

# Gaps and Needs for Successful Reintegration

of children associated with armed groups or armed forces



**GLOBAL COALITION**  
FOR REINTEGRATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS

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# Preface

Children associated with armed forces and groups require long-term and sustained reintegration support. The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict is one of the most egregious violations of children's rights, and the physical, emotional and cognitive growth of these children—and policies that support them to reach their full potential—are crucial to maximize their recovery and their families' and communities' futures. Supporting child reintegration is a strategic intervention for governments, donors and agencies towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and lasting prosperity and peace in conflict-affected countries.

Launched in September 2018, the **Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers**—co-chaired by the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations Children's Fund—tasked its Expert Advisory Group to carry out research, interviews and a series of consultations<sup>1</sup> to develop three interrelated briefing papers to understand how the international community could more effectively support children who have exited armed forces and armed groups. This document is one of three papers and contains actionable recommendations to stimulate thinking and action to assist these most vulnerable children and their communities. They explore the current status and issues surrounding funding

for programming and general support, as well as options for more predictable and sustainable opportunities moving forward.

The **Gaps and Needs** paper considers the barriers that hinder children's successful reintegration. Two significant constraints emerge. First, programmatic constraints result from the complexity of reintegration, its multi-sectoral, ever-changing and long-term nature, and the political and structural challenges that impede the effective implementation of programs. Second, reintegration programming faces a financing crisis, with funding for reintegration decreasing between 2006 and 2016 despite the proliferation of armed conflict.<sup>2</sup>

## A. Summary findings

The three papers collectively make the following key conclusions: i) Research on child reintegration should focus on evidence generated at the field level to show which interventions are most effective and warrant further investment, ii) Reintegration support should be available to children for a minimum of 3-5 years per child according to the needs of the child and his or her family and community, iii) Reintegration support calls for the shared responsibility of multiple stakeholders across sectors and the Humanitarian Development Peace nexus, iv) Funding should support community-

based reintegration programming that can address children's needs in the medium- to longer-term, and should span this continuum seamlessly, v) Programming should be built around one coherent framework with measurement tools and indicators that can be used across the continuum; and vi) Existing funding mechanisms should be maximized to achieve results before creating new mechanisms.

Key recommendations across the three papers include:

## B. Summary recommendations

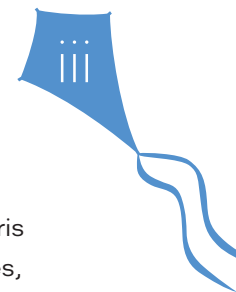
### Practice

- Adopt a common strategic vision and theory of where sector actors across the Humanitarian Development Peace nexus adopt a consortium approach to child reintegration that harnesses comparative advantages towards collective, sustainable, multi-year reintegration outcomes, and contribute to a robust protective environment and strong child protection systems, without compromise to humanitarian principles;
- Ensure a shared definition of success along with relevant metrics to guide collective outcomes;
- Situate child reintegration programming within broader formal and informal child protection interventions that prioritize prevention and comprehensive response services, including an investment in child protection, education and health care systems strengthening both at the national and community levels, with emphasis placed on aspects of social reintegration that support and engage parents, families and communities and that promote psychosocial recovery, prevention, and address stigma, and encourage social cohesion;

- Support local and national education systems to adapt and partner with other government agencies to support reintegration, including short-term education programs, and provide funding to support education systems in countries in conflict to rebuild, including integrating the values of peace, tolerance and acceptance of others, and 21st century skills into the educational systems.

### Research

- Fund analysis and research about reintegration successes and challenges in various contexts, including number and profiles of participants, and disaggregated data on gender, families, and qualitative perceptions of children. A further and more detailed analysis of 1-2 priority countries may help to develop a more complete picture regarding the scale of funding deficits, and the challenges associated with the transition of support across the Humanitarian Development Peace nexus and conflict typologies;
- Establish a research agenda to further explore and reality test some of the proposed mechanisms would contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues covered in this paper (and the other two briefing papers). This would enhance stakeholders' ability to create longer-term change. One component to consider is how the efficacy of financing instruments and their impact on programming might be explored;
- Support funding for additional research to better identify the specific gaps and needs in child reintegration on two fronts:
  - Determine the number of children affiliated with armed forces and armed groups who require support;



- Develop a costing methodology that can be used across contexts to estimate reliable 3-5 year programming budgets for community-based reintegration support, that accounts for local costs, needs and existing systems and capacities. Apply a developed methodology for costing analysis at the country level to determine reintegration funding gaps and seek to fill these through flexible funding mechanisms as soon as needs arise;

- Have agencies establish global monitoring frameworks for reintegration programming across Humanitarian Development Peace nexus;
- Partner with research entities to demonstrate that support for child reintegration interventions across Humanitarian Development Peace nexus programming has helped promote stability and immediate benefits/outcomes.

## Policy

- Affirm the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the leading framework for the successful reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups; lengthening the time horizon for reintegration and addressing multiple programming needs that include education and vocational training (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), employment and livelihoods (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16); while recognizing that eradicating the recruitment and use of children is specifically referenced in Target 8.7;
- Adopt and promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the

Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, Paris Principles and Guidelines, Vancouver Principles, Safe Schools Declaration and other relevant international instruments, guidelines and policies on children and armed conflict;

- Support stated to take all measures to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005);
- Include child reintegration programming into local government plans to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (4, 5, 8, 10, 16, 17);
- Establish national legal and policy frameworks that comply with and implement the provisions of international law conducive to ending, preventing, and responding to recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and that integrates reintegration into national and sub-national structures, policies and services for child protection, education, health and other aspects of social services and welfare;
- Engage in processes, ongoing action plans, and establish, sign and implement Action Plans where needed to end and prevent all six grave violations of children's rights, including specific work plans to end and prevent recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.





# Introduction

Reintegration for children, anyone under the age of 18, is a long-term process to support children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) “transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation.”<sup>3</sup> “[S]ustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm.”<sup>4</sup>

Increasing reintegration need results from the increase in recruitment of children by armed forces or armed groups and proliferation of in conflicts around the world. Children can recover and take part in their communities to rebuild when there are sufficient investments in their release and long-term reintegration. Without sufficient reintegration resources, children risk falling behind, limiting their full potential after experiencing violations against them caused by conflict. Likewise, families and communities may remain fragmented, and unable to support peace and development. Investing in these children’s recovery is critical for a peaceful future for countries in conflict and for children to

have the opportunity to recover and to become partners in peace.

Reintegration programs face two types of constraints at this time of increasing need. The first is programmatic. These result from the complexity of effective reintegration, its multi-sectoral, ever-changing, and long-term nature, and the political and structural challenges to effectively implement programs. Second, reintegration programming faces a financing crisis. Amidst increased need and greater programming challenges, funding for reintegration programming has decreased overall between 2006-2016, according to War Child data.<sup>5</sup> This means that children and communities in desperate need of fully funded, needs-based, long-term support are unable to count on this support, and less likely to reach stability, reintegrate, and recover.

This paper considers the key barriers that hinder children’s successful reintegration. Section I summarizes good practices for implementing reintegration, to illustrate the complexity of reintegration programming for children, and to provide context for why certain gaps and needs exist. Section II details programmatic constraints related to the nature of reintegration programming. Section III explains the challenges that come with costing and Section IV details how funding

constraints impact the ability to program.

This paper finally makes recommendations to member states, donors, and practitioners of how to effectively invest so that children receive the

reintegration support they need. In turn, children will be better equipped to contribute to social, economic and civic life and to sustainable peace.





# I. How to Achieve Sustainable Child Reintegration Outcomes

**R**eintegration is a complex and nuanced process that includes several different activities as part of a long-term process.

This section details the evidence-based approach to children's reintegration, including using a separate, child-specific intervention, grounded in child rights and child protection principles, including the best interest of the child. The reintegration approach for children is holistic, long-term, participatory, meaning local leadership and with children, responsive to local realities, and should target communities as well as include systems strengthening whenever possible. This approach guides all reintegration activities, which vary based on the context. These activities should be led by government officials whenever possible, or, using accompaniment, engage officials while being led by humanitarian, development, or peacebuilding actors who may need to provide direct support amidst conflicts. Finally, long-term monitoring and support is essential to the reintegration process, which should be presumed to last at least 5 years.

## A. Child rights approach to reintegration

Children's reintegration differs from reintegration for adults. A child-centred rights-based approach to

reintegration seeks to address individual harm and recognizes the child as an individual with agency and rights. The best interests of the child and the child's right to participate in decisions that affect him or her remain central throughout programming. The rights-based approach is essential throughout all phases of reintegration, from the earliest phases of the humanitarian response throughout development and peacebuilding activities.

**Children's Reintegration:** Children's reintegration occurs under different conditions than reintegration for adults. In addition to the broader rights-based approach, there are two key programmatic differences. First, no peace agreement or formal process is required for children to be released or to commence reintegration programming. Rather, children should be supported with release and reintegration before, during, and throughout conflict, to encourage them continuously to exit conflict, as per the UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS). Reintegration for children may be part of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programming, though not necessarily so. Many CAAFAG who require reintegration support may not qualify for DDR support because of their role in conflict, presence in locations where there is

no DDR process, or because they exited the armed force or group outside such a process and may not be identified as formerly part of an armed group. Second, children should be viewed and treated as victims of the conflict, whose involvement takes place along a continuum of coercion involving pressure, manipulation and the threat or use of force to press them into involvement with armed parties. Children should be treated primarily as victims while still being held accountable for their actions, rather than their alleged associations, by following international standards on juvenile justice and reintegration, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, international criminal law, international humanitarian law, and children's rights guidance, including the Paris Principles.

Child reintegration is needed in any country that has experienced conflict, and in some cases, in third countries where children are located after leaving a country in conflict, regardless of whether the country is formally on the Security Council agenda for Children and Armed Conflict.

- **Non-discrimination:** Children should not be discriminated against based on age, sex, race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, disability or other personal characteristics or associations. This approach requires an analysis of the situation and the profile of children to be targeted through reintegration programming, including their gender, age, abilities, and other characteristics, children in detention or institutions or who have been trafficked to other countries, and geography including based on urban-rural differences.

Children formerly associated with armed forces or groups should have access to the same opportunities irrespective of the armed group or force or political faction with which they were associated. In the broadest sense possible, reintegration should be encouraged, without any conditionalities for children's participation.

Civil registration should be integrated into the overall approach to ensure that children have the appropriate status and documentation to allow them to claim services, support, or remedy.

- **Do No Harm:** Reintegration programs must adhere to the principle of "Do no harm" during all phases of implementation, such that programming considers risks and errs on caution where risks of harm may be present. Examples of actions that may cause harm from the research include discriminatory implementation, imposition of outsider approaches, and ongoing child protection issues affecting the population.<sup>6</sup>
- **Gender:** Reintegration programming should account for gender dynamics pre-existing to and within the conflict, reflecting the roles, responsibilities, experiences, needs and vulnerabilities experienced by girls and boys at different stages of child development. The preexisting dynamics include the specific experiences and challenges faced by girls such as protection concerns and compounded stigma as a result of sexual violence, forced marriage and early pregnancy.<sup>7</sup> While gender considerations are not limited to sexual violence, a risk analysis is helpful to uncover possible existing and risk of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), including harmful practices and gendered social norms that contribute to SGBV risks for girls and boys.
- **Inclusiveness:** An inclusive approach to reintegration ensures that all children affected by conflict can benefit. Implementers should deliberately include all community children in some activities so as not to stigmatize CAAFAG, to provide opportunities for socialization with other children in the community, and to not incentivize child association with armed forces or groups by giving CAAFAG desirable benefits that are not available more generally. Such an approach also

provides some support to all children affected by conflict to benefit—including those who were impacted by conflict but not associated with its parties, which may help address less obvious needs and trauma in young people.

## B. Evidence-based child reintegration

Child reintegration activities vary, depending on the local context and the needs of the children and communities targeted. In almost all cases, however, decades of experience in child reintegration programming reveals several key aspects of a child reintegration approach, which should guide any and all child reintegration activities, regardless of the context. This section details the key aspects of the child reintegration approach, and subsequently, lists several activities that are normally required in or that complement any child reintegration process.

### A Successful and Sustainable Reintegration

**Approach:** The foundation of a successful reintegration programming, based on decades of experience in a variety of different operating environments, includes an approach that is:

- **Responsive to Local Realities:** Reintegration programming must be grounded in local realities. The first step of any program should consider the dynamics of the conflict. This includes a situation analysis of root causes of the conflict, the structures of involved armed forces and groups, any awareness of child recruitment or risks thereof, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of children and families regarding children's rights and protections, and possible security constraints and impeded access for programming. A situation analysis might also need to consider cross-border or regional dynamics, and operations in vastly different settings, for example, with displaced communities.

- **Drivers of Recruitment:** Root causes of the conflict and drivers of recruitment are important for understanding how and why children became involved in conflicts and how to best support their exit and prevent their re-recruitment. Analysis should consider factors that may increase children's vulnerability to recruitment. In research commissioned by World Vision, children who lacked physical safety at home, a lack of access to education, and extreme poverty that limited their access to basic necessities such as food and clothing were some common drivers. Armed groups also provide children with a "ready-made identity," and can allow children to gain power and influence outside of the traditional confines of their societies.<sup>8</sup>

- **Political Support:** A situation analysis should also consider the armed groups involved and their recruitment tactics, status of conflict resolution, and potential stigmatization of children associated with various parties to the conflict. It should also consider to what extent broad political support for the reintegration of CAAFAG exists, and if any early warning mechanisms are established at the local level to immediately prevent and respond to any re-recruitment.

- **Community Based:** The success of reintegration support depends on supporting communities to identify and work towards their own solutions to reintegrating CAAFAG. Therefore, ideally, reintegration should be led and implemented by community members themselves—with support from external actors where needed. Support and leadership should specifically focus on the capacity of local service providers, including health, education, alternative education, and the private sector for aspects of reintegration programming. The community-based approach begins with community sensitization during the earliest phases, to gain community inputs and

consider the dynamics of the conflict. Traditional and religious leaders, women's and youth groups and other community structures can also serve as entry points into the community. Their support in promoting acceptance of returning children is critical to successful reintegration.<sup>9</sup> In addition, generally, interventions should benefit the community as a whole, while supporting CAAFAG with the same opportunities that all children have in that same community. Using a community-based approach, the entire community can benefit from reintegration while minimizing tension, stigmatization, or envy.

- Examples of community-level support can include forming and supporting the capacity building of child protection committees comprised of broad community representation, including male and female children and youth, to be aware of children's rights and to identify protection risks, and appropriate means to monitor, report and refer child protection issues. This could also include supporting parent-teacher associations, community groups and other information points to strengthen awareness and ability to mitigate risks and advocate for children's protection. Developing and strengthening community-based systems will help to improve sustainability of programs, leverage reintegration programming for the entire population, and garner additional support from communities and governments.
- For example, in the Central African Republic, research found that faith leaders were among the strongest influencers encouraging girls and boys to engage in hostilities and associate with armed groups, because a significant element of the civil conflict reflected division based on association by religious belief.<sup>10</sup> In Iraq, this same research found that community members and family members were a source of influence for adolescent boys to associate

with armed actors.<sup>11</sup> These findings underscore the importance of linking reintegration programming to broader child protection system strengthening that engages parents, faith leaders and community members in discussions on the protection of children and children's rights, increasing knowledge, and developing local strategies to create a more protective and rights-based environment for girls and boys of all ages.

- **Participatory:** As part of the community-based approach, children, youth, and families should be consulted and involved in each step of reintegration planning and programming. Their participation in the design/development is crucial for long-term success. Likewise, a gender-sensitive approach requires a gender balance in consultations and decision making. Community acceptance is critical for successful reintegration. For girls in particular, participation and gender perspectives should reflect UNSCR 1325, the first resolution on Women, Peace and Security.
- **Child protection systems strengthening:** To the extent available, all programming should be implemented through or linked to existing child protection systems or bolster the capacities of existing systems. Good reintegration programming helps to strengthen the broader CP system and its ability to address all forms of abuse, exploitation and violence. Systems strengthening, including human resources strengthening and accompaniment, should be core components of reintegration programming, and simultaneously can offer support to the community at large. This helps to keep reintegration community-based, limits tensions between program participants and their communities, and contributes to the development and peace agenda with this longer-term vision.

- **Holistic:** Children receiving reintegration support have diverse needs. In order to support children as they exit conflict and re-enter their communities, various services might need to be available to them and their families. These services should be placed within or linked to broader child protection and social protection systems strengthening as soon as possible.
- **Preventive:** To prevent other children from engaging in conflict, as well as preventing re-recruitment for those who are being reintegrated.
- **Long-term:** Normally over the course of 3-5 years at minimum,<sup>12</sup> and with a focus on longer-term recovery and sustainability of children's re-entry into their societies and prevention of other engagement in conflict;
- **Flexible:** To allow tailored programs for each individual child and community, that can be modified based on the child's needs and community services available over time, grounded in a case management approach where needed.

### Examples of activities comprising reintegration

**Release services:** These activities are often the first step in the reintegration process, but while they may begin at the earliest phases, they do not necessarily cease after the first action. Rather, these release services may reoccur throughout the conflict and throughout the reintegration process, as more children are identified or released, and as the conflict evolves.

- **Negotiate for children's release:** Humanitarian actors or others may lead engagement and advocacy with armed groups or armed forces to secure children's safe and secure release from the groups.
- **Emergency services** may include shelter, food, health care, and other urgent supplies and services for children who exit from armed groups and are not already reunited or living in a family situation. Where these are not provided, re-recruitment remains a high risk, particularly where children have been coerced

to join as a result of extreme poverty.<sup>13</sup> Children should quickly transition into long-term reintegration programs in a stable environment (ideally within 48 hours).

- **Reunification:** Where safe to do so, all efforts should be made to keep or reunite children with their families, or place them within a family structure, based on best interest determination and children's wishes.<sup>14</sup> Reunification also may occur spontaneously in communities. In some contexts, district leaders and religious structures may carry messages to areas inaccessible to humanitarian workers, facilitating family reunifications despite ongoing violence.<sup>15</sup> In other cases, children may never have been separated from their families or communities, or families may find one another outside of a reintegration program. In all of these cases, former CAAFAG should be included in reintegration programs once identified.<sup>16</sup>

**Reintegration Support Services:** These activities support the children, families, and communities directly involved in the reintegration process. However, in alignment with the reintegration approach, these actions should be inclusive, community-based, and incorporated in systems strengthening as much as possible.

- **Mental Health and Psycho-social support should include support in reclaiming self-esteem by drawing upon existing social care systems where they exist.** Psycho-social assistance should support children as resilient individuals who can empower and help protect themselves and make contribution to society at large through reintegration.
- **GBV Prevention and Response:** Girls and boys who experience forms of gender-based violence while associated with armed actors require specialized GBV services. GBV response services should therefore be in place where reintegration programs are established to ensure child survivors, particularly adolescent girls, can access services easily and confidentially. Coherence between and coordination among child protection and GBV prevention initiatives is also critical, particularly to tackle harmful practices and social norms that can be contributing causes to girls' and boys' recruitment. Sexual and reproductive health services are critical, especially for girls who may have experienced gender based violence and pregnancy.
- **Family-Based Support:** Families have an essential role in reintegration—their capacity to support and invest in their children must be incorporated early on, from a reintegration programming perspective as well as preventive approach. Often, reintegration programming includes parenting skills specific for children and families who have experienced conflict.

Family-based support should be offered to all families affected by the armed conflict (not only those with reintegrating children) who experienced conflict in the community. Holistic group interventions involving the entire family are more likely to succeed.<sup>17</sup> Where it is not in the best interests of the child to be reunited with family, when family cannot be located, or when family is not in a position to care for the children, an alternative care-giver or guardian should be assessed and appointed to support the child's progress toward a durable alternative care solution.<sup>18</sup>

- **Case Management:** An individualized case management approach enables reintegration services to flexibly target some individual children's needs and the needs of their family members. Case management is a process of supporting individual children and families in need of more targeted support through direct social work. A community-based focal point for a child conducts ongoing an assessment of the protection issues and risks faced or experienced by that child, develops a holistic and collaborative care plan responding to the child's needs, facilitates referrals to multi-sector services, and provides consistent, confidential follow up support to that child and his or her family or care giver until the protection concerns are addressed.<sup>19</sup> While not all children will require case management, it is essential to strengthen or establish these structures, including referral pathways for some children, particularly to link them to services necessary for their longer-term recovery.

**Complementary Activities:** To support children as they exit conflict and reintegrate with their communities, other services might be made available to them, their families, and their communities. These services should be community-based and placed within broader child protection

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systems and social protection systems. They may launch direct linkages to the development and peacebuilding agendas in each context. These could include, amongst others:

- **Education:** Formal and informal education support for children to catch up with missed schooling, and to integrate into classes with other children in the community as a form of social reintegration and indirect opportunity for psychosocial recovery.
- **Income Generation Opportunities:** Where traditional education is not available or appropriate, other forms of training or employment support may help older children and address root causes of recruitment as well as provide an alternative sense of self or economic opportunity to engagement in conflict. Employment opportunities can be created in partnership based on market assessments, and developed with the private sector, and should complement the broader youth development, security sector reform, and economic strategy for the area.<sup>20</sup> Literacy and numeracy training should be available, at minimum, where income generation opportunities are implemented. Research by War Child has shown that vocational training accompanied by apprenticeships has the best results.<sup>21</sup> Vocational training and alternative education must be gender-responsive and consultative, in particular meeting the needs and addressing safety, access and participation barriers identified by women and older girls for more equal opportunities for employment and income generation.<sup>22</sup>

### C. Leadership from multiple stakeholders

Reintegration programming requires leadership and buy-in from both national and local government officials, or those in control of the context, as well

as humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors for integration within sustained peace and development goals, which will continue long after crisis actors have left the country.

**Government:** Government should be either the leader or key partner in the reintegration process for long-term sustainability. The level of national ownership depends on the context and the capacity and availability of government agencies during and after conflict. Advocacy with national and local government may be required to promote equal access for all children to reintegration support, regardless of the group with which they were associated or other discriminating factors, and compliance with international norms, laws and standards with respect to children's rights, legal protections and juvenile justice procedures. Reintegration typically requires engagement from Ministries of Education, Justice, Social Affairs, Families, Women, Health, Labor, and possibly Ministries of Interior and Migration at various levels including district and local levels. Partners in the security sector should also receive training on reintegration, and the special rights and needs of and protection for children.<sup>23</sup> Government actors should be engaged early to prepare policies and to integrate reintegration programs into local services and national structures. This includes establishing national frameworks, guiding principles and norms specific to the local contexts.

#### Humanitarian, Development, and Peacebuilding

**Actors:** Humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors may be supporting government reintegration programming or be leading it, depending on the conflict dynamics. If involved, they should support institutional capacity of local government, national government, civil society, and relevant social services as per each context. The humanitarian sector should be organized to coordinate and help manage structures related to reintegration and case



management, while development actors should incorporate reintegration programming in advance and exit strategy or long-term programming design.

## D. Sustained support

Reintegration services should be available to children for a period of up to 5 years or more, depending on the child's need, and will require guaranteed funding over the longer-term for programming that is preventive and contributes to broader peace and development dividends. Reintegration programs must inherently monitor factors contributing to re-recruitment and establish mechanisms for accountability.

**Follow-up Support:** Long-term follow-up support should be available in close consultation with children, families and the community who require it and who accept it. This support should be linked to existing systems and services where possible, and/or integrated within systems strengthening over the long term. Based on children's assessed need and a case plan agreed on with the child and family, follow up programs should be available for

at least 3-5 years after reunification. Follow up visits should ideally occur through social workers, child protection, and gender specialists local to the community, who should have an established referral system for comprehensive case management. According to the agreed care plan, they may visit children's homes, schools and community, including meetings with families, peers, teachers, and community leaders, monitor the progress of the child and their family, and adapt care plans to support beyond the initial phase of reintegration. Likewise, community-based child protection networks and community leaders, especially women, could be actively involved in monitoring the safety and well-being of reunited children, and should increasingly assume greater responsibility for their progress.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Monitoring of programs is essential to contribute to the knowledge on reintegration interventions and should be developed prior to program implementation. Monitoring and evaluation plans should be active in each local community.





## II. Barriers Preventing Children from Accessing Reintegration Programming

Even with an understanding of reintegration good practices, strong reintegration program implementation is difficult to achieve. Decades of experience in reintegration programming have provided lessons learnt regarding the barriers to successful reintegration programming. These include constraints from the lack of government engagement—either due to lack of leadership or capacity during conflicts, government bias, or government forces that may be directly involved in recruitment and use. Likewise, peace agreements or policies may place conditions or limitations on children’s access to reintegration programming. Logistical constraints and community-level constraints equally inhibit successful programming, and underscore the need to adhere to the good practices outlined in Section I. Equitable access to reintegration is constrained due to discriminatory practices. Finally, overall, the failure to fund and prioritize children’s reintegration may be the biggest constraint, discussed in the following sections.

### A. Government engagement and children’s equitable access to reintegration programming

Government engagement is crucial for successful reintegration programming, but governments often are the cause of constraints due to lack of leadership or capacity, bias, perceived security concerns and failure to treat children as victims, and recruiting and using children in conflict or committing other human rights violations.

**Leadership:** Governments are key partners in reintegrating children while respecting their duties under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Implementing rights-based child reintegration requires political will and leadership, and implementation of policies and principles early in any conflict such that children associated with armed groups are viewed and treated victims of violations of their rights. This may be achieved through the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols and of the Paris Commitments and the Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. Governments are often not functional or weakened due to the

ongoing conflict, limiting their ability to implement and enforce such policies.

**Government Bias and Involvement in Recruitment:**

Governments can demonstrate bias in reintegration policies and practices, resulting in unequal or non-inclusive reintegration programs. This can exacerbate tensions. For example, although Colombia has a comprehensive legal and policy framework that formalizes and resources the DDR process for children, in practice, only children formally released from a government-recognized armed group can access reintegration programming.

A child's association with a state versus a non-state armed group can influence the child's access to comprehensive reintegration services, although this can significantly vary depending on country context. A child formerly associated with a state-aligned armed group could enjoy the best access to reintegration services where a formal process is in place, or conversely, be completely unable to receive reintegration support where the state denies recruitment activities. Where a child has associated with a non-state armed group, access to reintegration programming can depend on the non-state armed group first capitulating or otherwise engaging in a peace process with the state. There can be further complexity and additional barriers for children where the non-state armed group is sanctioned or otherwise listed for terrorist activities. For example, in Iraq, children who were allegedly associated with the so-called Islamic State have been criminalized and are subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, and stigma and their families subject to punishment.

Moreover, in some cases, national governments themselves recruit and use children in violation of international law. For example, though the South Sudan National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (NDDRC) is strongly supportive of child reintegration, there is verified information that the state armed forces, formerly

known as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) have continued to recruit children.<sup>24</sup> In fact, despite the NDDRC, state armed forces in South Sudan have been continuously listed for recruitment and use since 2009. Likewise, 9 government security forces are listed for recruitment and use in the Secretary General's 2018 Report on Children and Armed Conflict.<sup>25</sup> Of these 9 governments, 3 have not signed the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles—Iraq, South Sudan, Syria.<sup>26</sup>

## B. Political limitations

**Legal instruments and peace agreements:** A child can informally disengage from an armed force or group—if they self-demobilize, escape or are captured, or are abandoned by the group. Likewise, children's release and reintegration should not depend on existence or finalization of peace processes but should be unconditional and encouraged continuously during and after any conflict, regardless of how children disengage. Children's reintegration therefore should remain completely separate from adult DDR, which be conditional or tied to peace agreements.<sup>27</sup>

**Detention and situations of deprived liberty:**

CAAFAG, particularly those associated with anti-government armed forces or groups, are at risk of being detained, investigated, charged, and prosecuted for criminal acts alleged to have been committed during their period of association.

In all cases, besides violating children's rights, detaining children hinders children's recovery, and hampers access to rehabilitation and reintegration programming where needed. Detention may actually cause more harm and exacerbate security risks.<sup>28</sup> Denying children the opportunity to re-join their communities and to access services, or detaining them solely for their alleged association with armed groups, may generate new grievances.<sup>29</sup> Still, children have been detained as perceived security

threats in Somalia, Nigeria, DRC, OPT/Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, amongst other locations. In Myanmar, for example, UNICEF has experienced challenges with reintegration programming because there is no guarantee that released children are protected from detention, prosecution or punishment from any alleged or actual association with armed groups.

**Political Considerations:** Global powers have an essential role to play in setting and maintaining international norms on human rights and acceptable standards of conduct in conflict, such as humanitarian access, ensuring civilians' safety, and protection of children from attacks or recruitment. There are several security council resolutions, including UNSCR 1539, 1612, 2250, and 2427, that articulate protections for children affected by armed conflict, and call on Member States to support these children with reintegration. UNSCR 2427 calls on Member States to ensure the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are fully incorporated and prioritized in all post-conflict

recovery and reconstruction planning, programs and strategies and encourages consideration of the views of children in these processes.

However, there are political considerations that are directly tied to the sensitive nature of reintegration programming and possible engagement with armed groups. States are at times less likely to support these activities or fund them due to the sensitivities of engaging with various armed groups. There are other political barriers for reintegration of children from non-state armed groups, particularly UN-designated terrorist groups, with whom there may be legal prohibitions to engaging at all.

### C. Logistical constraints

Logistical constraints are some of the most significant barriers to successful reintegration. Constraints include the dispersed nature of the children, families, and communities, security issues, lack of infrastructure and services, and organizational constraints across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus.

#### Counterterrorism Measures and Children's Vulnerability

Under counterterrorism or national security laws, children may be subject to a criminal process simply for being associated with the group, despite the fact that child association stems from a violation of child rights. State actions may infringe on children's legal status as victims of a grave violation of their rights and international standards. For instance, states may violate international law which stipulates that the detention of children should only be used as a last resort, for the shortest possible period. In reality, children are often held without charge or trial for months or even years. In addition, no one, including children, should be prosecuted or held due to actual or alleged crimes of

their family members. Some states similarly frequently violate this standard. Children's treatment and conditions of detention frequently violate international legal standards.<sup>30</sup> While in detention, children are often denied access both to legal assistance and to contact with relatives, as well as the opportunity to challenge the basis of their detention before a judge. Frequently there are no educational, social or other services available to children in detention to prepare them to return to their families and communities. Many children in detention have been subjected to coercive interrogations and torture, and an unknown number have disappeared into or died in custody.

**Geographical remoteness and access limitations:**

In many conflicts, communities that are most affected by conflict are remote, rural and difficult to access. Reintegration services, if present, tend to be located in central hubs and not in the “deep field,” although children and families are naturally dispersed throughout geographic regions. Hence children will either have to migrate to access services or be unable to receive support. At times, accessing support is impossible due to transportation prices or insecurity.

Active conflict impedes access to communities affected by conflict. Violations of International Humanitarian Law, including targeting civilians and aid workers and limiting access to humanitarian aid, has created increased challenges for implementers to access communities in need. Displacement of communities means communities may be on the move, which makes it difficult both to deliver long-term sustainable and sustained services rooted in communities, and to create some level of predictability and “normalcy.” Recruitment, re-recruitment, and advocacy with armed groups to release children are also all impacted by unstable environments.

**Lack of infrastructure and services:** Physical infrastructure is usually weak in many countries affected by long-term conflict—either because of limited investment in infrastructure development (roads, towns, economies), because the conflict has destroyed infrastructure, or because the areas are geographically remote. Low levels or irregular cycles of funding, inability to fund social and other services, competing priorities for funding, or low levels of tax hinder government budgets to invest in infrastructure and social services—generally because countries are low-income, or invest more in military or security, but also because conflict may lead more affluent citizens to flee to other countries. Due to these constraints, existing services that can be brought to scale or

strengthened to urgently reintegrate children are weak and require comparatively more initial funding and inputs to provide direct services, strengthen systems and build longer-term capacity for sustainable local services for reintegration.

Likewise, reintegration can be hindered by the absence or poor functioning of primary and secondary education, social services, vocational training opportunities, lack of psychosocial support services, absence or weakness of specialized services such as for mental health, children with disabilities or child survivors of GBV. For example, in the Philippines, because no schools exist in some communities where children reintegrate, the education system cannot be a key entry point for children to socialize back into their communities and return to a sense of normalcy. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there is also a lack of training infrastructure, schools with curricula adapted to participant needs, or free learning activities at all. In Pibor, South Sudan, a key constraint for reintegration shared by children and their families was the absence of any vocational training centers within accessible vicinity and the very limited access to education. Reintegration programming should create opportunities within existing services in the immediate term, while reframing reintegration across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus may enable stronger services for children and their families in the long term.

## D. Constraints at community level

**Stigmatization and social cohesion:** Reintegration typically takes place against the backdrop of a community that has experienced and is recovering from conflict. Where communities have been torn apart or where there is resentment and anger toward children who engaged in or supported hostilities, stigmatization can act as a barrier, preventing children from rejoining their friends, peers, families and communities. In conflicts where children report

joining an armed group to gain a sense of identity or belonging, community rejection can contribute to the re-recruitment for children still searching for social connection. In South Sudan, children who joined armed groups arising out of pre-existing “community defense forces” experienced less stigma than those who associated with other armed opposition groups. Girls can experience stigma, not only because association with armed actors is highly gendered and socially constructed, but because girls are also likely to experience compounded stigma as survivors of sexual violence, forced marriage and pregnancy, and other forms of GBV. Programming should reflect the vulnerabilities of women and girls.

Embedding reintegration programming within broader community-based child protection interventions and including any child with protection concerns in response services and benefits is critical to avoid creating new stigma.

**Community perceptions of children:** Some contexts are challenging because there is not strong attention paid to child rights locally, and the perception of children may differ from the Paris Principles and Guidelines and the CRC.<sup>31</sup> In research commissioned by World Vision to better understand the push and pull factors for child association with armed groups, a key factor that emerged was the perceptions of childhood held by parents, religious leaders or the community at large, where “adulthood” begins at or during puberty, or age 10 to 14 years.<sup>32</sup> These perceptions affect girls whose parents may wish to force marriage before 18, or where girls have already experienced early marriage. It affects boys who may be considered to be and treated as men, and gender norms may require them to prove their masculinity by engaging in conflict. Even where national laws or policies may have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and set a legal age majority at 18 years, customary law and community perceptions and expectations regarding adulthood can significantly impact the degree to which a child is

protected from recruitment and encouraged to avoid re-recruitment.

**Influence of existing stigma:** Conflict may fragment or amplify existing local biases, either breaking down barriers due to a shift in power dynamics and social structures or reinforce as a conservative response to recovering a time of peace. It is essential to assess and analyse barriers with a gender and conflict sensitive lens to access within the broader context of inequity and exclusion within the locality. Recognizing this, it is critical to listen to children and their families to understand where the source of stigma, real or perceived, originates and to consider a wide range of approaches to tackle all forms of stigma, whether conflict-related, historic or intertwined. This may involve less conventional approaches that consider how to engage traditional leaders or healers in safe, positive practices or rituals that can be perceived to remove a bad spirit, allow for forgiveness, or absolve conscience. Addressing stigma ultimately requires an investment in a whole-of-community approach to social reintegration and recovery.

**Lack of family and community involvement in reintegration planning:** Involving affected communities, children and families in planning and implementing reintegration programming can be challenging, in part due insufficient resources to meet their needs and community expectations more broadly. Safety, protection or political risks may limit community participation in planning prior to formal release events. Still, implementers have been able to overcome this barrier in some circumstances. In the DRC, World Vision used participatory planning processes with children to develop the format and structure of psychosocial support initiatives. In the Philippines, UNICEF was able to identify the need for additional social workers through independent consultation with government stakeholders, social workforce and children under case management care. In both of these cases,

the quality and sustainability of reintegration programming were significantly improved when a participatory approach was utilized. For example, in the Philippines, Para-Social Workers were selected from the community and were trained in social work. This facilitated access to families and development of family needs assessment profile for each child.

## E. Discrimination in receiving equitable access to reintegration services

A final barrier to full access to high quality reintegration services and support can be discrimination associated with a child's individual characteristics, such as their gender identity, disability, ethnicity, social or cultural identity, religious identity, political identity or affiliation, statelessness or other perceived status.

**Gender identity:** Gendered barriers may exist for girls attempting to access reintegration services, in that there may be an outright absence of services or resources that are accessible or appropriate for them. In many cases, reintegration is designed for “children” but implicitly framed from the experience of boys, and without consideration the experiences of girls. Girls’ needs, experiences and motivations are often different from boys’, as are the risks and threats they face. In addition, there are often differences in how girls came to be involved in an armed group. Moreover, depending on the roles that girls played during the conflict, they may not always be considered full members of an armed force or group who need reintegration support. In South Sudan, when designing a reintegration program, UNICEF did not anticipate the requirement of services for over 20 adolescent girls with infants and young children, and needed to quickly adapt programming to meet the care needs of both. A gender-sensitive approach should recognize that an individualized approach for some girls may be costlier and must be flexible to include dependents.

In the Philippines, legislation passed in January 2019, Republic Act 11188, Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (CSAC) Law, provides specific gender-sensitive provisions to ensure that girls formerly associated with armed forces and groups have access to educational assistance, including formal and alternative learning systems, to ensure access to education regardless of girls’ status as mothers or wives.

**Children with disabilities:** Inadequately resourced and short-term reintegration programming typically fail to accommodate children with disabilities. Children with disabilities tend to require specialized care that may not be available in the local context and often requires long-term intervention. When a child has an impairment or disability as a result of association with an armed group or force, supporting the specific needs of that child can be critical not only to their physical well-being, but emotional and psychological recovery. In South Sudan, a flexible budgeting approach was used to resource case management care plans in totality, rather than with a prescriptive amount per child. This flexibility provided a child who became deaf from an RPG attack and his family with support for sign language tutoring and other specialized support that would otherwise not been possible due to the additional cost compared to children without this specific need.

**Political, religious, social and cultural identities:** Ethnicity, tribal or cultural identity, a political group, cause or movement in which a child participated, the national or local perception of the armed group with which a child associated, or the child’s religious affiliation may affect access to reintegration services. Non-discrimination must be prioritized throughout programming. Attention may be needed in particular where a peace process includes reintegration, because children affiliated with a certain political group or socio-cultural identity could risk being left out of a peace process.



# III. Challenges of Estimating the Global Cost for Fully Funded, Sustainable Child Reintegration Programming

The aforementioned approach and activities, combined with the constraints that hinder the ability to implement good practices, create challenges to properly budget for reintegration programming. Variations across contexts, in terms of beneficiaries and their locations; changes over the course of programming due to ongoing conflict; logistical and security challenges; and human resources challenges further complicate properly budgeting for reintegration programming. The challenge of costing under such constraints, which in turn complicates fundraising, is detailed below. The broader issue of insufficient funds and mechanisms is discussed in Section IV.

## A. Variations across contexts

The overall costing of a reintegration program is difficult because managers budget for a 3-5 year reintegration program with unknown beneficiary and geographic targets.

**Participants:** At the outset of programming, it is normally unclear how many children will actually

need reintegration programming—both in terms of children who were recruited and in terms of children from the community who should participate. Numbers are difficult to quantify given the fluid nature of children's association, limited access to areas under armed control, and the reluctance of children, families and communities to openly discuss association. This is why situational analyses are crucial and require funding and time before program start-up. Global estimates of the number of children associated with armed forces or groups have ranged from the tens of thousands to 300,000 or more.<sup>33</sup> While country estimates do exist, they are rough estimates only. The number of participants in a program also is sometimes impacted by unpredictable events during the conflict. In Myanmar, for example, programming needs will likely increase significantly after Joint Commitments are signed with non-state armed groups, and additional releases take place. This may also require a revised approach to meet these children's needs.



The lack of information about participants further complicates other program components—information such as where children will ultimately be reintegrated, the available services or needs in those locations, and the number of children or community members who might also need support services in those locations.

**Community needs:** Reintegration locations are not all known at the outset of programming. Rather, they become clear as children exit armed groups and enter programs, and as their families are traced. Likewise, because responses must be contextualized, budgeting for each community’s needs cannot be the same, particularly as there may be significant differences between the available services in each community, and the communities’ needs. Thus, programming is both difficult to bring to scale and is unlikely to be simply replicated from one community to the next. This means that for each location where children will be reintegrated, there are likely to be significant “start-up” costs, including requirements for human resources support and community-level analysis. In addition, even after initial reintegration occurs, monitoring and follow-up visits, and other support activities, are more labor-intensive and time-consuming with children dispersed from a few central locations to scattered communities. For example, in Myanmar, UNICEF’s office notes that reintegration activities are spread out across the country. In some locations, there are very few children accessing services, so the “cost per child” is higher, whereas in other “hotspots” there are hundreds of cases, making overall cost per child lower. In some locations as well, easier access means that logistics costs are lower.

**Activity costs:** The costs of reintegration-specific services also vary significantly between countries and regions. UNICEF’s reported average annual cost in country per child, based merely on the overall budgets and number of children supported, varies

significantly, ranging from several hundred to several thousand. Data does not necessarily capture investments required for system strengthening to build structures and capacity through which children received services but focuses on activities and immediate inputs. There is not disaggregated data on “reintegration” budgets because these comprise so many different activities.

Some costs are more uniform, based on World Vision data. The average cost per child for awareness activities, essential to prevention, is between \$7 and \$10, whereas intensive activities to respond to children’s protection concerns include psychosocial support that can range from \$40 to \$50 per child, per year. Case management ranges from \$167 to \$2,423 per child, or average \$800 per child per year, based on available data. Reintegration program costing requires a combination of various activity estimates, per community and country to where children will be reintegrated, and within the context of investments into social development in the community and nationally that may alter the investments required for each individual activity over the course of the program.

The emphasis on quantifying numbers of children involved in programming has inhibited a more systemic approach that would focus on the community’s infrastructure and needs, and would not suffer from variations in numbers of children reintegrating. Rather than base costing on a per child estimate, it is more effective to budget based on the estimated overall programming needs for child protection and social protection programming within a community over the course of 3-5 years,<sup>34</sup> given the wide variety of needs for each context. Programs might, in addition, estimate annual budgets based on the caseload of known and estimated children and families who need more tailored, individualized support, such as case management, to complement community-based costing.



## B. Complementary costing for systems strengthening

For sustainability, reintegration must be grounded within a broader community development and child protection system strengthening. Thus, reintegration budgets should be framed within a broader child protection program, with complementary funding secured. By funding longer-term systems strengthening simultaneously to funding reintegration programming, there is built in opportunity for handover and sustainable programming led by the community.

## C. Long-term needs

Reintegration support normally must be available to each child for between 3 and 5 years, with shorter or longer periods for some children. However, with start-up costs, a pattern of donor fatigue during conflicts, and often short-term, rapid onset humanitarian funding at the beginning of programs, programs become stretched too thin to reach all children, are infrequently supplemented with development or other streams of funding and are rarely functional for more than 18 months. There are also significant variances for each child during each year of the program. For example, in addition to start-up investments, some programs provide one-time support to families when reintegration begins. The time at which reintegration begins is heavily dependent on each child, tracing their families, and at which point during conflict they exit armed groups. Reintegration for children is encouraged throughout conflicts, so funds must be available for spontaneous reintegration throughout the duration of the conflict, aware that some children will have received any necessary services earlier on in the conflict, while others will be just beginning the process. There are likely to be new, additional program participants year after year, running the risk that new participants will be prioritized with services if funding is not available for follow up

support to earlier participants. This means, when funding is insufficient, implementers must choose between providing ongoing services for fewer participants or providing less targeted support to more participants—a critical choice when these initial decisions are how to ensure children’s full recovery and communities’ return to peace.

## D. Logistics and security costs

A key challenge with reintegration costing is that programs often occur in the midst of ongoing conflicts. It is nearly impossible to predict what security and logistical challenges may occur while planning for service provision for the average child during ongoing conflict, and some areas may become more or less difficult, if possible to access. Because many children reintegrate in dispersed, hard-to-access locations, logistics can be highly costly and must remain flexible due to changing dynamics on the ground. In the UNICEF DRC office, for example, costs are elevated due to the lack of access to the locations from where children are exiting from armed forces or groups. Alternatives were devised to transport children from these zones to locations where services are available, even temporarily, before reintegrating them with families.

## E. Human resources budgeting

The most significant costs in reintegration programming are usually support for human resource salaries or incentives, capacity building and follow up and monitoring. Human resources are also costly due to the need, in many contexts, for direct service provision with accompaniment and capacity strengthening, especially where resources are limited. The prolonged time frame of reintegration programming coupled with limited funding streams over that time frame further poses challenges to effective human resources.

**Capacity Strengthening:** Reintegration programming is most often initiated in countries in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, where state infrastructure and systems are weak, and by definition, the state has been unwilling or unable to protect its citizens. Nonetheless, there is almost always some form of existing structures to which reintegration efforts should be linked. Programming therefore includes a focus on capacity-strengthening, or may be simply adding various tools to existing social services to bolster the types of support available within existing systems. For instance, reintegration does not normally require expert social workers, but rather, for most children, training community members on follow up and basic reintegration activity implementation has proven effective, where there are a few experts overseeing them and managing case management.

**Direct Service Provision:** There is often a necessity for direct service provision by UN or NGO implementing partners for a period, with a longer-term goal of systems strengthening in each location for eventual handover. In Myanmar, UNICEF has reported that a general lack of capacity in social work requires the recruitment of human resources to directly provide meaningful case management services, as well as conduct reintegration activities, while building local capacity to do so.

The requirement for direct service provision can also be triggered because the state is complicit in or a perpetrator of grave violations of children's rights, such as recruitment. This poses a specific

challenge; where other sectors such as health may be able to initiate technical partnerships to strengthen national health systems and support government health workers, child reintegration and protection may still need to be provided directly by neutral, impartial humanitarian agencies, even after peace processes or development interventions have been initiated, as long as their rights are still at risk of or are violated by state actors. However, the lack of funding means that Senior Child Protection Advisors who could encourage release of children, engage with armed groups, and lead reintegration service provision are not always available for contexts where they are needed. This may hinder effective release and reintegration.

**Time frame:** Finally, current reintegration programming funding with limited durations of 12 months or less, sometimes even as short as 3 months, has serious impact on the ability to recruit qualified human resources. The effect of short-term funding is grossly inefficient, requiring repetitive administrative time spent on re-recruitment and re-training of essential human resources. Insufficient and inconsistent funding limits the impact social workers can have to support a child's reintegration. This breaks trust with children, families and communities, crucial not only to preventing recidivism but to promoting a culture recognizing the benefits of promoting children's rights and protection more generally in the long term.



## IV. Funding Cycles and Priorities Impacting Child Reintegration Outcomes

This section details how funding cycles and priorities have impeded meeting the growing child protection needs across the sector, and in particular, for reintegration programming. Overall reintegration needs are increasing. Yet child protection as a sector receives little funding and is not prioritized within humanitarian funding.<sup>35</sup> There is limited donor support for reintegration, and it is thus far not effectively viewed as a long-term recovery and development program, encompassed within the peacebuilding and social protection agendas. Reintegration programming in particular is challenging to fund over the long term, and instead, is often covered by short-term, emergency investments that are poorly suited to the program approaches.

### A. Increased child reintegration need and decreasing funding

While overall humanitarian aid is increasing, funding for reintegration along the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding continuum is decreasing, even as needs are increasing in terms of geographic scope and children in need of support, according to War Child research. The impact of the

decrease in funding is more limited UN support in some contexts, and other actors are often unable to step in to meet critical reintegration needs.

**Increased need:** Although overall humanitarian funding is increasing, it is not catching up to increased need. Appeals for humanitarian response have doubled between 2010 and 2018 due to increasing needs. Yet the gap between estimated requirements and funds received has widened for overall programming according to War Child data. Investments simply have not kept pace with growing needs for assistance.

Reintegration needs specifically have increased along with overall humanitarian aid needs, in part due to the increase in conflicts over this period. Funding for reintegration has been found to have actually decreased over time, even if there is an overall increase in aid. War Child UK found that between 2012-2016, funding for children's reintegration dropped significantly. In 2012, funding totaled \$22.1 million, but by 2016 it dropped to \$14.7 million, marking a 33 percent decrease in global funds available.<sup>36</sup>

For example, due to increasing armed conflict contexts globally, in 2014, only 10 UNICEF Country Offices had CAAFAG operations. This number has increased each year to date, with now 19 offices implementing programming for CAAFAG due to emerging conflicts. Likewise, UNICEF data shows an increased need for reintegration programming in terms of actual children targeted, varying from 40,000 children targeted in 2016 to 200,000 children targeted in 2017, with variations over the five year period analyzed. The increase in need geographically means that start-up costs and overall programming costs are greater, yet UNICEF operations are ongoing with a lower overall budget for 19 offices than for 10 offices in 2014.

**Limited Expertise:** The child protection function within the UN has been limited due to the lack of funding and de-prioritizing the issue. There is a lack of child protection capacity in UN Peacekeeping and Political Missions, and there are efforts to further streamline protection responsibilities that may threaten the UN's ability to deliver on child reintegration. The UN needs dedicated child protection capacity to handle the increase in need for child reintegration expertise. Governments also often lack child protection expertise. This also means NGOs step in to fill the gap. For example, War Child has trained lawyers, police and civil servants in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but War Child is a small-player and cannot bring interventions to scale in the way that government structures or the UN are able to.

## B. Funding priorities limit child reintegration programming

The overall decrease in funds for reintegration support is partially due to the framing of reintegration and child protection within humanitarian aid. Child protection services are not always prioritized during and post-conflict, despite the massive influence that children's recovery

has on long-term peace and development.<sup>37</sup> Child protection and reintegration are complex, and may not be viewed as "life saving" by all donors. Within the child protection sector, reintegration support is comparatively expensive, human resource rather than supply driven, requires specialized long-term support, and is therefore not adequately measured numerically. Within limited humanitarian assistance budgets, the overall share of humanitarian aid that goes to child protection is minimal—an average of 0.53 percent, even though child protection is cross cutting and lifesaving in crises.<sup>38</sup> Underfunding is not consistent throughout all interventions—rather, there are patterns of underfunding for child protection in certain contexts—ranging from funding of under 30 percent to funding of closer to 80 percent in other contexts depending on perceived priorities. For instance, Syria received nearer to 80 percent of its funding, while CAR received a much lower percentage. Overall, requested child protection funds account for between only \$2 and \$40 per child, and that only accounts for children included in the budget targets, which never include the full needs, but prioritizes in emergency budgets. Budgets also do not include the community-based aspects and child protection systems strengthening components that are necessary components of reintegration. This is especially problematic for reintegration, where community and family involvement is crucial, and where aspects of programming fall outside of the humanitarian response plans and into longer-term development needs.

## C. Funding cycles limit child reintegration programming

The current lack of global funding available for reintegration is compounded by short-term and volatile funding cycles. Reintegration takes years, but too often NGOs and others receive short-term emergency grants for just six, nine or 12 months of programming. With such short funding cycles,

children are only partially supported. Some children may access activities in the first few months, while others may not access them until the second or third year of the program. Likewise, funding must be available immediately, when children are released from groups, but must also be available throughout the longer-term programming needs for reintegration. Whereas emergency funds can be made available most quickly, funds do not allow for all reintegration activities, and cannot guarantee continued support and follow up for 3-5 years. Even emergency funds are not always available as urgently as needed. In some contexts, DDR actors knew of hundreds of children who had been released, but there was no funding to begin support—or could only assist some of them. In other cases, children already had been home for a year, and only later were identified as formerly associated, and received training and other reintegration support.<sup>39</sup>

When funding is provided, funding may continue unevenly, contributing to some of the other risks discussed in this paper. Funding for reintegration often is piecemeal and unpredictable, although all evidence shows that sustained and flexible funding is essential for long-term programming that is adaptable to individual children and the contexts they are in.<sup>40</sup> For instance, the UNICEF Philippines office reported that due to short-term funding, the reintegration program had to cease operations for four months, until additional funding came through. This caused a loss in staff, and more worrisome, a lack of certainty and ongoing support for children who were in the midst of the reintegration process. Interrupted cycles can hinder the reintegration process. Donors and partners should be sensitized early on that reintegration is a multi-year process, and that when funding runs out, it can cause harm by creating disenchantment, and decrease participants' trust in institutions. Funding needs to be predictable, sustained and flexible to enable long-term programming that is adaptable to

individual children and the context they are in. The South Sudan Case Management Task Force has learned that most cases remain open for between two to three years and a short funding cycle results in a risk of being counter-productive if interventions are not followed through—particularly for reintegration cases that require more time.<sup>41</sup> Overall, there is an over-emphasis on quantifying the impact of reintegration numerically through numbers of children reached, often prioritizing a fast interaction rather than longer-term engagement that measures the qualitative impact of the program on the child and the child's community.

While the cost of reintegration varies per country and context, the massive increases and decreases in funding provided each year do not respond to the needs for consistent funding for sometimes unpredictable programs over 3-5 years. Funding from the outset should consider long-term, sustainable reintegration, and flexible timelines for activities and targets.

#### **D. Funding streams for child reintegration**

The lack of donors supporting child reintegration is a challenge. Child protection, and reintegration programming often comes out of the humanitarian response planning (HRP) as discussed above. Even within that framing, some donors are reluctant to fund programming that often requires discussions with armed forces and armed groups, due the political nature of the work and sensitivities around these discussions. In many contexts, regular UNICEF funds are used for CAAFAG support, due to the difficulty in finding urgently needed funding from donors. There is often no specific funding for CAAFAG within these appeals, sometimes due to sensitivities around this issue, or the information is deliberately hidden for that reason.

The lack of advocacy with donors is a gap within the humanitarian response framing. Humanitarian donors should also understand that emergency funds are needed for reintegration, but that these programs take longer than some urgent relief programming takes, and should be provided with different metrics and additional flexibility, at least in terms of time frames and targets.

### **E. Funding across the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding nexus**

The challenges of increasing humanitarian need, lacking funds, piecemeal and short-term funding cycles and limited donors could in part be ameliorated by reframing reintegration as a long-term recovery and development program. In reality, reintegration requires immediate support at the earliest phases of a humanitarian response, to encourage release, support family tracing, and provide urgent services, but needs to continue over time for dedicated child protection support, such as case management where needed, and to link children to other services they need. Reintegration should be implemented in parallel to ongoing support for strengthening social services, child protection systems building, and education and vocational training as well. By guaranteeing additional funding to support systems-strengthening in parallel to reintegration, there would be additional guarantees that local systems could continue to support children, their families, and communities after reintegration programming ceases. Where only certain, piecemeal funding is available for one component of reintegration, reintegration cannot be implemented properly. For example, UNICEF Philippines faced a gap in follow up and response when funding did not continue as expected. Funding identified to resume operation for another 10 months with no certainty of what would happen next.

In certain contexts, existing budgets for systems strengthening, community-based child protection, and case management could also be made more flexible to meet reintegration needs. This may be achieved if reintegration were viewed more as a long-term recovery and development program, incorporating the peacebuilding agenda, and social protection strategies. Agencies should develop or renew their strategies for CAAFAG reintegration—with a view of longer-term and sustainable support for reintegration; deliberately linking it with the broader peacebuilding agenda and youth-engagement and social protection strategy.

Reintegration programming components will ideally therefore be integrated into government services, and is an element of recovery funding agendas and development funding. In Myanmar, for example, UNICEF used to allocate 500,000 MMK per child for socio-economic reintegration, between 6 months to 24 months. Starting from 2018, the Department of Rehabilitation, the Ministry of Social Welfare, took over the responsibility of disbursing one-time cash assistance to each child formerly associated with armed forces. Case management of CAAFAG reintegration was a separate process from the general Child Protection case management system until mid-2018. The integration of CAAFAG reintegration into the Child Protection Case Management (CPCM) System started in late 2018. CAAFAG reintegration will be fully integrated into the CPCM system after the endorsement of the Standards Operation Procedure of Case Management.



# Key Findings and Recommendations

**D**ecades of experience in reintegration programming for children in contexts around the world has resulted in the following key findings, which informed the good practices for approaches and activities detailed in this paper. The good practices should continue in all contexts where reintegration programming is needed, coupled with attention to the recommendations to fill the gaps and needs identified, which inhibits reintegration successes. Attention to these recommendations will improve sustainable support for each and every child in need of reintegration.

## A. Findings

### Program planning and design

1. Engage governments early to prepare policies, to include or link reintegration programs into local services and national structures and to develop ownership as duty holders. During armed conflict, working with government line ministries to provide services for children and communities is in parallel with engagement to prevent and end violations of child rights and to uphold IHL.
2. Prioritize community-level leadership and ownership as critical through direct funding to local organizations and governments where possible. During UN or implementing agency planning, engage local structures and community leaders immediately to allow for context-specific approaches based on community needs and capacities, and eventual handover where ownership is not possible.
3. Engage formerly associated girls and boys and their peers, families and communities to help to define both metrics of success for child reintegration and design of interventions that prevent and respond to recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups.
4. Ground all reintegration programming in localized multi-dimensional risk analysis, including conflict sensitivity, children's rights and protection, and considering gender and power dynamics pre-existing to and within the conflict, social norms and gender-based violence.
5. Prioritize the use and scale up of a comprehensive community-based child protection case management system approach



to address the individual needs of children with protection concerns, including those who require reintegration support.

### Costing and funding

1. Support flexible, individualized care approaches that anticipate that the needs of some children will be costlier than others and that communities where reintegration takes place will have vastly different needs.
2. Provide funding for prevention of recruitment and other child protection and rights violations by addressing norms, attitudes and behaviours that contribute to such concerns.
3. Identify silos between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance policies, structures, funding instruments, strategic planning and resource allocation as it pertains to child protection generally and reintegration specifically.

### Policy and practice

1. Widely encourage both release of children associated with armed forces and groups, without any conditions, and access to comprehensive reintegration for released boys and girls.
2. Treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims of human rights violations and never detain or deprive children of their liberty for association or alleged association with armed groups.
3. Treat children who were affiliated with non-state armed groups equally to children formerly associated with armed forces, in all aspects.

4. Take seriously violations of child recruitment and take steps to hold armed groups and Member States accountable for instances of child recruitment and use, including through existing monitoring, reporting and accountability tools such as the MRM, annual report and listing, and others.

## B. Recommendations

### Program planning and design

1. Situate child reintegration programming within broader child protection interventions that prioritize prevention and comprehensive response services, including an investment in child protection, education and health care systems strengthening both at the national and community levels.
2. Promote consortium approaches to child reintegration programming across government, donor, UN, NGO and local civil society, bringing together multiple actors with a range of skills and expertise.
3. Equally prioritize social and economic reintegration interventions within the design of reintegration programming as part of national efforts to reach the SDGs, with emphasis placed on aspects of social reintegration that support and engage parents, families and communities and that promote psychosocial recovery, prevention, and address stigma, and encourage social cohesion.
4. Support local and national education systems to adapt and partner with other government agencies to support reintegration, including short-term education programs, and provide funding to support education systems in countries in conflict to rebuild, including integrating the values of peace, tolerance and



acceptance of others, and the skills of the 21st century into the educational systems, which requires a revision of curriculum and enrichment materials design in the armed conflict area. Where possible, implement PSS and health activities through schools to support all students and teachers affected by conflict.

## Costing and funding

1. Adopt a long-term view of funding for reintegration programming that supports the recovery of children, families and communities and social cohesion through child protection, education, psychosocial support and livelihoods initiatives. These could be integrated into efforts by national actors to reach the SDGs, supported by the UN system and included in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which also covers a 3-5 year period.
2. Provide predictable funding for multi-sectoral community-based reintegration programming with commitment periods of at least 3-5 years to adequately address a child's protection concerns and allow for consistent planning, human resourcing, implementation and monitoring.
3. Address the downward trend of resourcing child protection in humanitarian action, which represents 0.5 percent of humanitarian assistance globally, committing to resource child protection to a minimum of 4 percent of all humanitarian assistance, in line with the [recommendations](#) from the Child Protection Alliance, to ensure reintegration assistance rests within fully funded child protection programming in conflict affected settings, by including it as will in development and peacebuilding funding.
4. Invest in multi-sectoral child protection systems at formal and informal levels (with adaptations made for age, maturity, gender, disability), that are community-based and tied to infrastructure improvements, such as schools, as part of reintegration.
5. Embed multi-sector reintegration programming within Child Protection sector strategic plans for humanitarian response, development and peacebuilding actions at all stages of conflict, peace and recovery, with defined budgets.
6. During planning phases, sensitize all stakeholders that reintegration is a multi-year process, and that if funding runs out, it can undermine program effectiveness and results by limiting consistent support available for participants, who could become disenchanted, acquire new grievances, or be left without any support system, risking re-entry into conflict or simply limiting any positive impacts from early investments in recovery.
7. Rather than using "per child" estimates, estimate the overall country programming needs for reintegration within broader child protection programming and community-based systems strengthening for 3-5 years.
8. Develop a costing methodology that can be used across contexts to estimate reliable 3-5 year programming budgets for community-based reintegration support, that accounts for local costs, needs and existing systems and capacities.
9. Apply a developed methodology for costing analysis at the country level to determine reintegration funding gaps and seek to fill these through flexible funding mechanisms as soon as needs arise.

10. Fund more analysis and research about reintegration successes and challenges in various contexts, including number and profiles of participants, and disaggregated data on gender, families, and qualitative perceptions of children.
  11. Engage with governments to ensure 100 percent of development assistance and national investment in social services supporting the protection of children is realized.
  12. Allocate resources for reintegration within national annual budgets so that reintegration-specific and reintegration-supportive structures, policies and services can be eventually implemented by the government where the government is the primary duty bearer, and where necessary, allocate resources for reintegration within humanitarian response plans and budgets in contexts where the government may not be the primary duty bearer.
  13. Publicly disclose funding data about reintegration, child protection and social services systems strengthening and coordinate reporting to enable consistent analysis of financial reporting across all donors (government, multilateral and private) and recipient countries.
- guidelines and policies on children and armed conflict.
  2. States should take all measures to comply with UN Security Council resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).
  3. Local governments should incorporate reintegration programming into plans to achieve sustainable development goals (4, 5, 8, 10, 16, 17) associated with the reintegration and prevention of child soldiers.
  4. Establish national legal and policy frameworks that comply with and implement the provisions of international law conducive to ending, preventing, and responding to recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.
  5. Develop legislation and public policy to ensure reintegration programming and support are effectively integrated into national and sub-national structures, policies and services for child protection, education, health and other aspects of social services and welfare.
  6. Engage in processes, ongoing action plans, and establish, sign and implement Action Plans where needed to end and prevent all six grave violations of children's rights, including specific work plans to end and prevent recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

## Policy and practice

1. Adopt and promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, the Paris and Vancouver Principles and Guidelines, the Safe Schools Declaration and other relevant international instruments,

## Endnotes

1. Stakeholders consulted ranged from former child soldiers and other survivors of armed conflict, Member States, UN agencies, NGOs and academia, to independent experts and the private sector.
2. They can be found at <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/global-coalition-for-reintegration-of-child-soldiers/>.
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6. See Michael Wessels, How Reintegration Programs for Former Child Soldiers Can Cause Unintended Harm, 11 March 2019.
7. Jo Becker, Children as Weapons of War, January 2004.
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9. Community-Based Approaches to Reintegration of Children Affected by Armed Conflict: An Overview of Approaches, Lessons Learned and Challenges, A Presentation to the European Network for a Research Agenda on Children and Armed Conflicts European Seminar on Programmes on Reintegration of Children and Adolescents, Boys and Girls, Involved in Armed Conflicts, October 30-31, 2003, UNICEF Research Center, Istituto degli Innocenti, Florence, Italy.
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16. Mozambique Child Soldier Life Outcome Study: Lessons Learned in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts.
17. JA Robinson, The Right of Child Victims of Armed Conflict to Reintegration and Recovery, SAFLI, (2012).
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19. Global Child Protection Working Group, Inter Agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection. 2014.
20. GSX: Improving PVE Practice: 10 Steps to strengthening rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for terrorist offenders, FTF, and victims of violent extremism.
21. Tug of War: A study on the push and pull factors influencing children to join armed groups "voluntarily" in North and South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, War Child, May 2018.
22. Legrand, Lessons Learned from UNICEF Field Programmes for the Prevention of Recruitment, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers.
23. GSX: Improving PVE Practice: 10 Steps to strengthening rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for terrorist offenders, FTF, and victims of violent extremism.
24. Report of the Secretary-General, Children and Armed Conflict 2018, page 22. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/children-and-armed-conflict-report-secretary-general-a73907-s2019509-enar>
25. Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan, DRC, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Global Coalition in Yemen.
26. The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups provide in-depth recommendations that reflect the importance of a holistic and individualized approach in reintegration programming. Critically this framework asserts that children (associated with armed forces or groups) accused of crimes against international law must be considered primarily as victims of violations against international law and not only as alleged perpetrators. The principles also specify that reintegration is a long-term process requiring a long-term commitment from states. The Paris Principles remain the key reference point for practitioners. Other thematic guidance exists for practitioners on specific interventions within reintegration programming, including the Child Protection Minimum Standards, Child Protection Case Management Guidelines, Education in Emergencies, and the IASC Mental Health and

Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings handbook. More recently, following the UN University publication *Cradled by Conflict*, technical guidance has been developed for reintegration of children associated with extremist groups in the Middle East and Africa.

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**The Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers** (GCR) is an alliance of Member States, United Nations entities, the World Bank, non-governmental organizations and academia—launched in 2018 to advance global efforts to address reintegration of former child soldiers, and prompt action to increase children’s access to sustainable, long-term support.

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