCA. For example, one 16-year-old boy was first recruited at age 13 by Nyatura. He was released but re-joined voluntarily. One week later, his commander was beheaded in an internal power struggle and he escaped to join FDLR FOCA. Finding life no better there, he escaped and reunited with his family. Three days later, he was re-recruited by Nyatura.²²⁷

Re-recruitment by Nyatura both caused displacement and resulted from it, particularly in Rutshuru Territory, North Kivu. Displaced children made for easy targets for re-recruitment, without the protective factors of an intact family and community structures.²²⁸ The threat of re-recruitment from their family homes also forced children to leave home, even when their families were not displaced. This was the case for two boys facing threats of re-recruitment by their former commander in 2014. The boys left their parents’ homes in Rutshuru two weeks after reunification, making their way on foot and by taxi to Lac Vert IDP camp outside Goma. When the threats followed them to the IDP camp, the boys fled again, approaching FARDC in Mubambiro for protection.²²⁹

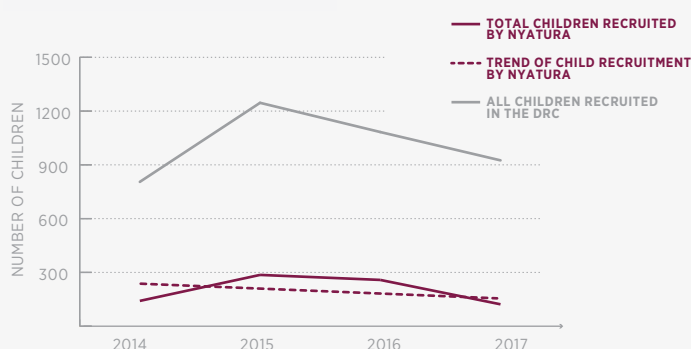
DURING:

CHILDREN'S LIVES INSIDE NYATURA

THE PROFILE OF A CHILD RECRUITED BY NYATURA FROM 2014-2017



CHILD RECRUITMENT BY NYATURA



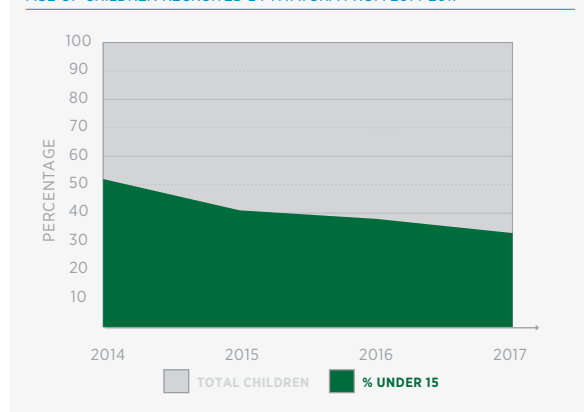
The Girls & Boys Recruited by Nyatura

Nyatura factions were the second most prolific recruiters in the DRC, bringing 766 boys and 38 girls into their ranks since 2014. However, like FDLR FOCA, Nyatura's child recruitment nearly doubled from 2014 to 2015, when it peaked in the heat of military operations, and has since decreased. Children reported that up to half of their units comprised children, with some assigned to child-only units, of an average of 20 combatants, though some numbered up to 125 elements.²³⁰

Age

More than a third (41%) of all children recruited by Nyatura were under 15. However, in an encouraging shift, this percentage decreased from more than half (52%) in 2014 to 33% in 2017.

AGE OF CHILDREN RECRUITED BY NYATURA FROM 2014-2017



Gender

On average, girls represented 5% of all children documented as recruited and used by Nyatura but their recruitment appeared to be converse to the overall trend in child recruitment by the group. In 2014 and 2017 – the years of Nyatura's lowest recruitment levels – girls were 7% of new recruits, while in 2015 – the year with the highest level of recruitment – girls were just 3% of documented new recruits. Given the stark gender roles of boys and girls within the group, this suggests that, when Nyatura was recruiting most heavily in 2015, it was searching for combatants, a role that only boys play in the group. However, Nyatura is widely believed to recruit girls at much higher rates than has been documented. The challenge is to better combat stigma and encourage girls formerly affiliated with Nyatura to come forward to claim DDR benefits, which allows them to also be documented and counted fully.

Life for Children Inside Nyatura

Initiation Rites & Daily Life

Similar to FDLR FOCA and in contrast to armed groups elsewhere in the DRC, particularly Mayi Mayi Mazembe and Kamuina Nsapu, Nyatura did not typically initiate children beyond a first beating and military training, which included three hours of exercises in the early morning.²³¹ In the experience of one 15-year-old boy, he and his fellow fresh recruits were first beaten, then taken to his commander's position in Rupango, Masisi Territory, where he was locked in a cell for four days before being released for military training.²³² One week to one month of weapons and combat training for up to 100 new recruits – both adults and children – at a time was standard practice, including for girls, regardless of their function.

Daily life was bleak: Children recalled eating leaves and sleeping uncovered in the open bush in the rain;²³³ receiving frequent beatings;²³⁴ and occasionally drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana to cope.²³⁵

Role: Combatant

Twenty-one percent of children in Nyatura – all boys – fought against Rayia Mutomboki, NDC-Cheka, FDLR, Shetani, as well as the FARDC. Children's weapons – knives, spears, AK47s – tended to be lighter than those used by other armed groups, perhaps a reflection of the state of Nyatura's coffers and alliances, or an indication of children's lower rank in the hierarchy. While boys reported that “girl soldiers” fought for Nyatura, no girls interviewed disclosed combatant status. Physical risks aside, the emotional impact of being used as a combatant by Nyatura, like other armed groups, could be long lasting. One 13-year-old boy described his time fighting in Nyatura as “the most difficult time of my life,” one that gave him nightmares lasting well after his escape.²³⁶

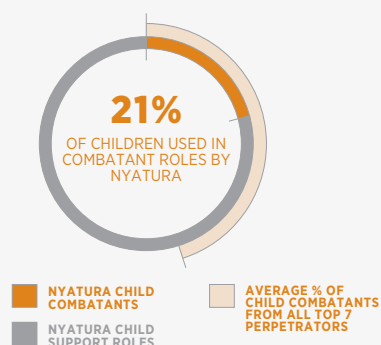
Semi-combatant roles that verged on participation in fighting were common in Nyatura. This might mean topping up ammunition supplies during clashes with Mayi Mayi groups or pillaging while armed with machetes and accompanied by a combatant.²³⁷ Such in-between roles normally placed a child at risk on or near the battlefield. However, the luckier ones were protected by commanders with whom they had “special” relationships. One 17-year-old boy serving as a féticheur, one of his commander's favorites, said his commander protected him from spending all of his time on the frontlines.²³⁸

Role: Support

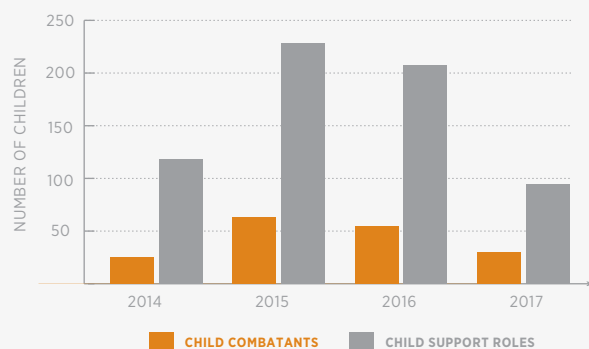
Two in three children recruited by Nyatura spent their months and years in the group behind the frontlines, in the groups' camps or in villages under their control. These porters, domestics for commanders and their wives, food suppliers, spies, escorts, tax collectors, cooks and others kept the group functioning.²³⁹ In more organized Nyatura factions, children were also used in the bureaucracy of the armed group, with one 16-year-old boy used as secretary of Nyatura's Fourth Battalion Headquarters, where he was given the task of registering new recruits and recording their deployment to their respective companies.²⁴⁰ Educated children were viewed as particularly valuable assets that factions deployed to support illiterate commanders, e.g. the 13-year-old boy used as a secretary because his commander had never attended school and did not know how to write.²⁴¹

Finally, children described in detail taking part in Nyatura's criminal apparatus, whether levying a “sleep well” tax from villagers to finance weapons purchases,²⁴² kidnapping civilians and collecting the ransom,²⁴³ or re-selling looted items.²⁴⁴

CHILDREN'S ROLES IN NYATURA FROM 2014-2017



CHILDREN'S ROLES IN NYATURA OVER TIME



Violations Triggered by Child Recruitment: The Risks Children Faced in Nyatura

Sexual Violence

While only 5% of children documented in Nyatura were girls, 73% of them reported enduring sexual violence from their commanders and peers. Multiple boys reported that girls in their units were sexually abused, served as “wives,” and that their babies were born in the camps.

It was not uncommon practice for children in Nyatura to be forced to commit acts of sexual violence against other children, a phenomenon described more often by children in Nyatura than in other armed groups, with the exception of FRPI. Multiple children independently reported that the same commander ordered a 17-year-old boy to rape a 12-year-old girl and a 13-year-old boy to rape two girls in Katoyi, Masisi Territory, North Kivu.²⁴⁵

Other times, boys took girls as concubines themselves. A 15-year-old girl spoke of serving as a boy’s concubine and enduring gang rape from other Nyatura combatants, resulting in a baby boy who was one year old by the time she was captured and released by a rival Nyatura group.²⁴⁶ While the number of children born to girls in Nyatura was difficult to estimate, babies were referenced frequently enough in children’s testimonies to confirm that they were a common sight in Nyatura camps. However, unlike FDLR FOCA, Nyatura did not appear to place value on children born into the group and reportedly induced abortions for some pregnant girls.

Girls, however, were not the only victims of sexual violence, with at least 10 boys (5% of all boys recruited by the group) disclosing that they had been raped while associated with the group.²⁴⁷ When used by Nyatura elements against boys, sexual violence was said to be related to punishment and used as an intimidation tactic.

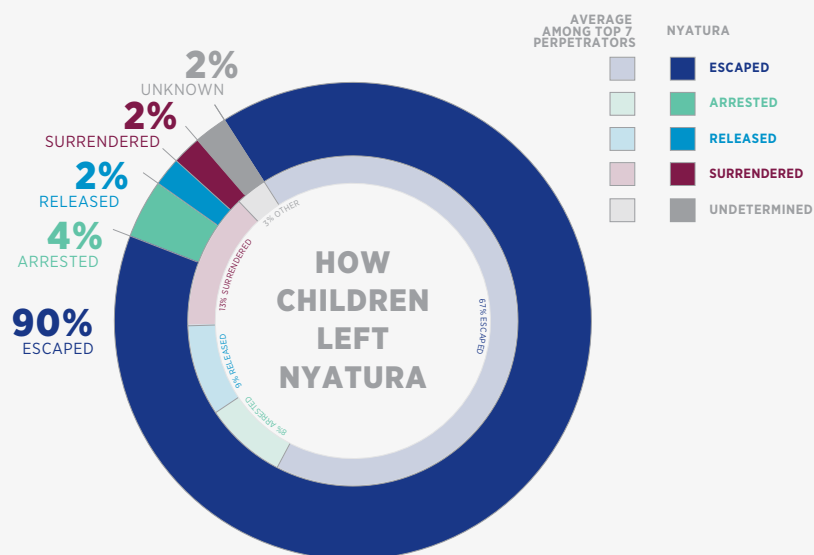
Killing & Maiming

Children formerly associated with Nyatura reported killing civilians and armed group combatants both on and off the battlefield, including children. One 12-year-old boy assisted in the assassination of a civilian after robbing him of all his possessions.²⁴⁸ Another boy, age 16, accidentally shot dead another child soldier, age 15, a few days after his recruitment when, drinking at a local boite, his commander handed the boy a weapon he was not trained to use.²⁴⁹ Children who survived battles reported witnessing the deaths of other children. For instance, just one week after his recruitment, a 17-year-old boy watched five boys die fighting against NDC-Cheka in Pinga, Walikale Territory, North Kivu.²⁵⁰

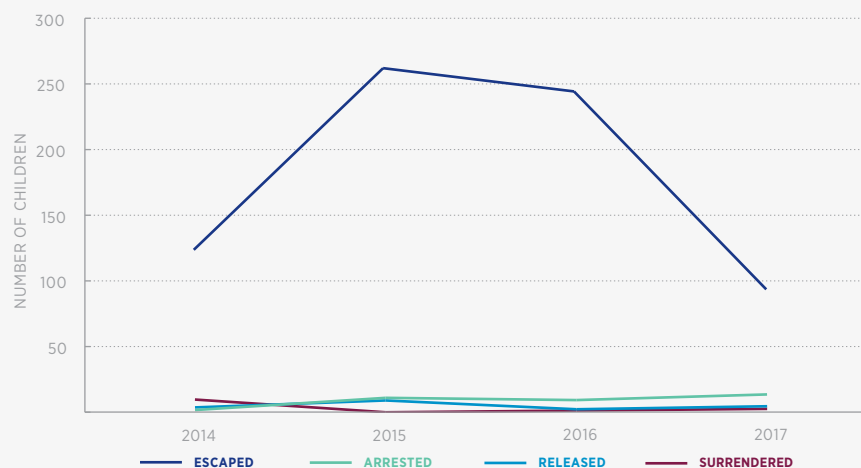
Nyatura’s wounded children were reportedly patched up and returned to camp. One 15-year-old boy, shot in the foot and hospitalized for six months in Kirumbu, was immediately brought back to his unit upon recovery, although not before his mother was forced to pay the hospital bill.²⁵¹ Maiming also resulted from torture and severe punishment doled out by Nyatura, with one 16-year-old boy and his friend held in an underground prison after being accused of selling the group’s arms.²⁵²

AFTER:

HOW CHILDREN WERE SEPARATED FROM NYATURA



HOW CHILDREN LEFT NYATURA OVER TIME



Escape

Escape was the number one means that children separated from Nyatura: 90% of children documented left by escaping, with just a fraction arrested or released.

Why Children Escaped from Nyatura

The two most frequently cited motives for children's escape from Nyatura were harsh living conditions, including commanders' physical abuse, and "disgust" with the reality of life in the bush, which proved false the promises of salaries and other benefits.²⁵³ The risks of escape were so great that each child who attempted to flee had to calculate that the pain of remaining was greater than the pain of capture. Some were determined and risked multiple attempts, like the 13-year-old boy who tried to escape on several occasions but he was captured every time until he finally succeeded.²⁵⁴ Not all children make the same judgment call: One 14-year-old boy escaped when he and a friend were sent on a looting raid; his friend was afraid of being punished and refused to come with him, instead returning to Nyatura.²⁵⁵

How Children Escaped from Nyatura

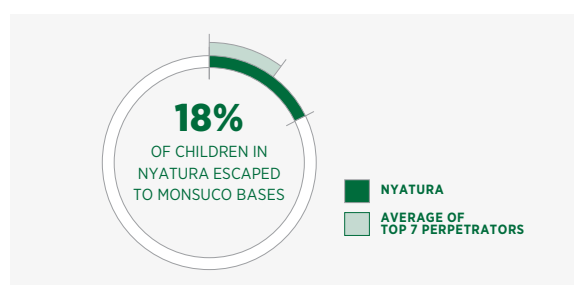
Children usually escaped alone or in small groups, with the rare help of others, such as the escort of the child's commander.²⁵⁶ In one noteworthy case, a 17-year-old girl, used as a sex slave, escaped after her parents advocated with her commander to allow the girl to travel to Mweso to take the annual State Exam. Her commander conceded – an indication of the group's flexibility – and assigned a loyal combatant to accompany the girl to ensure she did not escape. However, the girl managed to evade her minder.²⁵⁷

Like all escapees, children in Nyatura picked their moments carefully to increase their chances of success. This meant more escapes just prior to or during FARDC operations,²⁵⁸ clashes with other armed groups (e.g. FDLR FOCA), rotation of Nyatura units,²⁵⁹ sent to loot villages, the market or the river, and just after the death or arrest of the child's commander or "husband."²⁶⁰

To Where

A significant proportion – 18% – of children in Nyatura sought safe haven at MONUSCO bases, especially in Rutshuru and Masisi. Some children did not learn about MONUSCO until after they escaped and arrived home, only then approaching nearby bases on their family, community leader or local NGO's suggestion.²⁶¹ Others identified MONUSCO bases as sites of protection while still in the group and went to far greater lengths to reach them. This was especially the case when the child had ambitions to return to school and realized that MONUSCO could facilitate their attestation de sortie.²⁶² One 17-year-old boy was re-recruited and escaped the same night from a Nyatura camp in northern Masisi Territory, North Kivu, walking hundreds of kilometers to a MONUSCO base in Minova, South Kivu.²⁶³ Notably, only one girl escaped to a MONUSCO base, suggesting that it was boys who are most aware of and comfortable approaching MONUSCO.

During their escapes, children sought out other children formerly associated with Nyatura to ask for help. During his escape, a 16-year-old boy came across friends – former child soldiers in Nyatura – who gave him directions to the same Transitional Care Center in Masisi that had welcomed them.²⁶⁴ For children escaping in Masisi, children and community members were relatively more informed of their options than children escaping in other Territories or Provinces, and specifically sought out CARITAS in Masisi Centre (the only Transitional Care Center in the area) as well as the ICRC.²⁶⁵



Arrest

A fraction of children associated with Nyatura – 4% - were arrested by State authorities.

Most frequently, children were arrested after initially escaping and while en route to a MONUSCO base or their village.²⁶⁶ The small number of children, usually boys, arrested by FARDC does not diminish the deep fear felt by children who escaped Nyatura: One 15-year-old boy escaped but stayed far away from his family for two more years due to his fear of detention.²⁶⁷

Often arrests were linked with other patterns in Nyatura's use of children, including abduction and re-recruitment. In one such case, a 16-year-old boy was arrested, beaten, interrogated and detained, the same day that he was abducted and re-recruited by Nyatura, after previously escaping the group.²⁶⁸

Release

Nyatura commanders released just 2% of all the children they recruited, primarily in 2015. In these rare cases, the same four reasons deemed acceptable by FDLR FOCA justified release by Nyatura: defeat by FARDC, mourning, medical care, and family advocacy or bribes.²⁶⁹

The death of a family member earned some children the privilege of release, as was the experience of a 16-year-old girl whose commander released her when he heard of her father's death.²⁷⁰ Illness could earn lucky children unconditional release, such as the 14-year-old boy who became seriously ill one month after his re-recruitment and "imprisonment."²⁷¹ More commonly, Nyatura commanders would authorize children to leave their camp for medical care on the strict condition of their return. For example, [General] Domi instructed a 16-year-old boy's commander to bring the boy, sick with malaria, to his parents' home for treatment, but with a mission order that made clear that, after treatment, the boy must return to Nyatura.²⁷²

More frequently than with FDLR FOCA, determined family advocacy and bribes bought children freedom from Nyatura.

Families appeared to see room for negotiation with Nyatura commanders and male family members – fathers, uncles – or parents approached commanders multiple times to secure the release of their children.²⁷³ Bribes paid by families to release children cost as little as 10 or 30USD, while others cost as much as 100USD.²⁷⁴

Bribery was, however, not a magic pill guaranteed to return a child to his or her family. If the full sum was not paid, the child was not released. This was the case for a 13-year-old girl, used as a sex slave, whose relatively low-ranking commander, a captain, demanded the impossible sum of 350 USD for her release. The girl's family was very poor and could only offer 50 USD, an offer rejected by the commander. Ultimately, months later, the girl became sick and was abandoned at a hospital.²⁷⁵

Surrender

In 2014, just 10 responded to the Government's demobilization campaign and surrendered with their commanders.²⁷⁶ More frequently, however, it was the commanders who surrendered after abandoning the children in their units. Left behind, these children then approached MONUSCO for protection.²⁷⁷

Endnotes

- ¹⁹¹ 189768, 123197, 205206, 218651
- ¹⁹² 198276, see also 198307, 159344
- ¹⁹³ 205198
- ¹⁹⁴ 202502, 189830
- ¹⁹⁵ 24648
- ¹⁹⁶ 135777, see also 197178
- ¹⁹⁷ 220318, 238434, 192200
- ¹⁹⁸ 186796
- ¹⁹⁹ 211401
- ²⁰⁰ 180248, see also 219903, 219946
- ²⁰¹ 180259
- ²⁰² 179710, see also recruitment on pain of death in 225908
- ²⁰³ 190270
- ²⁰⁴ 220297, see also 118821
- ²⁰⁵ 244578
- ²⁰⁶ 162584
- ²⁰⁷ 122596
- ²⁰⁸ 238255
- ²⁰⁹ 180796, 185799, 185810, 185814, 260556, 202632
- ²¹⁰ 185816, 185817, 185818, 185819
- ²¹¹ 169632
- ²¹² 237061
- ²¹³ 255959
- ²¹⁴ 189754
- ²¹⁵ 236805
- ²¹⁶ 165284
- ²¹⁷ 158995, see also 207232
- ²¹⁸ 122655
- ²¹⁹ 133383, see also 133382
- ²²⁰ 254404
- ²²¹ 236546
- ²²² 248275
- ²²³ 135409
- ²²⁴ 123180, see also 187776, 145512
- ²²⁵ 121169, see also 187772, 204355. An attestation de sortie is the official document issued to children who were associated with armed groups and have since gone through the child DDR process. It provides children with legal protection from arrest by authorities.
- ²²⁶ 131215, see also 131228
- ²²⁷ 131229, see also 203809, 118821
- ²²⁸ 187410
- ²²⁹ 73779, see also 196033
- ²³⁰ 118764, 118671
- ²³¹ 237408
- ²³² 158994
- ²³³ 133382, 255911
- ²³⁴ 146184
- ²³⁵ 256978
- ²³⁶ 238469
- ²³⁷ 133382
- ²³⁸ 248648
- ²³⁹ 121870
- ²⁴⁰ 163435
- ²⁴¹ 220331
- ²⁴² 163435
- ²⁴³ 133385
- ²⁴⁴ 197256
- ²⁴⁵ 145536 and 145661
- ²⁴⁶ 204408
- ²⁴⁷ 180789, 180797, 180803, 180804, 180875, 180878, 75090, 759091, 75092, 75093
- ²⁴⁸ 260458
- ²⁴⁹ 256800
- ²⁵⁰ 110135, see also 204355
- ²⁵¹ 255959
- ²⁵² 131218
- ²⁵³ 121169, 146184, 180880, 163435
- ²⁵⁴ 180243
- ²⁵⁵ 133383
- ²⁵⁶ 220342
- ²⁵⁷ 207483
- ²⁵⁸ 109592, 202513
- ²⁵⁹ 123194
- ²⁶⁰ 165449
- ²⁶¹ 119821, 24625
- ²⁶² 146187
- ²⁶³ 204442
- ²⁶⁴ 180797
- ²⁶⁵ 159344, 159404
- ²⁶⁶ 223127
- ²⁶⁷ 165449
- ²⁶⁸ 186200
- ²⁶⁹ 189675
- ²⁷⁰ 220420, see also 236681
- ²⁷¹ 145637
- ²⁷² 256337, see also 256325
- ²⁷³ 189602
- ²⁷⁴ 189662, 189677, 207236, 220396
- ²⁷⁵ 220351, see also 248663
- ²⁷⁶ 156450, 133385
- ²⁷⁷ 133385

KAMUINA NSAPU



TERRITORY

Kasai Central (Dibaya, Dimbelenge, Kananga), Kasai (Kamonia, Mwenga, Tshikapa), Kasai Oriental, Lomami

CHILDREN RECRUITED

Total: 634
Trend: Increase (Peak 2017)
Girls: 21% / Boys: 79%
Abducted: 5%
Sexual Violence among Girls: 8%
Under 15: 60%
Combatants: 88%
Re-Recruited: 0%

MOTIVE

Opposition to the Government; Development in the Kasai Region; Luba/Lulua Self-Defense & Reassertion of Customary Power

ETHNICITY

Luba / Lulua

PRIMARY MEANS OF RECRUITMENT

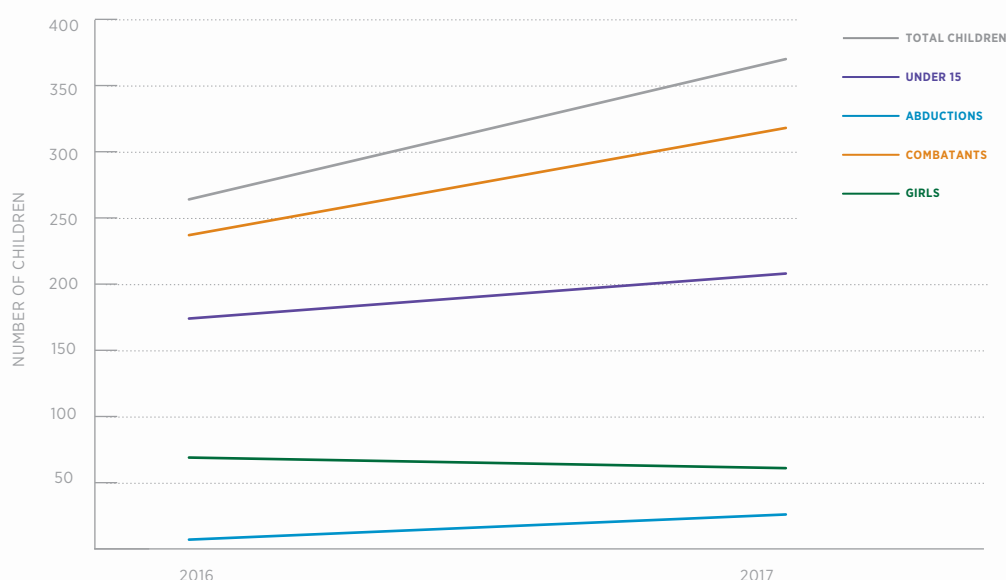
Forced (69%); Voluntary (25%)

PRIMARY PUSH FACTORS AMONG VOLUNTEERS

Family & Peer Pressure (37%); Self-Protection & Magic (29%); Ethnic Self-Defense (24%); Political (22%); Economic (20%)

PRIMARY MEANS OF SEPARATION

Surrender following MONUSCO awareness-raising (28%); Escape (26%); Arrest/Capture (20%)

TRENDS IN CHILD RECRUITMENT BY KAMUINA NSAPU

In August 2016, the Chief Kamuina Nsapu was killed by the FARDC, bringing together a coalition of his followers in a loosely organized and ethnically based militia composed of Luba and Lulua tribes. The chief's death sparked a complex crisis in which longstanding political opposition to the Government, lack of development, ethnic violence, and struggles over land and minerals came to a head. This set in motion an unexpected flare in violence in the previously calm Kasai Central Province, which quickly spread to neighboring Kasai Province, with Kasai Oriental, Lomami and Sankuru Provinces also affected. In late 2016 and early 2017, the Kamuina Nsapu militia fought the FARDC, with massive human rights violations on both sides, resulting in at least 88 mass graves identified by the United Nations. In late 2017, clashes increased with a counter militia, the Bana Mura, which is composed of Tchokwe and Pende tribes, and

is allegedly supported by members of the Government and businessmen. At the close of 2017, while the scale of recruitment and other violations committed by Kamuina Nsapu diminished, the violence between Lulua/Luba and Tchokwe/Pende bore signs of ethnic cleansing and recruitment by Kamuina Nsapu reemerged in pockets.

Described by one 11-year-old by as a “magical-religious” movement,²⁷⁸ Kamuina Nsapu became an appellation referring to a multiplicity of groups with no central command. While members of the Kamuina Nsapu family can be influential with a faction of the group, other factions entirely escape their control. The militia, which has a stronghold in Kasai Central but is active in all provinces of the Kasais, is loosely organized, amorphous, and lacks a clear command and control structure.

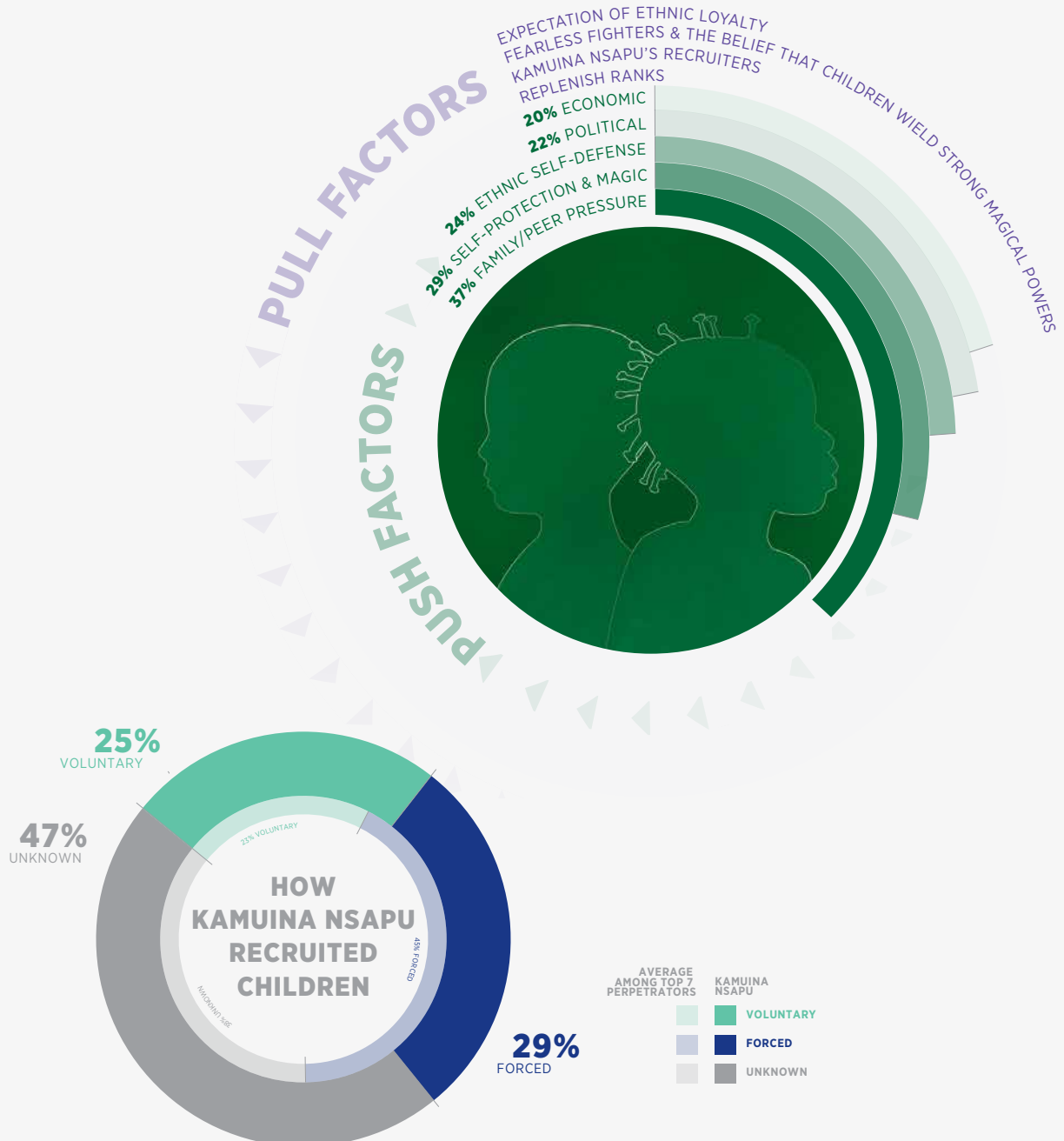
I. BEFORE:

HOW & WHY CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED BY KAMUINA NSAPU

Compared to its counterparts in Eastern DRC, the trademarks of voluntary child recruitment by Kamuina Nsapu bore starkly different signatures.

While the popular stereotype was that most children volunteered to join the militia, in fact at least 29% were forcibly recruited, including through death threats. For the rest, rarely was it one single factor that propelled a child to volunteer for the militia. In a telling case, a 12-year-old boy was baptized with his parents' blessing and said he was motivated by two reasons to fight the "FARDC who kill children our age like animals even though they are

innocent": Firstly, to avenge the death of these children and secondly, parroting the words of a well-known recruiter, to "fight the power of [the Governor]."²⁷⁹ This was a common story among children volunteering to join the militia, pointing to similar lines of argument used by certain recruiters.



Push Factors: Why Children “Volunteered” for Kamuina Nsapu

Family Facilitation & Peer Pressure

The number one reason that children joined Kamuina Nsapu was family and peer pressure, with 37% of Kamuina Nsapu child volunteers citing this reason for their decision. Some families not only condoned their recruitment, but also actively facilitated it by sending their children to tshiotas and paying for their baptism, for example the 15-year-old boy whose father gave him 5,000FC and sent him to be “baptized.”²⁸⁰ This appeared to be driven by parents’ membership in or support for the Kamuina Nsapu’s cause, or, as the violence wore on, a belief in the power of baptism to protect children from the violence in their milieu. Children frequently joined in groups of siblings, extended families or friends, egging each other on and walking or hitching rides to tshiotas together.²⁸¹ For example, one 14-year-old boy joined and was placed in a unit with “all his cousins,”²⁸² while another three brothers, ages 8, 10 and 15, were recruited by their father, a Kamuina Nsapu element who was ultimately killed by FARDC.²⁸³

Survival Strategy: Physical Protection

A lesser known but commonplace reason children joined Kamuina Nsapu was the forced recruitment of entire communities on pain of death. At least 29% of so-called volunteers did so to survive. Children, parents and whole villages who refused to give children to the militia were decapitated. This pattern can be traced to a particular recruiter named Trésor, who used this deadly tactic in Luiza and Dibaya Territories, Kasai Central Province and Kamonia Territory, Kasai Province to recruit at least 13 children between March-July 2017.²⁸⁴ Trésor and his accomplices’ threats were not empty: One 13-year-old boy watched Trésor decapitate and carry around the head of the Chief Mbangi, which he said “created great fear in the other chiefs so they [the other chiefs] could not resist our recruitment.”²⁸⁵ Another 10-year-old recruited near Luiza in March 2017 reported that Trésor ran three houses in his village: The House of Freedom, the House of Provisional Freedom and the House of Decapitation.²⁸⁶ This tactic led entire communities to enroll en masse, e.g. a family forcibly baptized together, including a 3-year-old boy.²⁸⁷

Children also volunteered to prove they were not “traitors,” thus saving their lives. One 17-year-old boy, an only child, cried as he recounted how his uncle persuaded him to join Kamuina Nsapu to prove the boy’s loyalty and save his own life, after Kamuina Nsapu assassinated his parents on suspicion of being spies.²⁸⁸

Particularly in mid-2017, the magical protective powers of baptism became magnets for children and families who did not necessarily want to join the militia, but wanted protection from the violence surrounding them. In the words of one 14-year-old boy, he was baptized “just for my protection and not to fight because I was afraid of being killed by FARDC, who kill many people, especially young people.”²⁸⁹ Other children were drawn by the belief that baptism could make them superhuman, with children reportedly struggling to grasp how friends or siblings who had been baptized could die at all.

Revenge & Protect Family and the Luba/Lulua Community: “Save My People”²⁹⁰

At least 38 children reported being recruited as early as May, June and July 2016 in Nsapu village, Dibaya Territory, Kasai Central, suggesting that the Chief was preparing for hostilities.²⁹¹ However, it was his death that provided the impetus for a wave of children to join to avenge his death. This was particularly true for boys from Nsapu village itself. Ultimately, one quarter of all child volunteers were spurred on by the desire for revenge or to protect Tshiluba-speakers. For example, one 12-year-old boy joined based on his recruiter’s call to avenge the Chief Kamuina Nsapu’s death and to end the “suffering of his village at hands of FARDC.”²⁹² This call to arms also hit closer to home, with children joining in an attempt to protect their own families or avenge the deaths of immediate family members, as demonstrated by the boy who joined after FARDC killed his parents in Mua Dikasa, Kasai Province.²⁹³ This soon extended to whole villages, as for the 15-year-old boy who joined to chase away the alleged “Rwandan soldiers who are always attacking the population in Kananga at night.”²⁹⁴ As the violence took on more ethnic tones in mid-2017, the reasons children gave for joining the militia widened from defending their families or villages to include defending the larger Luba and Lulua communities. In Kamonia, Kasai Province, children were recruited to fight not only FARDC but also Tshokwe and Pende communities, which fought under the Bana Mura moniker.²⁹⁵

Vengeance could intermingle with complex political factors. For example, one 15-year-old joined to avenge his father’s death, which on the surface appears straightforward enough. However, the boy’s father was in fact a Government intelligence agent who was first abducted and brought to a tshiota by Kamuina Nsapu, before ultimately being assassinated by the FARDC.²⁹⁶

Political Ideology²⁹⁷

In stark contrast to their counterparts in Eastern DRC, 22% of children who volunteered to join Kamuina Nsapu cited political reasons for their decision, clearly believing in the nationalistic foundation of their fight and reiterating political slogans used by their communities and, occasionally, their individual recruiters. In the words of one 17-year-old boy, he joined to “liberate his country.”²⁹⁸ Recruiters promised children, including an 8-year-old boy, that they would “occupy high ministerial posts once [we overthrew the] regime.”²⁹⁹ Others, like this 13-year-old boy, joined because they “hoped for money and a good life when the political regime changed.”³⁰⁰

Multiple children parroted the language used by a particularly prolific recruiter named Alain Kabala, who implicated Rwanda in his argument to recruit at least three boys: A 10-year-old boy recruited by Kabala joined to “reverse the government” after hearing alleged rumors of soldiers raping the wife of the Chief Kamuina Nsapu.³⁰¹ Multiple children formerly associated with the militia referred to their opponents as “Rwandan soldiers,” rather than FARDC.

Survival Strategy: Economic Support & Power

After March 2017, as family and ethnic loyalty diminished as a driver of volunteerism, Kamuina Nsapu recruiters resorted to making financial promises to children. In an under-developed region, financial incentives cannot be underestimated and were a factor that propelled 20% of all child volunteers to join. Poverty, lack of school fees and death of a parent made promises of “lots of money” tempting for children struggling to survive on a day-to-day basis.³⁰² Children were also motivated by the injustice and inequality in their communities, with one 16-year-old girl joining to “develop her village, where the suffering [poverty] is terrible.”³⁰³

Pull Factors: Why Kamuina Nsapu Recruited Children

Expectation of Ethnic Loyalty

While the vast majority of children were recruited after August 2016, 38 children reported being recruited as early as May, June and July 2016 in Nsapu village, Dibaya Territory, Kasai Central, prior to the death of the Chief Kamuina Nsapu.³⁰⁴ In six cases, children reported being personally recruited by the Chief Kamuina Nsapu himself.³⁰⁵ The expectation of ethnic loyalty dominated the militia's early child recruitment efforts. Initiation rites, which included only Luba and Lulua traditions, further reinforced the cultural basis for children's loyalty to the group. Ethnic reasons for recruiting children diminished somewhat in mid-2017, but again became a dominant factor in late 2017, as opposing ethnicities gathered their own militia, such as the Bana Mura, which was composed primarily of people from Tshokwe and Pende communities.

Fearless Fighters & the Belief that Children Wield Strong Magical Powers

More than any other armed group operating in the DRC, Kamuina Nsapu sought out children as combatants based on their beliefs in children's magical powers of protection. In a region where magic is real for both militia members and the FARDC, the belief that, by virtue of their virginity and baptism, children could be impermeable to bullets and would fearlessly approach FARDC armed with no more than sticks, made children the most valuable combatants. Indeed, the youngest children, especially girls, were explicitly sent to the frontlines to protect the next wave of combatants. Several sources also reported that drugs were used to augment children's sense of invulnerability in battle.

Kamuina Nsapu's Recruiters

Like children recruited elsewhere in DRC, children associated with Kamuina Nsapu identified their recruiters, commanders and fétisheurs by name. With such a high concentration of recruitment of so many children in such a short span of time, a web of recruiters emerged more clearly than in the East. Active recruitment campaigns were led by customary chiefs and designated recruiters, who spread the call to arms, "to save [yourselves] from being killed by the FARDC when they attack your village,"³⁰⁶ and to "restore peace" to the Kasais.³⁰⁷ Just nine men were responsible for recruiting at least 160 children in 2016 and 2017, with an additional 162 men and women serving as less prolific but still significant recruiters. Children, too, were amongst the recruiters, as in the 17-year-old boy tasked with visiting villages to "invite" other children to join.³⁰⁸

Replenish Ranks

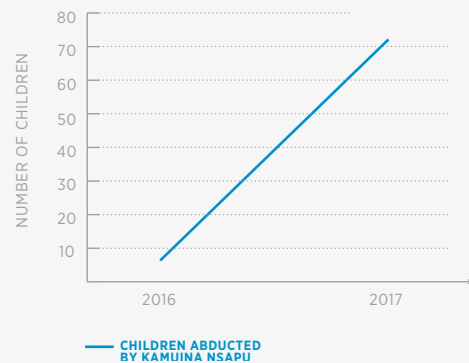
While rarely stated overtly, some children reportedly were aware that their recruitment was timed with certain units' need for more manpower. For example, two children recruited in Kambanjila, Dibaya Territory, Kasai Central in November 2016 knew they were recruited to reinforce the militia's Ngombe Brigade, which had sustained heavy losses.³⁰⁹

Trigger Violations: Abduction

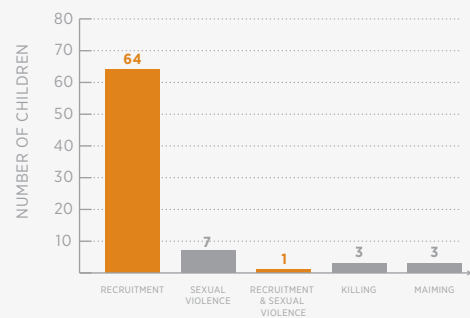
While numerous children, particularly older boys, reported joining voluntarily, this was by no means universal. As revenge and ethnicity diminished as recruitment drivers and losses in battle increased from 2016 to 2017, abduction became a means of boosting the militia's ranks. In 2017, the UN documented 72 children, including 13 girls, abducted by Kamuina Nsapu, a sharp increase from the six abductions documented in 2016. The vast majority - 83% - of these abductions were for the purpose of recruitment.³¹⁰ One 16-year-old boy abducted in Sandiji, Luiza, Kasai Central was clear that the reason for his abduction was to increase the militia's ranks in May 2017 after heavy losses.³¹¹

Certain regions, such as Mambayi Sector, Luiza Territory or Kazumba Territory,³¹² Kasai Central, were known for mass abductions targeting children. Children recounted stories of militia members, especially those of Kete ethnicity, entering villages specifically looking for children.³¹³

CHILD ABDUCTIONS BY KAMUINA NSAPU



PURPOSE OF CHILD ABDUCTION BY KAMUINA NSAPU



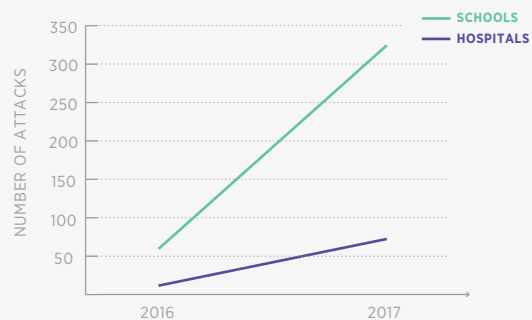
Attacks on Schools as a Means of Child Recruitment

Kamuina Nsapu launched at least 382 attacks on schools, far outstripping the scale of such attacks previously documented in the DRC.³¹⁴ Despite this unprecedented figure of documented attacks, the actual figures are likely far higher, with over 1,000 additional allegations received by the UN.

The attacks were intended to destroy places of learning, as symbols of defiance to government authority. Whole structures burnt to the ground, windows broken and facilities rendered unusable, with many schools remaining closed long after the original attack. In at least two cases, schools in Dibaya Territory, Kasai Province were attacked multiple times, first in August 2016 and again in February 2017.³¹⁵

While shocking on its own merit, this unprecedented pattern was closely inter-related with child recruitment, as schools and their hundreds of students were targeted as recruitment and abduction sites. For example, the militia – including children themselves – entered at least three schools in Kazumba Territory, armed with knives and machetes, demanding that if “we can’t go to school, neither can you,” and saying that teachers should not return to teach.³¹⁶ Five boys, ages 10 to 16, were abducted while hiding inside their classrooms at Tshikula Primary and Secondary Schools.³¹⁷

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS & HOSPITALS BY KAMUINA NSAPU



Re-Recruitment

In contrast to the revolving door of the East, Kamuina Nsapu did not display a pattern of re-recruitment.

This was in part due to the short duration of the violence, which could be measured in months, rather than years or decades as in the East. This, however, could change if the insurgency continues and the militia initiates new rounds of recruitment. It was also a function of the active role of MONUSCO demobilization campaigns, which led numerous local chiefs and their followers to surrender en masse in mid-late 2017. However, if the need

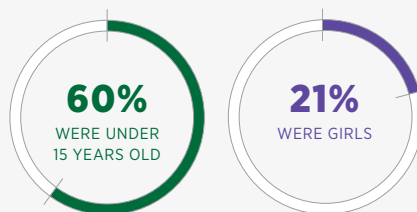
to provide intensive reintegration, economic and psychosocial support to the hundreds, if not thousands of children, separated from Kamuina Nsapu is not met, children will be more vulnerable to re-recruitment in the coming months and years.

II. DURING:

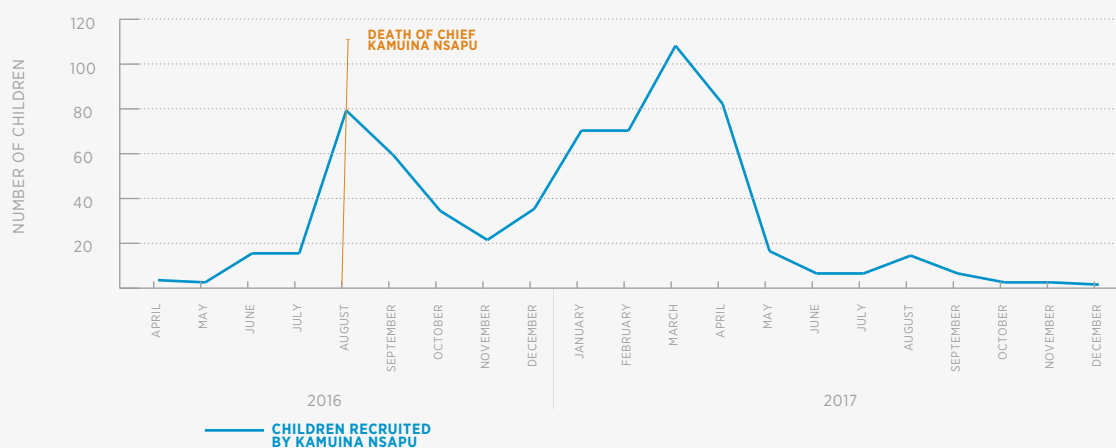
LIFE INSIDE KAMUINA NSAPU



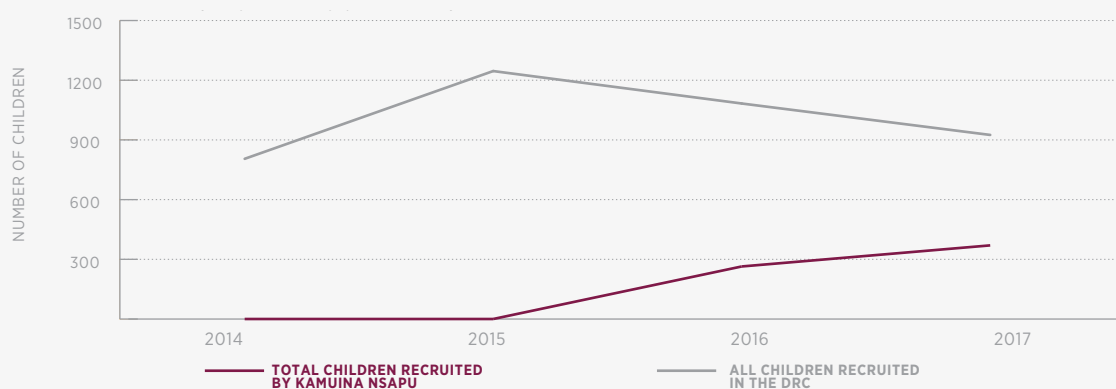
THE PROFILE OF A CHILD RECRUITED BY KAMUINA NSAPU FROM 2014-2017



CHILDREN RECRUITED BY KAMUINA NSAPU BY MONTH



CHILDREN RECRUITED BY KAMUINA NSAPU BY YEAR



The Girls & Boys Recruited by Kamuina Nsapu

In the first year and a half of the militia's existence, Kamuina Nsapu was the third highest child recruiter in the DRC since 2014 and the number one recruiter of children in 2017: 370 children (58 girls, 312 boys) and 264 children (25 girls, 239 boys) were recruited by the militia in 2017 and 2016, respectively.

These figures are likely the tip of the iceberg, as the UN received thousands more allegations of child recruitment that it was not able to verify. For example, on mission to Masuika, Kalunga Sector, Luiza Territory, Kasai Central in August 2017, MONUSCO was only able to verify a fraction (50) of the 657 allegations it received (527 boys, 130 girls) due to the overwhelming volume of cases and limited resources. Moreover, children reported the presence of up to 60 other boys and girls in their units, including networks of siblings and cousins.³¹⁸ Clearly, the number of children demobilized outstripped the UN's capacity to individually document them.

While beyond the reporting period, it is important to note that the high figures from 2016 and 2017 did not last into 2018, when figures fell in a dramatic inverse of late 2016 and early 2017. While the risk of resumption of conflict in the Kasais and therefore child recruitment remains, the pattern currently indicates that it was an acute instance of unprecedented recruitment, rather than a long-term trend.

Age

Kamuina Nsapu's recruitment pattern bore stark differences from that of armed groups operating in the East. Most notably, Kamuina Nsapu tended to recruit far younger children, baptizing some as young as age 3³¹⁹: 60% of all children recruited by Kamuina Nsapu were below age 15, although this figure dropped slightly from 2016 (66%) to 2017 (56%). Children reported that recruiters specifically searched for the youngest children, including children at schools.³²⁰ The youngest child documented as a combatant was a 4-year-old boy sent to face the FARDC with sticks;³²¹ the youngest child documented as baptized was 1 year and two months old.³²²

Gender

Kamuina Nsapu recruited girls at the relatively high rate of 21%, second only to FRPI nationally. The youngest virgin girls were believed to possess the strongest magical powers and were made to serve as "Ya Mamas" on the frontlines.³²³

Daily Life & Initiation Rites³²⁴

Entry into Kamuina Nsapu begins with spiritual ceremonies, or "baptisms," in shrines called "tshiota," at the heart of which is a sacred fireplace. Children were baptized along with dozens or hundreds of others – reportedly up to 190 children and 70 adults – on the same day as their recruitment to become invulnerable to bullets.³²⁵ In a reflection of the group's diffuse structure and recruitment patterns, local Kamuina Nsapu chiefs performed baptisms in their own tshiotas. Most children reported being baptized in or nearby their villages or towns, although some travelled for their baptism and then returned to their villages to join their local Kamuina Nsapu unit.³²⁶

Chiefs charged from 1,500CF to 8,000CF (1 to 5USD) per participant; a baptism of 300 people with an average of 5,000CF, could earn the chief as much as 1,000USD.³²⁷ Baptisms usually took place at night around a fire,³²⁸ with participants jumping over fire, swallowing three pieces of a local grain ("benga"), sometimes mixed into a ball of pounded yams ("fufu"), and one or two live red ants ("makenene"),³²⁹ drink alcohol fortified with roots and tree bark, and occasionally smoke marijuana to the point of losing consciousness.³³⁰ This "baptism" also involved immersing children in water and making deep incisions to children's abdomens and shoulders.³³¹ Those children who died of their wounds were deemed not to have protective powers while the survivors were believed to be "bulletproof," and were given protective amulets, red headbands and armbands, and spears or sticks called "musa wa lupatu." These children were then sent to the frontlines to fight the FARDC with knives, machetes, spears, occasionally small arms, or simply magic. Children believed wholeheartedly in the power of the baptism, adding to their initial fearlessness in battle: As one boy who initially did not want to fight said, "It is clear that this baptism can change a child's spirit and push him to commit odious crimes in battle with soldiers."³³²

Role: Combatant

Children, including the youngest, made up a significant number of the militia's fighting force and participated in combat at a rate rarely seen in the East, with 88% of children recruited by Kamuina Nsapu used as combatants. Such a high rate of child recruitment appears to have begun with the very beginning of the violence (90% of children recruited in 2016 saw combat), indicating that it was a deliberate strategy, rather than an act of desperation to fill ranks as the violence wore on. Children wearing "protective" red armbands and headbands took part in up to 10 major battles, including the fight to take Kananga airport, Mbuji Mayi, and other towns.³³³

Armed with knives, machetes, occasionally 12 caliber rifles, and rarely grenades,³³⁴ the majority of children fought with sticks and "white arms" (knives or machetes), like the 7-year-old boy who declared that he was sent to fight the FARDC with a wooden stick.³³⁵ Magic weapons, which were genuinely believed in by children and FARDC alike, included herbs ("kashinda kabukulu") that gave the user telepathic powers to evoke the spirits of the dead to carry out attacks, sticks or knives believed to transform into firearms, and eggs that had been "transformed into bombs" by the chief's magical blessing.³³⁶ One 16-year-old boy believed that kashinda kabukulu gave him the power to "cut off people's heads from a distance," including two FARDC and one PNC.³³⁷ Another 16-year-old boy fought with earth mixed with pieces of wood while invoking the name of the Chief Kamuina Nsapu for strength.³³⁸ A third 16-year-old boy invoked his ancestors' spirits in the name of the Chief Kamuina Nsapu [to carry out attacks] and other children used magic, in their own words, to "protect the population without killing."³³⁹

In the face of heavy losses, child combatants' faith in their protective powers required regular renewal and many children received multiple baptisms to restore their invulnerability.³⁴⁰ One 17-year-old boy claimed to have received 28 baptisms, for the price of 50FC each.³⁴¹ However, in the words of one 17-year-old boy, "At the start we used arms that had magical powers but, after a while, they no longer had effect so we turned to guns."³⁴²

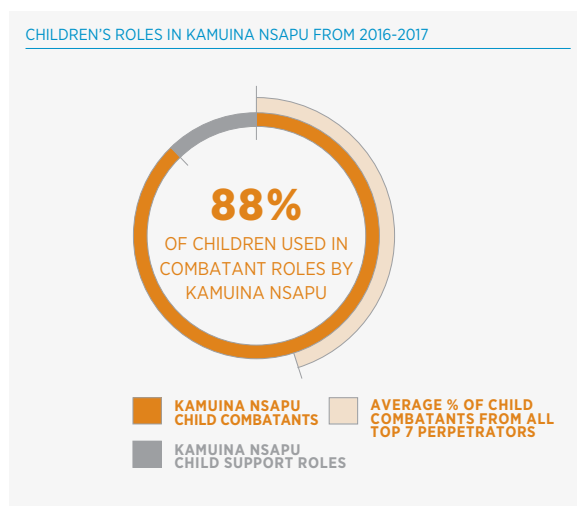
Girls Who Catch Bullets

Eighty-nine percent of girls recruited by Kamuina Nsapu were involved in armed clashes, in stark contrast to the armed groups in the East, which – with the exception of ADF – infrequently used girls as combatants. A rarity in the DRC, one 17-year-old girl served as a commander in battle, leading her unit of boys and girls in clashes against the FARDC.³⁴³ Not only were girls used as combatants but they were also deemed to have special powers, derived from their virginity. The militia sent these "Ya Mamas" to "receive bullets in their skirts" and collect the wounded on the frontline.³⁴⁴ One 16-year-old girl indicated that her "grand role" on the front was to "be like a bullet-proof shield" who could collect the wounded and "mysteriously" bring them to the tshiota for traditional medicine.³⁴⁵ Intentional use of children as human shields, while widely suspected, is difficult to prove on a large scale. However, at least three children, including an 11-year-old girl, declared that they always served in the first line of combatants to protect the militants behind them from the FARDC.³⁴⁶

Beheading the Enemy

More so than in the East, children in Kamuina Nsapu matter-of-factly recounted fighting, but many spoke of fear of being killed while fighting.³⁴⁷ Nevertheless, children as young as 10 claimed to have killed multiple – up to 25 – FARDC and PNC elements.³⁴⁸ Given the dearth of guns and the availability of machetes in children's hands, decapitation was the most common method of killing FARDC soldiers, during or after a battle.³⁴⁹ Adversaries' heads appeared to play a role in the baptisms or to reinforce the power of a tshiota, with younger children given specific responsibilities within this system. An 11-year-old boy described his role to slit the throats of and decapitate incapacitated, injured or captured FARDC soldiers, two boys, aged 9 and 14, brought the heads to the tshiota, and, finally, a 13-year-old boy organized and displayed all of the heads in the tshiota.³⁵⁰

CHILDREN'S ROLES IN KAMUINA NSAPU FROM 2016-2017



Role: Support

Even the 26% of children in Kamuina Nsapu who were not combatants were baptized and wore red bands for protection. This is in contrast to armed groups in the East, like Mayi Mayi Mazembe, which exclusively employed magic to protect combatants. This could be due to the inherent risk of any association with Kamuina Nsapu. It may also be a result of children in the militia playing roles that walk the line between combatant and support, such as a 17-year-old “war operator” who planned operations, thus putting him at high risk of being targeted.³⁵¹

Kamuina Nsapu made use of children as loyal enforcers to police its own members: One 17-year-old girl served as both combatant at Nganza and military police, doling out punishments at Kananga stadium to “militiamen who did not abide by the rules.”³⁵² The militia tasked another 16-year-old

boy with “arresting” [abducting] villagers at the request of his chief. Back at the tshiota, if the arrested were “found guilty” of transgressions, his chief would kill them on the spot.³⁵³ Children were especially valued as guards: A 9-year-old boy served as a bodyguard of the Chief Kamuina Nsapu prior to his death and was later charged with securing the “Royal Court,”³⁵⁴ and two boys, ages 14 and 16, guarded tshiotas while the others left for battle.³⁵⁵

Other children played operational support roles more reminiscent of the ways armed groups in the East used children. These ranged from a 12-year-old boy in charge of logistics and operations,³⁵⁶ spies informing militia commanders of FARDC movements,³⁵⁷ cooks, tax collectors, aides to fétisseurs and recruiters of other children.³⁵⁸ One 16-year-old boy told child protection staff that his only role was, in his words, to “lose blood,” which may be a reference to the reported practice of drinking blood during baptisms.³⁵⁹

Violations Triggered by Child Recruitment: The Risks Children Faced in Kamuina Nsapu

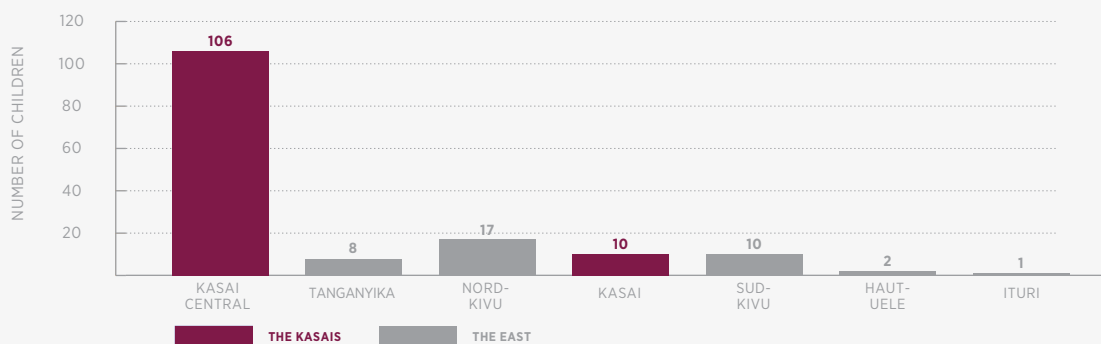
Killing & Maiming

With 88% of child recruits on the battlefield, killing and maiming was an inevitable risk for children in Kamuina Nsapu. The full scale of children who died as a result of their association with the militia remains unknown, however, testimonies from children, dozens more allegations received that have yet to be verified, and the identification of 88 mass graves by UN at the close of 2017 all point to significant numbers of child casualties. The protective powers that both children and their FARDC opponents believed to be real, as well as Kamuina Nsapu’s use of children on the frontlines and chiefs’ abandonment of children when the militia was overrun,³⁶⁰ led to close combat between young children, FARDC soldiers and PNC officers. The FARDC’s use of force was often disproportionate relative to the threat the children posed. For example, during clashes on 10 April 2017

in Tshimbulu, Kasai Central, FARDC soldiers reportedly threw grenades from short range at unarmed children associated with Kamuina Nsapu.³⁶¹

Child survivors sustained injuries ranging from multiple bullets lodged in their abdomens and spinal columns, to fractured bones and amputated legs.³⁶² Children rattled off the names and numbers of children they watched die on the battlefield,³⁶³ such as the 16-year-old boy who was the sole survivor of a battle in Luebo,³⁶⁴ or the 10-year-old boy who killed five soldiers after seeing FARDC kill his friends.³⁶⁵ Thirty individual children reported witnessing an estimated 60 children killed in Moma village, Luiza Territory, Kasai Central in May-June 2017. They were allegedly buried in a mass grave located two kilometers from the village.³⁶⁶

FARDC KILLING & MAIMING OF CHILDREN BY PROVINCE IN 2017



The perpetrators were exclusively state agents: Three quarters (116) of all children killed and maimed by the FARDC in 2017 occurred in the Kasais, far higher than in the East, where 38 such cases were attributed to the FARDC.

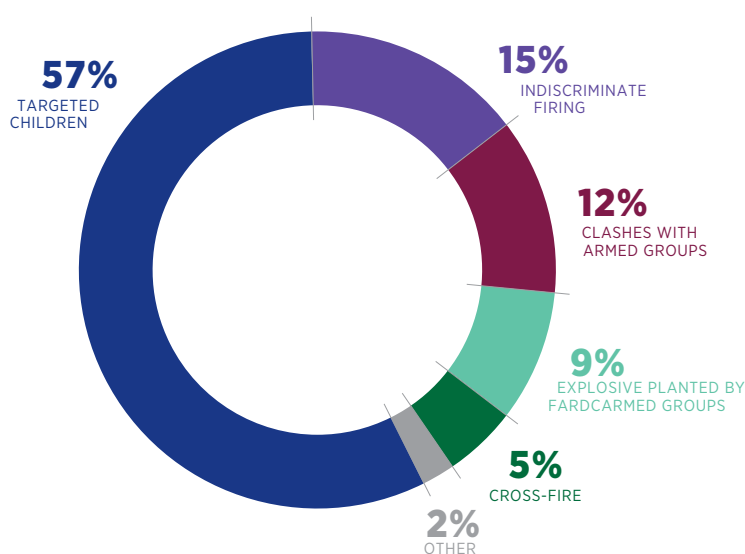
However, of the 116 child casualties documented by the UN in the Kasais between 2016 and 2017, only 12% of children were killed or maimed while fighting for Kamuina Nsapu. The majority - 57% - of children killed or maimed in the Kasais by FARDC were directly targeted on suspicion of membership in Kamuina Nsapu. This was in part a function of the massive recruitment and use of children by the militia such that just being under 18 years old and of Luba or Lulua ethnicity put children at elevated risk. In an indication of this generalized violence affecting all children in the Kasais, on 28 March 2017, in Nganza Commune, Kasai Central, 32 children (15 girls, 17 boys, aged from a few months old to 15 years) were among civilians killed by FARDC during cordon and search operations targeting alleged Kamuina Nsapu. Whole families – in one home, six children, four siblings and two cousins, and in nearby house four-year-old twin girls – were shot dead. That same night, 10 siblings died when a FARDC officer threw a grenade into their house.³⁶⁷

Killing and maiming of children associated with the militia had two opposing effects: Early on, it fueled the recruitment cycle of children motivated by revenge, for example the 9- and 12-year-old boys who volunteered to avenge the death of friends, with specific reference to the killing of young girls by FARDC.³⁶⁸ As fighting wore on, the death toll fueled surrenders, including several children who decided to leave the militia after the above mentioned killings in Nganza.³⁶⁹

Sexual Violence

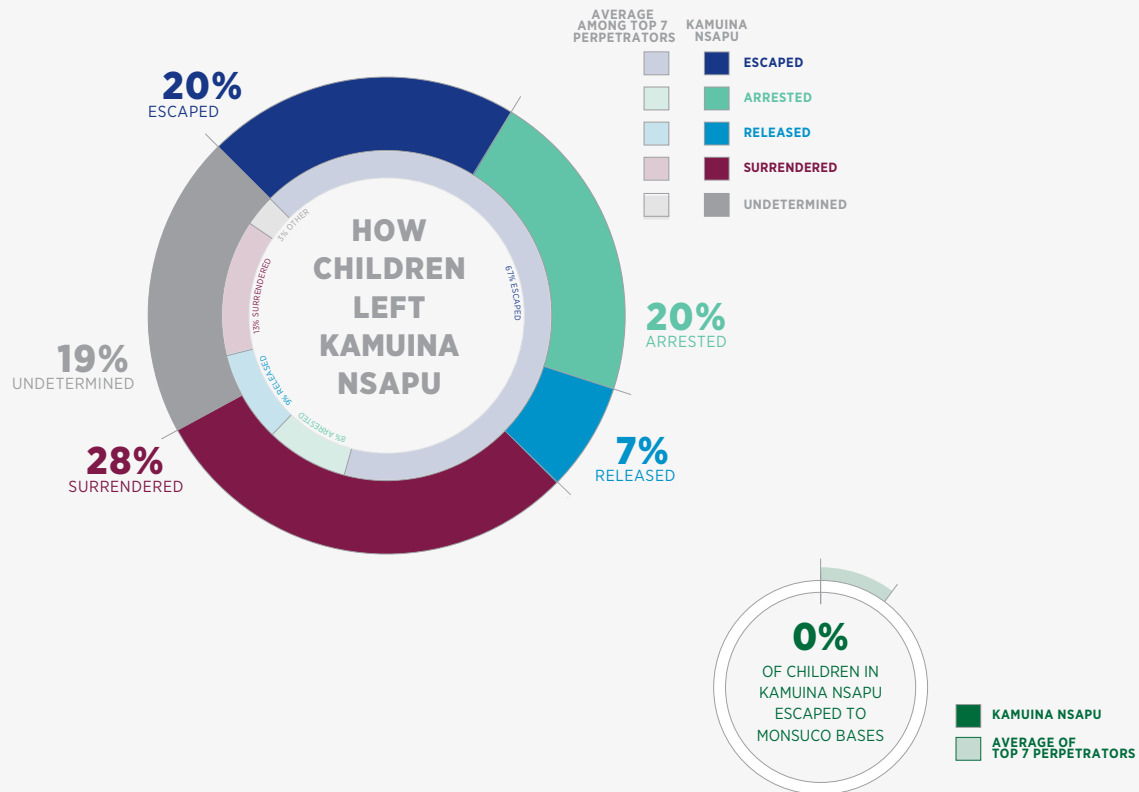
Very few (11) children in Kamuina Nsapu – boys or girls – reported sexual violence. Anecdotally, this may partly be due to the belief that girls retained power through their virginity. Consistent with the deep belief in magic, rape was, however, linked to divination, e.g. a 15-year-old girl in Kamuina Nsapu raped as a “test to know how long a battle would last.”³⁷⁰ No girls reported being used as “wives,” a common practice among armed groups in the East. However, one boy reported that militants paid their commander money to “obtain authorization to sleep with the young girls,” essentially pimping girl combatants out to his own soldiers.³⁷¹

CONTEXT OF KILLING AND MAIMING OF CHILDREN BY FARDC IN THE KASAI FROM 2016-2017



II. AFTER:

HOW CHILDREN WERE SEPARATED FROM KAMUINA NSAPU



Surrender

One in three (28%) children recruited by Kamuina Nsapu surrendered individually or with their chiefs in response to calls for demobilization from MONUSCO, chiefs, or, occasionally, parents.³⁷²

This was far higher than any other armed group in the DRC. By comparison, the armed groups with the next highest rates of surrender – Rayia Mutomboki and Mayi Mayi Mazembe – amounted to just 6% of all children recruited by those groups. In a typical example, a 13-year-old boy surrendered in June 2017 with his unit after his commander negotiated a peace deal with the FARDC and demobilized.³⁷³

MONUSCO community and radio demobilization awareness-raising proved to be influential in swaying children to surrender or for commanders to release children voluntarily, as, for example, the 11-year-old boy who surrendered with his chief after hearing MONUSCO DDR messages in April 2017.³⁷⁴ Between

August and October 2017, hundreds of children surrendered at a time – far more than could be individually documented. In just one mission launched on 8 September 2017, MONUSCO CPS separated 157 children, including 32 girls, ages 5 to 17; four days later, 134 more children, including 27 girls were separated, after MONUSCO child protection staff negotiated directly with customary chiefs.³⁷⁵

Escape

Relative to their counterparts in the East, a small proportion – 26% – of children recruited by Kamuina Nsapu escaped.

This may be due to the deep ethnic-religious-political commitment reported by many children, the effectiveness of negotiations and demobilization campaigns, or the high detention levels of children attempting to escape to family or NGOs. Scattered across rural areas, children tended to flee toward the regional capitals of Tshikapa or Kananga, while others reportedly fled to refugee camps across the Angolan border.³⁷⁶

As the fighting wore on, children's motives for escape grew stronger and boiled down to two factors: survival and disillusionment. As they watched their comrades die and units dwindle, fear for their lives prompted more children to escape.³⁷⁷ Others sought safety from harsh punishments within the militia itself, like the 15-year-old boy who escaped after suffering ill-treatment for refusing to fight the FARDC or the 14-year-old who fled after militants accused him of being a FARDC spy and cut off one of his ears.³⁷⁸

Arrest & Capture

Children recruited by Kamuina Nsapu had the highest arrest rate among children associated with any armed group in the DRC: At least 20% of all children documented by the UN as recruited by Kamuina Nsapu were arrested.

Significantly, this included high rates of girls arrested (18% of all girls recruited), whereas girls were very rarely arrested for association with armed groups in the East. This may be due to the high numbers of child combatants, including girls, who were captured by FARDC during battle and subsequently arrested, lack of familiarity among Kasai-based FARDC, PNC and Military Court with the child DDR and juvenile justice processes, or the politicized nature of the violence. Like armed groups in the East, such as the ADF or Mayi Mayi Mazembe, Kamuina Nsapu targeted prisons, releasing detained members while simultaneously attacking a state symbol. This was how a 12-year-old boy was freed when the militia mounted an attack on Kamayi Prison, where he was held in Dimbelenge, Kasai Central.³⁷⁹

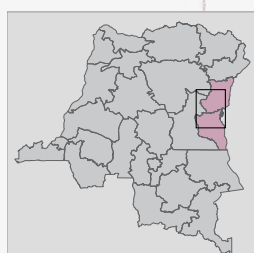
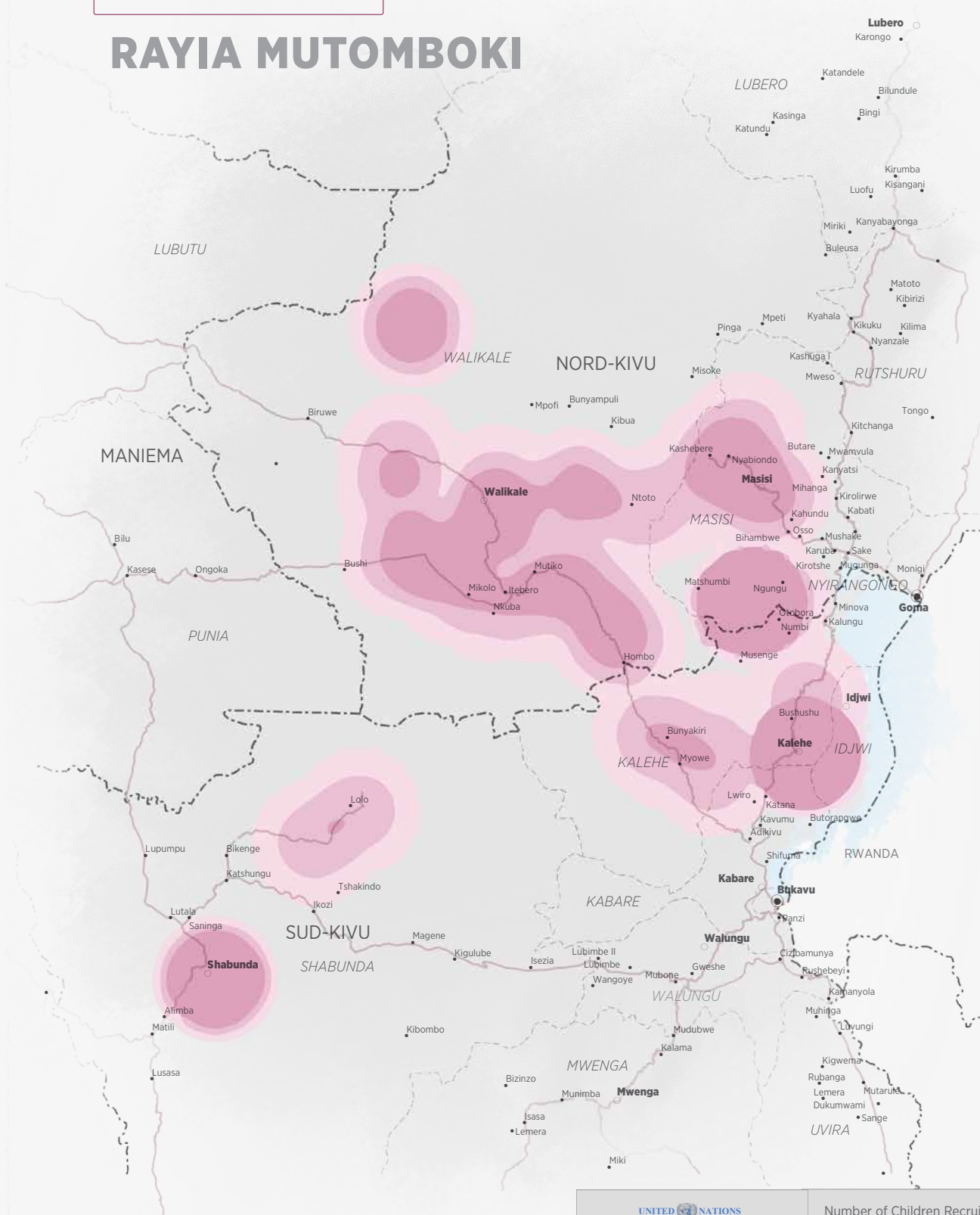
Brutal treatment of children during their arrest, capture and detention amounted in many cases to ill-treatment, including kicking, beating, deprivation of food and water for up to two weeks at a time.³⁸⁰ In one deeply concerning case, the boy never made it to detention: The 12-year-old boy, recruited in September 2016, was arrested while en route to Nganza to reinforce Kamuina Nsapu positions. His captors badly beat the boy, chopped off his thumb and left machete lacerations across his chest, shoulders and head before abandoning him in the bush.³⁸¹

Endnotes

- ²⁷⁸ 256050
- ²⁷⁹ 256327, see also 256254
- ²⁸⁰ 251446
- ²⁸¹ 239200
- ²⁸² 234494
- ²⁸³ 244457
- ²⁸⁴ 255988, see also 251446, 255657, 256018, 256039, 256710, 258711, 261206, 261230, 261226, 261371
- ²⁸⁵ 1261208
- ²⁸⁶ 261253
- ²⁸⁷ 261226, see also whole villages forced to join in 251260, 255267
- ²⁸⁸ 255651
- ²⁸⁹ 255787
- ²⁹⁰ 234489, see also 240780
- ²⁹¹ 234492, 234498, 238725, 239129, 239294, 247447, 243766, 239394, 247449, 246650, 243761, 238489, 236264, 235977, 234495.
- ²⁹² 255865
- ²⁹³ 251256, see also 255640, 260076
- ²⁹⁴ 255921
- ²⁹⁵ 256420
- ²⁹⁶ 255628
- ²⁹⁷ 255865
- ²⁹⁸ 234498, see also 251391
- ²⁹⁹ 255841, 259998
- ³⁰⁰ 260900
- ³⁰¹ 256314, see also 256254, 256327
- ³⁰² 255774, 240811, 255657
- ³⁰³ 1 255634
- ³⁰⁴ 234492, 234498, 238725, 239129, 239294, 247447, 243766, 239394, 247449, 246650, 243761, 238489, 236264, 235977, 234495.
- ³⁰⁵ 235977, 240877, 243761, 246650, 251529, 2515214,
- ³⁰⁶ 255835
- ³⁰⁷ 261013
- ³⁰⁸ 240752
- ³⁰⁹ 255949, 255955
- ³¹⁰ 244220, 244267
- ³¹¹ 255945
- ³¹² 259087, 259097, 259868
- ³¹³ 244220, 244267
- ³¹⁴ The United Nations verified 324 schools attacked by Kamuina Nsapu in 2016 and 2017. By comparison, 22 schools were verified as attacked by Mayi Mayi Mazembe, the second highest number of attacks in the DRC from 2014 to 2017.
- ³¹⁵ 232209
- ³¹⁶ 232212, 232214, 232215
- ³¹⁷ 232828
- ³¹⁸ 235732
- ³¹⁹ 261226
- ³²⁰ 1244267, 232823, 232828, 240796, 240866, 240899.
- ³²¹ 251529
- ³²² 261261
- ³²³ 235975, 236198, 255966.
- ³²⁴ For additional details, see MONUSCO, JMAC Profile: Kamuina Nsapu and the Dynamics of Violence in the Kasai Region, 2 May 2017.
- ³²⁵ 239737, 232845
- ³²⁶ 232367, 255676
- ³²⁷ 255658
- ³²⁸ 255660, 256253
- ³²⁹ In Luba lore, red ants figure prominently in the tribe's creation.
- ³³⁰ 232257, 255634, 255638, 255665
- ³³¹ 255642, 255651, 255960, 260632
- ³³² 261215
- ³³³ 234484, 232290
- ³³⁴ 232657
- ³³⁵ 244267
- ³³⁶ 232845, 240905, 240911, 234502
- ³³⁷ 234503
- ³³⁸ 234509
- ³³⁹ 239737, 240911 see also 240866
- ³⁴⁰ 255769
- ³⁴¹ 261037
- ³⁴² 240816
- ³⁴³ 261206
- ³⁴⁴ 235975, 236198
- ³⁴⁵ 255901
- ³⁴⁶ 256021
- ³⁴⁷ 239779
- ³⁴⁸ 232290, 232657, 232383, 234484. 234502, 236264, see also 232657
- ³⁴⁹ 236187
- ³⁵⁰ 256342, 256485, 256490 and 256480, see also 251807
- ³⁵¹ 240877
- ³⁵² 236187, see also 244267
- ³⁵³ 235721
- ³⁵⁴ 243761
- ³⁵⁵ 256269, 235721
- ³⁵⁶ 255837
- ³⁵⁷ 232367, 255965
- ³⁵⁸ 240888, 255267, 240752
- ³⁵⁹ 240881. See also MONUSCO, JMAC Profile: Kamuina Nsapu and the Dynamics of Violence in the Kasai Region, 2 May 2017, page 8.
- ³⁶⁰ 239171, see also 239206
- ³⁶¹ 232027, 232022, 234504, 251446
- ³⁶² 232027, 232022, 234504, 251446, 251391, 246039, 234501, 236264
- ³⁶³ 235146, 243766, 256097
- ³⁶⁴ 239125
- ³⁶⁵ 259883
- ³⁶⁶ 244220, see also 244267 in which children witnessed FARDC killing up to 14 children in Masuika, where there are allegedly mass graves.
- ³⁶⁷ 230747, 230840, 230849, 230850, 230867.
- ³⁶⁸ 255830 and 255857, see also 255860, 255965, 260027
- ³⁶⁹ 263819, 263821
- ³⁷⁰ 261356, see also 255947
- ³⁷¹ 260074
- ³⁷² 260935
- ³⁷³ 239171, see also 239206, 245279, 239450
- ³⁷⁴ 260381, see also 260590, 239765, 240794, 256017, 256018, 260889
- ³⁷⁵ 246652
- ³⁷⁶ 256710
- ³⁷⁷ 260000, see also 260900
- ³⁷⁸ 263812, 256714. To paint a realistically full and complex picture, it should be said that, while fleeing, the 14-year-old boy abducted and raped a 9-year-old girl.
- ³⁷⁹ 1 251807
- ³⁸⁰ 232367, 232905, 240811, 238234, 255052. Regarding "torture," children released from detention bore scars from their time in prison at the hands of authorities.
- ³⁸¹ 244253

IN-DEPTH PROFILE:

RAYIA MUTOMBOKI



0 25 50 100
Kilometers



TERRITORY

North Kivu (Walikale, Masisi), South Kivu (Shabunda, Mwenge, Kalehe, Walungu)

CHILDREN RECRUITED

Total: 554
Trend: Decrease (Peak 2015)
Girls: 11% / Boys: 89%
Abducted: 33%
Sexual Violence against Girls: 41%
Under 15: 38%
Combatants: 45%
Re-Recruited: 1%

MOTIVE

Self-defense; Control of natural resources; Taxation

ETHNICITY

Tembo / Nyanga / Rega / Mushi / Bashi

PRIMARY MEANS OF RECRUITMENT

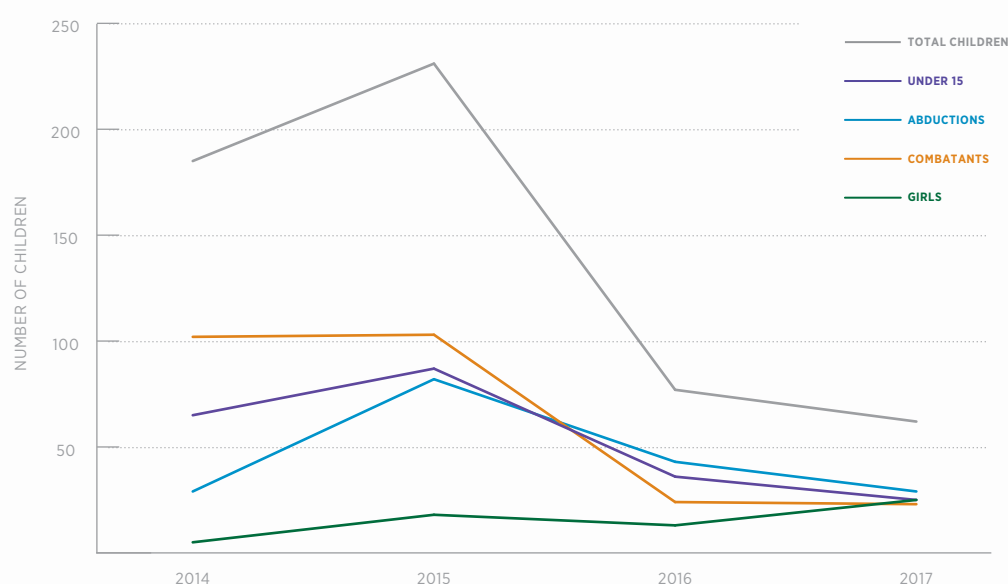
Forced (39%); Voluntary (8%)

PRIMARY PUSH FACTORS AMONG VOLUNTEERS

Revenge/Ethnic Defense (49%); Family & Peer Pressure (30%); Economic (19%); Self-Protection (9%)

PRIMARY MEANS OF SEPARATION

Escape (65%);
Release following NGO Awareness-Raising (19%)

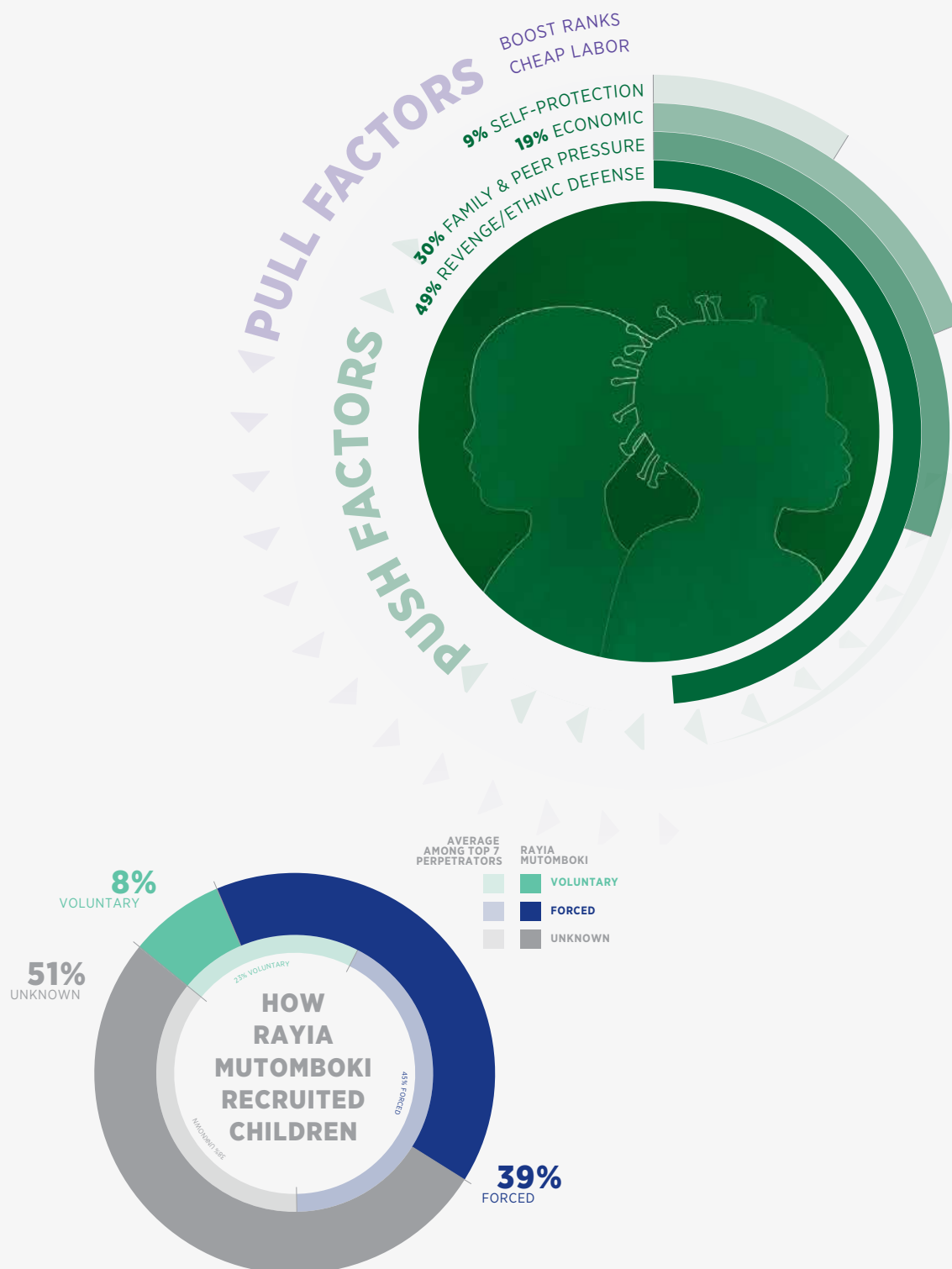
TRENDS IN CHILD RECRUITMENT BY RAYIA MUTOMBOKI

The Rayia Mutomboki armed movement began in Shabunda Territory, South Kivu in 2005 and spread to North Kivu around 2011. The groups did not develop under a central leadership but rather emanated as a spontaneous movement from various Tembo, Mushi and Rega villages in South Kivu, and Nyanga and Tembo villages in North Kivu, all of which felt under common threat from the FDLR and in need of self-defense mechanisms. At its origin, this diverse and loosely-organized network was supported by local communities and chiefs. In keeping with its loose structure, alliances

between Rayia Mutomboki and other armed groups have been somewhat fluid, and often short-lived. In the past, the FARDC reportedly benefitted from Rayia Mutomboki's anti-Rwandophone agenda and clashes against FDLR FOCA, until the FDLR FOCA vacated Kalehe and Shabunda. In 2017, Rayia Mutomboki intensified its attacks in an attempt to gain control of mineral resources, particularly gold mines in South Kivu. Rayia Mutomboki groups persist largely due to absent or weak state security, compounded by poor road access and the remoteness of many of their strongholds.

I. BEFORE:

HOW & WHY CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED BY RAYIA MUTOMBOKI



Push Factors: Why Children “Volunteered” for Rayia Mutomboki

Revenge & Ethnic Self-Defense

As the tit-for-tat cycle of reprisals played out in North and South Kivu, the primary reason that children joined Rayia Mutomboki was to defend their family, village or broader community from FDLR FOCA and from rival Rayia Mutomboki factions.³⁸² This reasoning spurred 49% of volunteers to join up. This reasoning was particularly common in 2014 and increased in frequency and vehemence in 2015 in North Kivu, when FDLR FOCA-Rayia Mutomboki clashes were frequent and Rayia Mutomboki actively mobilized its youth to “chase out the Rwanda Hutus” and to “fight against FDLR FOCA’s taxes and murders.”³⁸³

Most frequently, the emphasis was on the external enemy. In the words of one boy, his goal was to “combat the Rwandans in the village,”³⁸⁴ referring to the Hutu-based FDLR FOCA. Less frequently, the emphasis was on upholding the values of a child’s community. Over a beer, General Maachano personally recruited a 13-year-old boy whom he had reportedly known for many years, saying he must join to “protect our Tembo community.”³⁸⁵ Occasionally, family and peer pressure figured in children’s decisions to defend their communities, e.g. the 13-year-old boy convinced by friends already in the group or the 14-year-old girl recruited by her brother, but this factor was much less frequent than in FDLR FOCA.³⁸⁶

Some volunteers actively sought out high-ranking commanders, with one 15-year-old boy going directly to General Ngoa in Makombo, Walikale Territory, North Kivu to offer his services.³⁸⁷ This line of argument was particularly effective with boys, including a 17-year-old boy who reported feeling proud to belong to the group.³⁸⁸

Linked to – but far more personal than – ethnic defense, was avenging the deaths of loved ones. Often children made such choices immediately after an attack by another armed group on a child’s home. For instance, the 15-year-old boy who joined at the encouragement of his community shortly after FDLR FOCA pillaged his village and killed his two older brothers and uncle.³⁸⁹ When the coalition fragmented, children directed their desire for revenge internally toward other factions: When the Maachano and Birikoriko factions split in September 2017, Rayia Mutomboki combatants siding with Maachano killed three brothers siding with Birikoriko. At the boys’ burial, their 15-year-old brother decided to join General Birikoriko to one day avenge their deaths.³⁹⁰

Survival Strategy: Economic Support

Like Nyatura and to a lesser extent FDLR FOCA, Rayia Mutomboki’s child recruitment benefited from the often-dire poverty of children in its zone, particularly in 2017. Rayia Mutomboki recruiters promised one 14-year-old boy that his “life will change because there [in the camp], there are many good things.”³⁹¹ Small offers could reel a child in, e.g. the 12-year-old boy who followed elements to their camp for regular meals.³⁹² Others were savvy: One 16-year-old boy whose merchandise was stolen by elements in Shabunda chose to join the group in a calculation that he would no longer be robbed.³⁹³

Economic survival figured in 19% of child volunteers’ decisions and was usually paired with another push or pull factor, such as the enticement of food or a salary, adding weight to another reason to join the group. For instance, when a 14-year-old boy’s parents could not pay his school fees, the boy had time on his hands and decided to “reinforce” Rayia Mutomboki with the belief that “the group was disappearing.”³⁹⁴

Survival Strategy: Physical Protection

In the territory held by Rayia Mutomboki, protection was a rare commodity and a tempting proposition for 9% of child volunteers. Rayia Mutomboki was occasionally viewed as a “next best” protector when family fails to provide or is the danger itself, e.g. the 15-year-old who joined after his mother passed away and his stepmother threatened to kill him.³⁹⁵ Other times, children choose self-preservation, even when the group itself is the danger. In one case, Rayia Mutomboki apprehended a 16-year-old boy and 21 of his friends after their football hit a pregnant woman and caused a miscarriage. The collective punishment doled out to the whole community was the “donation” of a goat and forced labor, during which Rayia Mutomboki beat the boy so badly that he lost consciousness. After two days in the hospital, the boy agreed to join, judging he would be safer inside than outside Rayia Mutomboki.³⁹⁶

Pull Factors: Why Rayia Mutomboki Recruited Children

Boost Ranks

The clearest motive for Rayia Mutomboki factions' child recruitment was to strategically inflate their ranks. Drumming up child recruits was a key part of planning Rayia Mutomboki operations, with rallies held in preparation for attacks on FARDC, Mayi Mayi Kifuafua, or other Rayia Mutomboki factions, e.g. Commanders Maachano vs. Birikoriko in 2017.³⁹⁷ Other times, recruitment was a response to battlefield losses, which depleted Rayia Mutomboki ranks with casualties, captures or defections. In a sign of commanders' desperation for manpower in Walikale in 2015 and Shabunda in 2017, Rayia Mutomboki targeted boys as young as 11 to "rebuild."³⁹⁸

Early on in 2014 and 2015, Rayia Mutomboki actively recruited children at large recruitment drives, especially in areas vacated by the FARDC in 2015 as Sukola II moved from position to position.³⁹⁹ Rhetoric heard at rallies, particularly in Masisi and Walikale, North Kivu, became increasingly laced with the vocabulary of ethnicity and self-defense in 2016 and 2017, when Nyatura threatened Hunde and Nyanga communities. During the 2016 summer holidays, infighting between Rayia Mutomboki Birikoriko and Maachano factions led to dueling recruitment rallies, with each recounting the misdeeds of the other.⁴⁰⁰ On 15 September 2017, General Birikoriko held a rally calling on all

youth with this message: Here we are at this difficult moment. We must save our community and turn to face the enemy, the Nyatura who have allied themselves with Maachano [the leader of an opposing faction]. Our strength is in our youth. Those who refuse to join us will be taken or killed.⁴⁰¹ Ironically, General Maachano made the same argument during his rallies, which children described as "massive."⁴⁰² Crowds reportedly cheered his message at rallies over the Easter holiday, rallies which prompted at least one 16-year-old boy to join his nearest commander.⁴⁰³

Cheap Labor

In a nod to Rayia Mutomboki's ambition to control natural resources in Shabunda and, to a lesser extent, Walikale Territories, mines were closely linked to each stage of the group's child recruitment and use. One 14-year-old boy interviewed was working in Rayia Mutomboki-controlled mines in Mondongo, Walikale Territory, North Kivu, to earn school fees when he was robbed of his minerals and abducted.⁴⁰⁴ Another boy was recruited while visiting his father who worked in the mines,⁴⁰⁵ a third was recruited while selling fish to miners in the Kambubi mining site, Walikale Territory to raise money for school fees,⁴⁰⁶ and a fourth while digging gold in Lutulu Buzile in Shabunda Territory.⁴⁰⁷

Trigger Violation: Abduction

While some children "voluntarily" joined Rayia Mutomboki, one in three (33%) were abducted in a pattern that clearly mirrored the group's overall child recruitment patterns, which peaked in 2015. Of all the reasons for Rayia Mutomboki to abduct children, recruitment was the purpose at least 75% of all child abduction cases linked to the group.

Rayia Mutomboki followed FDLR FOCA and Nyatura's model of abducting children to carry plundered goods after looting raids. Motivated by children's cheap labor, this tactic could also apply to other tasks, like the 15-year-old girl abducted when Rayia Mutomboki demanded the chief of her village give them provisions and one girl to cook the food. This strategy was large-scale, with more than 20 children taken at once.⁴⁰⁸ Some abductions targeted both adults and children, e.g. the 13-year-old boy who was abducted with his father and was beaten when he was too tired to carry heavy loads.⁴⁰⁹ In one case, a boy was abducted before the pillaging began and his first mission was to participate: The 15-year-old was leaving Mukura football stadium in Walikale Territory, North Kivu when Rayia Mutomboki elements demanded he guide them to their

pillaging target. They promised the boy a share of the loot but, when he refused, they abducted him, gave him an AK-47 and said he belonged to Rayia Mutomboki.⁴¹⁰ In a grotesque twist, children were abducted to carry other children, e.g. the 12-year-old girl abducted to carry a commander's 8-month-old baby, freeing his tired wife.⁴¹¹

When rallies were not productive enough to fill their ranks, Rayia Mutomboki commanders moved on to abduction campaigns.⁴¹² Such campaigns could sometimes be subtle, such as levying a "tax" on all boys⁴¹³ while others were blatant, e.g. Major Bakisama's campaign to boost ranks included an order that all the young people living in his area in Masisi Territory be abducted.⁴¹⁴

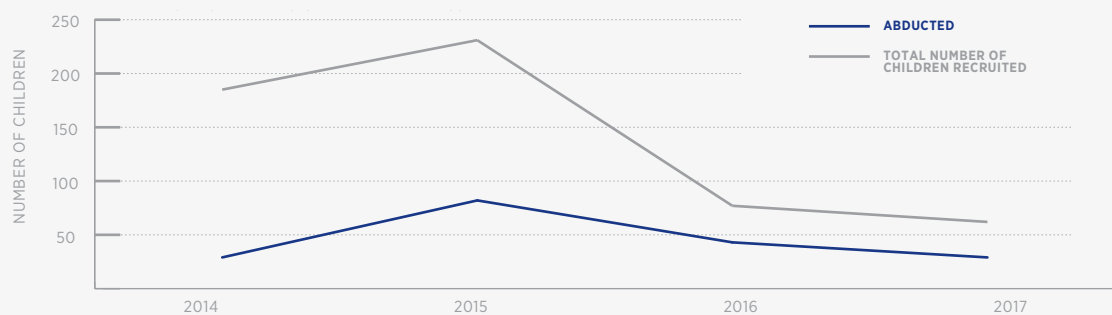
Rayia Mutomboki extorted communities by holding children hostage prior to their abduction, such as the 16-year-old boy abducted while reading in a field in Champunu, Walikale Territory. Warning the boy that if he tried to escape or utter a word he would be shot, the elements marched him to his village, extorted three goats from his parents and took both the boy and the goats.⁴¹⁵

More so than other armed groups in the East, Rayia Mutomboki employed a clear strategy to target specific locations – schools, market, mines – and times in order to maximize the numbers of children abducted.⁴¹⁶ Recruiters reportedly timed abductions for market days and just before or after school hours.⁴¹⁷ One 15-year-old boy interviewed was abducted in Masisi Centre when

Rayia Mutomboki Major Bakisima's combatants surrounded the market and abducted all the young men and boys they found within.⁴¹⁸ Rayia Mutomboki appeared to view schools as particularly fertile abduction grounds in Walikale, North Kivu and Shabunda, South Kivu in 2014 and 2015, with a surge of abduction and child recruitment seen during school vacations in 2016. Classmates reported being taken from their classrooms in groups of up to 12⁴¹⁹ and dozens of others were abducted on their way to or from school.⁴²⁰

Occasionally, abductions were opportunistic, with children having the bad luck to cross paths with Rayia Mutomboki, like a group of five 15-year-old boys abducted while fishing.⁴²¹

CHILDREN RECRUITMENT VIA ABDUCTION BY RAYIA MUTOMBOKI



Re-Recruitment

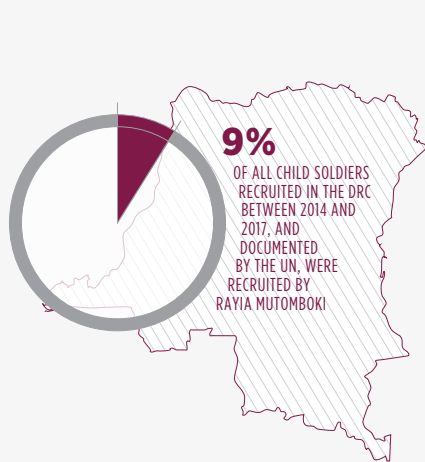
Although rare, re-recruitment by Rayia Mutomboki affected 1% of all child recruits.

After returning home for cholera treatment, one 15-year-old boy's parents attempted to stave off his re-recruitment by paying bribes each time Rayia Mutomboki elements came searching for the boy; the third time they came, the boy was re-recruited.⁴²² When Rayia Mutomboki could not re-recruit a child, they turned to his/her siblings, who, while not entirely interchangeable, were recruited under the pretext of replacing the escapee.⁴²³ Children were not spared from re-recruiting other children. In March 2014, a 15-year-old boy – a recent Rayia

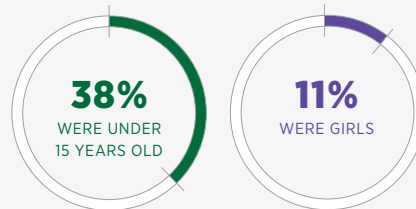
Mutomboki escapee living with a foster family – was medevaced by MONUSCO from Ntoto, Walikale Territory, after refusing to be re-recruited. Another child soldier, age 16, had shot him in the leg, on his commander's orders.⁴²⁴

II. DURING:

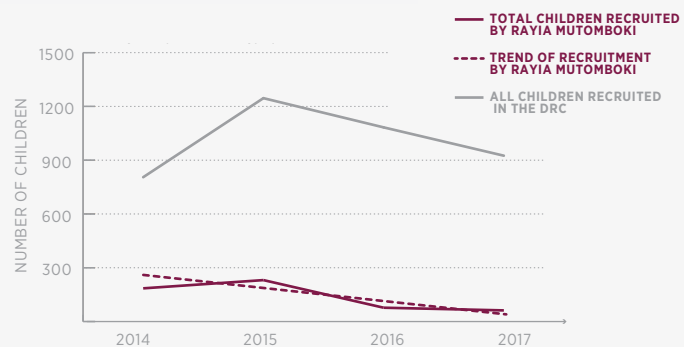
LIFE INSIDE RAYIA MUTOMBOKI



THE PROFILE OF A CHILD RECRUITED BY RAYIA MUTOMBOKI FROM 2014-2017



CHILD RECRUITMENT BY RAYIA MUTOMBOKI



The Boys and Girls Recruited by Rayia Mutomboki

At first glance, the fact that Rayia Mutomboki remains the DRC's fourth highest child recruiter since 2014, with a total of 554 children, including 61 girls, recruited, risks concealing an encouraging trend: Child recruitment by Rayia Mutomboki has decreased by 73% since 2015.

Age

When it comes to the recruitment of young children, Rayia Mutomboki stacks up with its adversaries: 38% of children Rayia Mutomboki are younger than 15. This percentage was fairly consistent over the years, with a small peak in 2016. Notably, girls were twice as likely to be under-15-year-old than boys.

Gender

Overall, girls made up 11% of all children recruited by Rayia Mutomboki, a higher-than-average percentage compared to the 5% of FDLR FOCA or Nyatura. However, this relatively inconspicuous figure obscured a significant increase in 2016 and 2017, when girls made up 40% of all Rayia Mutomboki child recruits.

Daily Life & Initiation Rites

Like Mayi Mayi Mazembe and Kamuina Nsapu, magic figured prominently in Rayia Mutomboki's daily life, with fetishes and tattoos invoking strength. The first step in initiation is tattooing, usually by child fétisheurs and not always skillfully: One 17-year-old boy's tattoo became infected after a single razor blade was used on all the new recruits.⁴²⁵ Children reported being beaten on arrival by other children in a hazing ritual. One 14-year-old boy arrived a Rayia Mutomboki forest camp, where other children "welcomed" him with slaps to the face to "give him spirit."⁴²⁶ However, once initiated, abuse appeared to ebb slightly, with one 12-year-old boy remembering that he was allowed to play when his jobs were done.⁴²⁷

While military training was ubiquitous, indoctrination was rarer, although reported increasingly in 2017, and included four days of ideological dogma rooted in ethnic opposition to Nyatura and ownership of "our land."⁴²⁸ Drug use was rarely reported but when it was it was done so casually, as if an everyday occurrence, with one 15-year-old guard learning that smoking marijuana kept him from feeling the cold during long hours at his post.⁴²⁹

Role: Combatant

Just under half (45%) of all children recruited by Rayia Mutomboki since 2014 fought. However, over the years, fewer children have played this role, decreasing from 55% to 37% while overall recruitment rates also dropped. This role was played only by boys, with just three girls reporting participating in combat.

Compared to its better-organized and more disciplined counterparts, Rayia Mutomboki gave child combatants basic military training lasting from three days to two weeks. One 17-year-old combatant recalled how, during his arms training, he accidentally fired off 50 rounds and his commander warned him to pay attention or he would accidentally kill his comrades.⁴³⁰ Rayia Mutomboki-associated children, including girls,⁴³¹ fought other Rayia Mutomboki factions, FDLR FOCA, Nyatura, and Mayi Mayi Kifuafua for the control of villages. Children reported handling AK47s, knives, spears and machetes, weapons of lower caliber than reported by other children recruited in the East, perhaps indicating a shortage of modern weapons among Rayia Mutomboki factions.⁴³²

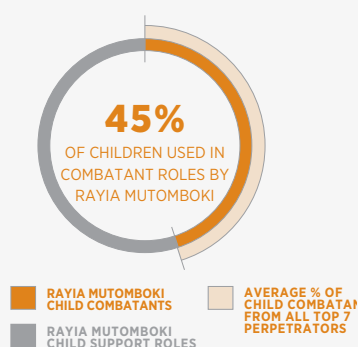
Role: Support

Like Kamuina Nsapu, protective powers were central to Rayia Mutomboki's modus operandi. However, in Rayia Mutomboki, children played the role of fétisheurs or witch doctors, routinely working their magic on both child and adult combatants.⁴³³ Along with the role of escort, fétisheurs and witch doctors were the most common support roles for both boys and girls, with the youngest deemed the most powerful by virtue of their innocence.⁴³⁴ One General chose a boy, 13-year-old and slight for his age, to be a witch doctor, because his age and size meant that he knew "nothing of the bad." Despite already being circumcised; the boy was circumcised a second time as initiation as a "doctor of the strong Kabiri." Carried on the backs of combatants during long journeys, the boy-doctor doled out fetishes to the combatants.⁴³⁵

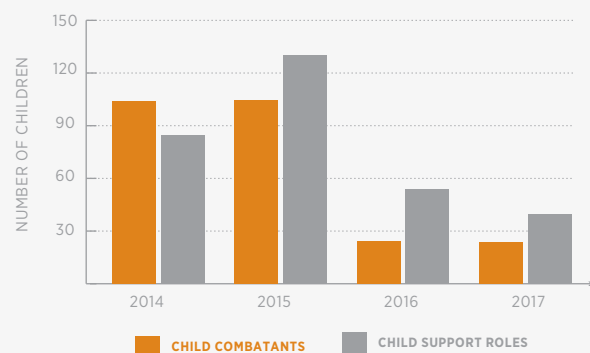
Like in Nyatura, Rayia Mutomboki used children to support its illicit activities, whether digging and collecting taxes at Rayia Mutomboki -controlled mines in Walikale,⁴³⁶ sifting for gold in the Kanoso River, Walungu Territory, South Kivu,⁴³⁷ or manning road blocks.⁴³⁸ In these enterprises, Rayia Mutomboki valued educated children who could serve as secretaries or accountants.⁴³⁹

As was typical of armed groups in the East, a child could serve as escort, sport, spy, cook, domestic, secretary, tracker of other armed groups⁴⁴⁰, pillager, or tax collector posted to roadblocks and markets. Girls usually played semi-combatant roles, e.g. guards, or domestic roles, such as babysitters, as in FDLR FOCA.⁴⁴¹ These roles were fluid, with one task blending into another as Rayia Mutomboki's priorities changed. For example, a 15-year-old boy was used to spy on FARDC and FDLR FOCA positions while planning operations and to transport ammunition during those attacks.⁴⁴² Rayia Mutomboki commanders used "promotions" from support to combatant or low ranking to higher-ranking support as a reward for good behavior or to handle fast turnover as ranks became depleted. Children were "elevated" from, domestic work or food supplier, for example, to ammunition supply manager, ambush squad or drill sergeant when a commander noticed their "hard work."⁴⁴³

CHILDREN'S ROLES IN RAYIA MUTOMBOKI FROM 2014 - 2017



CHILDREN'S ROLES IN RAYIA MUTOMBOKI OVER TIME



Violations Triggered by Child Recruitment: The Risks Children Faced in Rayia Mutomboki

Sexual Violence

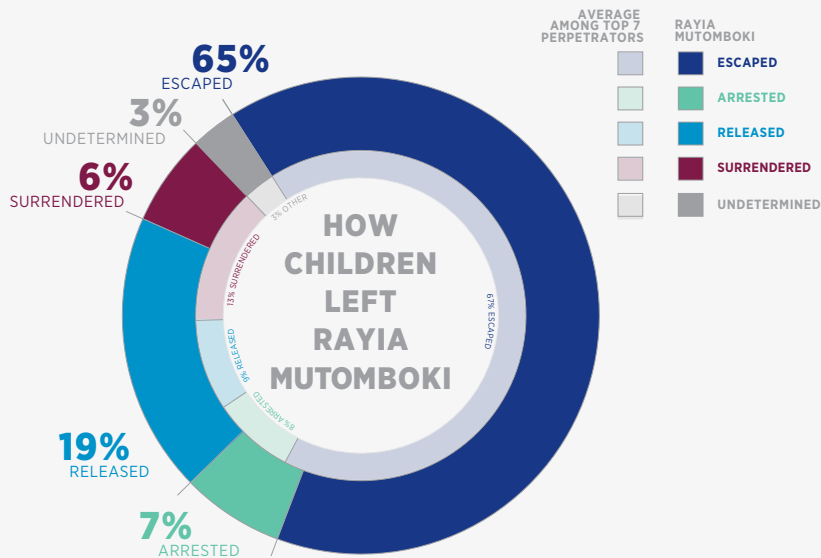
While the rate of sexual violence among all children in Rayia Mutomboki was only 3%, among girls, this figure jumped to 36%. Like Nyatura, both girls and boys reported that girls were used as sex slaves, with one 15-year-old boy referring to at least 20 girl sex slaves held at his camp.⁴⁴⁴ “Wives” as young as 13 were at the top of the group’s gender hierarchy, even if they had been forced to “marry” on pain of death or if they were a commander’s fourth wife.⁴⁴⁵ Like in other armed groups, both adults and children perpetrated sexual violence against other children, with one 14-year-old girl “married” to another child soldier and ultimately bearing his two children, and another 14-year-old girl combatant raped by two other child soldiers.⁴⁴⁶ Additionally, at least three boys disclosed being raped while associated with Rayia Mutomboki, in an indication of what is likely an under-reported violation against boys.⁴⁴⁷

Killing & Maiming

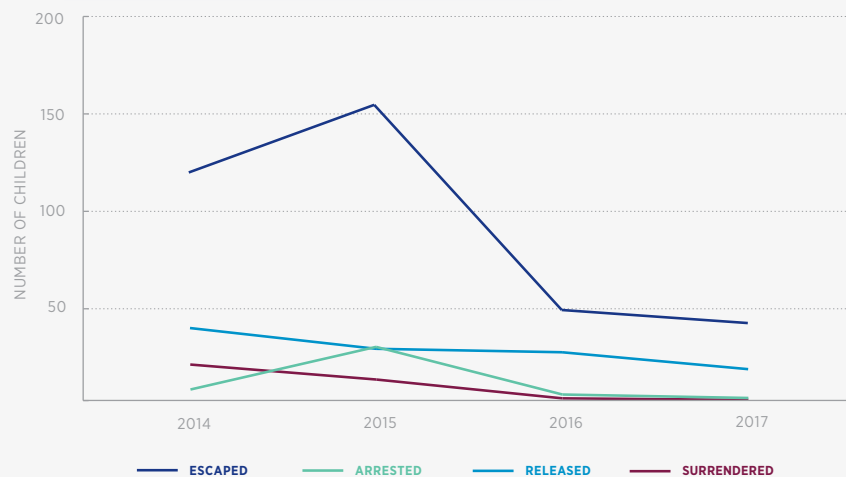
With one in two children recruited by Rayia Mutomboki seeing combat, the likelihood of death or injury was high. One 15-year-old boy witnessed at least 25 children killed during fighting between FDLR and Rayia Mutomboki in Walikale.⁴⁴⁸ Another 16-year-old boy fought Mayi Mayi Kifuafua in Rwindi, Walikale Territory in 2016, sustaining injuries that required over a month of hospitalization at Malembe. In an indication of the level of Rayia Mutomboki’s control over the area, Rayia Mutomboki paid the boy’s hospital bill, granted him one week’s rest at home and then took him back to the their camp to fight again.⁴⁴⁹ Children in semi-combatant roles – support roles that fell short of combatant status but still exposed children to deadly risks – were also injured, e.g. the 15-year-old boy recruited by Rayia Mutomboki in Kahuzi Byega National Park, South Kivu in 2015. Two days later, while being used as a porter, FARDC attacked Rayia Mutomboki’s defensive position in Kabenga Forest. The bullet entered his boy’s left cheek and punctured his nasal cavity before exiting through the right cheek.⁴⁵⁰

III. AFTER:

HOW CHILDREN WERE SEPARATED FROM RAYIA MUTOMBOKI



HOW CHILDREN LEFT RAYIA MUTOMBOKI OVER TIME



Escape

The majority – 65% – of children recruited by Rayia Mutomboki escaped.

Why children escaped from Rayia Mutomboki

Children most frequently cited the hardship and disappointment of life in the bush as the impetus for escape,⁴⁵¹ e.g. witnessing a 14-year-old girl die of illness,⁴⁵² not “living well,”⁴⁵³ and “searching for food, not washing, fighting every day and losing [our] fighters.”⁴⁵⁴ As internal spats increased with the divisions between Maachano and Birikoriko (“sons of the same territory” in Ufamandu),⁴⁵⁵ children also cited fear of being killed⁴⁵⁶ and worsening atrocities as reasons for their escape.⁴⁵⁷ A 12-year-

old girl, originally recruited by her brother, fled after finding the bodies of two children killed during clashes.⁴⁵⁸ In the words of one boy, he escaped “after seeing how my comrades fell like flies in a fire.”⁴⁵⁹ In rare cases, ideological disagreements with commanders prompted children to escape not to civilian life but rather to switch to another armed group, e.g. NDC-Cheka.⁴⁶⁰ To a lesser extent than Nyatura, children in Rayia Mutomboki also responded to awareness-raising messages heard over the radio.⁴⁶¹

How children escaped from Rayia Mutomboki

Like children escaping other armed groups, children in Rayia Mutomboki were savvy and opportunistic in their choice of when, how and where to escape. Many calculated that the cover of darkness and physical distance from a commander brought the greatest chance of success. This included the 13-year-old boy who waited until his commander was on a hijacking mission, the 16-year-old boy who escaped after his commander died fighting FDLR FOCA in Walikale Territory,⁴⁶² and the 13-year-old boy who escaped from his hospital bed after his combat wounds healed.⁴⁶³

Most of these children escaped in 2014 and 2015, when fighting against the FARDC was at its peak, giving children numerous opportunities. Just hearing rumors of an FARDC attack encouraged children to escape, even if the attack never materialized.⁴⁶⁴ In 2014 and 2015, when Rayia Mutomboki surrenders peaked, some children escaped, rather than surrender with their commanders.⁴⁶⁵ Clashes between Rayia Mutomboki factions, such as the June 2015 rivalry between Ngoa and Shebi, also gave children a chance to getaway.⁴⁶⁶ In a revealing example of the complex alliances and use of proxies, as well as the loose allegiances of Rayia Mutomboki factions, four boys escaped in Ntoto, Walikale Territory, North Kivu during the June 2015 fighting between the two Rayia Mutomboki factions backed by NDC-Cheka on one side, and Mayi Mayi Kifuafua and NDC-Rénové on the other.⁴⁶⁷

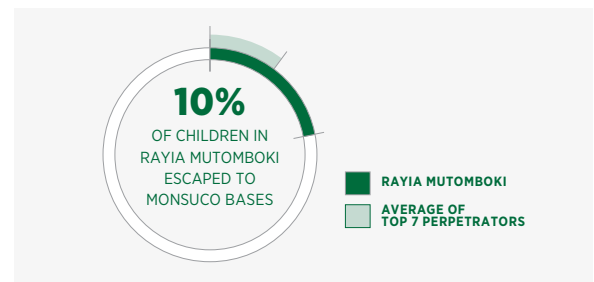
The ways children escaped Rayia Mutomboki attest to both their determination and their ingenuity, often attempting multiple times. Children reported receiving help from other children, including those who remained with the group, like the 14-year-old girl who fled with the help of another child soldier who was her commander's escort.⁴⁶⁸ A 14-year-old "wife" escaped the Rayia Mutomboki minder who accompanied her to her uncle's funeral,⁴⁶⁹ and a group of five 15-year-old boys slipped away at night wearing stolen FARDC uniforms, walking all night to Nyabangi, where a local NGO and MONUSCO partner contacted MONUSCO to extract the children.⁴⁷⁰

And, in the rarest good fortune, one 15-year-old boy became lost during a battle and found himself alone in the forest, giving him the chance to escape.⁴⁷¹

Where children escaped to

Notably, communities and NGOs play a central role in children's escape from Rayia Mutomboki, as well as their release. Children reported approaching child protection NGO staff members directly after escaping, e.g. at community awareness-raising workshops in Walikale, where CARITAS runs a CTO.⁴⁷²

Although they play a less significant role than for children fleeing FDLR FOCA or Nyatura, MONUSCO bases figured in the escapes of 10% of children associated with Rayia Mutomboki.⁴⁷³ Usually, children saw MONUSCO bases as safe destinations.⁴⁷⁴ However, the active role of local NGOs in Rayia Mutomboki-held territory, also meant that MONUSCO frequently assisted in extracting children from hiding places after their initial escape, like the 17-year-old boy who hid in the jungle until he was, in his own words, "rescued by MONUSCO."⁴⁷⁵ Community members also referred recently escaped children to MONUSCO, such as the priest in Walikale Territory who directed a 14-year-old escapee to a MONUSCO base in Kashebere, Walikale Territory.⁴⁷⁶



Release

Rayia Mutomboki had one of the highest rates of release among armed groups in the East, with 19% of all children recruited by the group voluntarily released by their commanders after awareness-raising by local NGOs and local chiefs, mostly in Walikale and Masisi Territories, North Kivu and Kalehe Territory, South Kivu.⁴⁷⁷

This was second highest nationally, after FRPI, and far beyond the 2% of other top recruiters in the East. Encouragingly, release levels remained steady over the years and commanders released girls at the very high rate of 48% of all girls recruited by Rayia Mutomboki.

Children's release stories testified to the impact of regular and locally based awareness-raising of Rayia Mutomboki commanders on child rights in general and child recruitment and use in particular. For example, multiple meetings with a local NGO in 2014 eventually convinced one commander in Masisi Territory, North Kivu to release all the children in his group and another to release four boys and two girls.⁴⁷⁸ In the words of a boy released in 2015, advocacy from NGOs and community leaders helped Rayia Mutomboki Commander Kalume "understand the risks he runs for using children" and finally decide to liberate his child soldiers.⁴⁷⁹ Children reported

a snowball effect among Rayia Mutomboki commanders, including one captain in Walikale Territory, North Kivu who was reportedly so swayed by a NGO that he not only released all of his own children but, in turn, called and sensitized the rest of the commanders in his faction to release their children to their "very happy" parents.⁴⁸⁰ One commander referred a 12-year-old girl directly to the NGO that first sensitized him in 2015 in Walikale Territory, North Kivu.⁴⁸¹

Rayia Mutomboki commanders' release of children was not always altruistic. A number of children were released after parents paid bribes,⁴⁸² like the 15-year-old boy whose mother negotiated for her son's release for an undisclosed sum in June 2017.⁴⁸³ However, bribery proved to be a less sustainable means of release than awareness-raising, with this boy reporting that he was still regularly threatened with re-recruitment by his former comrades.

Arrest

Authorities arrested children in Rayia Mutomboki at the relatively low rate of 7%, with the majority of arrests occurring in 2015.

Arrests either occurred after a child had escaped of his own volition, e.g. the 17-year-old boy who was arrested by a FARDC patrol hours after his escape. This boy was detained in Bukavu for two months before being handed over to MONUSCO Child Protection.⁴⁸⁴

Like FDLR FOCA, many children formerly associated with Rayia Mutomboki reported ill treatment during detention, often passing through multiple detention centers. For instance, the FARDC captured one 15-year-old boy after he sustained serious gunshot wounds to his face during battle. He was treated for two weeks at Bukavu Hospital and the FARDC military hospital, before being moved to a cell in T2 Sukola II in Bukavu for

two weeks, where he was subjected to forced labor. Unable to perform due to his injuries, the boy said his wounds were pummeled and he was put in an unventilated isolation cell, where he almost suffocated. He also reported being deprived food and visits from his family members.⁴⁸⁵

Arrest and detention also brought another 15-year-old-boy face-to-face with corruption that put his future in jeopardy. Injured and held FARDC custody, the boy reportedly paid 50,000CF (32USD) to one FARDC for an attestation de sortie – the release certificate that protects children from arrest for association with armed groups – only to have it ripped up later by other FARDC who demanded 30,000CF (19USD) for a replacement.⁴⁸⁶

Surrender

In 2014 and 2015, at the height of the Government demobilization campaign, 6% of children recruited by Rayia Mutomboki surrendered and were screened out at FARDC regrouping sites as their commanders opted to integrate into the FARDC. For example, five boys, ages 15, 16 and 17, surrendered along with Rayia Mutomboki [Colonel] Cent Kilos at the FARDC Mubambiro regrouping site in early January 2015.⁴⁸⁷

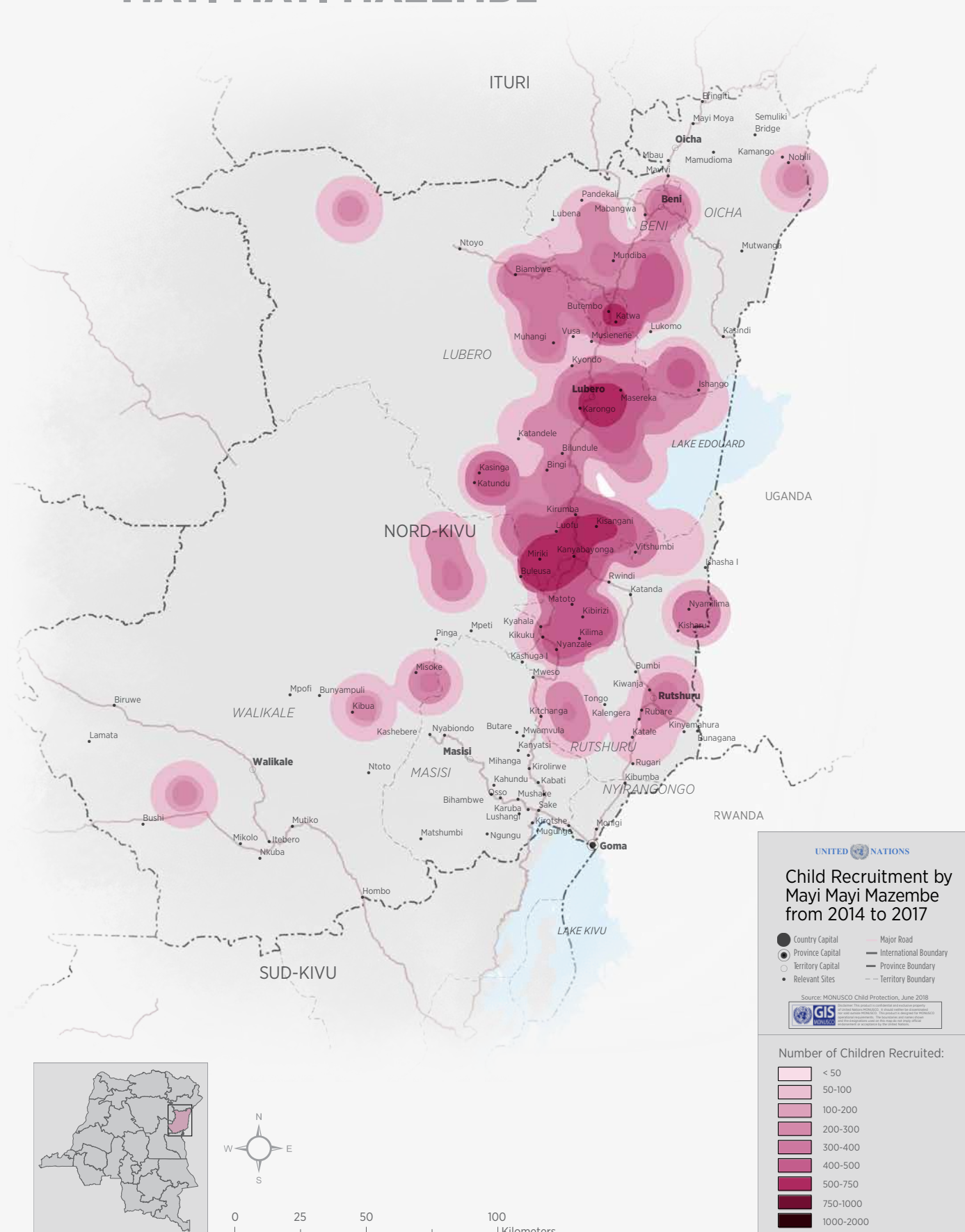


Endnotes

- ³⁸² 122777, see also 122781
- ³⁸³ 23298, 179670, 248060 see also 247147
- ³⁸⁴ 180428
- ³⁸⁵ 260788
- ³⁸⁶ 237943, 154284
- ³⁸⁷ 133669, 145974 see also 180790
- ³⁸⁸ 260553
- ³⁸⁹ 132840, see also 134532, 256939
- ³⁹⁰ 260790
- ³⁹¹ 237504
- ³⁹² 260609
- ³⁹³ 149095
- ³⁹⁴ 146182
- ³⁹⁵ 146011
- ³⁹⁶ 248211, see also 260794 who acquiesced on pain of death
- ³⁹⁷ 181224, 260786 see also 237632
- ³⁹⁸ 237481, 237510, 244133 see also 237924, 248667, 237580, 237595, 248584, 244137, 244139, 158599
- ³⁹⁹ 158602, 256886
- ⁴⁰⁰ 260785
- ⁴⁰¹ 260501
- ⁴⁰² 260513
- ⁴⁰³ 260510, 260513
- ⁴⁰⁴ 237509, see also 237490, 151942
- ⁴⁰⁵ 237917
- ⁴⁰⁶ 163449
- ⁴⁰⁷ 244725
- ⁴⁰⁸ 257494, see also 249110
- ⁴⁰⁹ 145965
- ⁴¹⁰ 180367
- ⁴¹¹ 260642
- ⁴¹² 256823
- ⁴¹³ 181211
- ⁴¹⁴ 260658
- ⁴¹⁵ 180766
- ⁴¹⁶ 163449
- ⁴¹⁷ 260510, 260513, 163449, 248224
- ⁴¹⁸ 260793
- ⁴¹⁹ 134359, see also 106636, 225909, 247206
- ⁴²⁰ 256871, 248106, 248066, 256828
- ⁴²¹ 164402
- ⁴²² 260793
- ⁴²³ 218819
- ⁴²⁴ 28310, see also 97485
- ⁴²⁵ 159494
- ⁴²⁶ 237502
- ⁴²⁷ 260638
- ⁴²⁸ 260497
- ⁴²⁹ 260490
- ⁴³⁰ 260791
- ⁴³¹ 256944, 248107
- ⁴³² 106636, 121479, 133669, 138184
- ⁴³³ 120743, 257045
- ⁴³⁴ 133672
- ⁴³⁵ 248187
- ⁴³⁶ 138309, 97503
- ⁴³⁷ 139180
- ⁴³⁸ 168982
- ⁴³⁹ 158601
- ⁴⁴⁰ 249110
- ⁴⁴¹ 256911
- ⁴⁴² 257512
- ⁴⁴³ 257508, see also 248675, 237487, 237483
- ⁴⁴⁴ 131377, see also 132840, 145724, 248063
- ⁴⁴⁵ 260659, 260343, 260505, see also 256921
- ⁴⁴⁶ 256915, 248107
- ⁴⁴⁷ 120738, 75083, 75084
- ⁴⁴⁸ 145012
- ⁴⁴⁹ 248063
- ⁴⁵⁰ 171936
- ⁴⁵¹ 119589, 144562
- ⁴⁵² 248224
- ⁴⁵³ 260646
- ⁴⁵⁴ 260790
- ⁴⁵⁵ 260657
- ⁴⁵⁶ 146182
- ⁴⁵⁷ 249110
- ⁴⁵⁸ 260643
- ⁴⁵⁹ 158602
- ⁴⁶⁰ 217838
- ⁴⁶¹ 147165, 147168, 147163, 147172
- ⁴⁶² 10654, 151549, see also 93429, 143758, 237481
- ⁴⁶³ 158599
- ⁴⁶⁴ 97503
- ⁴⁶⁵ 139183
- ⁴⁶⁶ 133669, see also 260490
- ⁴⁶⁷ 143166
- ⁴⁶⁸ 154284
- ⁴⁶⁹ 260651
- ⁴⁷⁰ 132840
- ⁴⁷¹ 146011
- ⁴⁷² 181224
- ⁴⁷³ 106636. Note that cases of children escaping to MON-USCO occurred almost exclusively in 2014 and 2015, with zero documented in 2017. This could have been influenced by base closures in 2017.
- ⁴⁷⁴ 133669
- ⁴⁷⁵ 133672
- ⁴⁷⁶ 131197
- ⁴⁷⁷ 248211, 256828
- ⁴⁷⁸ 247147, 247206, 248107 see also 256019, 158600
- ⁴⁷⁹ 158604
- ⁴⁸⁰ 248060
- ⁴⁸¹ 154279, 260565
- ⁴⁸² 151950
- ⁴⁸³ 260650
- ⁴⁸⁴ 144636, 144678
- ⁴⁸⁵ 171936
- ⁴⁸⁶ 164402
- ⁴⁸⁷ 117933, 119305, 119313, 121801, 123700, see also 144806, 207425

IN-DEPTH PROFILE:

MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE



TERRITORY

North Kivu (Lubero, Rutshuru,
Walikale)

CHILDREN RECRUITED

Total: 454
Trend: Increase
Girls: 6% / Boys: 94%
Abducted: 17%
Sexual Violence Among Girls: 66%
Under 15: 20%
Combatants: 52%
Re-Recruited: 1%

MOTIVE

Self-defense

ETHNICITY

Nande, Kobo

PRIMARY MEANS OF RECRUITMENT

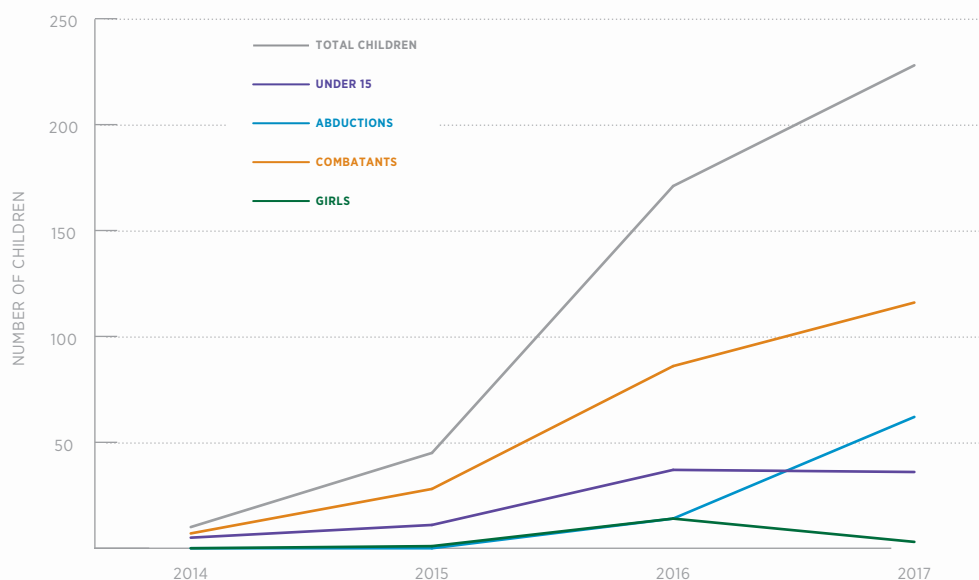
Voluntary (47%); Forced (21%)

PRIMARY PUSH FACTORS AMONG VOLUNTEERS

Revenge/Ethnic Defense (32%); Family & Peer Pressure (19%);
Economic (12%)

PRIMARY MEANS OF SEPARATION

Escape (62%); Arrest/Capture (9%)

TRENDS IN CHILD RECRUITMENT BY MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE

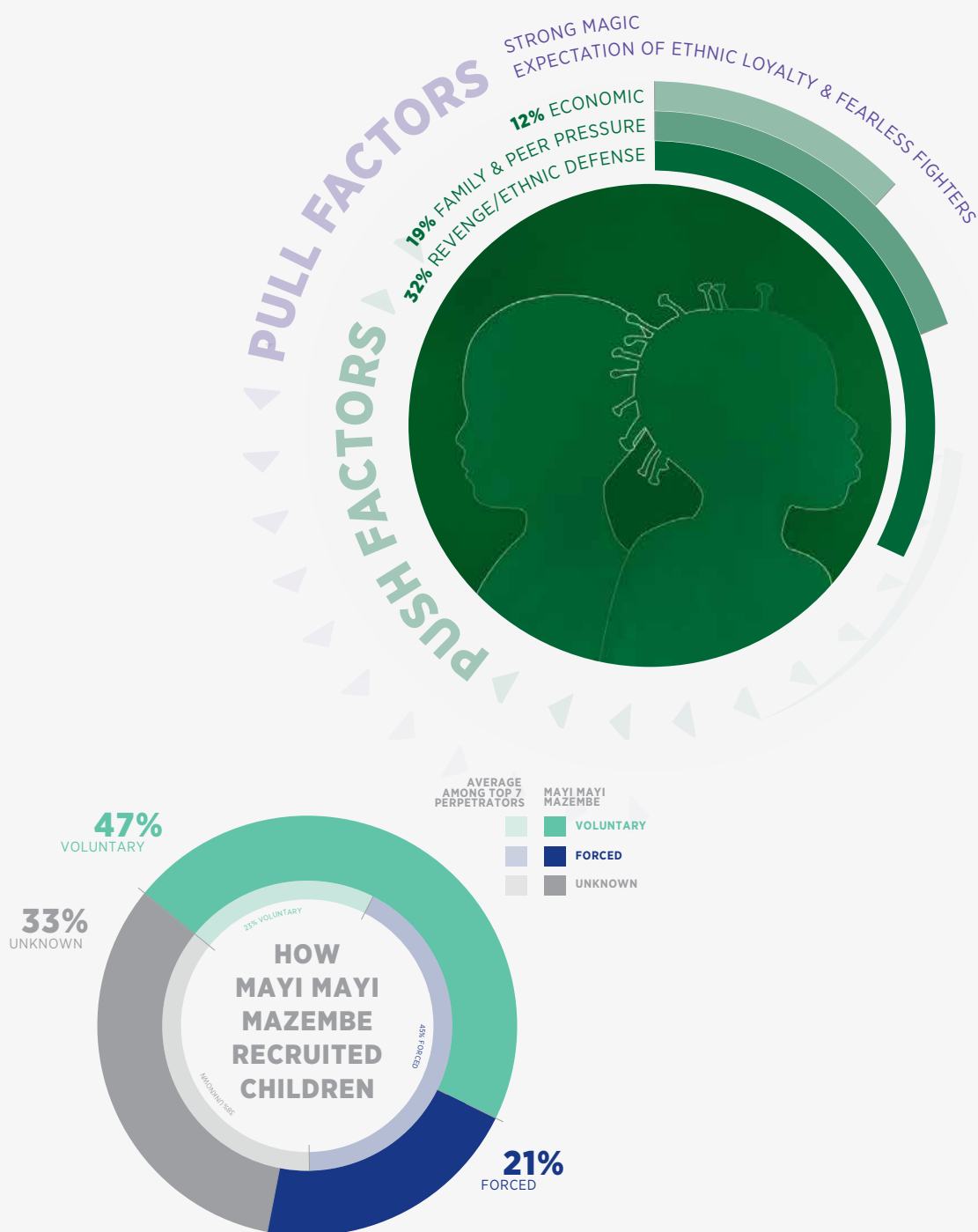
Mayi Mayi Mazembe is a web of localized groups primarily of Nande and Kobo origin that gained prominence in late 2015 during attacks on the FDLR. The term 'Mazembe' – originally inspired by the successful Lubumbashi-based football club – can be compared to a franchise and covers groups such as the Union des Patriotes pour la Défense des Innocents (UPDI). Originally established as Nande and Kobo Mayi Mayi self-defense groups fighting the FDLR and other Hutu armed groups, the Mazembe coalition is active in Lubero, Walikale, and Rutshuru

Territories in North Kivu. In 2017, many Mayi Mayi Mazembe-style groups, particularly those operating in Lubero territory, shifted tactics, and increasingly began to target symbols of state authority, including the PNC and FARDC, as well as schools. Like many local armed groups, Mazembe groups place particular importance on traditional rituals and the use of 'bulletproof' medicine, or dawa.

I. BEFORE:

HOW & WHY CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED BY MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE

Of all top perpetrators, Mayi Mayi Mazembe had the highest rate of volunteerism among children. Almost half – 47% - of children in the group reported doing so of their own volition, however these were exclusively boys.



Push Factors: Why Children “Volunteered” to Join Mayi Mayi Mazembe

Revenge & Protection of Family or Community

A third of all children volunteering to join Mayi Mayi Mazembe were propelled by the desire to protect their immediate families and the wider Nande and Kobo communities from Hutu-based groups like FDLR FOCA and Nyatura, particularly after the group became a cohesive coalition in 2016.

Children referred to the “tribal war between the Hutus and the Nande” giving them no choice but to “defend the cause and my community.”⁴⁸⁸ Children also spoke of “liberation of our people” from alleged “Rwandans,” “domination” and “occupation.”⁴⁸⁹ Older teenage boys reportedly goaded each other and volunteered together for the common cause, as reported one 15-year-old boy who decided to join a group of youth from his neighborhood in reinforcing UPDI/Mazembe to “chase away the Rwandans,” when they heard of an impending FDLR FOCA attack.⁴⁹⁰

The motive of revenge was a far more personal motive than the ethno-nationalism of Nande self-defense and was particularly strong in villages situated on the frontlines between the two groups, passing back and forth from one group’s control to the other. One 14-year-old boy lived in a village occupied by FDLR FOCA in February 2016, surviving beatings and the looting of his house. When Mayi Mayi Mazembe moved in that August, the boy immediately joined to take revenge against the FDLR FOCA for his mistreatment.⁴⁹¹ Witnessing his father be beaten to death by FDLR FOCA infuriated another 15-year-old boy and gave him the “power to fight.”⁴⁹² And a 14-year-old boy joined in a flash of fear and vengeance two weeks after seeing FDLR FOCA torture, kill and mutilate the bodies of his two brothers.⁴⁹³

While FDLR FOCA was the principal enemy cited by boys volunteering for Mayi Mayi Mazembe, boys also spoke of exacting vengeance on ADF following the 2015 massacres in Eringeti. In 2017, boys also referred to wanting to fight NDC-Rénové, as ethnic conflict with Hunde and Nyanga tribes rose.⁴⁹⁴ Boys specifically cited brutal massacres as motivating factors. One 14-year-old joined after his brother and friend were “slaughtered” by ADF. Another 15-year-old boy was the sole survivor among his family of an ADF massacre in Eringeti, Beni Territory, North Kivu. And a third boy, age 17, identified himself as a “passionate” member of Mazembe who wanted to “save the Nande community” after watching FDLR FOCA and the ADF commit massacres with machetes.⁴⁹⁵

Rarely was the impulse for revenge directed at State agents. However, Virunga National Park did figure in some children’s desire to protect their communities. For example, a 16-year-old boy volunteered “because the ICCN guards killed the population living near the Park, like my family.”⁴⁹⁶

Community, Family & Peer Pressure

Given Mayi Mayi Mazembe’s roots in the Nande community, both boys and girls faced a significant amount of pressure from peers, family members and community leaders to volunteer. Notable recruiters included women, like [Colonel] Florence, the mother of a 14-year-old boy whom she brought into the group in Butembo, Lubero Territory, North Kivu.⁴⁹⁷ In rare cases, children already living in Mayi Mayi Mazembe camps were initiated and forced to fight, like the 16-year old boy was forcibly recruited by his father [General] Kitete Odama and deployed to Butole.⁴⁹⁸

Most frequently, however, children influenced other children with the appeal of material items. The cache of military uniforms and expensive cell phones brandished by friends in the group lured more than one boy into the group because they “wanted to be equal to [their] friends.”⁴⁹⁹ One 13-year-old girl living with her grandmother “immediately believed and was convinced by the [financial] promises made by her friend.”⁵⁰⁰

Survival Strategy: Economic Support

Linked to peer pressure was the basic need for food, school fees and employment. Twelve percent of child volunteers for Mazembe cited economic reasons for joining the group, including the promise of 50-150USD salaries per month.⁵⁰¹ Recruiters used false promises of salaries and the hook of food to recruit children in villages in Lubero Territory, sometimes giving children weed to smoke while considering the offer.⁵⁰² A 15-year-old girl joined after her neighbor, the wife of a Mayi Mayi Mazembe captain, promised her a monthly salary.⁵⁰³ One 15-year-old boy volunteered the day that Mayi Mayi Mazembe arrived with meat. He explained that when he thought about his family, he “found that they were very vulnerable and only tasted meat on holidays or when my father sold his crops.”⁵⁰⁴ Other children reported Mazembe frequently feeding children from the neighboring villages in their camps and local chiefs sending food to children who joined.⁵⁰⁵ The children most vulnerable to this line of argument were, predictably, those whose families could not afford school fees.⁵⁰⁶

Survival Strategy: Physical Protection & Escape Punishment

A less common reason children, mostly boys, joined was to protect themselves and escape responsibility, like the 12-year-old boy who joined because he had lost 20USD and was afraid of being punished at home, or the 16-year-old boy who impregnated a girl and did not have the means to support her.⁵⁰⁷ In one unusual case, a 14-year-old boy was recruited by a motorbike driver who predicted a general insurrection in the DRC on 19 December 2016 ahead of the end of the presidential term.⁵⁰⁸

Pull Factors: Why Mayi Mayi Mazembe Recruited Children

Strong Magic

Magic is central to Mayi Mayi Mazembe's belief system and its fighting prowess. Like NDC-Rénové, the group prized younger children for their magical powers, particularly their protective and healing abilities. One 13-year-old boy who volunteered in 2016 said that the group needed more fétisheurs to maintain their talisman or fetish. He was given the name of “kadogo dawa” or “medicine child.”⁵⁰⁹

Expectation of Ethnic Loyalty & Fearless Fighters

Like its opponents, Mayi Mayi Mazembe saw the value in courageous child combatants. As one 16-year-old boy bragged, he was a favorite of his commander because of his “cold blood.”⁵¹⁰ There appeared to be an understanding between local Nande chiefs or notables and Mayi Mayi Mazembe commanders that Nande children were expected to fight for their communities. Local chiefs worked with commanders to conduct active recruitment campaigns, particularly after attacks by Nyatura or FDLR FOCA in 2017. For instance, a 16-year-old boy was recruited during a campaign led by two notables in Rutshuru after Nyatura attacked his village, burned down the school, abducted and killed teachers and students.⁵¹¹ He was not alone, as other older Nande boys reported being recruited for the express purpose of increasing Mayi Mayi Mazembe ranks after heavy losses in battle with Nyatura in 2017.⁵¹²

Trigger Violation: Abduction

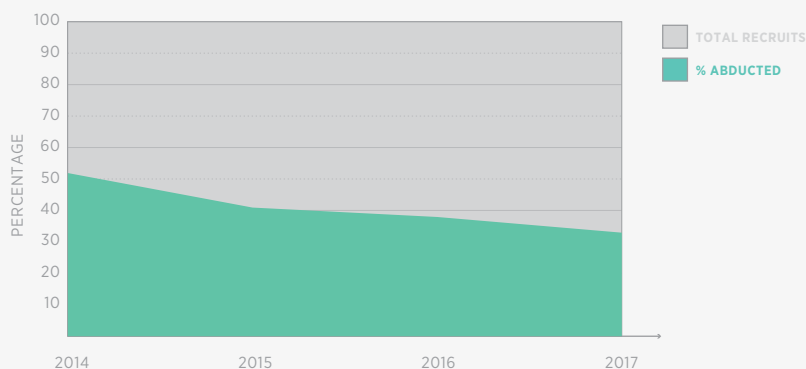
Of armed groups in the East, Mayi Mayi Mazembe had one of the lowest rates of child recruitment via abduction at 17% of all children recruited by the group. However, each year since its coalition was formalized, the number of children abducted increased exponentially. In 2017, 30 children, including three girls, were abducted, double that in 2016 and 10 times that in 2015, when children mostly volunteered to “protect” communities. Methods of abduction also became cruder and bolder over the years, with one 17-year-old reporting that he was drugged and lost consciousness during his abduction that year, and a 16-year-old boy abducted while fishing in Lake Edward by Mayi Mayi Mazembe patrolling by boat.⁵¹³

When volunteers were not sufficient, Mayi Mayi Mazembe strategically used abduction to force children into its ranks: 90% of all child abductions perpetrated by the group since its inception were for the purpose of recruitment. Like other groups operating in North Kivu, Mayi Mayi Mazembe employed

the FDLR-FOCA model of pillage-porter-abduct,⁵¹⁴ taking children from villages, fields, while hunting in the bush or, like one 10-year-old boy, on the way home from school, burning his school uniform and notebooks for good measure.⁵¹⁵

Markets appeared to be a favorite site for child abductions, with two 16-year-old boys abducted from a market and forced to collect taxes from all the stalls before being marched to the group’s camp.⁵¹⁶ With only one exception, all girls recruited by the group were abducted from markets.⁵¹⁷ The one exceptional case was of a girl abducted and forced to be a “guest” at a Mayi Mayi Mazembe Independence Day party in Lubero Territory, North Kivu. At the party, she was drugged and systematically raped, before eventually receiving military training and being used as a sex slave.⁵¹⁸

CHILD RECRUITMENT VIA ABDUCTION BY MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE



Re-Recruitment

Compared to more well-established armed groups, the recently emerged Mayi Mayi Mazembe had low rates of re-recruitment, with just 1% of all children reporting being recruited more than once by the group. However, at least one boy passed through the revolving door of well-established groups, like Nyatura, in 2012 and 2014, before Mayi Mayi Mazembe re-recruited him in 2016.⁵¹⁹ Occasionally, boys reported voluntarily re-joining the group while another was re-recruited several weeks after making his escape and was ultimately released when

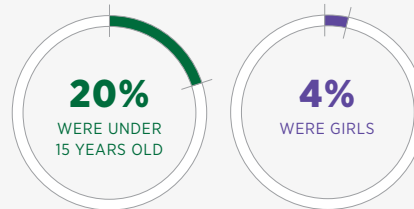
his community paid a 70,000FC bribe.⁵²⁰ Despite low rates of actual re-recruitment, threats of re-recruitment were apparently credible enough to cause children to move far from their home villages after escaping, in effect choosing to be displaced rather than risk re-recruitment.⁵²¹

II. DURING:

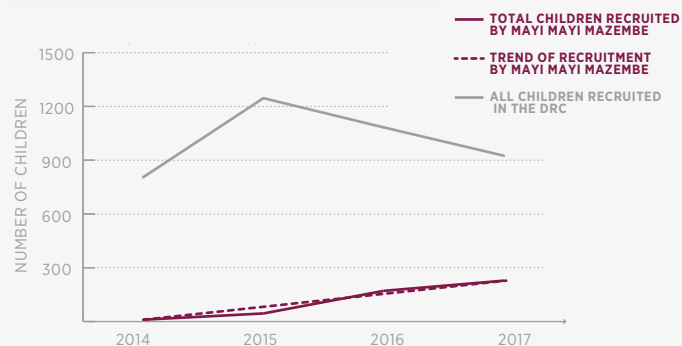
LIFE INSIDE MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE



THE PROFILE OF A CHILD RECRUITED BY MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE FROM 2014-2017



CHILD RECRUITMENT BY MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE



The Girls & Boys Recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe

Mayi Mayi Mazembe was one of only two top perpetrators in the East to show an increase in child recruitment, in part owing to that fact that the Mayi Mayi Mazembe phenomenon only emerged in full force in late 2015.

This increase may in part be explained by the perceived ‘success’ of Mayi Mayi Mazembe/UPDI in forcing FDLR FOCA out of Ikobo groupement in Walikale Territory, encouraging the expansion of Nande-majority “self-defense” groups in 2016. Local chiefs, business operators and customary leaders backed this effort, thus facilitating the groups’ activities, including their recruitment of children. Adding to this crescendo in 2016 and 2017, Mayi Mayi Mazembe/UPDI also benefited from an alliance with NDC-Rénové, however, this alliance fell apart around July 2017.

Age

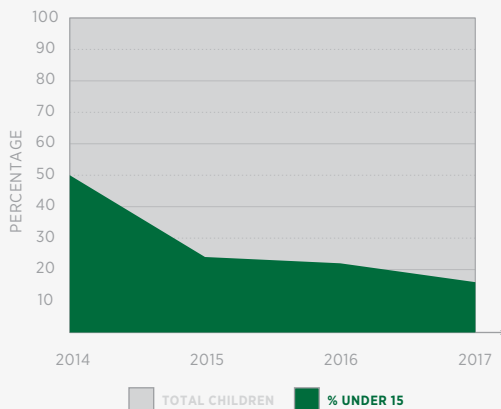
Compared to the top perpetrators, Mayi Mayi Mazembe recruited the lowest levels of young children: 20% of all children recruited by the group were under age 15. Although very few girls were recruited by the group, those girls who were recruited were nearly twice as likely to be under age 15 than boys.

Gender

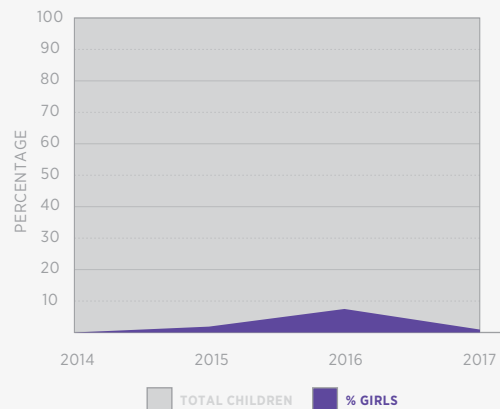
Mayi Mayi Mazembe had very low rates of girls documented as recruited, with just 6% of new recruits being girls. This is on par with its opponents of FDLR FOCA and Nyatura and may be related to the high levels of volunteerism and motivation of ethnic self-defense and revenge, which are typically cited as push factors by boys, not girls.

Life for Children Inside Mayi Mayi Mazembe

AGE OF CHILDREN RECRUITED BY MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE FROM 2014-2017



GENDER OF CHILDREN RECRUITED BY MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE FROM 2014-2017



Initiation Rites & Daily Life

On arrival, children received a mixed welcome, with some beaten and others reporting they were “warmly welcomed.”⁵²² Children also attempted to reassure each other, sometimes as soon as they were abducted. One 16-year-old reported his child abductors “motivating” him on his march to their camp, telling him he had “high morale and a strong heart.”⁵²³ However, many children were not protected from harsh punishment and abuse. A 13-year-old boy said that his commander forced him to work all day without a break and that he was whipped for “the smallest mistake.”⁵²⁴

Children in Mayi Mayi Mazembe reported some of the more elaborate initiation rites among armed groups in the East. Traditional ceremonies to bestow children with witchcraft could last up to three days. One 15-year-old boy was abducted and was welcomed to the camp by his older brother’s friend, who gave him a traditional alcoholic drink after drink until the boy was drunk.⁵²⁵ Another boy, 13 years old, explained that he “felt outside the human world” after inhaling traditional medicine.⁵²⁶

The trademark of Mayi Mayi Mazembe initiation was tattooing, almost always on the same day a child was recruited. The tattoo, usually performed by a “Kadogo Dawa” or medicine child, was viewed as the most powerful protection a child could receive and, along with “mayi mayi” water, was believed to render its recipients bulletproof. Indeed, for some Kadogo Dawa, their entire job was to tattoo new recruits. Former child combatants reported being tattooed multiple times for added protection.⁵²⁷ As a 16-year-old girl recounted, “we were registered in a big notebook by [Colonel] Kahasa. He called the Kadogo Dawa, who ordained us with tattoos and gave us black gris gris powder, telling us to eat it so we could become bulletproof. So we ate it and then drank the water he gave us.”⁵²⁸ In rare cases, senior commanders initiated children, as was a 13-year-old boy who was personally tattooed and trained by the coalition’s commander Busho Kitete.⁵²⁹

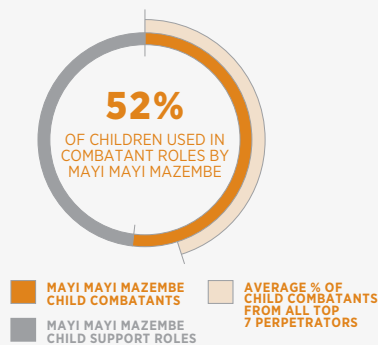
Children’s daily lives inside the group were affected by changes to the overarching Mayi Mayi Mazembe coalition. While loyal to their particular commander, such as the high-ranking commander Saperita, children were well aware that they belonged to the umbrella Mazembe coalition.⁵³⁰ One 14-year-old féticheur described the moment in 2016 when his group, Pareco, joined the coalition, emphasizing that even though they had changed their name to Mayi Mayi Mazembe, he kept his role as “docteur” charged with healing Mayi Mayi Mazembe elements.⁵³¹

Role: Combatant

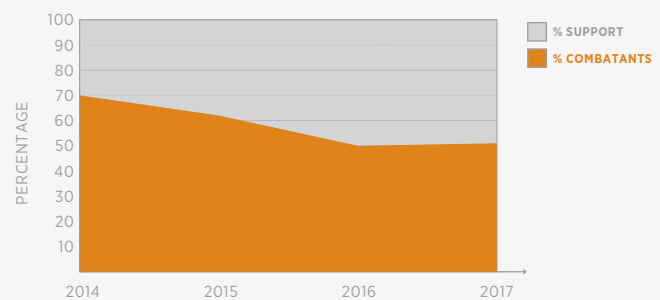
Among the top perpetrators in the East, children in Mayi Mayi Mazembe had the greatest likelihood of participating in combat. More than half – 52% – of all children recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe reported fighting. This usually meant older boys but some boys as young as 12-years-old also reported being used to fight.⁵³² Very occasionally, girls would fight, as in the case of a girl who joined Mayi Mayi Mazembe to avenge her rape by FDLR FOCA combatants. The girl never learned to use a gun but fought FDLR FOCA and NDC-Rénové using a spear. When she informed her commander of her reasons for fighting the FDLR FOCA, and because of her obvious emotional distress, she was reportedly protected and not sexually abused by her commander or comrades.⁵³³

Child combatants made a quick transition from recruitment, through initiation, to active combat duty, with just three days to two weeks of training before being sent to the frontlines to fight FDLR FOCA, Nyatura, NDC-Rénové, and FARDC, including naval battles on Lake Edward.⁵³⁴ Mayi Mayi Mazembe fought with the standard weapons favored by other armed groups, like AK-47s, submachine guns (SMG), Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) and PK machine guns (PKM), but children also used decidedly less technologically advanced weapons like stones, bows and arrows,

CHILDREN'S ROLES IN MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE FROM 2014-2017



CHILDREN'S ROLES IN MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE OVER TIME



spears and machetes, with one child reportedly armed with fruit (pears).⁵³⁵ Some children held dual roles, like combatant and prison guard, while others advanced up the chain of command like the 17-year-old boy abducted into the group in 2017 who held the rank of corporal in charge of his division by the time he escaped.⁵³⁶

Children described participating in operations that went beyond the standard battles with opposing armed groups or the FARDC, including attacking prisons to abduct and recruit the prisoners. One 15-year-old boy described taking part in such an attack three days after the group abducted him. On the night of 18 June 2017, he and more than 40 other Mayi Mayi Mazembe combatants attacked Beni Central Prison, bringing the prisoners to a designated meeting spot in the bush, where they picked from among the prisoners those to force to join the group and bring to their headquarters.⁵³⁷ Other children described being forced to take part in atrocities, like the 15-year-old boy who volunteered in 2016, who took part in “a terrible massacre of Hutus” and, when he returned from the front, lost his motivation.⁵³⁸ New child recruits reported being blindfolded on the march to the front to keep them from running away and one boy was ordered to kill his own uncle, although he managed to inform his uncle and save his life.⁵³⁹

The emotional impact of participating in such brutal combat operations was clearly visible in children’s testimony. One 16-year-old boy spoke of his “bad memories of innocent people dying,” including two 14-year-old girls killed during a battle with Rayia Mutomboki.⁵⁴⁰ Another 16-year-old said he “continues to regret killing innocents on orders.”⁵⁴¹ A third boy had blocked out the memory of specific battles but recognized that Mayi Mayi Mazembe “had killed civilians they found after Nyatura had fled,” and submitted to orders to kill a person and to loot his own village. This particular boy reported being “overwhelmed by fighting,” could not sleep or eat and lost weight because of the mental distress of what he had seen and been forced to do.⁵⁴²

Role: Support

The other half of children recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe – those in support roles – still received tattoos and military training, despite not fighting, suggesting that the group would use all children to fight if necessary.⁵⁴³ The standard roles included escort, cook, food/wood supplier, tax collector, spy, looter, assassin⁵⁴⁴, military police and bodyguard for commanders or their wives.⁵⁴⁵ Organized criminal activities also figured in children’s roles, like the 15-year-old boy who served as a tax collector who was well aware that the money he collected went to fund weapons and ammunition purchases.⁵⁴⁶ Girls were predominantly used for dual purposes, as both domestics and “wives” of commanders.⁵⁴⁷

By far the most prestigious support role children played was one of Kadogo Dawa or medicine child. Only virgin boys, usually ages 10-14, play this role. Once they lost their virginity, the boys became combatants.⁵⁴⁸ The role was prominent enough that a sort of apprenticeship system made newer recruits the assistant to the “grand féticheur,” carrying the witch doctor’s amulets to the frontlines.⁵⁴⁹ Child féticheurs were proud of and believed in the magic they wielded, as was a 14-year-old who “gave fighters the power of victory.”⁵⁵⁰ Not all féticheurs wanted to stay féticheurs, however. One 12-year-old boy was taught how to prepare traditional medicine and was anointed a Kadogo Dawa “because [he] was the smallest.” As a medicine child, he was forbidden from fighting but when his uncle died on the frontlines, he became furious and decided to lose his virginity “to destroy the power of gris gris so I would no longer be a Kadogo Dawa, but rather a fighter.”⁵⁵¹

Violations Triggered by Child Recruitment: The Risks Children Faced in Mayi Mayi Mazembe

Sexual Violence

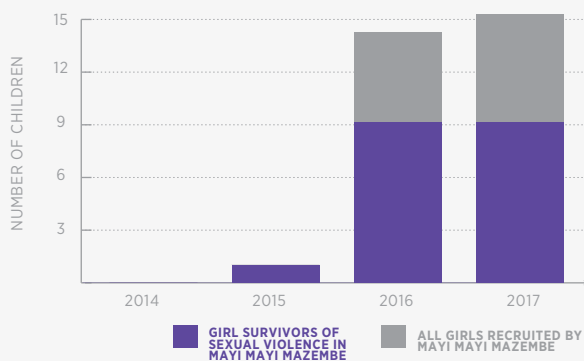
Rates of sexual violence among girls recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe, while relatively low compared to other armed groups in the East, still affected 66% of all girls associated with the group. Lower-level commanders took girls as concubines or “wives.”⁵⁵² When a commander took multiple “wives,” the youngest girl was frequently at elevated risk of abuse from both her “husband” and his older wives. For example, a 13-year-old girl was taken as a concubine of her commander’s escort until she caught the commander’s eye and became his “girlfriend.” When the commander’s “wife” learned of her husband’s faithlessness, the older wife threatened to kill the girl, prompting the girl to escape.⁵⁵³

Notably, some senior Mayi Mayi Mazembe commanders forbade sexual slavery among their elements. As one 16-year-old girl testified, she was nominally used as a laundress but “secretly became [a combatant’s] wife because [Colonel] Saperita would have refused sexual slavery among the combatants in his camp.”⁵⁵⁴

Killing & Maiming

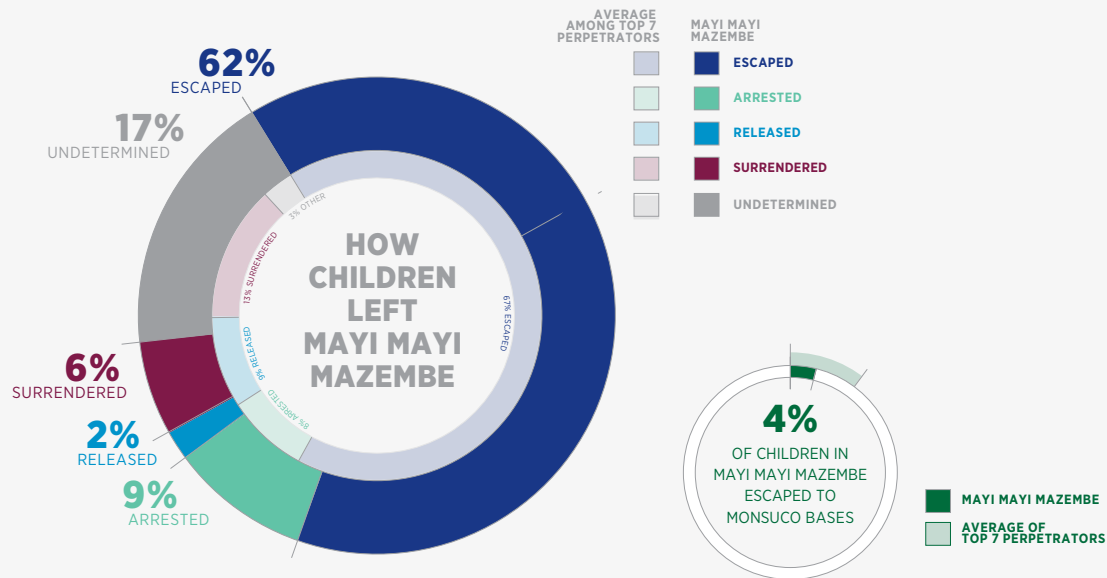
Like Kamuina Nsapu, Mayi Mayi Mazembe’s high rate of child combatants put children at elevated risk of being killed or maimed on the battlefield. Two 17-year-old boys fought with approximately 100 other Mayi Mayi Mazembe combatants against FDLR FOCA and watched ten children killed during one battle in Biriko in 2015.⁵⁵⁵ Another boy, age 16, was given a stone five days after being abducted and ordered to join an attack on FARDC in Mulo, Lubero Territory, North Kivu. Not finding FARDC, they attacked a nearby MONUSCO base, where the boy was “forced to enter the MONUSCO base to fight.” Shot in both legs, he fell into a ravine and spent the night hiding from heavy fire. In the early morning, the boy was shot a third time. When the smoke cleared, MONUSCO troops found the boy and medevaced him to Goma for medical treatment.⁵⁵⁶ Other times, severe maiming came not through battle but through punishment doled out by commanders, as was the case for a 15-year-old boy and his comrades who left for the frontlines without their commander’s authorization. Caught red-handed, the boys were “punished and whipped without pity.”⁵⁵⁷

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS RECRUITED BY MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE

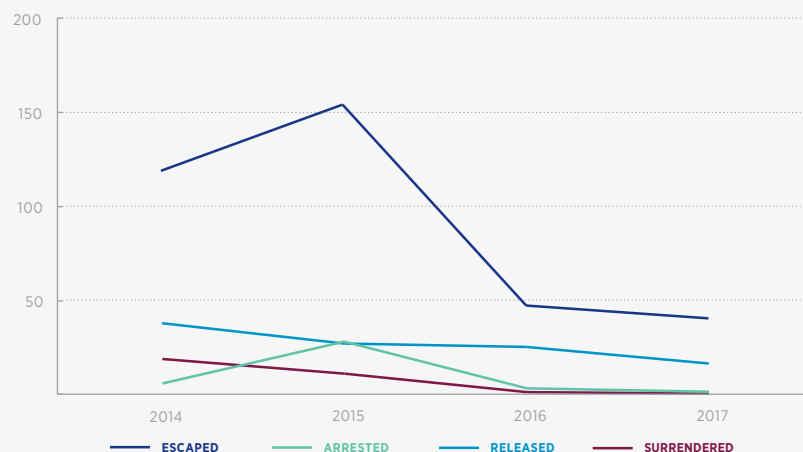


III. AFTER:

HOW CHILDREN WERE SEPARATED FROM MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE



HOW CHILDREN LEFT MAYI MAYI MAZEMBE OVER TIME



Escape

Two in three children recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe (62%) escaped. It was by far the most common, albeit dangerous, way to leave the group.

Why Children Escaped Mayi Mayi Mazembe

Fleeing Mayi Mayi Mazembe was, in part, a way to flee the despair that came with life in the group. As one 14-year-old boy put it, “there was more suffering than happiness in the bush,” and a 12-year-old boy called it the “most punishing place.”⁵⁵⁸ A 16-year-old boy escaped when he “became tired of seeing dead bodies, tired of seeing blood.”⁵⁵⁹ Another boy fled in good

physical health but could not sleep from the memories of what he had done on his commander’s orders.⁵⁶⁰ For another of their comrades, age 15, participating in a “terrible massacre of Hutus” sapped all his motivation to fight and spurred his escape.⁵⁶¹

Harsh living conditions in the bush – sleep deprivation, hunger, inability to wash their bodies or clothes, trekking long distances,

at the mercy of insects, and the risk of whipping for the smallest errors⁵⁶² – also pushed children to escape. One 16-year-old girl who was abducted and used as a sex slave risked death threats to escape because, “the suffering was beyond what I could tolerate.”⁵⁶³

Children also fled the very real risk of dying on the battlefield.⁵⁶⁴ A 16-year-old combatant fled when the group was surrounded and he felt his only options were to be killed by NDC-Rénové on the one side or FARDC on the other side.⁵⁶⁵ The loss of friends also pushed children to escape, like a 16-year-old boy who fled in July 2016 after watching two friends cut down on the frontline.⁵⁶⁶ A third boy escaped when his unit ran out of ammunition and he feared being overrun.⁵⁶⁷

Those children who were protected by their commanders became extremely vulnerable when that commander died. Faced with the daunting task of going it alone in the group and currying another commander’s favor, some children chose to escape, like the 17-year-old boy who fled when his commander was assassinated and no other commanders would accept him.⁵⁶⁸

Mayi Mayi Mazembe’s harsh punitive system – underground cells where prisoners were subjected to severe ill treatment – also became a reason for children to flee the group. One 16-year-old boy landed in a cell for skipping one night of guard duty. Subjected to mistreatment in the cell, the boy escaped two days after finally being freed.⁵⁶⁹ Another 17-year-old boy was the prison guard of one such underground cell. When one of the abductees held there escaped, the boy fled too, terrified of the punishment he would receive.⁵⁷⁰

Some child volunteers left the group when their mission – in the words of one 15-year-old boy, to “defeat the Rwandan rebels” – was accomplished.⁵⁷¹ However, with such a high rate of volunteerism, Mayi Mayi Mazembe struggled to live up to the expectations of its adherents and children disillusioned with its false promises eventually escaped. A 17-year-old boy left the group after being swiftly disabused of his impression that “military life would be a holiday.”⁵⁷² His younger comrade, age 14, was “tricked” into volunteering with a promise of a 100 USD salary but fled when he realized he would never be paid.⁵⁷³

How Children Escaped from Mayi Mayi Mazembe

Given the risk of harsh punishment if they were intercepted, escaping children chose their moments carefully. Most fled under the cover of darkness, during clashes with FARDC or after hearing rumors of impending FARDC attacks, during clashes with other armed groups like FDLR FOCA, or when camps were relatively empty or commanders distracted.⁵⁷⁴ One 17-year-old boy fled when his commander left to ambush NGO vehicles, a 15-year-old girl escaped when she was sent to buy medicine for another girl suffering from gunshot wounds, and the pair of boys who fled when sent to repair their commander’s boot and top up his cell phone credit.⁵⁷⁵ New Year’s Eve 2017 was

the chance for one 15-year-old boy who snuck away during the party while the combatants and commanders were drunk.⁵⁷⁶

When Mayi Mayi Mazembe factions surrendered to or integrated into one another, children also seized the opportunity to escape, like the 15-year-old boy who escaped when his faction “was disarmed by [Mayi Mayi Mazembe commander] Kitete because we operated outside his orders.”⁵⁷⁷

Assistance came from other children, both inside and outside Mayi Mayi Mazembe, usually former child soldiers who directed escaping children to the same child protection NGO from which they themselves had received support.⁵⁷⁸ For instance, one 15-year-old boy escaped the daily attacks on his camp and was driven to a child protection NGO by a friend from his village.⁵⁷⁹ Another 13-year-old boy, recruited by his grandfather and initiated by his brother, escaped with the help of this same brother.⁵⁸⁰

Trusted adults also played the critical roles in helping children escape. When a 16-year-old boy was sent in the market to collect taxes from the vendors, he called a Catholic Priest who he considered to be his “spiritual father.” The Priest sent a motorcyclist to pick him up from the market and bring him to the safety of the Church compound.⁵⁸¹

Children were not always successful on their first attempt, landing them in the underground cells where they were severely punished.⁵⁸² Commanders were wise to children’s attempts and kept a close eye on them. For instance, a 15-year-old féticheur-turned-combatant asked for authorization to visit his family in Katrisa, hoping to escape. Instead, [then-Colonel] Kitete himself accompanied the boy to his maternal uncle’s house and forced him to return to their base.⁵⁸³ Another boy, age 15, was luckier: his commander believed his lie that his sister was dying and authorized him to visit her without a minder.⁵⁸⁴

Where children escaped to

Escaping children were well aware of the risks outside the group, including of arrest by FARDC, punishment by their furious commanders or retribution from FDLR FOCA.⁵⁸⁵ Almost as a rule, children first escaped home and then to CTOs on the suggestion of their parents, who also feared retribution, including from neighbors who quickly identified escaped children.⁵⁸⁶

MONUSCO played a role in the escapes of 4% of all children recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe, again all boys. For instance, a 16-year-old boy abducted into Mayi Mayi Mazembe escaped and walked for two days to reach MONUSCO in Butembo, still wearing his military uniform and carrying a machete.⁵⁸⁷ While this figure is lower than FDLR FOCA and Nyatura for instance, this may be due to the more diffuse presence of MONUSCO in Lubero Territory and the drawdown of COBs in 2016 and 2017, when most children escaped from Mayi Mayi Mazembe.

Arrest & Capture

Similar to children associated with FDLR FOCA and FRPI, 9% of children recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe were arrested or captured by FARDC. Most often, this followed a child's initial escape to his/her home village, like the 15-year-old boy who

fled directly to his family in early August 2017. Two weeks later, after being denounced by community members, he was arrested by ANR and FARDC.⁵⁸⁸

Surrender & Demobilization

In rare cases – just 6% – children recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe surrendered to or were separated by international organizations. Rates among girls were higher, with 22% of all girls recruited ultimately surrendering. This was the case for a 16-year-old “wife” whose “husband” was wounded during a clash between Mayi Mayi Mazembe and FARDC. When the

commander was medevaced to the ICRC hospital in Goma for treatment, the girl accompanied him to look after him. When the commander died in hospital, it was determined that his “wife” was in fact a child and the girl was separated and brought to a CTO.⁵⁸⁹

Release

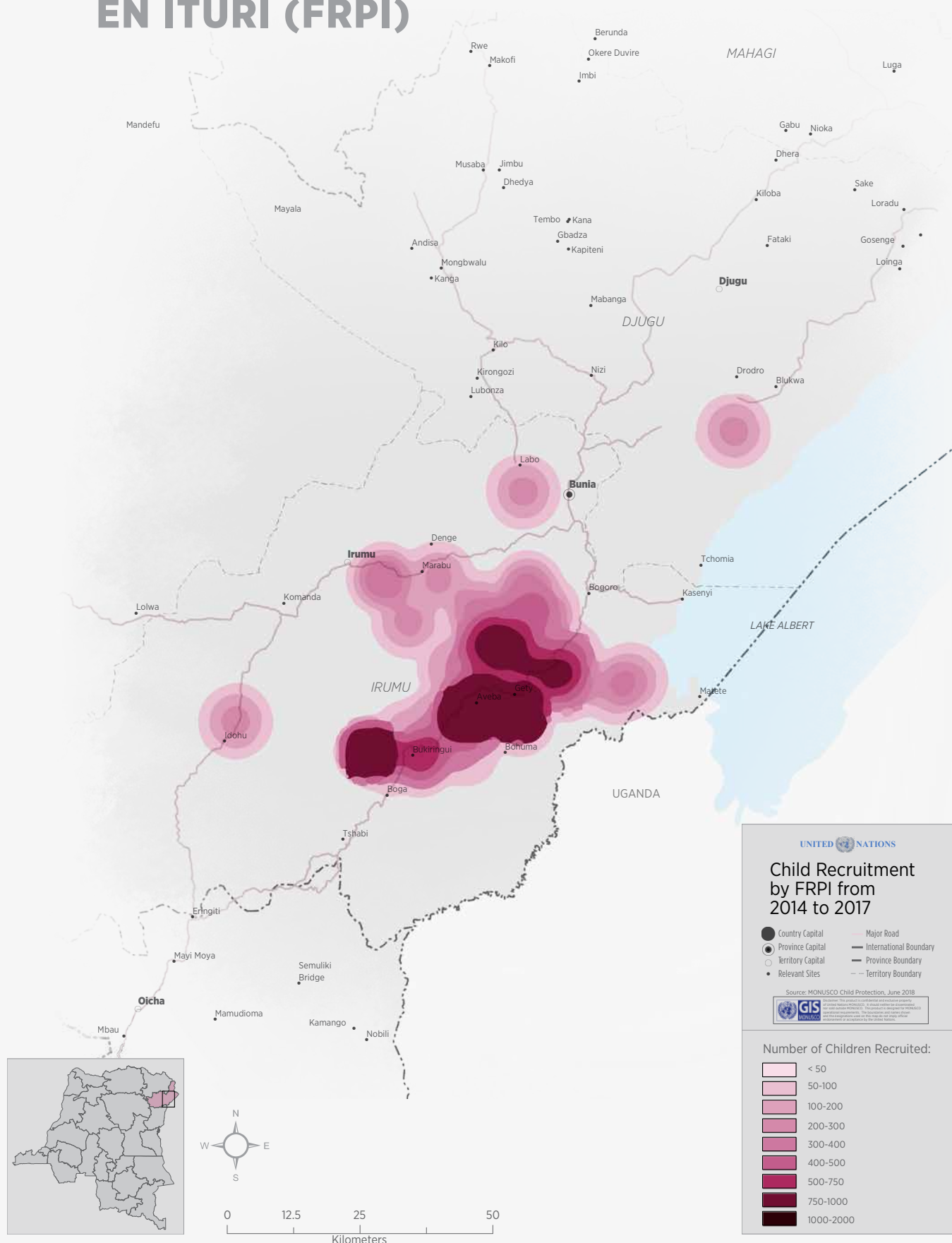
Commanders released just 2% of all children recruited by Mayi Mayi Mazembe. This unlikely scenario occurred only when a child was a favorite of a commander – like the 17-year-old bodyguard of a colonel's wife – or when family members negotiated for children's release.⁵⁹⁰ Unlike Nyatura, Rayia Mutomboki or NDC-Rénové, Mayi Mayi Mazembe only rarely accepted ransoms or bribes in exchange for releasing children, although the parents of a sick 14-year-old boy managed to negotiate his release for 50,000CF (31USD) and two goats.⁵⁹¹

Endnotes

- ⁴⁸⁸ 238491, see also 220031
- ⁴⁸⁹ 204872, 237293, 203299, 237225, see also 205189, 220030, 220746, 237447, 260506
- ⁴⁹⁰ 237336
- ⁴⁹¹ 256512
- ⁴⁹² 238493, see also 249590, 249591, 248646, 251210, 225140
- ⁴⁹³ 248609
- ⁴⁹⁴ 249534, 237437, 249715
- ⁴⁹⁵ 272430, 257001, 272484
- ⁴⁹⁶ 236610
- ⁴⁹⁷ 226650, 248330
- ⁴⁹⁸ 247216
- ⁴⁹⁹ 237285, see also 205181, 226644, 256310
- ⁵⁰⁰ 236602
- ⁵⁰¹ 220029, see also 260184, 268184, 268927
- ⁵⁰² 268877
- ⁵⁰³ 237304, see also 248651
- ⁵⁰⁴ 256413, see also 256523
- ⁵⁰⁵ 256534
- ⁵⁰⁶ 206895, 237291
- ⁵⁰⁷ 225167, 237431
- ⁵⁰⁸ 225150
- ⁵⁰⁹ 256409
- ⁵¹⁰ 237332
- ⁵¹¹ 256530, 256531, 256538
- ⁵¹² 260500
- ⁵¹³ 270730, 268180
- ⁵¹⁴ 236606, 237283, 249696, 238475
- ⁵¹⁵ 267467
- ⁵¹⁶ 268604
- ⁵¹⁷ 247650
- ⁵¹⁸ 270237, 270260
- ⁵¹⁹ 221266
- ⁵²⁰ 209499, 259187
- ⁵²¹ 237291, 249588
- ⁵²² 256403
- ⁵²³ 237283
- ⁵²⁴ 238475
- ⁵²⁵ 261334
- ⁵²⁶ 237291
- ⁵²⁷ 261332, 270262, 237335
- ⁵²⁸ 270263
- ⁵²⁹ 247791
- ⁵³⁰ 225150
- ⁵³¹ 267500
- ⁵³² 246571
- ⁵³³ 272590
- ⁵³⁴ 237293, 236610, 261337, 261334, 264441
- ⁵³⁵ 238096, 203271
- ⁵³⁶ 267816, 268180
- ⁵³⁷ 248335
- ⁵³⁸ 237336
- ⁵³⁹ 270730, 272758
- ⁵⁴⁰ 238096
- ⁵⁴¹ 260511
- ⁵⁴² 256792
- ⁵⁴³ 260594
- ⁵⁴⁴ 246374, 243846
- ⁵⁴⁵ 247585
- ⁵⁴⁶ 248646
- ⁵⁴⁷ 236602, 237298
- ⁵⁴⁸ 264441
- ⁵⁴⁹ 237291, see also 256818
- ⁵⁵⁰ 267500
- ⁵⁵¹ 264441
- ⁵⁵² 237304
- ⁵⁵³ 248651
- ⁵⁵⁴ 260593
- ⁵⁵⁵ 247729 see also 238084
- ⁵⁵⁶ 251107, see also 246371
- ⁵⁵⁷ 237437
- ⁵⁵⁸ 256512, 238485
- ⁵⁵⁹ 237332
- ⁵⁶⁰ 256792
- ⁵⁶¹ 237336
- ⁵⁶² 256310, 251210, 238475, 237318
- ⁵⁶³ 260502
- ⁵⁶⁴ 220029, 236606
- ⁵⁶⁵ 256608
- ⁵⁶⁶ 220030, see also 243845, 236606
- ⁵⁶⁷ 249691
- ⁵⁶⁸ 238491, see also 260498
- ⁵⁶⁹ 248660
- ⁵⁷⁰ 247746
- ⁵⁷¹ 237293
- ⁵⁷² 237449
- ⁵⁷³ 260184
- ⁵⁷⁴ 256310, 249534, 206895
- ⁵⁷⁵ 220046, 271640, 249590, see also 249696 while buying his commander phone credit
- ⁵⁷⁶ 261334
- ⁵⁷⁷ 237447
- ⁵⁷⁸ 220029
- ⁵⁷⁹ 248646, see also 249691
- ⁵⁸⁰ 260512
- ⁵⁸¹ 268604
- ⁵⁸² 256523, 261334
- ⁵⁸³ 264441
- ⁵⁸⁴ 260506, see also 249534
- ⁵⁸⁵ 237293
- ⁵⁸⁶ 237332, 238490
- ⁵⁸⁷ 264434
- ⁵⁸⁸ 247859, see also 247928
- ⁵⁸⁹ 245738, 257418
- ⁵⁹⁰ 243846, 251210, see also 260514
- ⁵⁹¹ 248607, see also 256403

IN-DEPTH PROFILE:

FORCES DE RÉSISTANCE PATRIOTIQUE EN ITURI (FRPI)



TERRITORY

Ituri (Irumu)

CHILDREN RECRUITED

Total: 303

Trend: Decrease

Girls: 27% / Boys: 73%

Abducted: 39%

Sexual Violence against Girls: 93%

Under 15: 35%

Combatants: 37%

Re-Recruited: 3%

MOTIVE

Origins in the 2002 Ituri war and community self-defense;
Opposition to the Government

ETHNICITY

Ngiti

PRIMARY MEANS OF RECRUITMENT

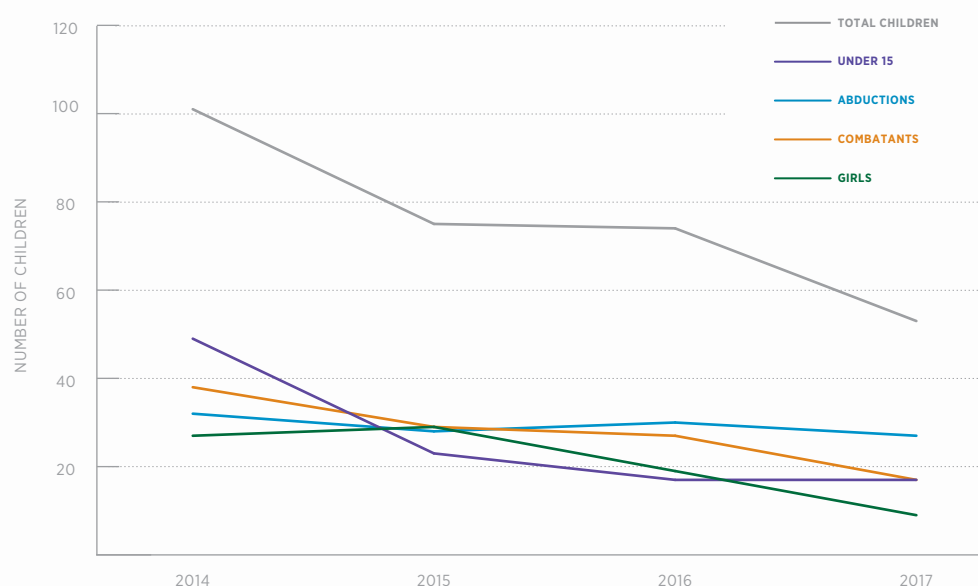
Forced (44%); Voluntary (35%)

PRIMARY PUSH FACTORS AMONG VOLUNTEERS

Economic (42%); Family & Peer Pressure (39%);
Self-Protection (24%)

PRIMARY MEANS OF SEPARATION

Escape (62%); Release (22%); Arrest/Capture (9%)

TRENDS IN CHILD RECRUITMENT BY FRPI

The Forces de Résistance Patriotique en Ituri (FRPI) was created in November 2002 and was initially commanded by Germain Katanga until he was arrested and transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 17 October 2007. In May 2010, Justin Banaloki alias Cobra Matata became the FRPI leader after deserting from FARDC until his arrest in Bunia on 2 January 2015. The group, which operates in South Irumu Territory, particularly the Walendu-Bindi collectivity, Ituri Province is currently led by Mbadu Adirodu. After a relative five-year lull in activities between 2003 and 2008, coinciding with the partial integration of the group into the FARDC, FRPI resumed activities at the end of 2008 and continues to pose a persistent threat to civilian security, primarily through criminal actions, and attacks against state security forces.

Today, the political objectives of the group have fallen by the wayside and FRPI elements engage primarily in looting, ambushes, illegal taxation and other criminality. The group retains some influence at mining sites, but this has waned over recent years. In November 2014, FRPI began negotiations with the Government of the DRC concerning their surrender, but these failed due to disputes over conditions of amnesty, and integration into security forces. With MONUSCO's support, the Government of the DRC re-engaged with FRPI in 2018. However, exactions against civilians continue in FRPI-influenced areas.

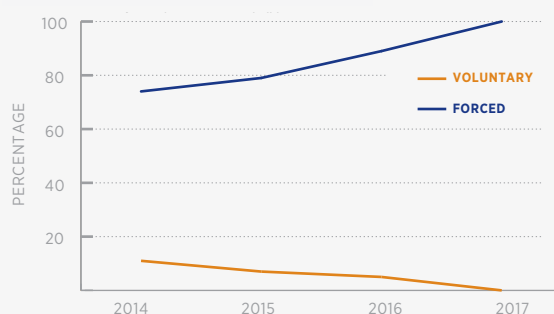
BEFORE:

HOW & WHY CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED BY FRPI

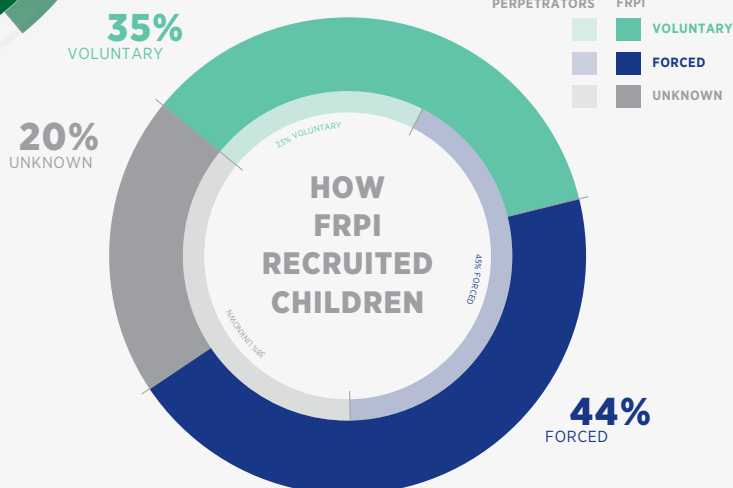
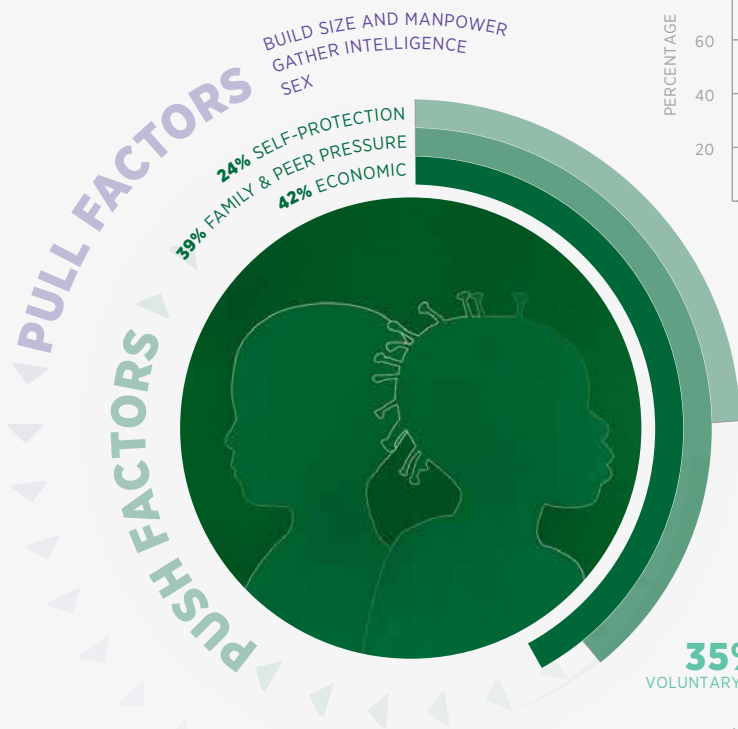
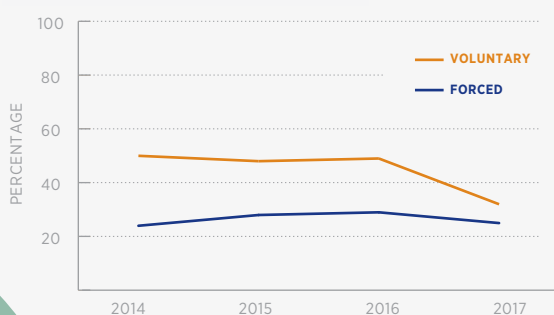
FRPI had the second highest rate of child volunteers in the East, after Mayi Mayi Mazembe, with 35% of all children recruited doing so voluntarily.

It is critical to note that not only did the overall number of volunteers decrease from 2014 to 2017, but there was also a remarkable gender divide among children who voluntarily joined FRPI. The rates of voluntary versus forced recruitment among girls and boys displayed opposite trends. The majority of boys were voluntary recruited and the majority of girls were forced.

HOW GIRLS WERE RECRUITED BY FRPI



HOW BOYS WERE RECRUITED BY FRPI



Push Factors: Why Children Volunteered to Join FRPI

A Part-Time Job

FRPI is deeply embedded in the community, which resulted in a child recruitment pattern characterized by a casual, easy-come-easy-go familiarity that made membership in the group akin to a part-time job. For example, one 14-year-old was the son of FRPI parents who were killed fighting the FARDC. The boy grew up in the bush before returning to Aveluma to live with his grandmother and attend school. However, from time to time, he would visit FRPI positions surrounding Aveluma, eventually deciding to leave school and to join his parents' cause in November 2015.⁵⁹²

Casual familiarity with FRPI was a slippery slope that quickly led children from visiting FRPI camps for dinner, running errands for family members or serving drinks to FRPI elements at the local bar to joining themselves.⁵⁹³ For instance, a 14-year-old boy frequently visited his father, a FRPI lieutenant, in the forest, cooking and laundering clothes for him. When his father died in 2015, the boy chose to stay in the forest with the FRPI.⁵⁹⁴ Adults' habits of revolving in and out of FRPI for several months or years also lured children brought in alongside them. For instance, a 13-year-old boy joined FRPI at his uncle's advice but, a month later, when his uncle left for his village he left the child with the combatants, among whom was the boy's older brother.⁵⁹⁵

Survival Strategy: Economic Support

The strongest predictor of whether or not a boy would volunteer for FRPI was his economic situation at home, particularly whether or not his parents could afford to pay his school fees: 42% of all children volunteering for FRPI cited this reason for their decisions. Indeed, boys who do not have the means to attend school viewed FRPI as a viable alternative "career."⁵⁹⁶ Hunger was also a predictor of volunteerism, with numerous boys joining because they were "looking for meat."⁵⁹⁷ Like other armed groups, FRPI recruiters played on the vulnerability of an empty stomach, with one 13-year-old boy joining after militants – including his older brother – visited his family and told the boy that they ate "a lot of meat in the bush."⁵⁹⁸

Frequently, poverty combined with family strife or parental death created a powerful push factor for boys. This was the case for a 15-year-old orphan whose father's death forced him to drop out of school. When he could not support himself farming, the boy, encouraged by his friends, volunteered to join FRPI.⁵⁹⁹ Displacement, a common occurrence in Ituru Territory, Ituri was an additional factor that predisposed boys, often already

mired in poverty and living with extended family after parents' deaths, to volunteer.⁶⁰⁰

While predominantly a male pattern, girls also occasionally volunteered for FRPI for economic reasons. This reasoning drove a 16-year-old girl to join when she went to FRPI position at Nyaigo to sell alcohol. The "wealthy life" of the FRPI elements she saw there, eating meat and other looted items, appealed to the girl and she decided to marry one of the FRPI elements she met there.⁶⁰¹

Family & Peer Pressure

Given the inter-mingling of FRPI and the community, the influence of family members and friends in FRPI was a powerful push factor for boys. One 14-year-old boy said he was "inspired" by neighborhood friends who were already part of FRPI, and an 11-year-old boy was recruited by an older friend, who ultimately became his commander.⁶⁰²

Watching both direct and extended family members rotate in and out of FRPI subtly influenced boys, normalizing the practice and minimizing the commitment such a decision required. Rather than active recruitment, such decisions took on a more circumstantial flavor. For instance, the 16-year-old boy who went to visit his uncle at FRPI barracks and did not want to return home, or the 14-year-old boy who followed his godfather back to a FRPI camp.⁶⁰³ This fluidity was clear in the case of a 13-year-old boy who grew up in the bush with his father, a FRPI element. When the boy's mother became sick, the boy went to live with his maternal aunt, although he would still visit FRPI in the bush before returning home. Eventually, he chose to join the group full time until his father was killed by FARDC.⁶⁰⁴

While FRPI operated in family structures, its fluidity and intermingling with communities meant that children were born frequently to FRPI parents but not in FRPI camps, as was the case in FDLR FOCA. Children rarely reported being born in and spending their whole lives in FRPI, but there were exceptions, like the 14-year-old boy who spent his whole childhood in FRPI camps with his parents, eventually formally enrolling to avoid his stepfather's abuse.⁶⁰⁵

Survival Strategy: Physical Protection

One quarter of the children who voluntarily joined FRPI cited self-protection as the reason for enrollment. Most commonly, boys fled from family abuse or neglect. For instance, a 14-year-old boy who joined rather than submit to his parents' severe beatings, a 12-year-old boy who joined after his father died and his mother abandoned him for a second marriage in North Kivu. In another case, a 10-year-old boy volunteered after his mother left for Uganda and his father kicked him out of the house, forcing him to seek out his uncle living in a FRPI camp.⁶⁰⁶

The destructive impact of years of conflict in Ituri on family structures was apparent in numerous children's stories explaining why they volunteered for FRPI. For instance, a 12-year-old boy grew up as an orphan and was raised by his uncle stated that, when FARDC killed his uncle in 2014, he felt he had no other option than to join FRPI for his survival.⁶⁰⁷

FRPI itself was also the menace that children sought to protect themselves and their families from by joining the group, judging that it was safer to be inside the group than outside it. This was the calculation of a 16-year-old boy who, in his own words, "judged it better to offer myself as a recruit" after FRPI attacked his village and killed his parents.⁶⁰⁸ FRPI's constant harassment of individual children, families and villages led a number of boys to join the group just to no longer be a target.⁶⁰⁹ The village of Supreme suffered frequent harassment and looting raids by FRPI until the village chief called a 14-year-old boy and four of his friends to offer themselves to the group to ensure protection for the village.⁶¹⁰

Occasionally, boys joined FRPI to evade arrest for petty crimes, like the 15-year-old boy who held up community members with a fake wooden gun, the 16-year-old boy who was on the run after a fistfight, or the 16-year-old boy who was caught having sex with his girlfriend.⁶¹¹ For all of these boys, FRPI appeared to be a safe hiding spot.

Revenge & Protection of Family or Community

Revenge and self-defense was a less prominent reason for children to join FRPI than for ethnically based groups in North and South Kivu. Eight percent of child volunteers for FRPI did so to exact revenge and to defend their families and communities. Still, the death of a direct family member, particularly a father figure, at the hands of FARDC was a powerful emotional factor in a child's decision to join FRPI.

In line with the FRPI long-standing history and occasional targeting by the Government during lulls in dialogue, children sought vengeance not against armed groups of other ethnicities but rather against the FARDC, like the 16-year-old boy who joined after his father was killed and his mother remarried a FARDC soldier.⁶¹² Sometimes vengeance moved children to join quickly, like the 15-year-old boy who went straight to a FRPI bush camp after watching FARDC kill his father in April 2016.⁶¹³ Other times, the desire for revenge burned slowly, as it did for the boy who sought retaliation years after his parents were killed by FARDC in Gety in 2013.⁶¹⁴

Occasionally, boys would band together to take revenge by jointly volunteering, like the 14-year-old boy from Bukiringi who decided to join after he and his friends were harassed again and again by FARDC who accused them of being associated with FRPI.⁶¹⁵

DDR Benefits & Integration into the FARDC

A rare but telling reason that some boys joined FRPI in late 2014 was the aim of integrating into the FARDC. At the time, negotiations between the Government and FRPI were promising, with scores of commanders demobilizing and integrating into the FARDC, along with their elements. The lure of an FARDC salary was a strong pull for at least one 15-year-old boy who quit the child DDR sewing skills program he was attending and voluntarily re-recruited when he heard that surrendering FRPI elements would receive money.⁶¹⁶ In at least one case, a boy voluntarily re-joined FRPI to become eligible for reintegration activities. This 17-year-old boy left his child DDR program with a UNICEF partner in Aveba when FRPI Etat Major Yambi asked the boy to run an errand moving money. The boy complied, saying he had seen FRPI elements demobilizing and he thought that doing Yambi's bidding would make him eligible to integrate into the FARDC.⁶¹⁷

Pull Factors: Why FRPI Recruited Children

Build Size and Manpower

FRPI commanders and elements appeared to be well aware that they could manipulate children's so-called part time jobs in the group to build its size and power, particularly when negotiations with the Government looked shaky.⁶¹⁸ More frequently, FRPI abducted children to fill its ranks. This was the case for the 17-year-old boy who was working as a miner in a community frequented by FRPI elements looking for a beer. In September 2017, the group was searching for new combatants and abducted the boy.⁶¹⁹

Gather Intelligence

One of the most common roles that children played in FRPI was that of spy, suggesting that FRPI valued children's ability to quickly and quietly gather intelligence on FARDC movements or to scope out future pillaging targets without gaining attention. In just one example, FRPI specifically recruited a 16-year-old boy as a spy to identify and target wealthy households to attack at night.⁶²⁰

Gender

FRPI systematically abducted and recruited girls for sex. In fact, FRPI had the highest rate of recruitment of girls (27%) of any armed group in the DRC and the highest rate of sexual violence among girls (93%). In some cases, girls in prior relationships with FRPI elements were forced into their camps. When a 15-year-old girl became pregnant from a FRPI element while living with her parents, she joined him in the camp where she became his "wife."⁶²¹ In another case, a 15-year-old girl who had been living with her boyfriend for two years when her boyfriend abducted by her and forced to continue living with him in the FRPI camp as his concubine.⁶²²

Trigger Violation: Abduction

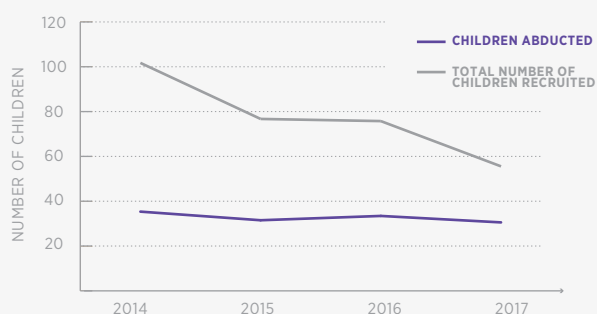
FRPI had the highest rate of recruitment via abduction of any armed group in the DRC since 2014, including Kamuina Nsapu. Thirty nine percent of all children recruited by FRPI arrived via abduction. Notably, while recruitment by FRPI decreased from 2014 to 2017, abductions remained steady, suggesting that FRPI placed a priority on maintaining a steady supply of girls for sexual purposes.

Abduction by FRPI is an inherently gendered child recruitment tactic. While FRPI is not alone among armed groups in predominantly targeting girls for abduction, the difference

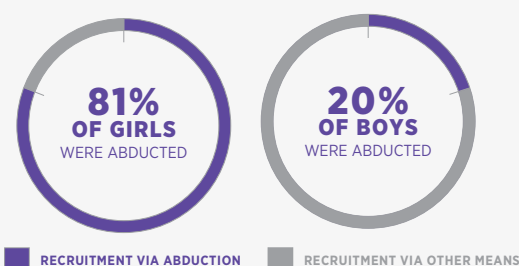
between FRPI abduction of girls versus boys is glaring in its almost exactly inverse pattern: 81% of girls abducted compared to 20% of boys.

As a starting point, 81% of girls recruited by FRPI via abduction were specifically targeted for being children. While rates of abduction by FRPI among adult women were not available, children's testimony suggests that FRPI prized girls specifically for their age. For example, FRPI abducted four girls while only robbing and releasing the women present.⁶²³ FRPI typically abducted girls directly from their homes or fields, with one

CHILD RECRUITMENT VIA ABDUCTION BY FRPI



ABDUCTION OF GIRLS AND BOYS BY FRPI



14-year-old girl robbed and abducted from her stall in the Gety market to become her abductor's "wife," and another 13-year-old girl abducted by her future "husband" while watching a football match with schoolmates.⁶²⁴ FRPI was also known to abduct girls en masse.⁶²⁵ In one case, a group of girls fled at the sight of approaching FRPI elements; the fast ones escaped while their slower sisters were abducted.⁶²⁶ Often FRPI elements first raped girls and then abducted them, after which the girls were systematically raped again under the guise of forced marriage. This was the fate of a 16-year-old girl who was raped and abducted by a group of FRPI elements in October 2016 while collecting firewood with four other girls, all of whom escaped.⁶²⁷ In some cases, familial links to FRPI paved the way for girls' abduction by bringing them in regular proximity with FRPI. This was the case for a 16-year-old girl who went as usual to visit her uncle, an FRPI element, only to find that her uncle had rotated to another FRPI position and the girl was abducted by his replacement.⁶²⁸

For boys, abduction was a different experience. FRPI did occasionally employ the tactics of pillage, porter, and abduct for boys that were used more commonly by armed groups operating in North Kivu. For example, a 16-year-old boy crossed

paths with FRPI elements who were returning from a pillaging expedition laden with loot. The elements beat the boy and forced him to carry the bags of looted goods 20km to their camp.⁶²⁹ One boy, aged 16, found himself with FRPI elements at his door and nothing to offer them as loot. Instead, the FRPI elements beat the boy and forced him to carry looted goods from other houses.⁶³⁰ Occasionally, boys were abducted by FRPI on suspicion of spying on the group, as was a 14-year-old boy abducted for allegedly "spying for the FARDC" while visiting his grandmother.⁶³¹ Sometimes the circumstances of abduction were more opportunistic, like the 17-year-old boy who fell into a FRPI ambush while on his way from an apprenticeship in Tshekele. Six FRPI elements, two of whom were armed, shot out the tires of the boy's motorcycle and took him into the bush in a FRPI vehicle.⁶³²

While most children were abducted by small squads of two to eight FRPI elements, children also reported massive abduction operations. In one case, more than 100 FRPI elements, including women and children armed with AK-47s, abducted 10 children, including three girls, along with 30 adults during an August 2017 night attack in Irumu Territory, Ituri.⁶³³

Re-Recruitment

FRPI had a relatively low rate of re-recruitment at 3%, perhaps in part due to the part-time nature of some children's activities in the group. Indeed, FRPI's door was always open, as some children found when they voluntarily re-joined the group to escape difficult family situations. One 15-year-old boy left FRPI and reunited with his family, however his incestuous sexual relationship with his cousin soon caused friction in the household and the boy voluntarily rejoined FRPI.⁶³⁴ Another boy, aged 16, rejoined 10 months after reuniting with his family when FRPI looted his reinsertion kit and he found himself without means of subsistence.⁶³⁵

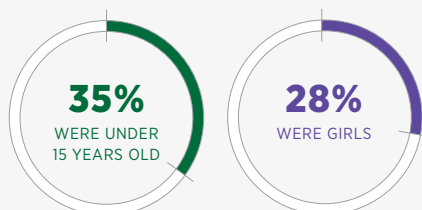
In contrast to other top perpetrators like Nyatura, FRPI rarely searched specifically for individual children to re-recruit. In only one case did a child report that his commander actively searched for him after his escape. Two weeks after reuniting with his family in June 2014, the 16-year-old boy was re-recruited.⁶³⁶ This, however, did not prevent children who escaped from FRPI from fearing re-recruitment. FRPI re-recruited a 17-year-old boy, held him "prisoner," and beat him daily for three weeks as punishment for escaping, leaving permanent scars. When the boy managed to escape, he was immediately arrested by FARDC and forced to perform heavy labor in detention, despite his injuries. This combination of re-recruitment and ill treatment by FRPI and detention and forced labor by FARDC left the boy seriously distressed, physically weak and "scared to ever return to South Irumu."⁶³⁷

II. DURING:

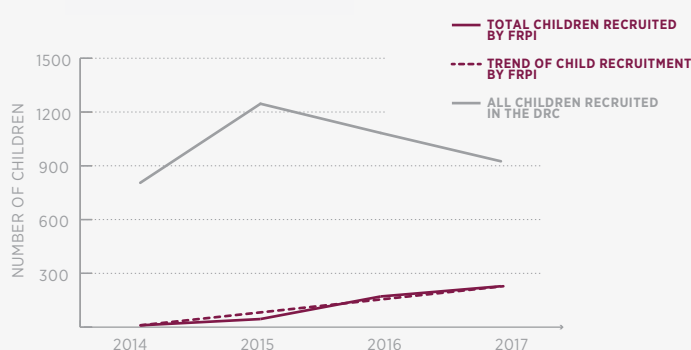
CHILDREN'S LIVES INSIDE FRPI



THE PROFILE OF A CHILD RECRUITED BY FRPI FROM 2014-2017



CHILD RECRUITMENT BY FRPI

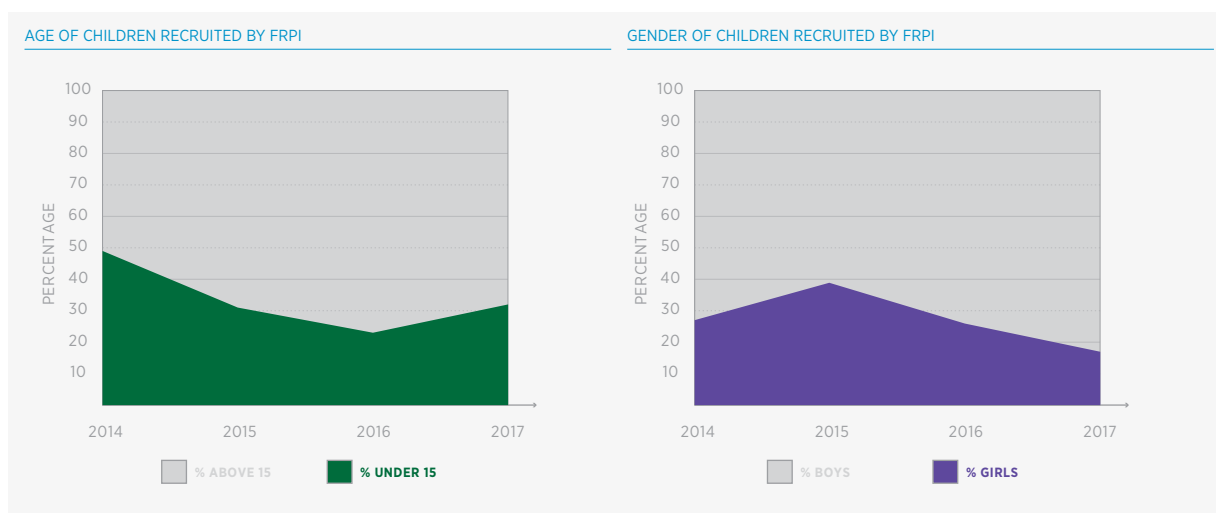


The Girls & Boys Recruited by FRPI

FRPI recruited at least 303 children, including 83 girls, in the last four years. Given the “part-time” nature of association with FRPI, however, this is thought to underestimate the actual scale of child recruitment by the group. Nevertheless, the downward trend is an encouraging one.

This decrease may be related to the declining strength of the FRPI overall, which has shrunk from an estimated 5000 plus combatants in 2002-2003 to an estimated 400-500 in 2018. In recent years, the gradual fragmentation of the group has undermined the operational cohesion of the FRPI, and the overall command authority of [Colonel] Mbadu, diminishing its capacity to recruit and retain child soldiers as it once did.

However, ongoing tensions between the Hema and Ngiti communities still allow the FRPI to retain a foothold as a stakeholder in the security and political landscape in Ituri, including as an active recruiter of children.



Age

On average, 35% of children recruited by FRPI are younger than 15 years old, a figure on par with Rayia Mutomboki. In 2014, the heaviest year of FRPI's child recruitment, half of all children were under age 15, a percentage that dipped in 2015 and 2016 before rising again in 2017. Unlike other armed groups, FRPI was more likely to recruit and use boys under age 15 than girls.

Gender

Of all armed groups documented as recruiting children in the DRC, FRPI has the highest rate of girls among its recruits: 27%, outranking Kamuina Nsapu with 21%. This was clearly linked to the group's exploitation of girls as sex slaves and "wives" but it may also be related to MONUSCO CPS outreach encouraging girls to come out of the shadows and claim the child DDR benefits to which they were entitled. The same year as the outreach campaign - 2015 - the number of girls documented spiked to 37%, suggesting that in fact the percentage of girls among children recruited by FRPI is, in actuality, far higher than 27%.

Life for Children Inside FRPI

Initiation Rites & Daily Life

Children separated from FRPI described living in camps ranging from 18 elements of which half were children, to camps of up to 100 elements, with approximately 10% children.⁶³⁸ While military training was universal for new child recruits, FRPI appeared to employ magic less regularly than groups like Mayi Mayi Mazembe, NDC-Rénové or Kamuina Nsapu, although children and adults did serve as “magicians” or fétisheurs.⁶³⁹

Rather, induction appeared to be more pragmatic and less ceremonial, in part due to the part-time nature in which children were members of FRPI and their communities at the same time, slipping from visiting a sibling or selling beer to becoming a full-fledged member of the group. Like the 14-year-old boy who would visit his friends in the group to share meals until he too joined, although even afterwards he regularly returned home to visit his mother, bringing her meat and other looted goods.⁶⁴⁰ Or the 15-year-old girl who went back and forth between her village and her “husband’s” barracks.⁶⁴¹ Some children even reported continuing to attend school while living in FRPI camps and joining looting raids.⁶⁴²

Friendships and family relationships played a central role inside FRPI, in part because they were central factors in pushing children, or at least boys, to join the group. One boy reported “finding [his] friends in the bush.”⁶⁴³ And another reported living with at least 50 other children, as well as adults, in the camp.⁶⁴⁴ Nevertheless, life inside FRPI was harsh, with children describing “torture” [ill treatment], such as the a 15-year-old girl escaping in a state of malnutrition, and a 14-year-old boy suffering from severe lower back pain due to regular physical abuse.⁶⁴⁵ One 16-year-old “wife” and cook sought solace from such punishments in her garden, which she had to abandon during clashes.⁶⁴⁶

Role: Combatant

With a steady rate of 37% of all child recruits serving as combatants, FRPI is on the middle-lower end of the spectrum compared to other top perpetrators. Not a single girl reported fighting for FRPI, underlining the group's exclusive use of girls for sexual purposes. While FRPI generally employed older boys as combatants, some as young as nine reported fighting.⁶⁴⁷ Several boys of approximately 15-years-old reported serving simultaneously as combatant and fétisseur.⁶⁴⁸ While girls predominantly did not participate in combat,⁶⁴⁹ FRPI commanders trained even the cooks and concubines to use AK-47s.⁶⁵⁰

In a nod to its dominance in Ituri, FRPI deployed children exclusively to fight FARDC, not other armed groups. Notably, clashes in which children fought against the FARDC mirrored the state of FRPI-Government negotiations, with a spike reported by children in January 2015 after the collapse of negotiations for FRPI to surrender.⁶⁵¹ Likewise, a 16-year-old boy reported taking part in burning down the FARDC camp at Longosa in June 2016.⁶⁵² Occasionally, commanders ordered child combatants to attack civilians, like the 16-year-old boy forced to loot his own village and the 15-year-old boy ordered to kill a pastor in April 2017.⁶⁵³

Children's testimony of fighting for FRPI points to significantly higher levels of sophistication and organization than most of the other top perpetrators of child recruitment. Boys described clear battalion and command structures, including serving in various branches like S4 Logistics or the Naval Battalion, Samba Battalion, Tiger Battalion, Infantry Battalion and Leopard Battalion.⁶⁵⁴ Children reported serving in multiple battalions, rotating through different commanders. For example, a 16-year-old boy fought for four months with the Leopard Battalion under the command of Auso and then rotated to the Naval Battalion under the command of Soma for eight months.⁶⁵⁵ Testimony reveals a well-developed command structure, with children reporting through multiple ranks rather to a single commander, as was often the case in armed groups in North Kivu. The battalions also adhered to clear roles, with one 16-year-old boy fighting in a battalion led by four captains and one lieutenant, and another 17-year-old rising to the rank of sergeant in two years.⁶⁵⁶

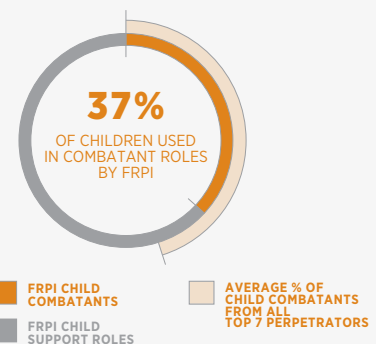
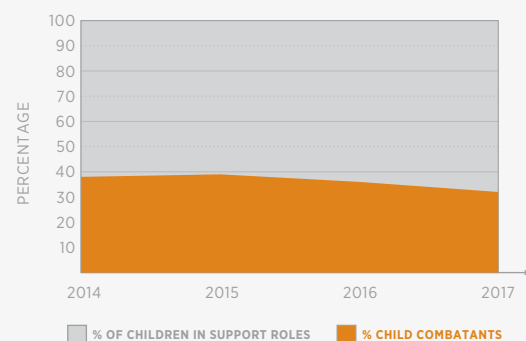
Discipline was strictly enforced and children, even if trained to fight, had to earn their weapons – typically AK-47, mortars, SMGs, Energized Sub-Machine Guns (ESMG), and knives⁶⁵⁷ – by making a genuine attempt to steal them from FARDC.⁶⁵⁸

Role: Support

The remaining 63% of children recruited by FRPI played support roles, ranging from semi-combatant roles like bodyguard or the commander's personal weapons porter, to witch doctor, cook, babysitter, butcher, looter and shopkeeper.⁶⁵⁹ Most children with "part-time" membership in FRPI played these support roles during the day, while returning home at night. For instance, one 14-year-old boy never permanently lived in FRPI camps, he simply did the shopping for the local FRPI commander on market day.⁶⁶⁰ One boy reported with pride that although he may not have fought, he "assisted in many battles between FARDC and FRPI in [his] capacity as a porter."⁶⁶¹ One 17-year-old boy's sole job was to steal weapons from FARDC, a role that triggered his arrest, alongside a female arms smuggler.⁶⁶²

Commanders frequently used boys as spies and messengers⁶⁶³ to inform on FARDC or civilian activities in various areas.⁶⁶⁴ One 9-year-old boy was assigned to a market, where he marked out wealthier civilians, whose houses could be pillaged that night.⁶⁶⁵ Girls, while occasionally used in looting expeditions, usually occupied traditionally female roles like cleaner, cook or laundress during the daytime, and served as concubines at night.

CHILDREN'S ROLES IN FRPI



Violations Triggered by Child Recruitment: The Risks Children Faced in FRPI

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence was rife in FRPI, with 93% of all girls interviewed disclosing rape, sexual slavery or forced marriage. While girls also reported that boys were used for sexual purposes, no boys disclosed sexual violence.⁶⁶⁶

FRPI elements of all ranks systematically took girls as “wives,” even by boys their own age, like the 15-year-old girl forced to marry a 15-year-old boy.⁶⁶⁷ Indeed both girls and the local communities commonly referred to girls in FRPI as “wives.”⁶⁶⁸ Some of these unions could be short, lasting just two weeks, while others stretched on for three years.⁶⁶⁹

Most often, a girl’s experience began with rape during her abduction, which was the precipitating violation for 82% of all girls in FRPI.⁶⁷⁰ The circumstances of girls’ rape and abduction were brutal, with one 15-year-old girl raped in front of her grandfather before being abducted during a pillaging attack.⁶⁷¹

However, not all girls became “wives” by abduction; occasionally, forced marriages followed courtship but these relationships had to adhere to certain social mores. For instance, a 16-year-old girl joined FRPI to marry her boyfriend, whom she had met in her mother’s liquor store and who was a distant relative, however, her customary chief considered the relationship to be incestuous and the girl was brought back to her parents four days later.⁶⁷²

These forced marriages inevitably resulted in many pregnancies, reported by both girls and boys.⁶⁷³ Girls as young as 13 gave birth in the bush.⁶⁷⁴ One 14-year-old girl gave birth to a baby boy exactly 9 months after her abduction, and another 15-year-old girl who found she was pregnant three weeks after being raped, abducted and “married,” went home to her village to deliver her baby.⁶⁷⁵

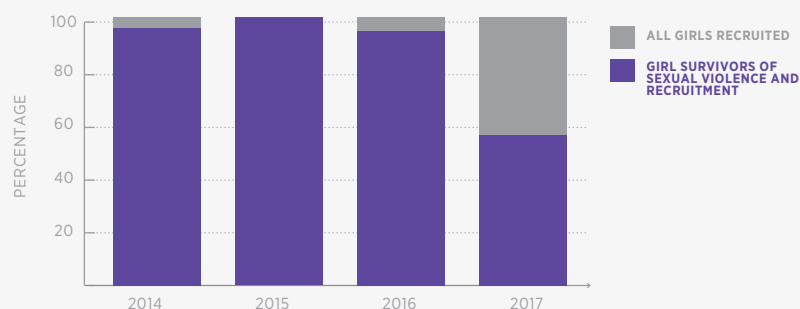
Killing & Maiming

Like all children recruited by armed groups, the risk of death was very real for children in FRPI. For instance, two boys, ages 14 and 15, were killed in a clash against FARDC in Kenga almost a month to the day after being recruited on 25 May 2016. Reportedly, boys made up a quarter of FRPI fatalities in that attack, alongside four men and two women.⁶⁷⁶

Child combatants in FRPI reported more severe, high-tech injuries than those in armed groups in North and South Kivu, suggesting that the FARDC deployed more advanced weaponry to Ituri. Children regularly survived with shrapnel injuries and had limbs amputated due to injuries sustained from explosives, like the boy who joined FRPI “in search of meat” and instead lost his forearm to a “bomb.”⁶⁷⁷ For instance, a 17-year-old boy, medevaced by the Congolese Red Cross, bore oval and circular scars on both of his arms, chest, and back following a helicopter attack. The same day he left the hospital to visit his family, he was arrested by the PNC.⁶⁷⁸ In another case, a commander used a 13-year-old boy as a human shield, ordering him to walk ahead of the other combatants; the boy sustained two gunshot wounds and shrapnel injuries from FARDC rounds.⁶⁷⁹

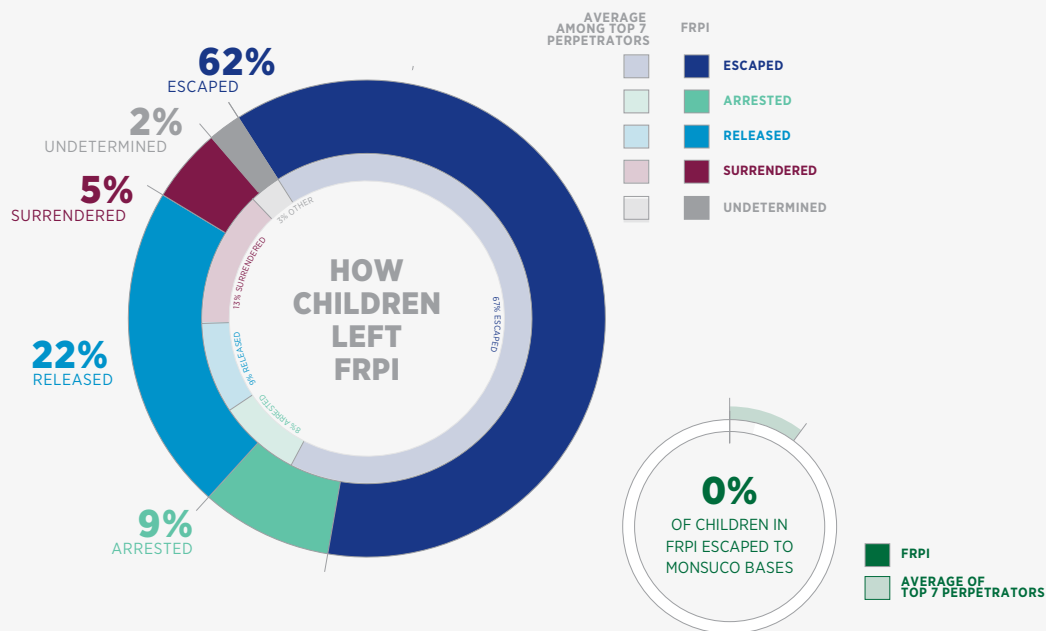
While most child deaths and injuries occurred on the battlefield with FARDC, children also reported sustaining injuries while escaping the group, like the 14-year-old boy who took his chance during a FARDC attack but was shot in the head and neck while running away.⁶⁸⁰ Occasionally, internal clashes within FRPI resulted in injuries. For instance, a 16-year-old boy who joined FRPI at his brother’s request narrowly escaped FRPI in December 2016, when internal clash left one element dead and injured the escaping boy in the neck.⁶⁸¹

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS RECRUITED BY FRPI

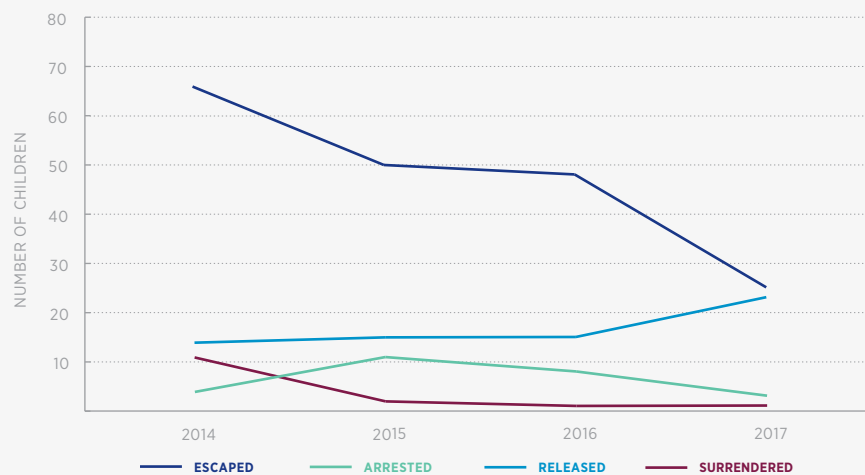


III. AFTER:

HOW CHILDREN WERE SEPARATED FROM FRPI



HOW CHILDREN LEFT FRPI OVER TIME



Escape

With such a high rate of recruitment via abduction, particularly for girls, it is no surprise that two in three children recruited by FRPI (62%) left the group by escaping.

Why Children Escaped FRPI

For children driven to join FRPI by poverty, finding even worse hardship in FRPI camps, such as sleeping outside without cover, was a common reason for children to escape. Children reported that life in FRPI became “very difficult” when FRPI-Government negotiations failed in Aveba in 2015.⁶⁸²

For child combatants, the risk of injury or death was also a reason to flee. For instance, a 15-year-old boy decided to escape when he saw his best friend shot in the leg in combat.⁶⁸³ Others fled threats from within FRPI, like the 16-year-old “wife” who was rejected by her “husband,” or the 16-year-old girl who escaped after her father, a FRPI combatant, was murdered by other FRPI elements who then came looking for her and her mother.⁶⁸⁴

One positive knock-on effect of FRPI’s fluid recruitment methods is that children stay in touch with their family members outside the group, who frequently persuade the child to escape. This was the case for a 16-year-old boy who joined voluntarily but who escaped when his uncle encouraged him to leave the group and go to school.⁶⁸⁵ Likewise, the family relationships inside the FRPI that influenced children to join FRPI, could equally influence children to escape when their family members did so. For instance, a 13-year-old boy recruited by his uncle escaped when his uncle decided to surrender and join the national DDR program in August 2015.⁶⁸⁶

One of the remarkable trends in children’s escapes from FRPI is the impact of child DDR awareness-raising conducted by NGO partners and communities. Starting in 2016, a number of boys and girls cited child DDR programs offering skills-based trainings as contributing to their decision to escape.⁶⁸⁷ The part-time nature of association with FRPI aided in the ability of NGOs to reach children. For instance, a 14-year-old boy was visiting his family when he met NGO outreach workers meeting with youth, ultimately prompting him to leave the bush in April 2016.⁶⁸⁸ Another 13-year-old boy escaped after a local customary chief met with his commander to negotiate the release of children. Although the boy’s commander refused, the boy heard the chief’s message and decided to escape of his own accord.⁶⁸⁹

The peer pressure that brought some children into FRPI could also generate a movement for their exit, with networks of friends in FRPI sharing child DDR opportunities after a series of NGO awareness-raising sessions in 2016. This was the case for a 17-year-old boy who escaped after his friends were encouraged to join the child DDR program in Kapalayi in April 2016.⁶⁹⁰ In the words of one boy, he “preferred to leave FRPI to join the child DDR process with the goal of learning a trade that could help [him] in the future.”⁶⁹¹

How Children Escaped from FRPI

Children escaping FRPI took the standard opportunistic escapes so common among all armed groups in the DRC, like the 14-year-old boy who escaped when sent to the market or the 14-year-old girl who fled at four in the morning on the premise of collecting the day’s water.⁶⁹²

Boys and girls also escaped during clashes with FARDC,⁶⁹³ particularly in Aveba in January 2015 after negotiations for FRPI’s surrender failed. Children openly discussed how the failure of negotiations led to clashes that created opportunities for them to escape. For example, at least three children escaped during the same FRPI-FARDC clash in a February 2015 at Songolo Pinga.⁶⁹⁴

Girls in particular took the opportunity to escape from their “husbands,” whether by the man’s death, arrest or FARDC integration. For instance, a 14-year-old girl escaped two days after her “husband” was taken prisoner by FARDC in September 2014 and the 17-year-old “wife” who returned home after her husband integrated into the FARDC.⁶⁹⁵ These child wives escaped not only for themselves but for the lives of their children, like the 13-year-old girl who escaped with her 4-month-old baby while her “husband” was on a looting mission.⁶⁹⁶ However, some “husbands” stalked their former “wives” even after their escape. This was the case for a 13-year-old girl abducted and used as a concubine for 5 months until she escaped when her recruiter went on a looting operation, however he continued visiting the girl at home.⁶⁹⁷ Girls also tended to escape together, like the pair of 16-year-old girls who were abducted together and escaped together six months later, after one of the girl’s “husband” was killed by FARDC in South Irumu.⁶⁹⁸

Like children associated with the other top perpetrators, children fleeing FRPI often made multiple attempts at escape and risked severe punishment for the disloyalty of desertion. One 17-year-old who held the rank of sergeant made several attempts before succeeding. When he was intercepted in his early attempts, he was severely punished.⁶⁹⁹ Another boy, age 16, was shot in the foot by another child while escaping in November 2015.⁷⁰⁰

Rather than escaping to MONUSCO or NGOs, girls fleeing FRPI tended to go straight home, from where their families brought them directly to hospitals for medical and psychological care.⁷⁰¹ Boys, on the other hand, tended to go first to local chiefs before going home, like the 15-year-old boy who hid in the bush for three weeks before contacting his local chief for protection.⁷⁰²

Release

Among the top perpetrators of child recruitment, FRPI has the highest rate of commanders' voluntary release of children, with 22% of all children recruited by FRPI exiting the group this way. This is due primarily to two factors: Positive developments in the FRPI-Government negotiations and determined awareness-raising of FRPI commanders by NGO partners.

During promising interludes in the negotiations, such as early January 2015 and February 2017, FRPI commanders released many of their children. This was the case for a 17-year-old girl who was released in January 2015 when her unit was stationed in Aveba during the negotiations. These soon failed and her unit returned to the bush.⁷⁰³

NGO awareness-raising succeeded in persuading some commanders but not others. Records showed that the same awareness-raising session held by an NGO and a customary chief on the same day in 2016 was effective half of its audience. One commander in attendance refused to release his children (two escaped later on⁷⁰⁴), while another commander agreed to give children in his ranks the choice of staying or being released to the NGO (at least three boys, ages 11, 13 and 14 chose to be released).⁷⁰⁵ Another 14-year-old boy had in fact advocated with his commander to attend the NGO awareness-raising session in the first place and ultimately won his authorization for release.⁷⁰⁶

Another factor that secured FRPI commanders' agreement to release children was concerted advocacy by family members.⁷⁰⁷

Parents, often known personally to FRPI elements and commanders, would go directly to FRPI camps, sometimes with bribes and sometimes without, to negotiate for their children's release. Ransoms ranged from two goats brought by the father of a 15-year-old boy, or 50,000CF (31USD) paid by a 15-year-old boy's mother, up to 150,000CF (94USD) for the release of a 16-year-old.⁷⁰⁸ Sometimes custody disputes put the child in the middle of warring family members, like the 12-year-old boy whose father, a FRPI element, had recruited the boy but whose mother wanted him released to her when FARDC operations intensified.⁷⁰⁹

Finally, the part-time nature of some children's roles in FRPI encouraged their commanders to release them for education or health reasons.⁷¹⁰ One 15-year-old boy, who joined FRPI to evade the police, sought and received his commander's permission to return to school.⁷¹¹ In another case, a 14-year-old boy who grew up in the bush to FRPI parents became seriously ill after his parents were killed. The boy's commander called his aunt to come for the boy and to ensure he received medical treatment.⁷¹²

Arrest & Capture

Children formerly associated with FRPI had a 9% arrest rate, on par with children recruited by FDLR FOCA and among the highest of all top perpetrators in the East.

The most common scenario for a child's capture and arrest was just after their escape, often with the complicity of local communities. For instance, a 16-year-old boy was forced to join FRPI by his brother-in-law in June 2016 and escaped three days later, only to have local villagers alert FARDC that he was "a FRPI spy," leading to his arrest and 15-day detention.⁷¹³

Capture and arrest also occurred during direct clashes with the FARDC, including when children were injured on the battlefield, like the 17-year-old boy who sustained bullet wounds while fighting FARDC in Ruzinga and was captured and admitted to Getty Hospital over Christmas 2016.⁷¹⁴ In rare cases, children who had surrendered and been separated by MONUSCO CPS at FARDC regroupment centers were arrested when they returned home.⁷¹⁵

The risk of arrest and the frequent ill treatment it entailed discouraged children from leaving FRPI and occasionally forced them to return to the group or to put themselves in risky situations in an attempt to protect themselves from arrest. Fear of arrest and detention prompted one 15-year-old boy, re-recruited twice, to hide in the bush until he approached a local NGO on his second escape.⁷¹⁶ FRPI elements forced another boy to buy groceries – drinks, cigarettes, flour and fish. The enormous purchase attracted the community's attention and they immediately informed the FARDC. To escape arrest for this one errand, the boy fled to the bush.⁷¹⁷

Alongside children associated with FDLR FOCA, children recruited by FRPI and captured or arrested by FARDC tell brutal stories of torture and ill treatment during their detention. In

the worst case, a 17-year-old suffered severe shrapnel wounds in battle and was medevaced to the Medecins Sans Frontieres Hospital in Gety for one month; the day after his release, he was arrested by the PNC and spent two days in Gety Prison, where he was beaten while both of his hands were tied behind his back. When he was transferred to the T2 Detention Cell in Bunia, the boy reported that he was bound and forced to lie face down on the floor of a truck while FARDC elements sat on the prisoners as they drove. He spent 42 days in the T2 detention

cell. There, he was forced to put his knees on bottle caps and keep his hands in the air while counting to 600. If he fell, he was beaten. Finally, he was transferred to the Military Prosecutor's detention cell, where he was forced to spend his first night in a small room with an overflowing toilet.⁷¹⁸ Another boy survived severe punishment from FRPI for his first escape attempt only to be arrested on his second attempt and forced to perform hard labor during 3 weeks of detention in T2 Bunia.⁷¹⁹

Surrender & Demobilization

Just 5% of the children recruited by FRPI surrendered or demobilized.

The majority of these did so in late 2014, when agreement on FRPI's surrender appeared within reach. Rounds of demobilization and integration of FRPI commanders into FARDC included children in their ranks, like the 16-year-old boy who surrendered with his whole unit.⁷²⁰ These children were brought to FARDC regroupment centers and subsequently screened out by MONUSCO CPS conducting age verification before former FRPI elements were integrated into the FARDC. In just one case, [General] Cobra Matata ordered a 17-year-old

boy's unit to surrender to the FARDC after "many meetings and compromises." In November 2014, the boy and his unit surrendered at Bunia and were brought to the FARDC Training Center at Kamina before the boy was screened out and returned home.⁷²¹ FRPI commanders did not only surrender with their combatants but also with their "wives," creating an avenue for girls to leave the group as well. A pregnant 16-year-old concubine and cook surrendered with her "husband" in May 2015, immediately being transferred to a hospital in Gety.⁷²²

Rescue

A final means of separation – and one only documented in FRPI – was rescue of children by their family members.

Perhaps because of the casual nature of association with FRPI, parents often knew where their children were located and, instead of negotiating for their release, actually rescued their children. For instance, one commander kept his 16-year-old spy

close by, giving him little chance to escape. Nevertheless, his father followed the group from camp to camp, trying to liberate the boy until one day he succeeded.⁷²³

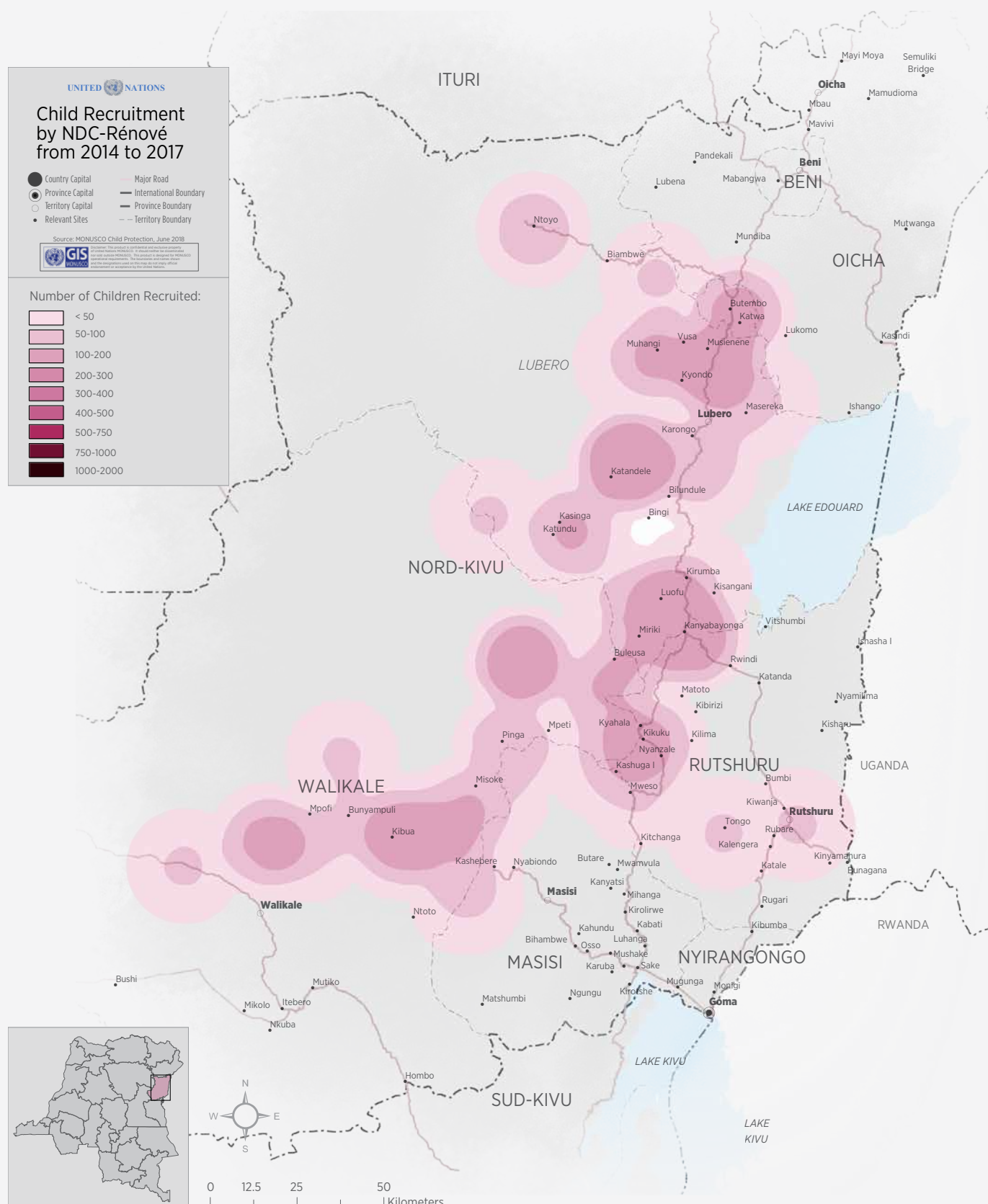


Endnotes

- ⁵⁹² 220586, 228434
- ⁵⁹³ 257009, 228430
- ⁵⁹⁴ 198141
- ⁵⁹⁵ 258631
- ⁵⁹⁶ 162543, 27903, 228305
- ⁵⁹⁷ 228498
- ⁵⁹⁸ 256982, see also 228534
- ⁵⁹⁹ 133494, see also 198286, 105627
- ⁶⁰⁰ 106222
- ⁶⁰¹ 220504
- ⁶⁰² 133519, 228494, see also 135012, 169466, 215506, 125299, 127853
- ⁶⁰³ 258630, 125468, see also 134186, 198270, 162540, 169464, 70796, 133328
- ⁶⁰⁴ 220581
- ⁶⁰⁵ 220728
- ⁶⁰⁶ 137876, 169202, 228537
- ⁶⁰⁷ 125465
- ⁶⁰⁸ 129593
- ⁶⁰⁹ 133504, see also 220522, 169198
- ⁶¹⁰ 198134
- ⁶¹¹ 228318, 238537, 238638
- ⁶¹² 243255
- ⁶¹³ 207485
- ⁶¹⁴ 243142
- ⁶¹⁵ 256824, see also 198285
- ⁶¹⁶ 106222
- ⁶¹⁷ 106335
- ⁶¹⁸ Note that on 3 July 2017, the Prime Minister proposed a dialogue with FRPI toward peaceful resolution of the conflict.
- ⁶¹⁹ 256962
- ⁶²⁰ 228309
- ⁶²¹ 135520
- ⁶²² , see also 138120
- ⁶²³ 220740
- ⁶²⁴ 159106, 159105, see also 199864
- ⁶²⁵ 138118
- ⁶²⁶ 138662
- ⁶²⁷ 211538, see also 218022, 232596, 258633
- ⁶²⁸ 238284
- ⁶²⁹ 215509
- ⁶³⁰ 160356, see also 160364
- ⁶³¹ 139284
- ⁶³² 179945
- ⁶³³ 244683
- ⁶³⁴ 135884
- ⁶³⁵ 238640. A UNICEF reinsertion kit typically includes soap, clothing, and shoes, among other essential items.
- ⁶³⁶ 135887
- ⁶³⁷ 140928
- ⁶³⁸ 256953, 256797
- ⁶³⁹ 220728
- ⁶⁴⁰ 228524
- ⁶⁴¹ 220516
- ⁶⁴² 70775, see also 160963
- ⁶⁴³ 228517
- ⁶⁴⁴ 228498
- ⁶⁴⁵ 258641, 138120, 228524
- ⁶⁴⁶ 159046
- ⁶⁴⁷ 228534
- ⁶⁴⁸ 127871, 127873
- ⁶⁴⁹ 12864
- ⁶⁵⁰ 137887
- ⁶⁵¹ 125708, 127871, see also 198286, 198090
- ⁶⁵² 244479
- ⁶⁵³ 244479, 238262
- ⁶⁵⁴ 133523, 123343, 198096, 238640, 199393, 244514, 244479
- ⁶⁵⁵ 244479
- ⁶⁵⁶ 157616
- ⁶⁵⁷ 125295, 133504, 169466
- ⁶⁵⁸ 198041
- ⁶⁵⁹ 133523, 169202, 126154
- ⁶⁶⁰ 199354
- ⁶⁶¹ 199868
- ⁶⁶² 244449
- ⁶⁶³ 129596, 128282, 162540
- ⁶⁶⁴ 129596
- ⁶⁶⁵ 256819
- ⁶⁶⁶ 135527
- ⁶⁶⁷ 160934
- ⁶⁶⁸ 128164
- ⁶⁶⁹ 128164, 128056, see also 133527, 133919, 133918, 13732, 228258
- ⁶⁷⁰ 129603
- ⁶⁷¹ 129665
- ⁶⁷² 162369
- ⁶⁷³ 145890, 156294, 203746, 258630
- ⁶⁷⁴ 228257
- ⁶⁷⁵ 228258, 198332
- ⁶⁷⁶ 197644
- ⁶⁷⁷ 228498
- ⁶⁷⁸ 140925
- ⁶⁷⁹ 207219
- ⁶⁸⁰ 182663
- ⁶⁸¹ 220521
- ⁶⁸² 125295, see also 127853, 129593, 129596, 129603, 133328, 95530, 95579
- ⁶⁸³ 228316
- ⁶⁸⁴ 258627, 203756
- ⁶⁸⁵ 133504, see also 157637, 227539
- ⁶⁸⁶ 160963
- ⁶⁸⁷ 199857
- ⁶⁸⁸ 198134, see also 199393
- ⁶⁸⁹ 198149
- ⁶⁹⁰ 199390, see also 220497
- ⁶⁹¹ 199395
- ⁶⁹² 133999, 157630, 159059
- ⁶⁹³ 125299, 125512, 238638
- ⁶⁹⁴ 139281
- ⁶⁹⁵ 133527, see also 138662, 145892, 203746
- ⁶⁹⁶ 228257
- ⁶⁹⁷ 220519
- ⁶⁹⁸ 137887, 169113 see also 157623
- ⁶⁹⁹ 157616, see also 191981
- ⁷⁰⁰ 162996
- ⁷⁰¹ 159105 see also 159106
- ⁷⁰² 243137 see also 238638, 243255, 243257, 238640
- ⁷⁰³ 156276, see also 228524
- ⁷⁰⁴ 198007, 198090
- ⁷⁰⁵ 198041, 198096, 198151
- ⁷⁰⁶ 198151
- ⁷⁰⁷ 155993, 248082, 156142, 156286, 182111
- ⁷⁰⁸ 134000, 241690, 244452, see also 222474, 228257, 220498, 220502
- ⁷⁰⁹ 169466, see also 258632
- ⁷¹⁰ 241683
- ⁷¹¹ 257007
- ⁷¹² 220586, see also 248083
- ⁷¹³ 191684, see also 191839 17-year-old boy arrested the same day he escaped, and 69462, 125705
- ⁷¹⁴ 22753, see also 70796, 570795
- ⁷¹⁵ 170648
- ⁷¹⁶ 221629
- ⁷¹⁷ 198144
- ⁷¹⁸ 140925
- ⁷¹⁹ 140928, see also interrogation and torture in 125708
- ⁷²⁰ 125031
- ⁷²¹ 147950, see also 133494, 27903
- ⁷²² 145890
- ⁷²³ 162543, see also 162540

IN-DEPTH PROFILE:

NDUMA DEFENSE OF CONGO – RÉNOVÉ GUIDON (NDC-RÉNOVÉ)



TERRITORY

North Kivu (Walikale, Lubero);
Tshopo border areas

CHILDREN RECRUITED

Total: 164 ⁷²⁴
Trend: Increase
Girls: 12% / Boys: 88%
Abducted: 34%
Sexual Violence Against Girls: 80%
Under 15: 28%
Combatants: 49%
Re-Recruited: 2%

MOTIVE

Nyanga self-defense against Rwandophone presence;
Control of natural resources; Taxation

ETHNICITY

Nyanga

PRIMARY MEANS OF RECRUITMENT

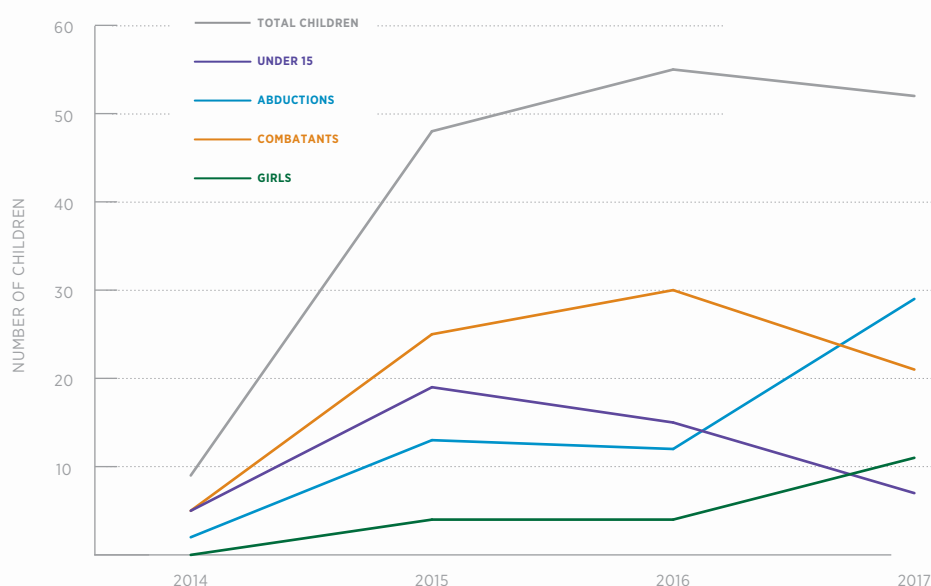
Forced (43%) Voluntary (25%)

PRIMARY PUSH FACTORS AMONG VOLUNTEERS

Economic (32%); Revenge/Ethnic Defense (32%);
Family/Peer Pressure (22%)

PRIMARY MEANS OF SEPARATION

Escape (79%, to MONUSCO 15%); Surrender (9%); Release (7%); Arrest (5%)

TRENDS IN CHILD RECRUITMENT BY NDC-RÉNOVÉ

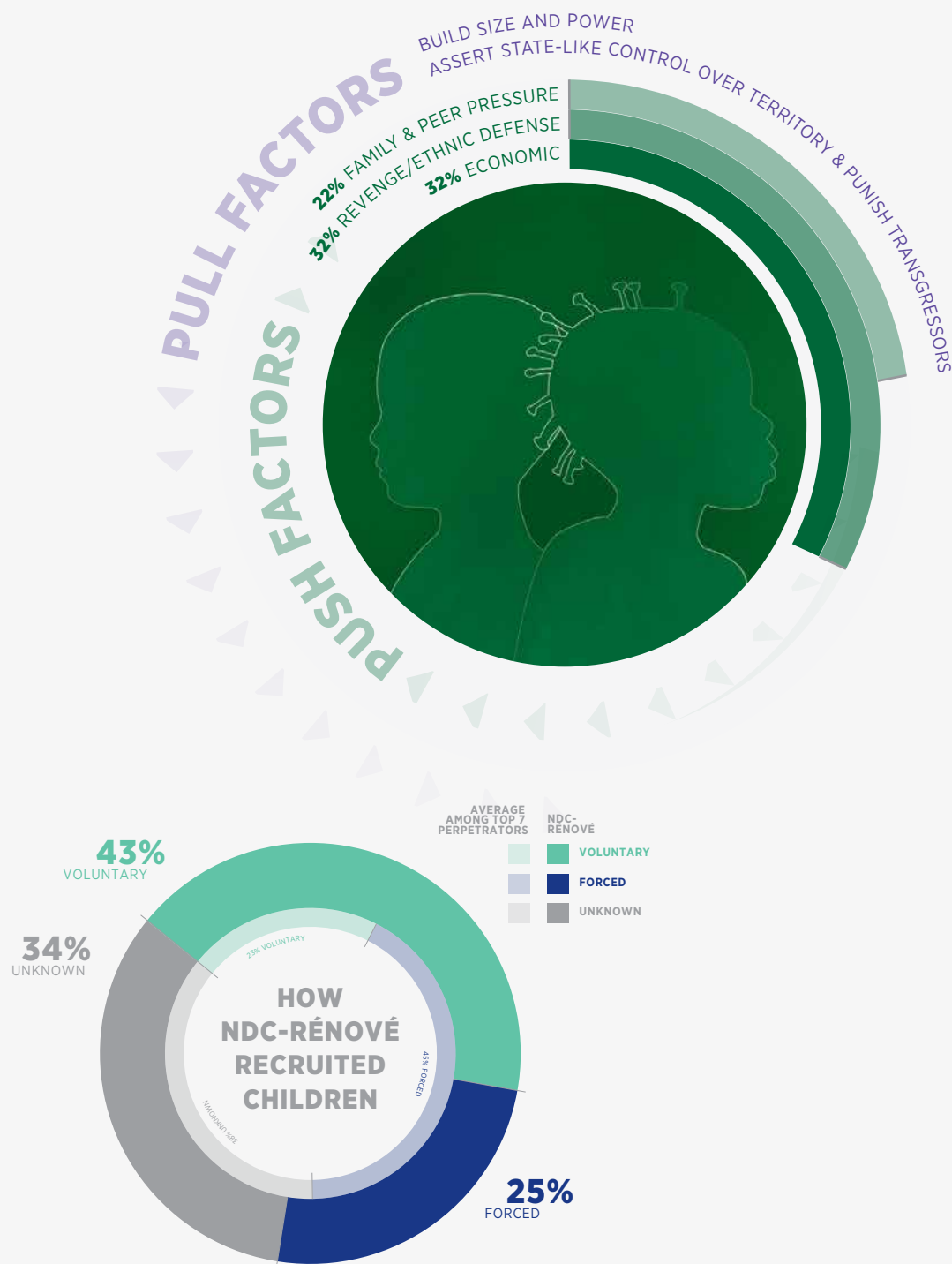
Nduma Defense of Congo – Rénové (NDC-Rénové) broke off from NDC-Cheka in July 2014 under the leadership of Cheka's former Second in Command, Guidon Shimiray Mwissa. At its origin, NDC was motivated by control of gold and other natural resources in Walikale Territory, while claiming to fight for the inclusion of local communities in the management of these resources against perceived competition from Rwandophone interests. On the security front, the group claimed to defend the Nyanga community from FDLR FOCA.

Overall, Cheka lost up to three-quarters of his elements and weapons to Guidon, and defections from NDC to NDC-Rénové continued for many months after the split. Since then, the group has expanded its control and influence in Lubero territory, notably implementing lucrative taxation rackets and controlling key mining sites.

Today, NDC-Rénové is considered one of the strongest, best-equipped and financially secure Congolese armed groups currently operating in eastern DRC, with sophisticated economic operations, expansionist aims, and logistical strength. NDC-Rénové faces little military pressure from the FARDC, a key factor in its expansion to date.

I. BEFORE:

HOW & WHY CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED BY NDC-RÉNOVÉ



Push Factors: Why Children Volunteered to Join NDC-Rénové

At least one quarter of all children recruited by NDC-Rénové volunteered to join the group, predominantly in 2016. In some cases, such volunteerism was an active choice, for instance with a 15-year-old boy “presenting [himself] to Guidon’s camp,” while in others it was reminiscent of the slippery slope common among children in FRPI, in which children were used informally, for example as spies, before formal recruitment.⁷²⁵

Survival Strategy: Economic Support

A third (32%) of all child volunteers for NDC-Rénové did so for economic reasons. With highly lucrative control of the gold economy in the isolated Walikale and Lubero Territories, including collecting taxes and imposing a monopoly on both buying gold and selling commodities, NDC-Rénové appears to have developed a modus vivendi with the impoverished communities it controls. Moreover, the group’s income allows it to afford to pay child soldiers salaries of reportedly 20,000CF (12USD), a sum that can go a long way in these rural, mountainous areas.⁷²⁶ Salaries attracted both girls and boys, with one 14-year-old girl joining after watching “many girls” join and report back that they were “well-received and given a lot of money.”⁷²⁷ However, not all children were paid equally, with one 14-year-old Hutu boy saying that he never received his salary because he was “discriminated against for being Hutu.”⁷²⁸

Like many other child volunteers in North Kivu and Ituri, hardship at home pushed children to search for other viable options, including a 14-year-old boy who volunteered in Binyampuri, Walikale Territory in 2015.⁷²⁹ Boys in particular reported shame at their families’ inability to pay schools fees and found pride in joining NDC-Rénové. This was the case for a 16-year-old boy who lived “a precarious life” at home. When he saw other children from the neighborhood going to school while he had to stay at home, he became angry and frustrated, going back and forth to the fields with his parents. One day, the boy decided to enroll himself in NDC-Rénové, with the motive of “creating an identity.”⁷³⁰

Revenge & Protection of Family or Community

A third of children volunteering for NDC-Rénové were motivated by the desire to avenge their parents’ deaths or to protect their communities. As the tit-for-tat cycle of reprisals between FDLR-FOCA and NDC-Rénové gained momentum in 2016, children volunteering that year used increasingly ethnic arguments to justify their choice to join NDC-Rénové. For instance, when a 15-year-old boy heard that “the Rwandans” had killed his brothers in Kikuku and were coming to occupy his village, he joined the group in a fit of anger to “face the aggressors and defend his community.”⁷³¹ In October 2016, another boy joined after a Nande chief was killed by “Hutu people.”⁷³² Indeed, local chiefs were often complicit in rallying boys to enroll in NDC-Rénové to “fight the FDLR.”⁷³³ Rather ironically, NDC-Rénové also recruited Hutu children, e.g. a 14-year-old Hutu boy “arrested” for allegedly being Rwandan who found himself among many tribes inside the group.⁷³⁴

Boys were most likely to join in order to avenge a parent’s death, like the three brothers, aged 10, 12 and 15, whose parents were killed by “Hutus” and decided to join NDC-Rénové together for “vengeance one day.”⁷³⁵ Another boy, aged 15, was abducted by FDLR FOCA while farming with his older brother. “With the help of God,” the younger brother escaped, leaving his older brother in the FDLR’s hands. Two weeks later, he learned that his brother had been executed and he reported for duty to an NDC-Rénové camp to avenge his brother’s death.⁷³⁶ It was not unusual for the desire for revenge to combine with other push factors, like economic hardship, making the decision to join all the more tempting.⁷³⁷

Family & Peer Pressure

Approximately one quarter of children who volunteered did so under the influence of friends, brothers, and fathers. After NDC-Rénové carved out its own territory by 2016, family ties became a greater push factor, familiarizing children with the group casually, as with the FRPI. Take, for instance, the 14-year-old boy who often visited his elder brother, an NDC-Rénové element under Guidon's command, in Pinga, Walikale Territory. The boy usually looked after his nephew during his visits but he was also trained to use a weapon.⁷³⁸ Another 15-year-old boy was persuaded by long-time friends who were already in the group that he should enroll to "gain more from my life" and that "anything was possible" in NDC-Rénové. The boy and his friend immediately approached the nearest NDC-Rénové camp.⁷³⁹ One 15-year-old boy joined the group in 2016 when five other child soldiers persuaded him to join.⁷⁴⁰

The arguments used by family members or friends in NDC-Rénové highlighted the lack of alternatives in North Kivu, with one 14-year-old boy's father, an NDC-Rénové leader, telling his son that, "studies are useless in the DRC."⁷⁴¹

Survival Strategy: Physical Protection

Another less common reason for children to enroll in NDC-Rénové was the need for self-protection, whether from family disputes or the group's own death threats.⁷⁴² The additional factor of displacement and family separation, a not uncommon occurrence in Walikale Territory, made children more vulnerable to the arguments of recruiters promising them safety inside the group, like the 17-year-old boy who fled fighting between NDC-Rénové and FARDC in August 2016 and became separated from his aunt. While searching for her, NDC-Rénové elements persuaded the boy to join for his safety.⁷⁴³

Death threats – a regular hazard of life in NDC-Rénové territory – commonly propelled children into the group. At times the children had to save themselves, like the 15-year-old boy who quickly agreed to join NDC-Rénové after watching them disembowel a man who refused to hand over his goats and cows to the group.⁷⁴⁴ Another boy, abducted in 2016 and thrown in a prison cell in an NDC-Rénové camp, was given the non-choice of "joining the group or dying in prison."⁷⁴⁵ Other times, children sacrificed themselves to save their family members' lives. A fifteen-year-old boy did just this when he and his younger brother, age eight, were ambushed on the way to the Mundjuli market, Walikale Territory. NDC-Rénové elements demanded the boys prove they had paid their security taxes but only the older brother had the requisite token. The combatants told the older boy to join or his brother would be killed. Having witnessed the group decapitate two other youths for not having paid their taxes, the boy knew their threats were credible and joined the group to save his little brother's life.⁷⁴⁶ NDC-Rénové subjected girls too to such life-and-death choices, like the 15-year-old girl who agreed to join the group to "spare my family members' lives."⁷⁴⁷

Pull Factors: Why NDC-Rénové Recruited Children

Build Size and Power

NDC-Rénové was documented as conducting active recruitment campaigns to specifically recruit children and build its manpower. [General] Guidon himself led at least one of these campaigns, according to a 14-year-old boy who was first recruited by APCLS and, following his escape, was re-recruited in 2015 when “Guidon came to Buleusa to recruit children for his group.”⁷⁴⁸ Children reported that the group strategically timed recruitment campaigns to coincide with preparations for major offensives. During one such recruitment campaign, a 14-year-old boy volunteered when he heard the call to “reinforce [NDC-Rénové] in combat against “Ndime Ndime,” possibly a reference to NDC-Cheka or his successor, Mandaima.⁷⁴⁹ Notably, one 15-year-old boy, who was abducted in 2015 and escaped in 2017, linked his recruitment to the Government, recounting that NDC-Rénové’s objective was to “fight for the interests of the FARDC.”⁷⁵⁰

Assert State-like Control Over Territory & Punish Transgressors

Starting in late 2016, child recruitment became closely intertwined with NDC-Rénové’s de facto authority and assertion of state-like functions, including imposing “rules” such as taxes, enforcing law and order, and punishing alleged criminals. Children interviewed increasingly referred to abductions by NDC-Rénové as “arrests,” which armed groups, as non-state actors, cannot carry out. Commanders appeared to use child recruitment as a punishment for breaking the group’s rules. For instance, a 14-year-old boy was “arrested,” along with all the other youth in his village, for not paying a “sleep well” night tax, and another 16-year-old boy was thrown in a prison cell for one week before undergoing military training as punishment for not having the right permissions to farm a particular field.⁷⁵¹ The list goes on, including two 17-year-old boys imprisoned at Brigade Headquarters on accusations of hiding an NDC-Rénové escapee and eventually forced to enroll, and the 13-year-old boy recruited for failing to pay NDC-R’s tax of 100CF (6 US Cents).⁷⁵²

These rules however were often arbitrary and the penalties for infringing them extremely severe. For instance, a 16-year-old boy was abducted from Buleusa IDP camp on allegations that he was a FDLR FOCA collaborator. Thrown in prison in the NDC-Rénové camp for two weeks, the boy joined after he and all the prisoners were given the non-choice of being inducted or being strangled to death.⁷⁵³ In another extreme case, a 15-year-old boy was “arrested,” enrolled and whipped every morning and night for two weeks for stealing a bush rat from a NDC-Rénové trap.⁷⁵⁴ In such situations, the group’s motivation to exert control over communities melded with children’s survival strategies, both of which resulted in children’s recruitment.

Moreover, the lack of State authority in the group’s territory provides little deterrent against child recruitment, whether overt or under the guise of law and order.

NDC-Rénové's Recruiters

NDC-Rénové's child recruitment patterns display an unusually frequent involvement of the group's commander, with children's testimony revealing that Guidon personally recruited children or otherwise defining a direct chain of command from individual recruiters to Guidon himself.

At least one boy reported being personally recruited by Guidon in September 2015 in Bunyatenge, Lubero Territory.⁷⁵⁵ Other boys, aged 13 to 16, reported being recruited by high-level commanders, including Guidon's deputy commander Dodoly in Pinga, Walikale Territory in July 2014, [T3 Colonel]

Sandoka in Irameso and Mapera, Walikale Territory in January 2017, [Colonel] Kabido Patrick in Lusogha, Rutshuru Territory in November 2016, and [Colonel, Commander of the 3rd Brigade] Kamutoto in 2017.⁷⁵⁶

Trigger Violation: Abduction

One third – 34% – of all children recruited by NDC-Rénové became associated with the group via abduction.

This was on the higher end of the spectrum, closely trailing FRPI and Nyatura for highest percentage of children abducted. Abductions increased significantly in 2017, the same year that NDC-Rénové began imprisoning children more regularly for petty crimes or not paying taxes. NDC-Rénové was documented as abducting children from schools and hospitals, like the 10-year-old boy abducted from Kibila Primary School in Kigoma, Walikale Territory in June 2014, or the 14-year-old girl visiting her sick mother in Kasugho hospital.⁷⁵⁷

Early on, in 2014 and 2015, NDC-Rénové (at the time breaking away from NDC-Cheka) employed FDLR FOCA's model of pillage-abduct-porter, frequently combining looting raids with child abductions. In a typical case, a 16-year-old boy was harvesting manioc with his aunt when NDC-Rénové elements demanded their crop and forced the boy to carry the sacks of manioc to their camp, telling his aunt that if she protested they would shoot her on the spot.⁷⁵⁸ Unlike FDLR FOCA, which often abducted both children and adults together, NDC-Rénové predominantly targeted teenagers for abduction and portering, disregarding or killing adults who happened to be present.⁷⁵⁹ Occasionally, NDC-Rénové abducted boys and forced them to porter ammunition and other baggage straight to the

frontlines. One 16-year-old boy was abducted and, within hours, was sprayed with magical "mayi mayi" (water) medicine and marched toward the front.⁷⁶⁰ In a different case, NDC-Rénové elements abducted a 14-year-old boy and forced him to show the location of a nearby Nyatura hideout. Having marked their target, the elements refused to allow the boy to return home and inducted him into the group.⁷⁶¹

In one rare case, a boy was targeted for abduction by another child associated with the group. Sent by a neighbor to the corner for an avocado, a 14-year-old boy was followed by another boy in NDC-Rénové, who, unbeknownst to the first boy, was carrying a concealed weapon. After walking a kilometer together, the boy in NDC-Rénové disclosed his affiliation, brandished his gun and abducted the boy, presenting him to his commander as a new follower.⁷⁶²

Re-Recruitment

Like other armed groups operating in Eastern DRC, NDC-Rénové was known to re-recruit children at the relatively low rate of 2% of all children recruited.

As was common in North Kivu, NDC-Rénové was often one of multiple armed groups through which children would cycle. For instance, a boy was first abducted in 2010 at age 11 by FDLR FOCA. After suffering severe torture, including burning both of his hands, the boy escaped and joined Rayia Mutomboki. Two years later, the boy escaped, joined NDC-Cheka, and fought against FDLR, FARDC, Mayi Mayi Simba and Pareco. When the group split in 2014, the child remained with NDC-Rénové under Guidon's command.⁷⁶³

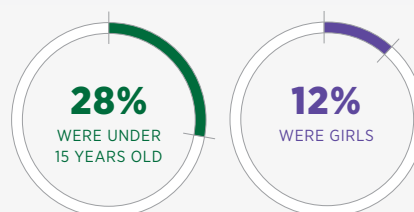
Re-recruitment by NDC-Rénové commanders was remarkably precise, pointing to the close tabs that commanders kept on both their child soldiers and the communities they came from. Commanders re-recruited escaped children from the same village in which they were first recruited three years earlier, or re-recruited them within days of reuniting with their families.⁷⁶⁴

II. DURING:

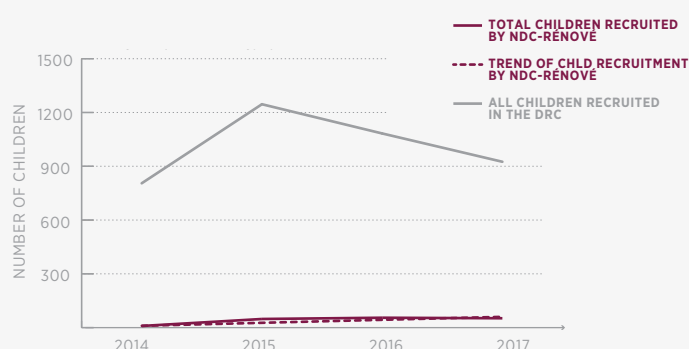
LIFE INSIDE NDC-RÉNOVÉ



THE PROFILE OF A CHILD RECRUITED BY NDC-RÉNOVÉ FROM 2014-2017



CHILD RECRUITMENT BY NDC-RÉNOVÉ



The Girls & Boys Recruited by NDC-Rénové

Despite being the last of the top seven perpetrators of child recruitment in the DRC since 2014, NDC-Rénové's recruitment of at least 164 children, including 20 girls, displayed an upward trend.

The increase in child recruitment in 2015 may be linked to a key growth period for NDC-Rénové during its split from NDC-Cheka from late 2014 to 2016, which saw as much as 75% growth in fighters and weapons. 2017 represented a consolidation phase for the group, rather than its earlier expansion, hence a levelling-off in the numbers of children recruited. Finally, the charges levied against Cheka, including child recruitment, as well as engagement from MONUSCO may have also discouraged child recruitment as the group attempted to lower the risk of an arrest warrant being issued against Guidon.

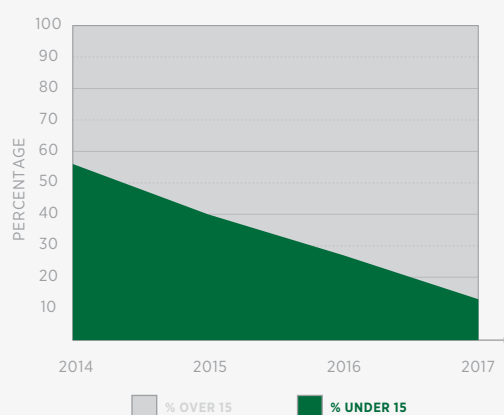
Age

On average 28% of all children recruited by NDC-Rénové were younger than 15 years old, however this figure dropped from 56% in 2014 to 17% in 2017.

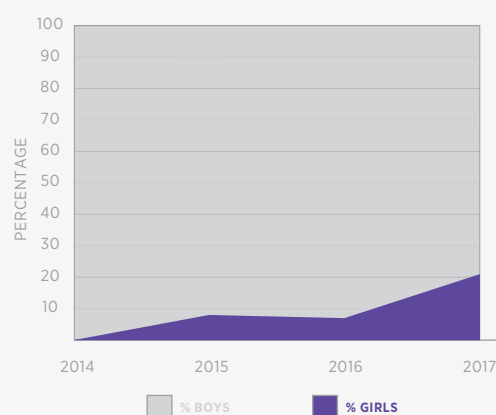
Gender

Girls made up approximately 12% of all children documented as recruited by NDC-Rénové, with this percentage increasing in 2017 to 20% of all children recruited by the group. Nevertheless, given the barriers to girls' disclosure of association with armed groups and anecdotal evidence from senior NDC-Rénové commanders that girls were "wives" of combatants, this figure is considered to significantly underrepresent the actual presence of girls in NDC-Rénové.

AGE OF CHILDREN RECRUITED BY NDC-RÉNOVÉ FROM 2014-2017



GENDER OF CHILDREN RECRUITED BY NDC-RÉNOVÉ FROM 2014-2017



Life for Children Inside NDC-Rénové

Initiation Rites & Daily Life

Like Mayi Mayi Mazembe and Kamuina Nsapu, magic was central to NDC-Rénové's initiation of children recruited into its ranks. Children, especially those who joined voluntarily, were welcomed by a ceremony in which traditional medicine and witchcraft played a central role. If a child was destined to be an escort or combatant, he or she would also be tattooed.⁷⁶⁵ For child combatants, this was followed by military training lasting from two days to one month.⁷⁶⁶ Children learned to assemble and disassemble weapons, fire rounds in target practice, and were led through military drills.⁷⁶⁷ Sometimes senior commanders served as drill sergeants, with one 16-year-old boy who volunteered in January 2016 stating that he was trained for one month by Guidon, and a pair of boys, aged 15 and 17, trained in Lubero in 2016 by [T5] Tondeuse, one of Guidon's right-hand men.⁷⁶⁸ The level of training children received appeared to be a function of immediate operational needs, with one 14-year-old boy reporting that he was given a gun without any training "because [he] arrived at a good moment when they needed new elements."⁷⁶⁹

Depending on their location, children reported living in camps ranging from 60 elements of which 50% were children, including four girls between the ages of 14 and 17, to 100 elements, 25% of which were estimated to be children.⁷⁷⁰ In 2017, one 17-year-old boy estimated that, in 2017, NDC-Rénové was made up of 500 elements, 65% of which he estimated to be boys.⁷⁷¹

Camp life entailed hardship, with a 14-year-old abducted boy describing "extraordinary suffering," including hunger, poor sanitary conditions, and forced labor.⁷⁷² Children also described severe ill treatment, like the 13-year-old boy beaten on his back by [T2 Colonel] Bonheur for refusing to go to the river to collect water and the 12-year-old boy who disclosed euphemistically that he "submitted to violations by the Chief [Guidon]."⁷⁷³

Role: Combatant

Half (49%) of all children recruited by NDC-Rénové saw combat, with those recruited in 2014 to 2016 more likely to have fought than those recruited in 2017, when combatant status among children dropped. This is the second highest rate of child combatants among top perpetrators in the East, following Mayi Mayi Mazembe.

In contrast to Mayi Mayi Mazembe, which almost exclusively used boys to fight, NDC-Rénové recruited both boys and girls to serve as combatants. Girls associated with NDC-Rénové were frequently subjected to multiple violations, like the 15-year-old girl recruited in July 2017 in Mbwavinywa, Lubero Territory who was a domestic, a combatant and was raped by her commander.⁷⁷⁴ Another girl, age 17, was abducted from a funeral in January 2017 and forced to carry stolen goods to an NDC-Rénové camp, where she received one month of military training. When she was not being used as a sex slave by her commander and other elements, the girl fought Mayi Mayi Mazembe and FARDC in Mabambi, Kayambe, Vuyinga and Kanana under [Colonel, Commander of the 3rd Brigade] Kamutoto. During her last battle, the girl was four months pregnant, but that ended when she was shot in the stomach, leaving visible scars from her treatment in an NDC-Rénové camp.⁷⁷⁵

Children recounted fighting on NDC-Rénové's side when Guidon split from Cheka in 2014 and in subsequent battles in 2015 and 2016.⁷⁷⁶ The same was true for children who fought in battles when Guidon's former deputy Mandaima broke off from NDC-Rénové in 2017. For instance, a 13-year-old boy who was originally recruited by NDC-Rénové sided with Mandaima during the split, fighting against his former comrades in NDC-Rénové.⁷⁷⁷

In addition to NDC-Cheka, children fought against FDLR FOCA,⁷⁷⁸ Mayi Mayi Simba⁷⁷⁹, Nyatura⁷⁸⁰, and Mayi Mayi Mazembe⁷⁸¹ using AK-47s, Uzis, and PKMs.⁷⁸² A 15-year-old boy admitted to killing a man in battle, saying that he “died on the spot.”⁷⁸³ Like children recruited by FRPI, children in NDC-Rénové spoke of an apparently well-organized force, including clear chains of command and battalion structures.⁷⁸⁴ Children were included in this chain of command, taking on leadership roles when necessary. In one case, a 13-year-old boy, recruited in 2014 in Walikale, was placed in charge of S5 Operations for his unit when the officer in charge was killed during fighting.⁷⁸⁵

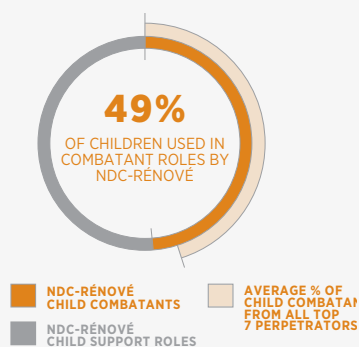
Role: Support

For the 51% of children associated with NDC-Rénové who did not fight, life inside the group consisted of laboring as porters, food collectors, spies, cooks, secretaries, and, for younger boys and girls, fétisheurs.⁷⁸⁶ A common role was “food supplier,” a euphemism for being charged with looting neighboring farms to feed his unit.⁷⁸⁷ Girls played traditionally feminine support roles, most frequently as cooks, laundresses, or nannies, confirming the presence of babies and very young children in NDC-Rénové camps.⁷⁸⁸

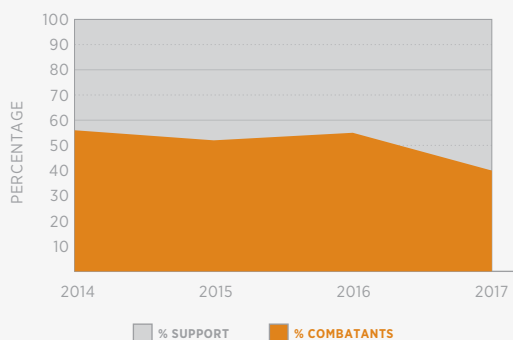
Semi-combatant roles in which children were exposed to but did not participate in combat were common, like the 15-year-old boy combatant who reported that two 12-year-old girls were assigned to his unit of combatants to guard the fetishes.⁷⁸⁹ Another 16-year-old boy boasted that because he was an assistant of a fétisheur, he was allowed near the frontlines, carrying the fetishes.⁷⁹⁰

Like Rayia Mutomboki, NDC-Rénové employed a promotion system for new recruits, moving them from decidedly supporting roles to semi-combatant roles and eventually to combatant. One 17-year-old boy, who was abducted in 2016, was first used as a domestic, before being tattooed and becoming an escort.⁷⁹¹ Notably, senior commanders were directly implicated in the use of children in support roles.⁷⁹²

CHILDREN'S ROLES IN NDC-RÉNOVÉ FROM 2014-2017



CHILDREN'S ROLES IN NDC-RÉNOVÉ OVER TIME



Violations Triggered by Child Recruitment: The Risks Children Faced in NDC-Rénové

Seventy-five percent of all girls recruited by NDC-Rénové were subjected to sexual violence, including every single girl recruited in 2017. This is the third highest rate of sexual violence against girls by the top perpetrators, following FRPI and Nyatura.

Sexual Violence

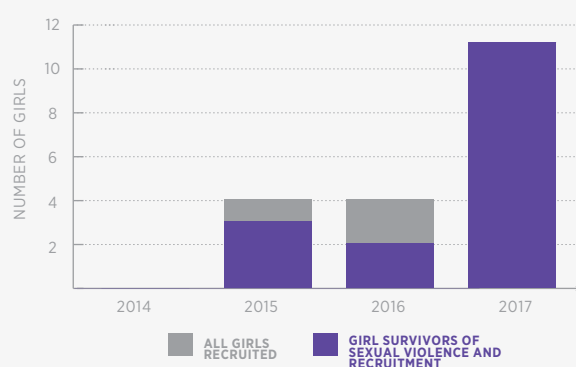
Girls were used as “wives” of NDC-Rénové combatants, although not as commonly as FRPI. For instance, a 13-year-old girl was forced to marry her brother’s friend when her brother died in battle.⁷⁹³ Another girl, age 16, acted both as “wife” and escort to her “husband.”⁷⁹⁴ Other girls were forced to sexually service multiple elements, like the 13-year-old girl recruited by [Colonel] Shetushe in November 2015 to sexually service the 60 elements in her camp, including about 20 boys.⁷⁹⁵ One girl, age 16, was abducted in 2017, raped repeatedly by two senior commanders, [Colonel] Ushindi and [Colonel, Commander of the 3rd Brigade] Kamutoto.⁷⁹⁶

One boy also disclosed surviving sexual violence while associated with NDC-Rénové. While no other cases were documented, it is suspected that this boy was not alone and that other boys may have been raped as well, but who, for reasons of shame and stigma, did not report their experiences to child protection staff.

Killing & Maiming

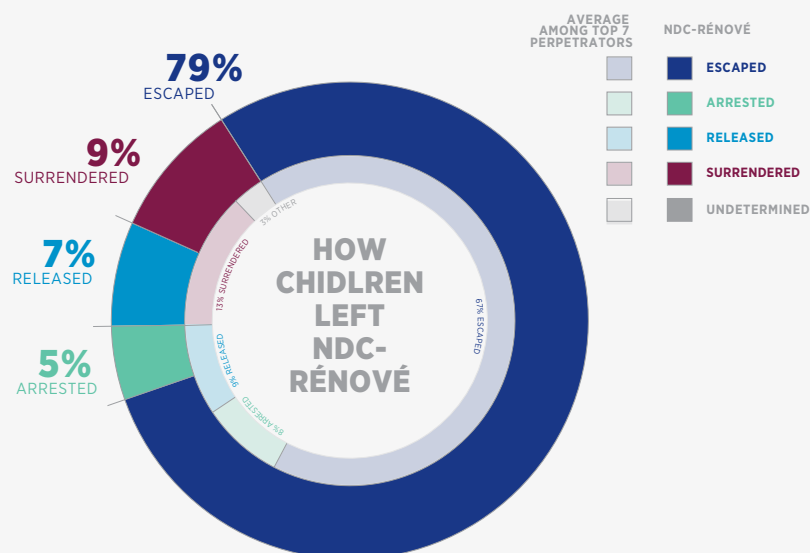
Children in NDC-Rénové reported witnessing the deaths and injuries of their friends on the battlefield, however these fatalities were reported less frequently than did children recruited by other top perpetrators. Nevertheless, examples do exist. For instance, a 16-year-old boy reported watching two children die fighting FDLR FOCA in Katobo and Ihula, Walikale Territory in 2016.⁷⁹⁷

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS RECRUITED BY NDC-RÉNOVÉ

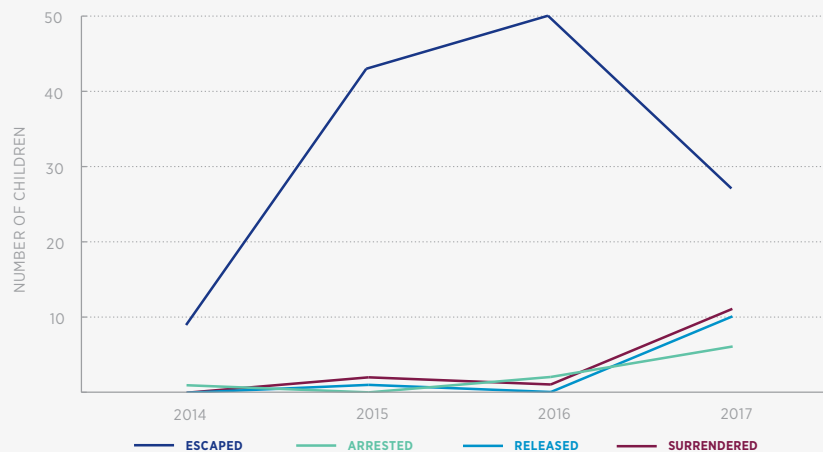


III. AFTER:

HOW CHILDREN WERE SEPARATED FROM NDC-RÉNOVÉ



HOW CHILDREN LEFT NDC-RÉNOVÉ OVER TIME



Escape

Of all the children documented as recruited NDC-Rénové, 79% ultimately left the group by escaping, the third highest rate of escape among the top perpetrators.

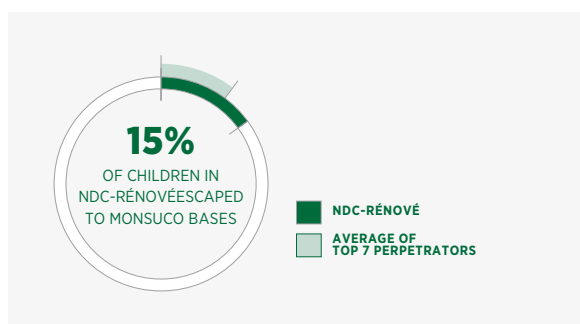
Why Children Escaped NDC-Rénové

The reasons that pushed children to escape ranged from the difficult living conditions in the bush to receiving death threats from inside the group.⁷⁹⁸

Hardship in the bush often combined with disillusionment from unpaid salaries to encourage children's escape.⁷⁹⁹ One boy escaped NDC-Rénové a year after volunteering, having decided that "my suffering as an [armed group] element was bigger than my suffering in civilian life." However, his community viewed him as a "deserter" and did not understand why he left NDC-Rénové.⁸⁰⁰

In a sign of the impact of NGO partner awareness-raising, at least one 15-year-old boy decided to escape after hearing an NGO's awareness-raising messages discouraging child recruitment.⁸⁰¹

Power struggles inside NDC-Rénové also prompted children to escape, like the 15-year-old boy who fled a fight among the escorts of his commander, or the 15-year-old boy who left when commanders' personal conflicts started affecting morale.⁸⁰² Ethnic attacks within the group also forced some children to flee, like the 14-year-old Hutu boy who escaped after suffering discrimination, or the 17-year-old sex slave and combatant who escaped when she heard that the group would be cleansed of all Nandes.⁸⁰³



How Children Escaped from NDC-Rénové

Children seized opportune moments to escape, including while collecting water, buying the commander his daily cigarettes, or when girls' "husbands" died on the battlefield.⁸⁰⁴ In one case, a 13-year-old boy escaped from Kinohimba, Walikale Territory, when his commander demobilized and decided to work as a teacher.⁸⁰⁵ Children escaped together, like the 13-year-old sex slave who escaped with another girl, or the two boys who were abducted together and who abandoned the ammunition they were carrying and escaped during a FARDC attack in September 2017.⁸⁰⁶

Fifteen percent of all children recruited by NDC-Rénové escaped directly to MONUSCO. Boys in particular approached MONUSCO bases in Pinga, Mpofi, and Walikale Centre, Walikale Territory.⁸⁰⁷ In some cases, children would escape following NGO awareness-raising and then receive transport assistance from MONUSCO troops to reach Mubambiro DDR camp where they could be documented by MONUSCO CPS and access UNICEF partners.⁸⁰⁸ Children also escaped NDC-Rénové to FARDC, like the 16-year-old boy who escaped from Muna in December 2015 and approached FARDC in Kibua, Walikale Territory.⁸⁰⁹

NGO awareness-raising targeting Walikale Territory was effective, as reported by numerous children who either fled directly or were referred to child protection partners by siblings, parents, former child soldiers or local chiefs.⁸¹⁰ For instance, a 13-year-old girl, once used as a sex slave, was directed by other former child soldiers to a local child protection NGO in January 2017, while a 14-year-old boy was accompanied to a CTO by his village chief.⁸¹¹

The impact of endemic internal displacement in areas of North Kivu was also apparent, affecting where children escaped to, and whether or not they found their families in the place they once called home. For instance, a 13-year-old girl who was used as a "wife" by her brother's friend, escaped "the bad life" in NDC-Rénové and went to find her family in Kalembe, Masisi Territory. But her family had been displaced and was not to be found in Kalembe, forcing the child to approach an NGO for assistance in tracing her family.⁸¹²

Surrender

One in ten children recruited by NDC-Rénové surrendered to FARDC, the highest rate of the top perpetrators in the East, suggesting that children feel secure they will not be arrested.

For Instance, on 17-year-old boy approached FARDC in Ruenda, Lubero Territory, handed over his ammunition and surrendered in 2017.⁸¹³ Another boy surrendered during a clash against FARDC in Kasugho in 2015.⁸¹⁴ To illustrate the proximity of NDC-Rénové and FARDC camps: In September 2017, a 14-year-

old boy, first abducted into the group in 2015 and used as a combatant, walked 10 minutes from his unit's camp to surrender to the FARDC Regiment Commander in Butembo, who welcomed him.⁸¹⁵

Release

From 2014 to 2017, NDC-Rénové commanders voluntarily released 7% of the children they recruited.

In late 2017, NDC-Rénové appeared to be responsive to direct engagement by MONUSCO CPS, releasing at least 4 boys whose commander gave them 100,000CF (124USD) to “return to their families to continue their studies.”⁸¹⁶ This cautious progress was independently reported by at least four boys, ages 15-16, and their parents in Kasugho, Lubero Territory in February 2018.⁸¹⁷ Like in other armed groups, girls were more likely to be released than were boys, with approximately 16% of girls recruited by NDC-Rénové ultimately being released by their commanders.

NDC-Rénové was known to accept ransoms paid by desperate parents, like the 15-year-old girl who was released in exchange for a goat and 50kg of flour.⁸¹⁹ Some commanders drove hard bargains, with one commander rejecting a first offer of four goats and settling for 100USD.⁸²⁰ However, not all commanders were persuaded. One boy's commander categorically rejected his parents' offer of 100USD and two goats, and moved camp so that the boy's parents could no longer find him.⁸²¹

More frequently, children were released for medical reasons, like the 14-year-old boy who became very sick one year after being recruited and received his colonel's authorization for medical leave. Upon his recovery, the boy decided not to join up again, preferring to stay in his community. However, without an attestation de sortie, he was worried about being re-recruited.⁸¹⁸

Arrest & Capture

Second to Nyatura, NDC-Rénové had the lowest rate of arrest or capture of child soldiers, with just 5% leaving the group in this manner.

In one case that points to the complex alliances in Lubero Territory, a 16-year-old boy was captured by FARDC when he was sent with other combatants to meet a Mayi Mayi Mazembe Commander at Buleusa.⁸²²

Endnotes

⁷²⁴ This figure includes children recruited prior to the split with NDC-Cheka who remained among NDC-Rénové's elements.

⁷²⁵ 159862, 259861

⁷²⁶ 238482

⁷²⁷ 189353, see also 249701

⁷²⁸ 238482

⁷²⁹ 248182

⁷³⁰ 236603, see also 237556

⁷³¹ 238471, see also 159459, 219954

⁷³² 228441

⁷³³ 203298, see also 203300

⁷³⁴ 238482

⁷³⁵ 197776

⁷³⁶ 260495

⁷³⁷ 219944

⁷³⁸ 189363

⁷³⁹ 236604

⁷⁴⁰ 248050

⁷⁴¹ 219960

⁷⁴² 235604

⁷⁴³ 219956

⁷⁴⁴ 256542

⁷⁴⁵ 238462

⁷⁴⁶ 204326

⁷⁴⁷ 237442

⁷⁴⁸ 189093

⁷⁴⁹ 260665

⁷⁵⁰ 256542

⁷⁵¹ 237557, 248341

⁷⁵² 251513, 266207

⁷⁵³ 238467, see also 238482

⁷⁵⁴ 262120

⁷⁵⁵ 237629

⁷⁵⁶ 260753, 202600, 230547, 244059, 247748, 202605, 245727, 247593, 159459

⁷⁵⁷ 135947, 272030

⁷⁵⁸ 238480, see also 248027, 159863, 159864

⁷⁵⁹ 251505

⁷⁶⁰ 260753, see also 180759

⁷⁶¹ 237288

⁷⁶² 237565

⁷⁶³ 149460

⁷⁶⁴ 256598, 204421

⁷⁶⁵ 228441, 256630

⁷⁶⁶ 245485, 219954, 251515

⁷⁶⁷ 248341

⁷⁶⁸ 230549, 238324

⁷⁶⁹ 237556

⁷⁷⁰ 135947, 230158, 159864, 204337

⁷⁷¹ 256543

⁷⁷² 237557

⁷⁷³ 230547, 237514, see also 248329, 230583

⁷⁷⁴ 246820

⁷⁷⁵ 254761, see also 256466

⁷⁷⁶ 159459, 159338, 149460, 202605, 202600

⁷⁷⁷ 267912

⁷⁷⁸ 121478, 202600

⁷⁷⁹ 248027

⁷⁸⁰ 245624, 251463

⁷⁸¹ 247630, 251463

⁷⁸² 159306

⁷⁸³ 248050

⁷⁸⁴ 159459, 245494

⁷⁸⁵ 159306

⁷⁸⁶ 248182, 237288

⁷⁸⁷ 159864

⁷⁸⁸ 189353, 189565

⁷⁸⁹ 256542

⁷⁹⁰ 260495

⁷⁹¹ 260487, see also 236604

⁷⁹² 266207

⁷⁹³ 206660

⁷⁹⁴ 249701, see also 130254, 230158, 235604

⁷⁹⁵ 230583, see also 254761, 256466

⁷⁹⁶ 272021

⁷⁹⁷ 228988, see also 230549

⁷⁹⁸ 206660

⁷⁹⁹ 256847

⁸⁰⁰ 260678

⁸⁰¹ 248027

⁸⁰² 237558, 238471, see also 250844

⁸⁰³ 238483, 256466

⁸⁰⁴ 237288, 237565, 249701

⁸⁰⁵ 159306

⁸⁰⁶ 230583

⁸⁰⁷ 121478, 135947, 159863

⁸⁰⁸ 248050

⁸⁰⁹ 159459

⁸¹⁰ 159912, 180759

⁸¹¹ 230583, 237557, see also 249701

⁸¹² 206660

⁸¹³ 245727, see also 247593, 247594

⁸¹⁴ 251505, see also 256542

⁸¹⁵ 251515

⁸¹⁶ 272066

⁸¹⁷ 272066, 272067, 272069, 272073

⁸¹⁸ 260665

⁸¹⁹ 237442

⁸²⁰ 262120

⁸²¹ 238480

⁸²² 228441



CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

After absorbing the breadth, depth and complexity of child recruitment in the DRC, we are left with these lessons:

- **Child Recruitment Entails Complex and Compounding Violations:** Child recruitment is neither a single nor a short-lived violation. It rarely occurs alone but child recruitment is the nexus at the center of other violations. Abduction, sexual violence, killing and maiming, and attacks on schools and hospitals merge, trigger and compound each other.
- **Targeted Communication with Armed Groups Can Ebb the Tide:** Armed groups are not one and the same. They employ different modus operandi to recruit children and justify it by different logic. Children themselves choose to join armed groups for different reasons. Effective communication requires the UN to target its messages carefully based on the data it collects to correspond to the diverse ways and reasons that armed groups recruit children. Armed with this information, the UN is in a stronger position to engage with individual commanders to secure their commitment to end child recruitment across the DRC.
- **Prosecution of Perpetrators Can Send a Powerful Prevention Message:** Children regularly name both their individual recruiter, commander and commander's commander, up the chain of command. High-level prosecutions of perpetrators of child recruitment can and should be regularly on the docket of Congolese Military Prosecutors. With protections in place for child victims and witnesses, such prosecutions work as a powerful disincentive to other armed group commanders, who reportedly closely watch the arrests and upcoming trials of their peers and rivals, such as Ntabo Ntaberi Cheka, former commander of NDC-Cheka now facing charges of child recruitment.

Taking on board these lessons, we can and must take targeted and strategic action. We recommend:

The Government of the DRC:

- Facilitate the work of the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting regarding engagement with armed groups operating in the DRC to develop action plans to end and prevent all violations and abuses against children, including the multiple violations linked to child recruitment;
- Release all children held in detention for alleged association with armed groups to MONUSCO as they are not criminally liable under Law No. 09/001 on the Protection of the Child, end detention and ill-treatment of children on this allegation, and expedite the distribution of Attestation de Sortis to all children formerly associated with armed groups to ensure children receive them in a timely manner and on an equal basis.
- Put an end to impunity by swiftly bringing all perpetrators of child recruitment and use, as well as sexual violence, to justice and hold them accountable, as such acts are prohibited and criminalized by Law No. 09/001 on the Protection of the Child, which was adopted on 10 January 2009 and which includes recruitment and use of children by national armed forces or non-State armed groups; and

Armed group commanders:

- Immediately and without preconditions release all children – boys and girls under age 18 – in your ranks and take concrete actions to end prevent child recruitment and use by any member of your group in the future, including via abduction or for the purpose of sexual violence;
- Publicly express your commitment to ending and prevent all grave violations against children, including but not limited to child recruitment and use, and swiftly develop, adopt and implement action plans in line with UN Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), and subsequent resolutions.

Donors:

- Commit necessary funds to support holistic and sustainable child demobilization and reintegration, and the fight against impunity for perpetrators of child recruitment and use.
- Support designated child protection capacity in MONUSCO, including via secondment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the commitment and years of hard work of the MONUSCO Child Protection staff, who interviewed and referred thousands of children to care over the years. Likewise, we are indebted to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Operations and Rule of Law David Gressly and Chief Child Protection Dee Brillenburg Wurth for their support.

We are grateful for the invaluable feedback from MONUSCO colleagues in the Joint Human Rights Office, the Joint Mission Analysis Centre, DDR, Legal Affairs, and the Office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Operations and Rule of Law. Likewise, we thank the staff at DPKO DPET, OCHA, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, and War Child UK for their review of and feedback on earlier versions of this report. We must also thank all of the staff of UNICEF partners who document and provide transitional care to children formerly associated with armed groups in the DRC every day.

We are particularly grateful to Helen Gibson, who designed this report, and to Hanna Maalej, Camille Delbourgo, and Nicole Fenwick for their assistance with its translation.

We would like to also extend our thanks to the members of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Joint Technical Working Groups, both at national and provincial-levels, whose work ensures that children affected by conflict are taken into consideration and protected by each Ministry and State security forces.

Above all, we thank the children who bravely recounted their experiences of child recruitment for sharing their stories, which we attempted to honor in this report.

This report was researched and written by Lili Birnbaum, Child Protection Officer at MONUSCO.





“Our Strength Is In Our Youth”:

Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups
in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

2014 – 2017