CHILD-INCLUSIVE AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES

LIECHTENSTEIN INSTITUTE ON SELF-DETERMINATION AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

CHILD-INCLUSIVE AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES

Mikaylah Ladue
Princeton University
Georgetown University

Lindsay Stark
Washington University in St. Louis

Laura Perez
Columbia University

Barbara Buckinx*
Princeton University

*Corresponding author: bbuckinx@princeton.edu.

Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination
Princeton School of Public and International Affairs
https://lisd.princeton.edu

Suggested Citation: Ladue, Mikaylah et al. "Child-Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Reintegration Programmes." (Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination, Princeton University, and United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, June 2025).

Cover Photo: UNICEF/UN038011/Khuzaie. Photo, page 11: UNICEF/UNI367278/Fazel. Photo, page 26: UNICEF/UNI693324/Dicko. Photo, page 45: UNICEF/UNI549345/Oo

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY[1]

Documentation has emphasised alarming rates of suffering in conflict situations and the continued evolution and escalation of conflict, including that which is increasingly protracted. In 2023, children living in conflict situations experienced an unprecedented increase in violence and violations of their rights.[2] This paper focuses on children who are most at risk: those who end up in government armed forces or nonstate armed groups. Armed entities perpetrate multiple human rights violations against these vulnerable children, and therefore special attention must be paid to their reintegration into society once they emerge from armed entities. Given the rise in violence, an increasing number of children will be eligible for and require reintegration to support their transition from military to civilian life in the midst and in the wake of conflict.

Through its mandate, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) aims at strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict, raises awareness, promotes the collection of information about the plight of children affected by war, and fosters international cooperation to improve their protection. The Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict reports to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, raises challenges by children in armed conflict to the Security Council, engages with Member States to raise such challenges and secure political and diplomatic engagement, and supports the work of operational partners.[3] A critical initiative co-chaired by the OSRSG-CAAC alongside the United Nations Children's Fund has been the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, an alliance of Member States, United Nations entities, the World Bank, civil society organizations, and academia to identify ways to support, strengthen, and improve child reintegration programmes.[4]

Reintegration programmes are central to addressing the specific needs, experiences, and vulnerabilities of all children, mitigating the potential negative impacts of their return to communities and families, and providing access to services to redress and establish meaningful lives and livelihoods. Despite the transformative potential of such programmes, they have historically struggled to address the complex and long-term needs of children. This translates to a deeply consequential protection gap, which is in urgent need of both national and international attention.

When child reintegration programmes are established, they can lack a nuanced understanding of the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children of different ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds, which may result in limiting their meaningful participation or undermining their best interests. This not only undermines the capacity of children to contribute to their communities and develop resiliency against drivers of recruitment and re-recruitment, but it also threatens prospects for peace for society as a whole.

Existing guidance and guidelines rarely consider how to advance programmes that are both child-inclusive, in that they respond to the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of all children,

and gender-responsive, in that they address the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of individuals of different gender identities and the power dynamics between them.[5] This working paper aims to provide child-inclusive and gender-responsive considerations for practitioners working along the spectrum of reintegration programming to promote the full and meaningful inclusion, participation, and protection of all children in those programmes.

The working paper first addresses key recommendations for reintegration and research, as well as considers the importance of child-inclusive, gender-responsive, and intersectional approaches. It then considers the gendered experiences of children in armed conflict, the nuances of which are necessary to guide inclusive programming.

After this background, the working paper considers child-inclusive and gender-responsive reintegration programmes. Since approaches to these combined and intersectional approaches are not detailed in existing guidance, these sections aim to encourage thoughtful consideration of how programmes can be designed to address the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds.

1.1. Methodology

Research for this report was conducted by Princeton University in collaboration with academic experts. The final report was reviewed by OSRSG-CAAC.

The research was designed to respond to the overarching question of how reintegration programmes may be developed to address and respond to the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children of different ages and gender identities. The research was advanced through a desk literature review, including existing United Nations guidance on reintegration, policies and guidelines relating to reintegration, and civil society reports and academic publications on reintegration. Literature that addressed child reintegration or gender dynamics and reintegration were prioritised in the review. The research was not designed to collate all existing recommendations on designing, implementing, and evaluating reintegration programmes. Not all guidance that exists, namely that included within the Paris Principles Operational Handbook, was reproduced here, because the focus was on particular areas where age and gender are critical.

This working paper uses primarily the terminologies of *girls* and *boys* to reference children with female and male sex characteristics, respectively. Yet there are children in conflict and post-conflict situations who are not represented by this language, as they identify with a broader spectrum of gender identities or have intersex characteristics. Some children may even be targeted for violence on the basis of their real or perceived gender identity or sex characteristics, as well as their real or perceived gender expression or sexual orientation.

The decision to use the terminologies of *girls* and *boys* is to ensure that the working paper does not misrepresent the original text of existing guidance, literature, evaluations, and principles. Such original text often focuses narrowly on girls and boys and is representative of an

exclusion of children of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics from consideration, which can translate to detrimental protection gaps in programming.

In response, this working paper integrates literature and guidance that addresses the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of persons who may be targeted for violence on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics, and considers how to integrate this knowledge into reintegration. Practitioners and policymakers must bear in mind that an approach is neither responsive to nor aware of gender if it is narrowly restricted to an analysis of the gender binary.

1.2. Recommendations for Reintegration

Key recommendations for the design of child-inclusive and gender-responsive reintegration programmes include:

- *Advance* do no harm principles in all programmes to mitigate potential harm to children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds.
- *Incorporate* inclusive language for children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds in relevant programmes and policies, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles.
- *Support* the participation of children of diverse ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of reintegration programmes. This includes the design of public information and communication strategies that address children about eligibility for and access to reintegration programmes. All children affected by conflict, and other vulnerable children within return communities, should be represented.
- *Ensure* that eligibility criteria for reintegration programmes include children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups.
- *Coordinate* reintegration programmes for adults to ensure that children who turn eighteen years of age during reintegration are able to receive support services tailored to their experiences as children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups.
- *Identify* cultural understandings of childhood and adulthood, which can influence how children, communities, and families perceive the roles and responsibilities which children of different ages, sexes, and gender identities should be able to access in support programmes.
- *Ensure* that medical, mental health, psychosocial, and sexual and reproductive health services are provided to children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities, without discrimination.

1.3. Recommendations for Research

In analysing existing documentation of child-inclusive and gender-responsive approaches to reintegration, this working paper identified several gaps in existing knowledge of the needs, experiences, and vulnerabilities of children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities in conflict and post-conflict situations. These gaps inhibit the design and implementation of thorough and evidence-based child-inclusive and gender-responsive approaches. Additional research should include field research and interviews to triangulate and inform desk-based review of existing documentation. Recommendations include:

- *Advance* do no harm principles in all research to mitigate potential harm to children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds.
- *Identify* best practices for research into the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children associated with armed forces and armed groups and for their inclusion in policies and programmes. Key considerations include:
    - *Standardisation of* data disaggregation by age.
    - *Disaggregation of* data by sexual orientation, including potential risks, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles.
    - *Participation of* children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of programmes, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles.
    - *Provision of* support services, including mental health and psychosocial support and sexual and reproductive healthcare, to children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations, in alignment with do no harm principles.
- *Research into* the experiences of children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations in armed conflict and their special needs to take into consideration in reintegration programmes. Participatory approaches such as life history interviews may be an ethical starting point for this research to avoid an extractive research approach and empower young people to make meaning of their own experiences. Recommendations for this research include:
    - *Address* drivers of recruitment, experiences within armed forces and armed groups, and unique challenges during reintegration. Explore how local gender norms and cultural attitudes towards persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations impact both the recruitment of children and their experiences in release and reintegration, including domestic legislation as well as cultural barriers and facilitators to inclusive programming.
    - *Identify* risk and protective factors over time through use of longitudinal studies. Explore how involvement in conflict and militarised environments impacts gender expression, identity formation, and psychological resilience.

    - *Investigate* the intersection between marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations and disabilities.
- *Research into* experiences of children with disabilities in armed conflict and their special needs to take into consideration in reintegration programmes. Disaggregate data collection by disability status, in addition to age and sex.
    - *Include* data collection on, inter alia, pre-existing disabilities and physical and non-physical disabilities. Increased data availability will contribute to understanding the relationship between age, sex, gender identity, and disability status.
    - *Include* research into grave violations committed against children with disabilities and how age, sex, gender identity, and disability status interact in conflict situations.
    - *Investigate* how age, sex, and gender identity influence how children experience injuries and disabilities.
- *Identify* and *evaluate* reintegration programmes that address militarised masculinities and gender-transformational approaches to shifting harmful gender norms in conflict and post-conflict situations to evaluate how they facilitate transitions to civilian life.
- *Identify* the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children of all gender identities in middle and late childhood, who receive comparably less attention in the existing literature.
- *Recognise* that an exclusive focus on rigid developmental stages may not be in the best interest of the child and may obscure recognition of their evolving capacities and intersectional vulnerabilities.
- *Research into* the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of newborns and infants of all gender identities in reintegration programmes, particularly those who accompany their parents who are children.
- *Explore* the risk profile of and evidence-based supports for children born of sexual violence in conflict.
- *Research into* how existing, new, and emergent technologies influence the recruitment, use, and gendered experiences of children in armed conflict.

2. DEFINITIONS

Armed Forces	"The military organization of a State with a legal basis, and supporting institutional infrastructure (salaries, benefits, basic services, etc.)." [6]
Armed Groups	"A group that has the potential to employ arms in the use of force to achieve political, ideological or economic objectives; is not within the formal military structures of a State, State-alliance or intergovernmental organization; and is not under the control of the State(s) in which it operates." [7]
Child	"[E]very human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."[8]
Child Associated with an Armed Force or Armed Group	Any child "who is or has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken part in direct hostilities."[9]
Child Reintegration	Child reintegration "includes family reunification, mobilizing and enabling the child's existing care system, medical screening and health care, schooling and/or vocational training, psychosocial support, and social and community-based reintegration. Reintegration programmes need to be sustainable and to take into account child's aspirations."[10] Per Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of […] armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child."
Combatant	"Based on an analogy with the definition set out in the Third Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Treatment of Prisons of War in relation to persons engaged in international armed conflicts, a combatant is a person who: is a member of a national army or an irregular military organization; or is actively participating in military activities and hostilities; or is involved in recruiting or training military personnel; or holds a command or decision-making position

within a national army or an armed organization; or arrived in a host country carrying arms or in military uniform or as part of a military structure; or having arrived in a host country as an ordinary civilian, thereafter assumes, or shows determination to assume, any of the above attributes."[11]

Demobilisation

"The formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion."[12]

Dependant

"A civilian who depends upon a combatant for his/her livelihood. This can include friends and relatives of the combatant, such as aged men and women, non-mobilized children, and women and girls. Some dependants may also be active members of a fighting force. For the purposes of DDR programming, such persons shall be considered combatants, not dependants."[13]

Disarmament

"The collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes."[14]

Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration

"A process that contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict recovery context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods."[15]

Gender

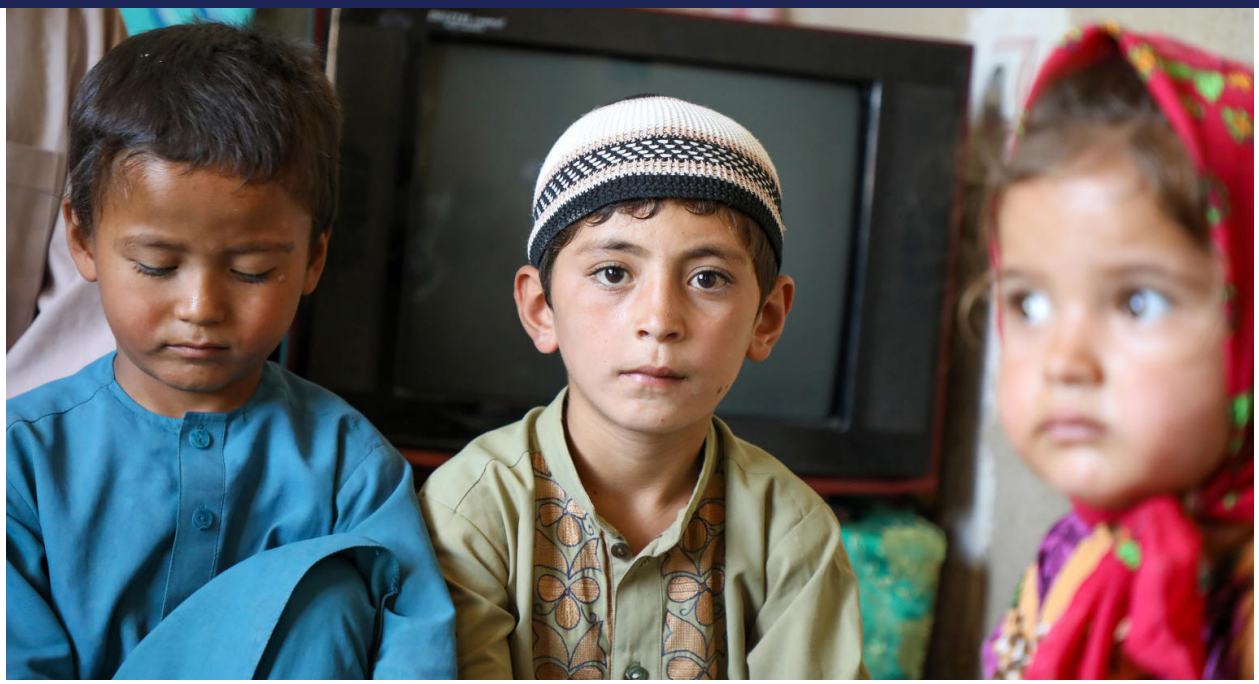
"Socially constructed identities, roles, and attributes that a society considers expected, appropriate and accepting for someone according to their sex and the social and cultural meanings attached to biological differences based on sex. In short, gender is a set of behaviours, activities and forms of expression that society expects from people based on their sex. These expectations vary across societies, communities, and groups, as well as over time, and often result in inequality, favouring men and disadvantaging women and other genders, negatively affecting all members of society."[16]

	Additionally, gender is inclusive of "the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women, men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender is part of the broader sociocultural context."[17] While this definition is written in the binary of male and female, it is applicable to persons of other gender identities.
Gender Expression	"The way in which people externally portray gender through actions and appearance, including dress, speech and mannerisms. Some terms to describe gender expression include masculine, feminine and androgynous. For a lot of people, their gender expression goes along with the ideas that our societies deem to be appropriate for their gender. For other people it does not. A person's gender expression may vary, and is distinct from their gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics." [18]
Gender Identity	"Generally defined as a deeply felt internal and experienced sense of one's own gender. It may or may not be aligned with the sex assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity, which is part of their overall identity. Concepts of gender identity vary across the world."[19] Gender identity, as "a person's self-perceived identity," may also not align with their gender expression.[20]
Gender Non-Conforming	"A term that describes people who are perceived not to conform to socially accepted and expected gender norms and stereotypes. The term usually refers to gender expression, including dress, speech and mannerisms. The term can apply to any individual regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. Used next to a noun i.e. gender non-conforming people."[21]
Intersex	"A term that refers to people born with physical sex characteristics (such as sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal patterns and/or chromosomal patterns) that do not fit typical definitions for male or female bodies. These characteristics may be internal or external, may be apparent at birth or emerge from puberty, or may not be physically apparent at all. […] An intersex person may have any gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. Used next to a noun i.e. intersex person."[22]

Non-binary	"A term used to describe a person whose gender identity falls outside the male-female gender binary. This term can encompass a wide variety of gender experiences, including people with a specific gender identity that is neither exclusively man nor woman, people who identify as two or more genders (bigender, pangender or polygender) and people who do not identify with any gender (agender). Non-binary people may or may not also describe themselves as trans, gender queer or gender fluid (someone whose gender is not fixed over time). Used next to a noun i.e. non-binary youth."[23]
Release	"The process of formal and controlled disarmament and demobilisation of children from an armed force or armed group as well as the informal ways in which children leave by escaping, being captured or by any other means. It implies a disassociation from the armed force or armed group and the beginning of the transition from military to civilian life. Release can take place during a situation of armed conflict; it is not dependent on children having weapons to forfeit."[24]
Reintegration	"The process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance."[25]
Sex	"The classification of a person as having female, male and/or intersex sex characteristics. While infants are usually assigned the sex of male or female at birth based on the appearance of their external anatomy alone, a person's sex is a combination of a range of bodily sex characteristics. A person's sex may or may not be aligned with their gender identity. In an increasing number of countries, a person can change the sex marker on their identity documents."[26]
Sex Characteristics	"Physical features relating to sex, including sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal patterns and/or chromosomal patterns, and secondary physical features emerging from puberty (such as a deepening of voice, growth of body/facial hair, breast development etc.)."[27]
Sexual Orientation	"A person's romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings or attraction to people of the same, different or more than one gender."[28]

Youth

"Within the UN system, young people are identified as those between 15 and 24 years of age. However, this can vary considerably between one context and another. Social, economic and cultural systems define the age limits for the specific roles and responsibilities of children, youth and adults."[29]



3. INTRODUCTION

"We are failing children."

Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the
Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict[30]

In 2023, children living in conflict situations experienced an unprecedented increase in violence and violations of their rights. The United Nations reported 32,990 verified grave violations against children, including killing and maiming, recruitment and use, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks against schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.[31] This represents a 21 per cent increase in grave violations and a 35 per cent increase in killing and maiming of children from the year prior, including the killing (5,301) and maiming (6,348) of 11,649 children, the recruitment and use of 8,655 children, the abduction of 4,356 children, and the detention of 2,491 children for actual or alleged association with an armed group, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations.[32] This represents an average of nearly 15 children killed and 17 children maimed per day. Verified violations affected a total of 22,557 children, including 15,847 boys and 6,252 girls, with recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and abduction disproportionately impacting boys, and rape and other forms of sexual violence disproportionately impacting girls.[33]

Six grave violations against children

1. Killing and maiming
2. Recruitment and use
3. Rape and other forms of sexual violence
4. Abduction
5. Attacks against schools and hospitals
6. Denial of humanitarian access

Amidst these alarming rates of suffering and the continuing evolution and escalation

of conflict, including that which is increasingly protracted, the United Nations engaged with parties to conflict to encourage the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups. Children were released from armed forces and armed groups in several country situations on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council, including, *inter alia*,

- The release of 333 boys from the Taliban in Afghanistan,[34]
- The release of 535 children by Raia Mutomboki Kiriku, an armed group in Democratic Republic of the Congo,[35] *and*
- The release of 122 children from parties to the conflict in Sudan.[36]

Children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups additionally accessed reintegration programmes, including 42 children in the Central African Republic.[37] Despite the intensification of conflicts across regions and the increase in verified numbers of children recruited and used in 2023 (8,655) compared to 2022 (7,622), the total number of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups who received protection and/or reintegration support decreased from more than 12,460 children in 2022 to more than 10,600 children in 2023.[38] These figures are alarming, and they highlight the significant number of children who remain associated with armed forces or armed groups, who remain invisible to reintegration programmes, and who remain particularly vulnerable to re-recruitment.

Reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups can uphold child protection and provide rehabilitation support in the midst or in the wake of armed conflict. As such, these programmes are critical elements of building and sustaining peace in conflict and post-conflict situations, contributing to security and stability and supporting transitions from military to civilian life and from conflict to post-conflict situations. Reintegration is central to addressing the specific needs, experiences, and vulnerabilities of all children, mitigating the potential negative impacts of their return to communities and families, and providing access to services to redress harms and establish meaningful livelihoods.

Despite the transformative potential of such programmes, they have historically struggled to address the complex and long-term needs of children. This translates to a deeply consequential protection gap, which is in urgent need of both national and international attention.[39] When child reintegration programmes are established, they can lack a nuanced understanding of the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds, thereby limiting their meaningful participation or undermining their best interests. This not only undermines the capacity of children to contribute to their communities and develop resiliency against drivers of recruitment and re-recruitment, but it also threatens prospects for peace for society as a whole.

Existing guidance and guidelines address considerations which rarely contemplate how to advance programmes that are both child-inclusive, in that they respond to the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of all children, and gender-responsive, in that they address

the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of individuals of different gender identities and the power dynamics between them. This results in a dearth of research that addresses explicitly the specific needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of all children. This working paper aims to provide child-inclusive and gender-responsive considerations for practitioners working along the spectrum of reintegration to ensure the full and meaningful inclusion, participation, and protection of all children in reintegration programmes. As such, this working paper aims to encourage thoughtful consideration of child-inclusive and gender-responsive reintegration provisions, both within and outside the context of programmes supported by the United Nations.

3.1. Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration

Integrated disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) covers the range of options available for a DDR process: DDR programmes, DDR-related tools, and reintegration support. DDR processes can be implemented in mission settings, where the Security Council has provided a mandate for peace operations, as well as in non-mission settings.[40]

- *DDR programmes* include the operational categories of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration. They are implemented when a set of preconditions are in place: (1) "the signing of a negotiated ceasefire and/or peace agreement that provides the framework for DDR," (2) "trust in the peace process," (3) "the willingness of the parties to the armed conflict to engage in DDR," and (4) "a minimum guarantee of security."[41]
- *DDR-related tools* include programmes such as community violence reduction and transitional weapons and ammunition management.[42] These tools can be used as a complement to DDR programmes either before, during, or after the implementation of such programmes, or can be used on their own when the preconditions of DDR are not satisfied.[43]
- *Reintegration support* can be provided alongside DDR-related tools, following DDR-related tools, or on its own, including when the preconditions of DDR are not satisfied.[44] Reintegration support is often longer term and may be carried out on local and national levels.

Release and reintegration of children need not occur in the context of disarmament, demobilisation, or reintegration for adults, although they may be part of such processes. If release and reintegration are part of formal processes, then child-specific provisions must be developed to ensure the best interests of the child are upheld and provide for safe and accessible handover to child protection actors.

There are two key programmatic differences between the two approaches:

1. *No formal peace agreement, ceasefire, or peace process is required for the release and reintegration of children.* The release and reintegration of children should be supported before, during, and after conflict, irrespective of the role of the child in the conflict. While

only children associated with armed forces and armed groups participate in release, all vulnerable children may be eligible for reintegration support.

2. *Children should be treated primarily as victims of the conflict.* In contexts where children are held accountable for their actions during conflict, international juvenile justice standards apply.[45]

Not all children will choose to participate in formal release processes due to several factors, such as concerns for their safety. Some children will instead choose to informally exit an armed force or armed group. It is therefore important not to limit the provision of reintegration support solely to those children who have participated in a release process, which can itself further stigmatise children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups by visibly identifying their former association.

> "The release of children from armed forces or armed groups, their reintegration and prevention of recruitment and re-recruitment require priority attention. Actions in this regard must not be dependent or contingent on or attached in any way to the progress of peace processes. All measures to assure the release of children, their protection and the prevention of the recruitment of children shall by determined by the best interests of such children."
>
> Paris Principles, 3.4.0

3.2. Child-Inclusive Approaches

When a child is directly or indirectly exposed to armed conflict, they are likely to suffer substantial and enduring harm that can delay their development and erode protective factors that may otherwise support such development. Children may immediately experience and witness injury, trauma, illness, and death, may be forced to perpetrate violence, and may be impacted over the longer term by insecure living conditions and the collapse or intentional destruction of infrastructure. Delayed development, which may increase with continued exposure to conflict, can further threaten the social, economic, physical, and psychological outcomes of children, particularly for those who are exposed to armed conflict in early childhood.[46] Yet children may also demonstrate resiliency in the face of armed conflict, and protective factors such as social support networks can contribute to the promotion of child safety and wellbeing.[47]

Reintegration programmes for children must be designed with a child-inclusive approach to ensure that the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children are addressed, contributing to the efficacy and longevity of such programmes and mitigating the impacts of armed conflict on children. Child-inclusive approaches consider the specific needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children based on their evolving capacities and abilities and their developmental stage, which is context specific and culturally dependent.[48] Different cultures define childhood and adulthood differently and will assign roles and responsibilities to children based on

these cultural understandings. Children may thus be perceived as adults and hold adult responsibilities, irrespective of their age. This means that the specific age range correlating with a given developmental stage may be dependent on cultural context.[49]

Child-inclusive approaches should consider the age of the child when they became associated with armed forces or armed groups and when they enter reintegration programmes. Age-appropriate programming ensures that the needs of individuals of all ages are met. This may include, for example, ensuring that appropriate medical care and nutrition are available for newborns and infants or tailoring interview techniques and participatory processes to the capacities and cognitive development of each child.[50] Without an intentional child-inclusive approach, the needs of children may go unmet, and children may experience increased vulnerability to re-recruitment as they lack necessary care and support.

Child-inclusive approaches recognise that while children must be treated primarily as victims, they also have agency and are "actors who provide different insights into and perspectives on the workings of conflict and post-conflict settings."[51] By taking a child-inclusive approach, practitioners and policymakers can uphold the right of a child to be heard and ensure the autonomy, dignity, and agency of a child by developing age-appropriate participatory processes that acknowledge the evolving capacities of the child. Understanding the needs, perspectives, and desires of children of different ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds contributes to the design and implementation of effective programming.

> "This principle [of the evolving capacities of the child] has profound implications for the human rights of the child. It establishes that as children acquire enhanced competencies, there is a reduced need for direction and a greater capacity to take responsibility for decisions affecting their lives. The Convention [on the Rights of the Child] recognises that children in different environments and cultures who are faced with diverse life experiences will acquire competencies at different ages, and their acquisition of competencies will vary according to circumstances. It also allows for the fact that children's capacities can differ according to the nature of the rights to be exercised. Children, therefore, require varying degrees of protection, participation and opportunity for autonomous decision-making in different contexts and across different areas of decision-making."[52]

Child-inclusive approaches may adopt an approach that considers the different developmental stages of a child: early childhood, middle childhood, late childhood, and adolescence.

Early Childhood

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee describes *early childhood* as the period below eight years of age during which a child undergoes rapid brain development.[53] The Committee on the Rights of the Child further recognises that the specific age range of children in early childhood is defined differently based on national and regional contexts and local traditions.[54]

While children in early childhood are unlikely to take a direct part in hostilities given their age, they are nevertheless impacted by armed conflict, including acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide.[55] Research suggests that children in early childhood who are exposed to armed conflict may be particularly vulnerable to deleterious outcomes for their development.[56] This may include not only children associated with armed forces or armed groups but also children born of sexual violence in conflict. Additionally, these children may have been abducted by an armed force or armed group for the purpose of recruitment and use.[57]

Reintegration programmes must consider provisions for children in early childhood, as they may accompany their parents who are children or adults in disarmament, demobilisation, release, or reintegration programmes, may be associated with armed forces or armed groups themselves, or may be orphaned, abandoned, or separated from their parents. They may also face abuse, neglect, or violence upon their arrival or return to communities and families, or may require alternative care while awaiting family reunification, particularly for those children who are displaced within or across borders. Children in early childhood may have also begun schooling and be subjected to occupation of or attacks on school infrastructure. Provisions for children in this age range may include, for example, food that meets the nutritional needs of newborns and infants.

Middle and Late Childhood

The developmental stages of *middle and late childhood* are not well-described in the literature on children in humanitarian, emergency, conflict, or post-conflict situations, nor are they acknowledged in the general comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. This absence may reflect a concerning lack of attention to the specific needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children in these developmental stages in reintegration programmes. Middle childhood and late childhood are generally understood as encompassing children between six and eleven years of age, or until the onset of puberty.[58] During this period, children experience cognitive, social, emotional, and physical developments that are influenced by their environment.[59]

Children in middle and late childhood, as those in early childhood, are impacted by armed conflict, including acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide.[60] Research has documented that children in this age range may take a direct part in hostilities, serve other roles for an armed force or armed group, such as support roles, or be subjected to sexual violence.[61] They may also have been abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use.[62] As with children in early childhood, reintegration programmes must consider specific provisions for children in middle and late childhood. This may include, for example, access to appropriate educational opportunities as part of reintegration support.

Adolescence

Developmentally, adolescence is understood as occurring after the onset of puberty and until a child reaches the age of eighteen. In this stage of development, a child is experiencing

the maturation of sex characteristics and forming their sense of identity.[63] The Committee on the Rights of the Child describes adolescence as primarily the period between ten and eighteen years of age but recognises that puberty and maturation occurs at different ages and that "the process of transitioning from childhood to adulthood is influenced by context and environment."[64] Adolescence may be further categorised into early adolescence, or the onset of puberty, and late adolescence, or the beginning of the development of the pre-frontal cortex.[65] The pre-frontal cortex, which undergoes maturation during adolescence, is involved in rational decision-making.[66]

Adolescents are also impacted by armed conflict, including acts that may amount war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide.[67] Adolescents, as with other children, may take direct part in hostilities, serve other roles for an armed force or armed group, or be subjected to sexual violence. They may also have been abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use.[68] Once children have the capacity to bear children, they may be increasingly vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence, including the crime of forced pregnancy, which includes unlawful confinement to force a birth.[69] Adolescents may also themselves perpetrate violence, and in some cases, may be subject to criminal responsibility.[70]

Reintegration programmes must consider specific provisions for children who are adolescents. This may include, *inter alia*, access to prenatal, postnatal, or maternal health care, or access to vocational training and employment opportunities through reintegration support to establish livelihoods. In some cultures, adolescents, particularly those between fourteen and eighteen years of age, may be viewed as adults.[71] Adolescents may engage in adult responsibilities, such as heading households or taking care of children or siblings, which will require support that acknowledges their agency and capacity.

Youth

Children between fifteen and eighteen years of age may also be considered youth and thus may participate in relevant youth organisations and programmes. The United Nations understands youth as the "period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence" and statistically defines youth as persons between fifteen and twenty-four years of age.[72]

Understanding child development can help guide development of inclusive and comprehensive programmes. However, use of this framework must recognise "that a universal, prescriptive and deterministic conception of a linear process of child development applicable to all children is inadequate to reflect the complex realities of children's acquisition of competencies."[73] Practitioners and policymakers should emphasise the evolving capacities of the child which, as a developmental concept, "[recognises] the extent to which children's development, competence and emerging personal autonomy are promoted through the realisation" of the rights of the child, enshrined in international law, which thereby obliges Member States to promote, protect, and fulfil these rights.[74]

3.3. Gender-Responsive Approaches

Gender is a social construct that varies between and within cultures and contexts and is not temporally bounded. Gender differs from sex, which is the classification of an individual as having female, male, or intersex sex characteristics.[75] Gender is often conceptualised within the gender binary of male and female, which excludes persons of diverse gender identities from consideration. Gender is inclusive of the social attributes that are commonly associated with being male and being female, as well as the relationships between individuals of the same and different gender identities.[76] Masculinities refer to the attributes typically associated with males, and femininities refer to the attributes typically associated with females.

Gender norms and gender roles represent the specific societal expectations of individuals based on their gender, such as what are deemed to be appropriate behaviours and attitudes. Gender norms and roles can marginalise and discriminate against persons of all gender identities, although they may disproportionately harm females and persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations. Age may determine which gender norms and roles are ascribed to an individual, as they may be dependent upon whether an individual is in childhood or adulthood. Children often internalise expected gender norms and roles through a process of gender socialisation.

Gender must be a central consideration in reintegration programmes to ensure that practitioners and policymakers understand the needs of children properly. Research suggests that girls have been excluded from reintegration due to their classification as dependants or victims, and existing literature does not currently address the needs of children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations in such programmes, including in contexts where same-sex conduct or gender nonconformity is criminalised.[77] This can significantly harm children by limiting their ability to receive critical forms of support and lead to isolation and marginalisation, which may increase their vulnerability to re-recruitment. The needs of children before, during, and after conflict are highly dependent on their gender, including because of the ways in which gender norms and roles may restrict the ability of children to access services and heal from the emotional, psychosocial, and physical wounds of armed conflict.

A gender-based approach "[provides] a framework for addressing multiple asymmetries of power (deriving from how sex is constructed and operates in societies)."[78] Such approaches consider the gender identity of an individual, which may not fit within the construction of the gender binary or align with sex assigned at birth or gender expression, and how that identity relates to power and the perpetration of discrimination or violence. Programmes may adopt different levels of gender-based approaches:

- A *gender discriminatory programme* will actively reinforce or uphold harmful gender roles and norms, thereby leading to discrimination, marginalisation, and violence.
- A *gender-blind programme* will not recognise the differential needs and vulnerabilities of persons of different ages, sexes, and gender identities, thereby ignoring the power

dynamics between them and implicitly causing harm against programme participants and beneficiaries.

- A *gender-sensitive programme* will recognise the differential needs and vulnerabilities of and power dynamics between persons of different ages, sexes, and gender identities, but will not explicitly address, fulfil, or alter these needs, vulnerabilities, and dynamics.
- A *gender-responsive programme* will recognise the differential needs and vulnerabilities of and power dynamics between persons of different ages, sexes, and gender identities, and will adopt specific measures to address, fulfil, and alter these needs, vulnerabilities, and dynamics.
- A *gender-transformative programme* will recognise the different needs and vulnerabilities of and power dynamics between persons of different ages, sexes, and gender identities, and will undertake measures to not only address, fulfil, and alter these needs, vulnerabilities, and dynamics but also to fundamentally target the root causes of gender inequalities within a given society.[79]

This working paper focuses intentionally on gender-responsive reintegration because it is a complex process that does not require or allow for the implementation of gender-transformative programmes at all stages. For example, developing security protocols for physical protection can occur in a manner that recognises differential needs and vulnerabilities, *i.e.*, is responsive, but that does not address root causes of gender inequalities, *i.e.*, is not transformative. Gender-transformative programming should be integrated in reintegration when appropriate and possible and in alignment with do no harm principles, such as in programmes that address harmful social and gender norms, but gender-transformative approaches will not be relevant to all aspects of design and implementation. Practitioners should consider when gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches will best advance the best interests of the child.

During armed conflict, individuals may be targeted for violence not only on the basis of their actual or perceived gender identity or expression, but also on the basis of their actual or perceived sex characteristics or sexual orientation.[80] In many situations of conflict and crisis, persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations experience a heightened risk of violence.[81] This violence may include, inter alia, rape, genital mutilation, forced stripping, physical assault, torture, killing, enforced disappearances, or abduction.[82] In societies with harmful cultural practices or restrictive laws and policies that criminalise same-sex conduct or gender nonconformity, individuals may experience increased vulnerability to these harms.[83]

Violence perpetrated against persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations is a form of gender-based violence that is rooted in harmful gender norms and roles within a society, particularly those which emphasise characteristics that adhere to conventional notions of masculinity and femininity and rely upon the heteronormative, cisgender binary between males and females.[84] In conflict situations, armed forces or armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, may enforce and reinforce these gender norms and roles for ideological or other purposes, which can give rise to conflict-related gender-

based violence, with often fatal consequences.[85] Detrimentally, this presumed binary of gender identity often extends to the conceptualisation of a gendered dichotomy between victims and survivors that presumes males are perpetrators and females are victims.[86] This limited structural understanding obscures the autonomy, agency, and existence of male victims and victims of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations.

Advancing gender-responsive approaches requires the collection of sex-disaggregated data during all stages of assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.[87] Sex-disaggregated data are typically categorised within the binary of male and female, which does not capture the specific needs and vulnerabilities of persons of marginalised gender identities. It is important for practitioners to consult with local organisations that can provide guidance on when it may be appropriate to create safe, secure, and respectful spaces for data collection on persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations in ways that do not put children in contravention with domestic legislation, which should be collected alongside training in human-rights based approaches and in alignment with do no harm principles.[88] It will not be safe in all contexts to collect such information, and the best interests of the child should be prioritised when determining levels of appropriate disaggregation.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender with Age Marker (GAM) is a reflective tool that supports the design and implementation of inclusive programmes in humanitarian settings that are responsive to gender, age, and disability-related differences. The GAM asks users a set of questions relating to ten programme elements, known as gender equality measures, to ensure programmes are founded upon a gendered needs analysis to facilitate targeted, transformative programming.[89]

Gender-responsive approaches to reintegration will thus consider the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children based on their gender identity, which is context specific and culturally dependent, and sexual orientation. Critically, such approaches will require "examining assumptions around security and masculinity," which are heighted in conflict situations and can influence programme implementation in conflict and post-conflict situations.[90] A gender-responsive approach will further seek to "[understand] the risks and opportunities related to gender norms in a given society, identifying and addressing gender-specific needs and capacities, and ensuring equal access to and benefit from any DDR-related intervention."[91] Reintegration programmes can also serve as tools to promote gender equality, including through gender-transformative approaches that design programmes to address root causes of gender inequality. This may occur, for example, through programmes that seek to address and transform harmful and violent masculinities.

When considered in tandem, a child-inclusive and gender-responsive approach considers the unique needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, and sexual orientations.

3.4. Advancing Child-Inclusive, Gender-Responsive Approaches

While this report has outlined child-inclusive approaches apart from gender-responsive approaches, this is not to suggest that these two approaches should be defined, interrogated, understood, and applied separate from one another. Rather, this is to show that each approach is advanced by an extensive body of literature, is essential to understanding the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of all children, and illuminates different social, cultural, and other dynamics of a child's life that are consequential for their health, safety, and wellbeing, as well as their transition to civilian life.

Advancing an approach that is both child-inclusive and gender-responsive requires keen attention to the ways in which both approaches inform and complement one another. At each stage of programme assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, practitioners should ask questions that critically examine the evolving capacities and abilities of children, their developmental stage as understood within a cultural context, and their gender identity and sexual orientation. Children are impacted by the ways in which their age, gender identity, and sexual orientation interact with one another, producing differential forms of stigmatisation, discrimination, and marginalisation that are specific to the culture and the conflict situation. Girls, boys, and children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations will all have different needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences based on their age, capacity, and development, and, likewise, children of similar ages, capacities, and developments will have different needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences based on their gender identities and sexual orientations.

In understanding the experiences of children in armed conflict, a child-inclusive and gender-responsive analysis would uncover how recruitment pathways and association differ for children based on their gender identity and their age. This analysis leads to a set of intervention recommendations tailored to the unique needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of all children. For example, an analysis may consider the different roles and responsibilities assigned to children during their association. Documentation shows that in some conflict situations, girls may be relegated to domestic duties until they are able to bear children, at which point they suffer repeated sexual violence at the hands of combatants, commanders, and others. This understanding of the dynamic association of girls based on their age would inform provisions to ensure that reintegration programmes target younger girls who are mothers and their children. Age and gender identity must be considered in tandem as identities which can exacerbate, mitigate, and alter risks, harms, and experienced vulnerabilities.

Do No Harm Principles

Any approach adopted by policymakers and practitioners must only be implemented when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles. The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration.

The do no harm approach ensures that no harm occurs to children, families, and communities through programme activities, and it requires "tak[ing] measures to prevent and alleviate any adverse consequences of [programmes] on the affected populations."[92] In conflict and post-conflict situations, a conflict-sensitive approach will be necessary to understand the specific risks and harms of a given context. The Paris Principles operational handbook provides the following considerations for a do no harm approach:

- *Be aware* of the harm that can be caused through drawing attention to children who were formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups or their families.
- *Avoid* activities that single out children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups and their families, highlight differences between them and their peers, or create further stigmatisation or risk of reprisals.
- *Provide* safe, confidential, and child-friendly ways for children and others to provide feedback on programme design and implementation. This may include providing a physically, socially, and emotionally safe and supportive environment, acknowledging the trauma that children have suffered, and ensuring that facilitators are trained to handle difficult conversations.
- *Provide* safe, confidential, and child-friendly ways for children and others to report incidents of unethical conduct by programme staff, including sexual exploitation and abuse.
- *Ensure* that programme activities do not jeopardise the safety of the child or their family, including through conducting interviews in exposed locations, disclosing their identity or information that could identify them in public reports, or insisting on asking questions on matters they do not want to talk about.
- *Ensure* child's access to essential services prior to their participation and understand relevant referral pathways and services for children and offer them to the children and their families. Monitoring should be accompanied by referrals.
- *Follow up* with children and their families to ensure there is no negative impact from making a disclosure, to the extent possible.
- *Adhere* to safe information management practices.[93]

3.5. Intersectional Considerations

Intersectionality "recognises that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors [which] combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person's context and existing power structures such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism."[94] By applying an intersectional lens, practitioners and policymakers can recognise "the complex ways in which social identities and systems of discrimination overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination and concurrent forms of oppression."[95] This recognition can enable the development of inclusive and responsive programmes.[96]

Adopting an intersectional lens in reintegration allows for a consideration of the unique needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children based on, *inter alia*, their age, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, disability status, race, ethnicity, indigenous status, religion, nationality, legal or displacement status, or type of association with an armed force or armed group. The United Nations Secretary-General has noted that characteristics such as these can be "determining factors in adversely shaping the vulnerability of children" to experiencing grave violations of their rights.[97]

> "Discrimination may arise in various ways: on the basis of sex, between vulnerable groups upon reintegration and between children who were associated with different armed forces or armed groups or based on social definitions such as ethnicity, religion, disability or caste."
>
> Paris Principles, 3.1

A representative understanding of the vulnerabilities of children therefore requires critical attention to the identities and characteristics of children and the ways in which these can exacerbate or limit the ability of children to participate meaningfully in reintegration. An intersectional approach further enables a consideration of the vulnerability of children to experiencing grave violations of their rights during armed conflict, including the potential for re-recruitment. The nuances of how identity influences the engagement of a child in reintegration programmes have implications for how such programmes contribute to the promotion and maintenance of safety and security and to the ability of children to have their harms redressed and establish meaningful lives and livelihoods.

Consider, for example,

- Children of marginalised ethnicities and races, who may be at an increased risk of experiencing rejection, harm, or violence upon their return to communities or families, which may not be addressed in the context of reintegration programmes. These children may experience different levels of risk to rejection, harm, or violence depending on their gender identity, and whether they are perceived to have transgressed cultural and gender norms during the conflict.

- Children with disabilities, who may be unable to participate in reintegration programmes due to a lack of accessibility measures, such as pathways to facilities that can be accessed by children with mobility limitations. Girls may experience increased risk of harm of violence if they need to travel on their own to find accessible pathways and are thus unaccompanied and exposed to dangerous conditions.
- Children who have been displaced within or across borders, who may not meet eligibility criteria for reintegration programmes that require specific forms of documentation. Lacking identity documentation can impact girls and boys differently. For example, in communities where land is passed through paternal lineage, a lack of identity documentation can limit claims to land.
- Children who were born as a result of sexual violence in conflict, who may not receive the benefits from reintegration programmes if their parents are unaware of their eligibility. Children of girls who are mothers may be particularly vulnerable, especially if their mothers are not receiving support from reintegration programmes.

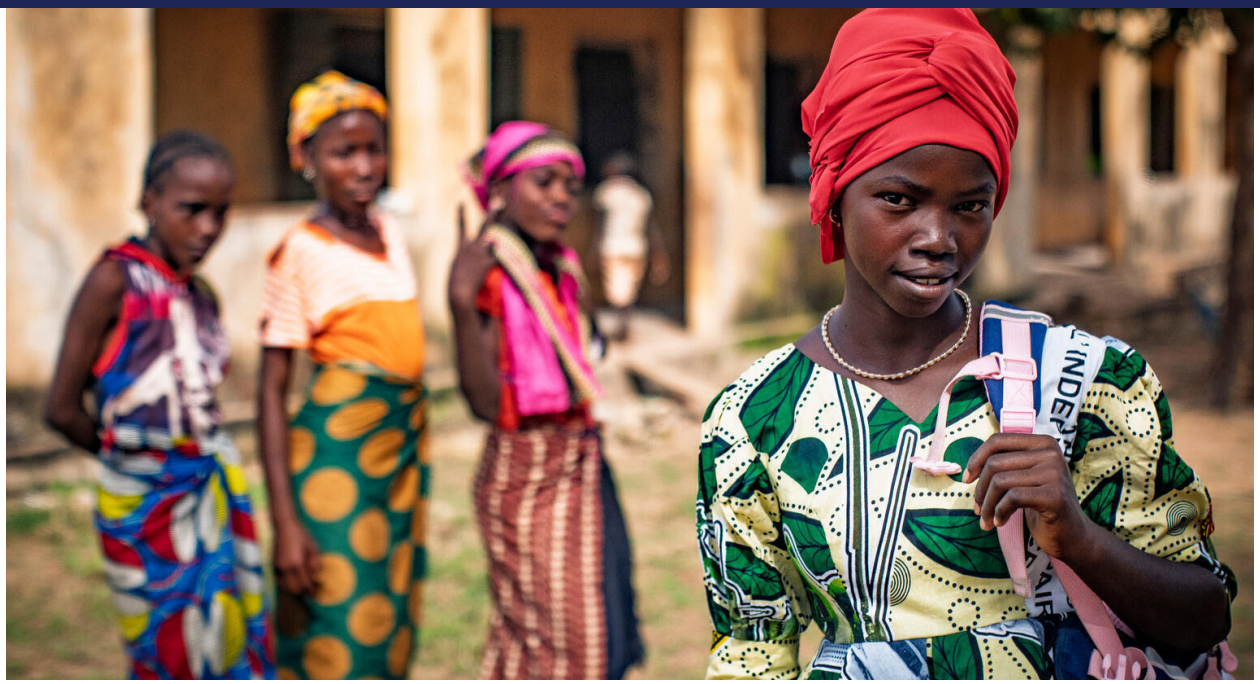
An intersectional approach in the context of reintegration should additionally incorporate a consideration of factors that may influence how a child is impacted by their experiences during armed conflict. These factors may include the individual level of resilience, the duration of association with an armed force or armed group, the distance that a child travelled from their home, the nature of the involvement of the child in the armed force or armed group, the treatment of the child while associated, the involvement of the child in committing or witnessing particular acts of violence, the life of the child before their association, and the level of support available for reintegration after leaving an armed force or armed group.[98] Such factors can shape not only the participation of children in reintegration, but also the types of support that children will need to enable their meaningful participation. It is important for practitioners to recognise that each child will respond differently to their experiences, exhibiting different levels of harm and resilience. As such, "practitioners should avoid making assumptions, and listen to what children say about their experience, as well as the ways they understand, express, and live the various consequences of their association with the armed force or armed group."[99]

The United Nations Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit outlines eight enablers that facilitate an intersectional approach, including reflexivity; dignity, choice, and autonomy; accessibility and universal design; diverse knowledge; intersecting identities; relational power; time and space; and transformative and rights-based approaches. Applying this framework would require, among other approaches, that practitioners reflect on their own biases or practices and how they may shape the design and implementation of programmes, consult with individuals and organisations with relevant expertise, and consider the specific needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children as they relate to their differential identities.

3.6. United Nations Principles for Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Programmes

Within the United Nations, ten principles guide design and implementation of integrated DDR programmes. These principles are of relevance to reintegration programmes. All programmes must be (1) voluntary, (2) people-centred, (3) gender responsive and inclusive, (4) conflict sensitive, (5) context specific, (6) flexible, accountable, and transparent, (7) nationally and locally owned, (8) regionally supported, (9) integrated, and (10) well planned.[100]

With respect to people-centred programmes, the "unconditional and immediate release of children associated with armed forces and groups must be a priority," including that "children shall be separated from armed forces and groups and handed over to child protection agencies [and] then supported to demobilize and reintegrate into families and communities" with interviews of children only being conducted by child protection actors.[101] For children who have committed crimes and may be responsible under criminal law, it is critical to uphold all international juvenile justice standards.[102] With gender-responsive and inclusive programmes, special measures must be built into design and implementation to address the specific needs of all persons without discrimination based on age, sex, or gender identity, including in development of eligibility criteria. In considering these specific needs, it is important for practitioners to "[take] into account [the] different experiences, roles, capacities and responsibilities acquired during and after conflicts."[103]



4. GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Understanding the roles and experiences of children in armed conflict is central to conducting assessments during operational planning that will guide the development of child-inclusive and gender-responsive approaches to reintegration. A reliance on misperceptions about such experiences can lead to the exclusion of children from programming, thereby limiting their opportunities for short- and long-term safety and security.

Note on language

This working paper uses the terminologies victim and survivor to acknowledge the range of ways in which individuals who have experienced violence may choose to identify themselves and indicate their agency, while recognising that not all individuals who experience violence survive. It also uses the terminology victim in recognising the language adopted by the international legal framework.[104]

4.1. Gender Expectations, Norms, and Roles

Gender structurally influences how a child experiences conflict and post-conflict situations, and armed conflict situations tend to not only reinforce and heighten harmful gender norms, but also to offer opportunities for resistance to change. Occupying roles and responsibilities that challenge gender norms, however, can create challenges for children who are perceived by communities and families to have transgressed cultural and societal expectations, including a heightened likelihood of experiencing abuse, violence, or rejection. Structural gender

inequalities and power imbalances shape these harmful forms of stigmatisation and fuel marginalisation in conflict and post-conflict situations.

How a child engages with reintegration programmes is also influenced by gender dynamics and histories of structural gender inequality, and the gender expectations and roles of a child may differ depending on their age. It is important to keep in mind that reintegration can provide space for gender-transformative programming that seeks to actively address and dismantle harmful gender norms, thereby promoting gender equality in post-conflict societies.

Masculinities

Masculinities are embodied differently across cultures and individuals, but there are dominant, overarching forms of masculinities that normatively define manhood, referred to as hegemonic masculinities. The concept of hegemonic masculinities has been critiqued for its rigid understanding of masculinities, but it is more broadly utilised in the literature to reference expectations of how individuals should perform their gender identity, and it defines the set of behaviours that the individual performance of gender identity is measured against. How masculinities may be embodied can depend on intersecting identities of an individual, including, *inter alia*, their age, sexual orientation, and marital status.[105] United Nations Women has adopted the terminology of *patriarchal masculinities* instead of hegemonic masculinities to reference "those ideas about and practices of masculinity that emphasize the superiority of masculinity over femininity and the authority and power of men over women."[106]

During armed conflict, processes of "militarization requir[e] the production of different heterosexual violent masculinities" that value violence, killing, and protection.[107] These masculinities are linked to those in peacetime that prioritise the dominance of males and subordination of females, including within the home. Theorisations of masculinities may differ depending on the sociocultural context:

> "In societies where social choice and mobility are far more restricted and cultural assumptions about gender roles and expectations are far more deeply entrenched and immovable, conceptions of manhood may be more rigid and cultural differences as to familial role and communal roles may need to be integrated more fully into the analysis."[108]

Militarised masculinities are often understood as heightened forms of masculinities, where the "strictures against femininity and homosexuality are especially intense and in which physical strength and aggressiveness are paramount."[109] This creates a military environment that associates manhood with violence and aggression, and children are influenced to aspire to and abide by these masculinities through processes of socialisation and the normalisation of violence. Critically, "conflicted societies can mummify highly gendered role expectations for men and women from early childhood in ways that are quantifiably more intense than in societies not experiencing communal violence [and in conflicts driven by ethnic or religious hatred], the overlay of 'othering' that accompanies the construction of the social and masculine self is profoundly linked to the reproduction of violence through the generations."[110]

Males and females associated with armed forces and armed groups are understood in relation to notions of militarised masculinities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, male soldiers would "recast women soldiers as either 'masculine,' or as unworthy, devalued feminine," highlighting how gender roles and expectations shift within conflict to align with the perpetration of violence.[111] Masculinities were further weaponised as a justification for committing sexual violence, and these justifications emerged, for example, from a desire to fulfil the so-called physical needs of men and from the climate of normalisation of violence.[112]

Yet, for females, this masculinised environment can provide space to reconstruct their identity and assume roles that are more traditionally associated with males. In Colombia, some girls chose to join armed groups as a form of security from violent and oppressive family situations that upheld gender discrimination, while others experienced greater coercion due to the proximity of armed violence. Joining armed groups allowed them to reconstitute their identity and assume roles and responsibilities that provided an illusory sense of equality with males, as both males and females held the same duties.[113] These experiences often empowered girls in post-conflict situations, as they learned "that they have the same capabilities as men [which] gave them the determination to build a new life and a consciousness of being subjects of law."[114]

The dominance of militarised masculinities in armed conflict influences transitions to civilian life, as it "poses complex issues for undoing violence, for mainstreaming gender equality, and for remaking societies that have been fractured and deeply divided."[115] Reintegration programmes can not only serve to deconstruct these masculinities, but also to represent children of all gender identities as equally respected community members.[116] Understanding how these militarised masculinities present themselves in a given conflict situation and in relation to existing cultural and gender norms within a society can help guide the development of reintegration programmes that do not exacerbate harmful and violent behaviours and norms.

> "In both conflict-affected and peaceful environments, violent masculinities and femininities are shaped by socially constructed and perpetuated norms related to the use of violence. Understanding the motives for violence, social influences, and socialization into the use of violence is necessary so that reintegration programmes can be designed to identify and break the patterns that increase the likelihood of falling victim to and/or perpetrating violence. When planning for reintegration support […] practitioners should consider how gender roles may be renegotiated and how different population groups may participate equally in all programming."[117]

Addressing masculinities in conflict and post-conflict situations, including reintegration programmes, should further consider that "institutional cultures of key humanitarian actors are often highly masculinized, both in the sense of being male-dominated as well as being characterized by ways of operating that are often associated with particular forms of masculinity, such as hierarchical control-and-command structures [and] a sense of action-oriented urgency with little space for deliberation."[118] The ways in which organisations may strive to address institutional gendered inequalities, which can influence the types

of programming that are conceived of, designed, and implemented, have been embedded throughout the report recommendations.

Passivity and Presumptions of Victimhood

Gendered assumptions of the perpetration and experience of violence in conflict may portray girls as passive victims and boys as active, violent perpetrators. Assumptions of passivity and victimhood of girls strips them of their agency, dignity, and independence, and undermines their experiences and roles in armed conflict.[119] Similarly, this assumption obscures the victimisation of boys in armed conflict from consideration, particularly in circumstances where they are victims of sexual violence. This dichotomy, which constructs the notions of passivity and victimhood, further lacks a nuanced consideration of the experiences of violence against children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations. Underlying these gendered constructions are assumptions regarding children's agency.

> "The transition from victim to perpetrator was not a linear one and none of the children [in Sierra Leone] experienced the entire transition from victim to hardened perpetrator. Instead, it would appear that children continually drifted between committing acts of violence, and simultaneously being victims of violence by others."[120]

The language within the dualities of 'victim and perpetrator' and 'passive and agent' is particularly imbued with meaning as it implicitly references agency. Children, notably those in conflict situations, may be referenced as victims or perpetrators in situations "when their behaviour is in stark contrast to established and normative conceptions of childhood and youth, such as in the case of a number of categories of children deemed to be 'at risk', including 'underage criminals', 'child-soldiers', 'street children' and 'child-headed households.'"[121] The agency that children hold while occupying these positions is an "ambiguous agency" because it contradicts these normative conceptions of how children should behave.[122] Literature has addressed the ways in which programmes and interventions have differentially acknowledged and respected children's agency in these contexts, largely reflected in the shift from protecting the best interests of the child to both protecting these interests and upholding the right to participation.[123] Yet the roles of children who occupy these positions are often in "an unrecognized in-between social space between childhood and adulthood," where children perform roles and responsibilities of adults but are "excluded from the rights of adulthood simply because they are constricted by the legal definition of a 'child.'"[124]

Other notions of agency have been proposed to understand the experiences of children, including agency as continuum and interdependent agency. Agency as continuum recognises that children utilise their agency not only to fulfil expectations, but also to enact choice, both of which operate relationally between children, families, and communities. Interdependent agency recognises that children may exercise agency "in daily circumstances of life, in making ends meet, or by being involved in diverse livelihood strategies for collective existence," all of which may be connected to cultural or familial practices and gendered expectations.[125]

Conceptions of children's agency, particularly as they relate to passivity and presumptions of victimhood, influence how reintegration is conceptualised, understood, and implemented. Research in northern Uganda highlights how reintegration discourse centres on the child as an innocent victim. This guiding notion of innocence has "tended to deprioritize, or even dismiss, the experiences of war-affected people, in particular, people affected by atrocities committed by former child soldiers," including within their communities.[126] Narratives of innocence may prevail over the implementation of local accountability or restorative justice processes, including those that use traditional modes of thinking and healing, which can undermine the opportunities for children's meaningful reintegration into their communities and families by recognising and addressing harms and violence committed against them.[127] Narratives of innocence may further diminish considerations of how "innocent children were turned into fighters and into individuals who only knew how to live in a militaristic way" during armed conflict.[128]

Gendered understandings of these dualities and of agency can further limit the forms of violence that are considered and attended to in reintegration programmes. Assuming that girls are only victims of violence within armed forces and armed groups, particularly sexual violence, neglects an understanding of girls' pathways into armed forces and armed groups, including in situations where they report choosing to join to escape situations of instability, poverty, or violence. It further neglects a recognition of the roles and responsibilities that girls hold during armed conflict. Girls may be combatants and perpetrate violence, for example, or occupy supervisory roles with greater power.[129] Understanding the breadth of the trajectories of girls into and the experiences of girls in armed conflict contributes to the development of programmes that can respond to their relevant needs and vulnerabilities.

While boys are viewed as innocent, they can also be viewed as perpetrators of violence against persons of all ages. Positioning boys within this broad terrain inhibits a nuanced consideration of their experiences of violence during armed conflict, including sexual violence and that which can render them disabled.[130] Understanding victimhood apart from perpetration creates a "[dyad that is] not only conceptually inaccurate but [that also] stranglehold[s] what is known or unknown, and seen or unseen, as consent in the sociality of violent settings, and the possible antagonistic contestations of the subjugated."[131] Research in northern Uganda showed that while sexual violence against girls has been widely documented and discussed in the armed conflict, sexual violence against boys has received comparably little attention, despite research indicating that young boys were raped by both female and male commanders.[132] A focus on perpetration of sexual violence by boys at the expense of their victimhood and vulnerability to perpetration limits consideration of the violence they experienced.

Caught between victimhood and agency is the idea of victimcy, "a form of self-representation by which *agency* may be effectively exercised under trying, uncertain, and disempowering circumstances," whereby an individual may tactically navigate social landscapes by operating as a victim and by joining armed forces or armed groups (emphasis in original).[133] Agentic practices of children and youth may expose them to dangerous situations, even when practiced

as a tool of protection or self-empowerment.[134] As the trajectories of children into, and experiences of violence in, armed forces and armed groups demonstrate, children may enact victimcy as a form of survival in uncertain, war-torn environments. This has elsewhere been described as the "choiceless decisions" that females make in settings of coercion, even when those decisions require violence.[135]

Age is intimately connected to agency, passivity, victimhood, and gendered assumptions of these concepts. How a child is understood to navigate the continuum between passivity and agency, and between victimhood and perpetration, is in part dependent on their age. This poses questions for how programmes respond to older children or to persons demobilised as adults but recruited and used as children. Dominic Ongwen, a former child soldier and high-ranking officer of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, presents an exceptional instance of this blurred boundary. During his trial at the International Criminal Court, it was questioned "whether his victimhood ceased at any time during his captivity," whether "he, having been a victim kept under the keen watch of Joseph Kony and his spy network and sacred of spiritualism, transcend into a perpetrator," and whether he, "abducted at age 9 and having spent nearly 27 years in the vicious grips of the [Lord's Resistance Army], became an adult in terms of mind transformation."[136] No demarcation exists that indicates when a child victim may become a perpetrator, and an attempt to draw such demarcation becomes difficult in societies where concepts of childhood and adulthood do not align with the legal definition of children.

Passivity and presumptions of victimhood are thus emergent from gendered assumptions that call into question how agency and violence are understood in armed conflict and, as such, in reintegration programmes. Recognising these nuanced dynamics will allow practitioners to develop programmes that take into consideration the varied experiences of violence by children of all identities. Of notable importance is recognising that girls may have perpetrated violence, that boys are subjected to violence, and that communities and families may vividly recall violence committed against them by child soldiers. Excluded from these dichotomies is a consideration of children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations, who may mobilise their agency to navigate structures of heightened discrimination, stigmatisation, and violence, who may themselves perpetrate violence, and who may be subject to particularly brutal forms of violence resulting from structural gender inequalities. Lost within these conversations, too, is how concepts of agency, passivity, and victimhood may alter and expand as a child becomes older during armed conflict.

4.2. Documented Experiences of Children in Armed Conflict

Documentation reveals that children of all gender identities encounter a wide range of experiences in armed conflict, from abduction and detention to sexual violence and forced witnessing of violence. Children may also have multiple roles and responsibilities within an armed force or armed group, which requires inclusive access to services for reintegration programmes. These experiences occur alongside the loss of social support networks, disruptions

to education, and breakdown of infrastructure, which can impact the reintegration of children into their communities and families. Children may be subjected to repeated experiences of violence over a long period of time.

The following consideration of the experiences of children in armed conflict is not meant to be representative of the totality of harms committed against them, but rather illustrative of the diversity of such experiences for children of different ages, sexes, and gender identities. Understanding these experiences is critical to the design of inclusive and accessible reintegration programmes that can adequately respond to and address the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of all children.

Abduction and Recruitment

Trajectories of children into association with armed forces and armed groups exist along a "continuum of coercion" that highlights how even so-called voluntary recruitment is coercive in nature.[137] Under international law, voluntary child recruitment into armed forces may exist under limited circumstances when a set of safeguards is met, but recruitment into armed groups cannot be considered voluntary for children at any age.[138] International law further prohibits forced recruitment by armed forces or armed groups of children under eighteen years of age.[139]

Understanding trajectories of children into association with armed forces and armed groups supports the design of context-specific reintegration programmes that are responsive to conflict dynamics. While such programmes should recognise the agency of children in making decisions about their life, they should also recognise that children may face vulnerabilities because of their economic stability, safety, or developmental stage that influence their capacity to make rational decisions. For example, children may be unable to understand the implications of 'voluntarily' joining an armed force or armed group, such as mortality.[140]

Factors that drive children to 'voluntarily' join armed forces or armed groups are often mutually reinforcing. Children may be in search of status, power, or protection, including due to violent or economically unstable situations in the home, and may join armed forces or armed groups as a survival strategy. Social norms within the family or community may promote, support, or encourage participation, or children and their families may perceive association to guarantee security or survival. Children may also join armed forces or armed groups to seek revenge, defend their communities, or support the agenda of an armed force or armed group.[141] Research further shows that armed groups may use ideology, including through the use of misinformation or indoctrination, to promote 'voluntary' recruitment.[142]

Gender dynamics can also influence drivers of 'voluntary' child recruitment. For boys, joining an armed force or armed group may be perceived as a symbol or performance of manliness, while for girls, joining an armed force or armed group may allow them to contradict traditional cultural and gender norms and attain a sense of power. Girls are also more likely to report joining armed forces or armed groups due to past experiences of sexual abuse or victimisation.[143] In Nepal, for example, girls reported joining the Community Party of Nepal—Maoist to avoid being subjected to child marriage or marital rape.[144]

Children may be deliberately targeted for recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups through abduction, or they may be trafficked into armed groups.[145] Abduction has been documented across several conflict situations, including in recent years in, *inter alia*, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Aran Republic, and Yemen.[146] Children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities are vulnerable to abduction. In Colombia, the United Nations verified that a child as young as three years old was forcibly recruited.[147] Research shows, however, that boys are particularly vulnerable to both abduction and recruitment.[148] Some armed forces or armed groups use violent indoctrination practices after abduction or recruitment to ensure the loyalty of the child. Documentation shows that such indoctrination practices have been used, for example, by the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda and nearby countries.[149]

Children Born of Sexual Violence

Children born of sexual violence in conflict experience immediate, enduring, and intergenerational risks and harms that threaten their autonomy and security, including physical injury, psychological trauma, neglect, and infanticide. These risks and harms are rooted in social and cultural stigmatisation and, in some cases, emerge from the perception that children remain affiliated with armed forces or armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, after release or that they represent the "next generation of an armed political, ethnic, or religious movement."[150]

The Paris Principles recognise explicitly children born of sexual violence in conflict and the need for their protection:

> "Many girls give birth during or after their time with an armed force or armed group; the surviving children are likely to face numerous child protection problems, so other specific programmes should be developed which seek to address the particular nature of the challenges faced by these children as infants and as they grow up. They are likely to suffer from health problems, neglect, rejection and abuse or there may be custody battles with the father or his family trying to reclaim the child. The legal status of these children according to both domestic and international law is likely to be unclear. Primarily, the state where the child currently resides has responsibility for ensuring the best interests of the child are protected. This will include registration at birth or as soon as possible afterwards, the child's right to identity, a nationality and its family and right not to be discriminated against."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.7

The operational handbook further notes that these children may be a source of shame for their mothers or rejected by communities and families, have difficulty integrating if they

learned the language of their captors if born in captivity, have limited to no information about their families to aid in tracing or reunification, and face barriers in constructing their identity, with repercussions for their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.[151] Monitoring their needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences is difficult due to several barriers, including the general underreporting of conflict-related sexual violence and the fear that a pregnancy would endanger the safety of the mother and child due to their potential perceived or actual affiliation with an armed force or armed group. Estimates collected by the United Nations suggest that between 2,000 and 5,000 pregnancies resulted from sexual violence during the genocide in Rwanda; upwards of 8,000 pregnancies resulted from forced pregnancy following abduction by the Lord's Resistance Army to replenish forces in northern Uganda; upwards of 20,000 pregnancies resulted from sexual violence during the civil war in Sierra Leone; and thousands of other pregnancies have resulted from sexual violence in other conflict situations.[152]

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, documentation shows that many of the children born of rape and forced pregnancy were impacted by various forms of physical and psychological trauma. The nature of conception and the environment of collapsed infrastructure, for example, led to increased risks during the birthing process and increased rates of disability among these children. Reports also documented cases of extreme physical violence against these children, including infanticide, as well as abandonment and abuse. In some cases, family members harboured feelings of disgust and rejected the child: one child, for example, was forced to introduce himself as, "I am the product of my mother's shame."[153]

Similarly, children born of sexual violence perpetrated during the internal armed conflict in Peru were at risk of abortion and infanticide, often a response to "a desire to spare [children] the violence of memory—and to spare their mothers these memories of violence."[154] Harmful naming practices labelled children who did survive: *los regalos de los soldados*, the soldier's gifts, *hijo de nadie*, nobody's child, *chatarra*, stray cat, and *chiki*, danger. In Quechua-speaking communities, *chiki* was used as a term to warn others that something bad is imminent or should be avoided, including that there have been signs of an enemy attack. This naming practice is thus an embodiment of stigmatisation that labels a child as a danger to society, as a person to be avoided, and as an extension of the enemy.[155] Some mothers expressed concerns that their children would one day seek to exact revenge. A quotation from the truth commission reflects this concern: "I thought that inside me, the product of all that [detention and rape], so many of them [soldiers]—it will be a monster. Oh, so many of them abused me! I thought I had a monster inside. What kind of thing could it be? What was growing inside of me?"[156]

In northern Uganda, abducted girls held various roles in the Lord's Resistance Army, including as so-called wives to commanders. Forced marriage was used to replenish the armed forces and girls were "forced to bear children before their reproductive system had matured," leading to many girls becoming mothers after repeatedly suffering sexual violence.[157] Conversations with children born of sexual violence while in captivity revealed that while captivity "was reported as profoundly debilitating and horrific, the post-war period was regarded by [these children] as equally, if not more debilitating."[158]

Family and community members severely stigmatised these children, viewing them as dangerous "rebel [children] with a bush mentality" who would "infect [others] with the spirits in [their] head."[159] Children also experienced verbal, physical, and sexual violence, including beatings by their family, due to their identity and former affiliation with the Lord's Resistance Army.[160] One mother reported that her child had permanent scars on his back from being beaten with a stick within the home. Harmful naming practices contributed to the visibility of this shame.[161]

Children also faced considerable legal challenges. In northern Uganda, the persistent absence of biological fathers, who either remained in the bush, abandoned the biological mothers and their children, or died, have negative implications for children who no longer have claims to a paternal clan. Acholi tradition also permits the inheritance of land from fathers to their sons, but boys in captivity cannot make claims to their traditional land, leading to economic marginalisation and physical isolation, exacerbating other forms of material deprivation.[162] Children face barriers, for example, to attaining an education due to limited financial support, eating because families may withhold food, and receiving medical care because families may withhold care or lack financial support.[163] Yet interviews have revealed that not all families will stigmatise and reject children.[164]

Experiences of these children are further influenced by their age, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and actual or perceived gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, and clan or tribal affiliation. Additional vulnerabilities may also arise for children who are born to mothers that have died or are disabled from conflict or childbirth. Children may lack birth registration or identification or be rendered stateless. In situations where reparations are available, children may not be entitled to receive them due to their non-recognition as victims or survivors. Risks to physical security and health include food insecurity, homelessness, starvation, and suicide. Children may also be at risk of radicalisation; recruitment to armed forces, armed groups, or criminal organisations; and trafficking in persons.[165]

> "All children, regardless of the circumstances of their conception, have the same rights pursuant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights are indivisible and universal."[166]
>
> Pramila Patten, *Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict*

Despite documentation and knowledge of these risks and harms across regional and conflict situations, these children typically remain excluded from reintegration programmes that could otherwise address their needs through the provision of services and, in some cases, reparations. This exclusion presents a substantive and deeply consequential protection gap in direct contravention of human rights treaties demanding for protection through the provision of such support.[167] Concerningly, while these children are referenced in guidance on reintegration, these references are usually limited to a consideration of the specific needs and vulnerabilities experienced by their mothers. This can translate to the development of programmes that lack of the capacity to identify and support these children.

Combat and Intelligence

Children may take a direct part in hostilities, including combat and intelligence roles. Contrary to common depictions of the roles and responsibilities of children associated with armed forces or armed groups, children of all gender identities may hold combat and intelligence roles. Documentation has shown, for example, that girls held combat or military roles in conflicts including, inter alia, Colombia, El Salvador, Eritrea, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and Uganda.[168]

Armed groups may operate separate units specifically for children. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone reportedly maintained Small Boys Units (SBU) and Small Girls Units (SGU), which were headed by 'wives' of commanders:

> "The SBU were made up of boys aged 6–15 used primarily for scouting to prepare attacks and food raids, but were dispatched to execute some of the most violent killings and mutations. The SGU were made up of similarly aged girls and were used primarily for raiding villages and spying, although they too were sent to fight and commit atrocities. In some cases, commanders' 'wives' used loot to mitigate abuse by the SBU or to reward them for not abusing the girls within the compound. In other cases, they could order punishment of the SBU or SGU for 'disrupting life in the compound.'"[169]

This anecdote reflects the range of responsibilities attached to combat and intelligence roles for children. It was also reported in Sierra Leone that children served as bodyguards, including for captive 'wives' of commanders, with one report documenting that a boy as young as six years of age performed bodyguard duties. Intelligence roles in Sierra Leone were often fatal, and girls were subjected to sexual violence in these positions as they were instructed to have sexual intercourse with men of other armed forces or armed groups to gather information.[170]

Combat roles of children in armed conflict may require the perpetration of brutal violence and can result in disabling injuries. Children have reportedly been used on the frontlines of armed violence, including to shield adult fighters from fire.[171] Children may also be selected for particular roles due to their gender identity. Boys, for example, may be selected as suicide bombers in contexts where they have greater access to the public, while girls may be selected as suicide bombers to exploit their assumed innocence or because they are perceived as less valuable.[172] Children may hold multiple roles in addition to their duties in combat and intelligence. One girl who was a fighter with the RUF in Sierra Leone at fifteen years of age reported that it "was better to be a fighter and the 'wife' of a common soldier because you could protect yourself with your own weapon, you had access to food and loot, and your chances of escaping were greater, unlike captive 'wives' of commanders who were closely guarded with little chance of escape."[173]

As this documentation shows, girls can hold roles and responsibilities in armed conflict that contradict gender and social norms and that may provide them with a sense of power. That children of all gender identities hold combat and intelligence roles in armed conflict has gender-

sensitive implications for reintegration programmes. Girls should not only be categorised as dependants or victims in relevant programmes, but also as combatants, which can increase the number of programmes available to them. Reintegration programmes should consider that girls can experience barriers to reintegration relating to the return to traditional gender and cultural norms and to community stigmatisation, marginalisation, and rejection of girls perceived as transgressing these norms during the armed conflict.[174] Programmes should also seek to be inclusive of children with disabilities, including those who acquired injuries during the conflict.

Detention

Children may be detained during or after armed conflict, and they are commonly detained for alleged or actual association with armed groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations. In contravention of international juvenile justice standards, detained children are often prosecuted. Prosecution may occur for actual or alleged association with armed groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, which does not consider the best interests of the child, the international standards delineating when prosecution may be appropriate for children, or the coercion inherent to children's pathways into association.[175]

Detention delays or prevents children from receiving necessary services to support their wellbeing or transition to civilian life. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that punitive approaches to children's association have "lasting consequences for the development of the child [and] a negative impact on the opportunities for social reintegration, which in turn may have serious consequences for the broader society."[176]

> "The increase in children detained in the context of armed conflict represents a worrying departure from the principle that children involved in armed conflict are entitled to rehabilitation and reintegration."[177]

Children may be apprehended because they appear to be of fighting age, which suggests that children of certain ages may at times be more vulnerable to detention. Children may also be apprehended because their communities or families are perceived as supporting opposition forces or have been associated with armed groups. Once detained, children suffer horrific violence, including torture and sexual violence to coerce confessions, and often have no legal recourse or assistance available to them to mitigate the abuses or the dangerous and unhealthy conditions of detention settings.[178]

In Iraq, children were detained for alleged association with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and reported confessing to end the torture, including beatings, electric shocks, and pain positions. Children were convicted in unfair trials that often did not consider the pathways of children into association or their level of involvement with the armed group designated as a terrorist group by the United Nations. Children were also subject to deplorable conditions for alleged association with Boko Haram in Nigeria, with children as young as five being detained, as well as babies and infants detained with their mothers. In Somalia, children prosecuted in military courts for acts relating to Al-Shabaab have received death sentences.[179]

Girls may be detained for their alleged or actual association with an armed group or as a form of punishment in response to participation with an armed group by a male relative, as well as to gain information on male relatives or fracture bonds between communities and families.[180] Boys are often detained for their alleged or actual association to or connection with an armed group. In detention settings, persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations may be targeted directly for sexual violence if they are perceived to be transgressing social and cultural norms.[181] Sexual violence in detention settings may amount to torture, and it can be perpetrated at any point in the process: during capture, arrest, admission, interrogation, transfer, or body searches.[182] Since the majority of children detained are boys, they are disproportionately vulnerable to sexual violence in detention settings.[183]

Gender-sensitive implications of detention require that practitioners recognise the overrepresentation of boys in detention settings and provide services that can support their rehabilitation after surviving torture and violence. Practitioners should also analyse whether detention creates additional barriers to reintegration, including community perceptions of formerly detained children. When engaging with children who have been detained, practitioners should advocate for and promote international juvenile justice standards.[184]

Note on terrorism

Terrorism is not addressed herein given the differential legal frameworks relating to release and reintegration from armed groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations. It is important to address, however, the intersection between terrorism, detention, and vulnerability for children, as the "security response to terrorism raises protection challenges for children. Children who are stuck in the middle of counter-terrorism operations are often killed or maimed. Those who survive are usually arrested and detained for being allegedly involved with" armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations.[185] Children in detention are then subject to violations of their rights. This approach contradicts the treatment of children primarily as victims.

Disabilities

> Association with armed forces or armed groups frequently results in children acquiring a disability. The marginalisation and disempowerment which a child with a disability may face in a stable situation can be exacerbated for [a] child formerly associated with armed group or force.
>
> Paris Principles, 7.50

Persons with disabilities, including those who become disabled in the course of hostilities and human rights violations, are disproportionately impacted by armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies.[186] When discussing the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of persons with

disabilities, it is critical to use rights-based approaches as opposed to the medical model of disability, which undermines the agency, autonomy, and dignity of persons with disabilities and "focuses exclusively on the impairment of the person and reflects a paternalistic approach."[187] In line with the rights-based approach, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes a broad definition of disability:

> "Recognizing that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."
>
> *Preamble*, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
>
> "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."
>
> *Article One,* Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Children with disabilities in conflict and post-conflict situations includes children with preexisting conditions as well as children who acquired a disability during or after the conflict. Children may be directly injured during the conflict due to violence perpetrated against them, such as physical or sexual violence. Children also sustain a greater number of blast injuries than adults and are more likely to be severely or fatally injured from such injuries.[188] Children are at an increased risk of potentially fatal injury due to unexploded and abandoned weapons, including landmines and unexploded ordnance. These weapons may be located where children live, play, or perform household duties.[189]

The breakdown of infrastructure or denial of humanitarian access can lead to chronic health conditions, like malnutrition, among children.[190] Children may also experience a worsening of an existing disability, or development of a secondary acquired disability. In addition to injury, children with disabilities are also at risk of being killed: armed groups such as Al-Qaeda, for example, have also been reported to recruit children with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, to carry out suicide bombings.[191]

Research has documented that children with disabilities, especially girls, are increasingly vulnerable to sexual violence. In fact, existing research documents that girls with disabilities are at significantly higher risks of experiencing violence, including sexual violence, due to the intersection of their gender identity and disability status, suggesting that they are more vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict situations.[192] Girls may be particularly vulnerable due to the perception of girls with disabilities as desexualised and therefore virgins, which places them at risk for so-called 'virgin rape.' Children with disabilities who are separated, abandoned, or rely heavily on others for support may also experience heightened vulnerability to sexual violence. Children who may be of the legal age of consent may be otherwise unable to consent due to

their disability and may be taken advantage of as a result. Sexual violence may also lead to disabling injuries among children of all gender identities, including from reproductive injuries and genital mutilation, and children with disabilities may be subjected to forced sterilisation. Babies and infants may also become disabled due to complications in childbirth that are not easily addressed in conflict and post-conflict situations.[193]

Note on data limitations

Due to challenges in obtaining data on children with disabilities, it is unknown the number of grave violations committed against children with disabilities and how age, sex, gender identity, and disability status interact in conflict situations, including to inform the design of sustainable reintegration programs.[194] Literature does document certain disabilities among children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, including psychological trauma and sexually transmitted diseases and infections. Age, sex, and gender identity may influence these and other experiences by, for example, impacting the ways in which injuries can temporarily or permanently disable a child, such as with respect to reproductive capacity or stunting.

Forced Perpetration and Witnessing of Violence and Atrocities

> "Once on the frontlines, this process of brutalisation continues as children are repeatedly obliged to commit abuses, including murder and rape, against civilians and enemy soldiers. Some have been made to kill their own families, while others have been made to engage in cannibalistic or sexual acts with the corpses of enemies killed in battle. Children are often given drugs and alcohol to cloud their emotions as they carry out these crimes."[195]

Armed forces or armed groups may force children to either perpetrate or witness acts of brutal and extreme violence, including violence against their own communities and families. Such experiences traumatise children involved in these forced acts of violence, as well as other victims of and witnesses to these acts. Communities and families may find it particularly difficult to support the reintegration of children who have been forced to perpetrate violence, and they may not recognise the coercive nature of such perpetration.

Forcing children to perpetrate or witness violence fulfils several aims for armed forces and armed groups. Research has illustrated, for example, how armed groups force armed actors to perpetrate gang rape as a form of combatant socialisation, which contributes to "communicating norms of masculinity, virility, brutality, and loyalty" and socialises children into armed groups by creating intragroup bonds based on shared experiences of traumatisation.[196] Younger children may be particularly susceptible to this form of violence, which is in line with previous work on the susceptibility of children to violent socialisation processes because of their desire to align with the new norms of armed groups once they are isolated from prior social groups.[197]

Instances of forced perpetration of violence across contexts have revealed other motivations for forcing children to perpetrate violence. In the Lord's Resistance Army, both girls and boys were forced to beat, cut, and kill family members to help children "bind to the group, reduce their fear of killing, and discourage disobedience."[198] Forced perpetration may also be a tool of humiliation. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, documentation shows that fathers and sons were forced to anally rape one another at gun point in detention settings as a form of humiliation.[199]

Children may be selected by armed forces or armed groups because of their age and their vulnerability to manipulation. This is particularly true of younger children, including girls who may be more obedient.[200] In northern Uganda for example, girls, including girls who were mothers, were forced to kill relatives and schoolmates.[201] Episodes of forced violence call into question the dichotomy of victimhood and perpetration by emphasising how individuals may be victimised through the process of being forced to perpetrate violence. While the so-called 'perpetrator' is not passive in committing the violence, the action occurs within a coercive environment that also victimises the perpetrator.[202] Practitioners should recognise how forced violence can traumatise the child who is committing, but also subjected, to the act. This will inform services that not only provide psychosocial support to children who are forced to perpetrate violence, but also to communities, families, and other children who are victims of forced perpetration.

Witnessing brutal violence can also traumatise children, and this may be particularly true for children who witness violence perpetrated against their family members. The literature has referenced this experience as "secondary torture" and, in the context of males forced to watch the rape of female relatives, as "stemming from the manipulation of gender-based roles and identities as a form of psychological warfare."[203] The International Criminal Court Office of the Prosecutor Policy on Children has emphasised that children forced to witness violence are "direct victims of the crime," and that children in these positions may "experience a sense of powerlessness to protect their loved ones, distress about death or injuries, and fear that it may happen again." [204] Children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities may bear witness to such violence and should have access to necessary psychosocial support services during reintegration.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a deeply stigmatising and often invisible act of violence that has been perpetrated in conflicts across time and space: it is "war's oldest crime […] spanning all of history and geography, with no regional, religion, culture, or continent left unscathed."[205] The United Nations Secretary-General defines conflict-related sexual violence as referring to "rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict."[206] Acts of sexual violence can constitute atrocity crimes under international law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide.[207]

Documentation of conflict-related sexual violence has revealed considerable variation in its perpetration across and within conflicts, including in its forms, motivations, perpetrators, and victims and survivors. Sexual violence is not an inevitable form of violence in all conflicts, and it may be perpetrated to different degrees, at different points in time, and in different forms by the same actor or within the same country or conflict.[208] Both state and nonstate armed actors perpetrate sexual violence,[209] and armed groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations have utilised sexual violence as a tactic of terrorism, including the use of trafficking in persons as a source of financing and recruitment.[210] Contrary to prevailing binary understandings of perpetration, evidence has further shown that females are perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict and that males and persons of marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations are victims and survivors.[211]

Three categories of motivations for the perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence have been identified in the literature: opportunistic, strategic, and as practice. Opportunistic sexual violence is driven by individual motivations and desires, including when perpetrators take advantage of a culture of impunity and collapsed protection and response infrastructure resulting from the conflict.[212] Strategic sexual violence is the intentional use of sexual violence as a tactic of war to further an organizational or military policy, and it may be explicitly authorized or ordered by command.[213] Sexual violence as practice refers to contexts where sexual violence is not authorized directly but is either tolerated or not punished by commanders, creating a permissive environment for its perpetration that can be strengthened by socialization among peers and combatants.[214] Several conditions have also been linked to the restraint and perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence, including forced recruitment, resource constraints, and ideology.[215] Note these motivations are not mutually exclusive.[216]

Girls are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence: from January to December 2023, the United Nations verified 1,186 cases of sexual violence against children, 1,157 (98 per cent) of which were against girls.[217] The Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, for example, would abduct young girls and force them into 'marriage' with commanders. While commanders would sometimes wait until girls could menstruate before they became 'wives,' there are reports of girls as young as seven or eight years of age being forced into 'marriages.'[218] Older female adolescents were less likely to experience these forms of sexual slavery because they were perceived as potential carriers of sexually transmitted diseases and infections.[219] This reflects how vulnerability is connected to age within gendered practices of forced marriage. Younger children may also be more generally vulnerable to sexual violence for their presumed virginity.[220]

Reports of sexual violence against boys, including men, is in part severely limited due to the influence of hegemonic and militarised masculinities, which create a taboo around male victimisation.[221] Sexual violence perpetrated against boys is most commonly inclusive of rape and sexual mutilation, including castration in detention settings and enslavement, and is often perpetrated as a tool of humiliation. Sexual mutilation has been documented extensively

against males, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but it is often perceived as torture as opposed to sexual violence.[222] An inability to label and recognise this violence as constituting sexual violence contributes to the shame and stigmatisation directed against male victims. Another example of sexual violence perpetrated against boys is bacha bazi, a violent practice in Afghanistan that has existed for over a century. It references the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys for the gratification and entertainment of adult males, and the practice has been linked to the Afghan military and police, which existed prior to the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 2021.[223]

That girls and boys experience sexual violence during armed conflict has gender-sensitive implications for reintegration. During reintegration, children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities need access to sexual and reproductive health care services. Children who are parents will require support for their children, including access to childcare.

Support Roles

Support roles for armed forces or armed groups may include, inter alia, roles as porters, cooks, messengers, or water collectors. Documentation shows that both girls and boys perform support roles during armed conflict. While research is limited, documentation also suggests that some armed groups will relegate younger children to support roles. Children formerly associated with the Nduma Defence of Congo (NDC), for example, indicated that children younger than twelve years of age were used as porters to carry ammunition.[224]

Recognising that children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities may perform support roles for armed forces or armed groups supports the development of eligibility criteria for reintegration that is not based on gendered presumptions of involvement in armed conflict, such as the idea that only boys support armed forces or armed groups or that girls are only involved in non-combatant roles.

Technology

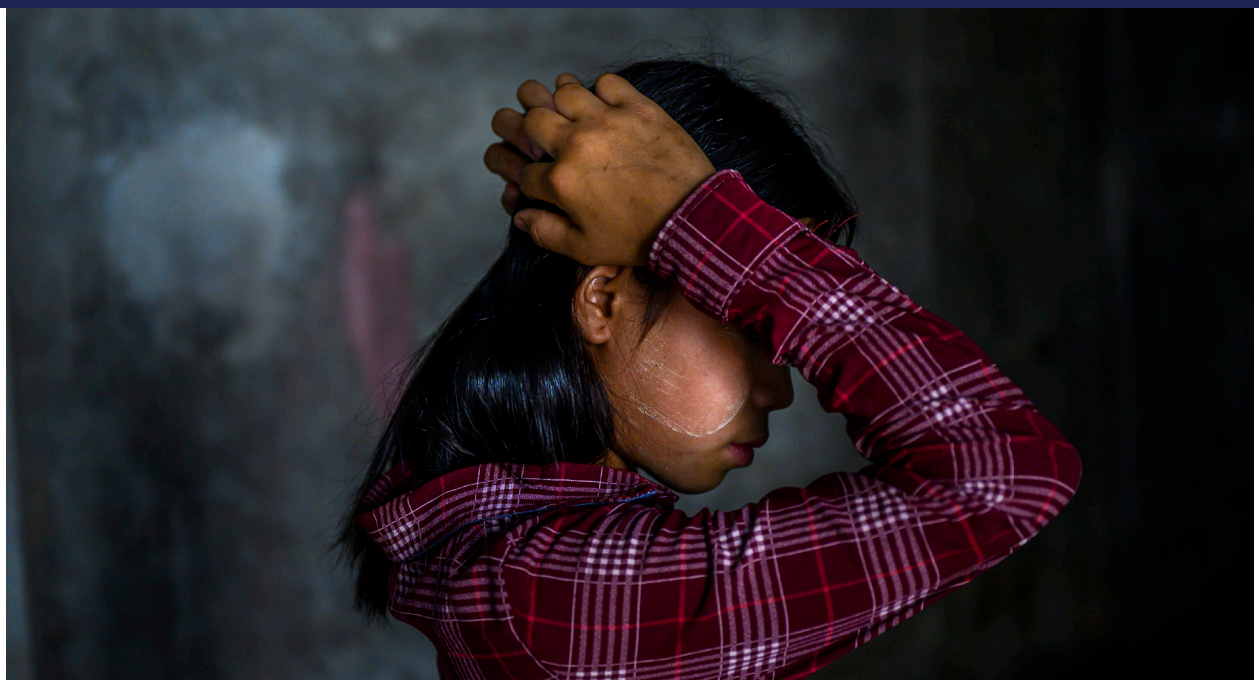
The rapid advancement of technology, including drones, unmanned vehicles, artificial intelligence, and other cyber capabilities, influences how actors initiate and wage conflict. These technologies can have harmful consequences for children through the indiscriminate effects of civilian casualties, targeting of public infrastructure, and dissemination of misinformation and disinformation.[225] Technology also has the potential to transform the recruitment and use of children in conflict and, by extension, the gendered experiences of children. As conflicts evolve, practitioners along the spectrum of reintegration should consider the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children who may be affected by or operate existing, new, and emergent technologies. This consideration should include attention to whether there are gendered patterns in the operation of technologies that may disproportionately impact children of certain gender identities. Practitioners may also need to be particularly aware of the potential for adverse mental and psychosocial harm.[226]

Violence against Persons of Marginalised Gender Identities and Sexual Orientations

Information on the specific experiences of children with marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations in armed conflict is limited due to taboo, discrimination, stigmatisation, and marginalisation, which not only fuels fear of reporting but also increases the negative consequences of disclosing violence, particularly in countries or areas where same-sex conduct or gender nonconformity is criminalised. Experiences of persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations generally can help guide an understanding of the experiences of children to inform development of inclusive and sensitive reintegration programmes.

Documentation of violence against persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations during armed conflict reveals several reasons for its perpetration. Armed forces or armed groups may use social and morality-based campaigns to impose homogeneity on societies or rid societies of persons whose identities are deemed immoral or unacceptable. Violence may also be used intentionally as part of a strategy to attain popular support for an armed force or armed group from the civilian population. Militarisation of society, including the increased use of security checkpoints, can reveal an individual's identity through information obtained on mobile phones or official documentation placing them at an increased risk of violence due to obtained information about or visibility of their marginalised identity. Violence may also be perpetrated against children as so-called 'corrective' rape

Persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations may also take part in resistance movements, leading to armed forces or armed groups viewing them as a threat. Alternatively, laws criminalising same-sex conduct or gender nonconformity may be used as a basis to detain persons suspected of this conduct, or these persons may be detained arbitrarily. The conflict situation may even provide an opportunity for individuals to act out their own personal biases, and violence may be heightened in situations where perpetrators perceive justice mechanisms during and after conflict to be inaccessible. Yet this violence may also not be specific, as conflict-related violence can be used indiscriminately against everyone to strategically terrorise and subdue a population.[227]



5. CHILD-INCLUSIVE, GENDER-RESPONSIVE REINTEGRATION

Reintegration is a complex process requiring long-term investment by States and coordination with local and national actors to ensure its sustainability. When reintegration is inclusive and tailored to the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds, it has the capacity to support children as they return to their communities and families, form new identities as civilians, recover from the abuses, harms, and violence suffered during armed conflict, establish livelihoods, and contribute to the promotion of peace and security. Reintegration programmes that do not consider the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of all children leave children unsupported in unstable and precarious situations—often the situations that made them vulnerable to recruitment in the first place.

Advancing a child-inclusive and gender-responsive approach to reintegration requires practitioners to consider the experiences of children in armed conflict and how these experiences may promote or inhibit reintegration into communities and families. It also requires practitioners to examine dynamics within the context of reintegration, including traditional gender and social norms, that may negatively influence how children can navigate opportunities provided in reintegration programmes and inhibit development of a protective environment for children.

5.1. Introduction to Reintegration Programmes

> "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of […] armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child."
>
> Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 39

Reintegration is understood as "the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income," and it is "essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level [and that] is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance."[228] Reintegration programmes for children, which are available to all children affected by conflict, specifically "includes family reunification, mobilizing and enabling the child's existing care system, medical screening and health care, schooling and/or vocational training, psychosocial support, and social and community-based reintegration. Reintegration programmes need to be sustainable and to take into account child's aspirations."

Reintegration programmes occur at individual, family, and community levels, and they have psychosocial, economic, political, and security considerations. Such programmes seek to empower individuals affected by conflict and build resilience to (re-)recruitment into armed forces and armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, or criminal organisations.[229] Strengthening resilience is important in conflict and post-conflict situations to "withstand, resist and overcome" violence, adversity, risk, and traumatic experiences, including those relating to armed conflict.[230] Reintegration not only involves persons formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups but also communities of return and other persons affected by conflict. The literature highlights that less resources tend to be allocated for reintegration, which can place the burden of reintegration disproportionately on individuals and communities.[231]

Children enter reintegration with different needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences. Children may have lost family members or caregivers, require short- and long-term medical and psychosocial support, be displaced within or outside their country of origin, or experience exacerbated vulnerability to abuse and insecurity owing to their identity. Children in reintegration programmes should be considered primarily as victims, as they may have joined armed forces or armed groups under duress, coercion, or manipulation. For children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, programmes should focus "on creating an enabling environment for their reintegration and on ensuring their meaningful participation throughout the reintegration programme, addressing the trauma they have endured, highlighting their self-worth and ability to contribute to society and peace, and countering drivers that resulted in their association with armed groups in the first place."[232]

The United Nations has provided the following guiding principles for the protection and inclusion of children in reintegration:

- "Children shall be treated as children and, if they have been associated with armed forces or [armed] groups, survivors of violations of their rights. They shall always be referred to as children.
- In any decision that affects children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. International legal standards pertaining to children shall be applied.
- States shall engage children's families to support rehabilitation and reintegration."[233]

Children may enter reintegration programmes through various pathways. Children may be connected to reintegration programmes after participating in formal release processes, identified within communities as children who informally exited armed forces or armed groups, or identified within communities as children affected by conflict, and they may also choose to spontaneously reintegrate, wherein they return to communities without receiving available formal assistance. When designing reintegration programmes, practitioners should analyse the motivations for children to choose different pathways to reintegration to ensure that programmes reach the greatest number of children in need. These motivations are often connected to the age, sex, and gender identity of the child. Girls, for example, may spontaneously reintegrate out of fear of being identified as formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups due to the stigmatisation and marginalisation it can produce.[234]

> "While the reintegration of children into civilian communities should wherever possible be carried out in ways that facilitate local and national reconciliation, it should always be preceded by a risk assessment including a cultural and gender analysis addressing issues of discrimination and should be based on the child's best interests irrespective of national considerations or priorities."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.31

Reintegration provides a critical opportunity to adopt gender-transformative programmes and promote gender equality. At all stages of assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, practitioners should take into account dynamics relating to age and gender that unintentionally or intentionally reproduce harmful gender norms and that may increase a child's vulnerability to stigmatisation and marginalisation. This ensures that reintegration programmes can advance their purpose of supporting the transition to civilian life, establishing sustainable livelihoods, and contributing to and promoting international peace and security.

Note on community-based reintegration and community violence reduction

In some situations, children will be reintegrating into communities that remain heavily militarised or controlled by armed groups. Depending on the best interests of the child and the need to prioritise family reunification, it may be difficult in these scenarios to separate children from armed groups and there may be barriers to their reintegration.

Gender identity and age will necessarily influence how children engage in programming in these environments, especially if their families or communities expect them to abide by harmful gender and cultural norms.

Community-based reintegration emphasises strengthening the protective environment for children and preventing their (re-)recruitment. Practitioners may also consider whether community violence reduction programmes, which can be implemented before, during, or after reintegration, would be useful. Community violence reduction can also be implemented in situations with high risks of recruitment into criminal organisations, militias, or gangs. In the Central African Republic, for example, community violence reduction and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes have been implemented. Engagement with local communities has enabled, for example, at-risk youth to participate in alternatives to recruitment and learn coping strategies.[235]

5.2. Operational Planning

Operational planning for reintegration requires a child-inclusive and gender-responsive approach at all stages that is contextually relevant and culturally sensitive, taking into consideration the dynamics of a given conflict and post-conflict situation. Assessments guiding operational planning should be conducted on a regular basis to ensure that child protection can respond to evolving conflict dynamics and security risks, as well as to facilitate linkages with existing and developing local and national programmes and initiatives that can support reintegration over the short- and long-term.

5.2.1. Child Participation

> "All stages of programme assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation activities to prevent the association of children with armed forces or armed groups, secure their release, provide protection and reintegrate them into civilian life should include the active participation of those communities concerned, including children. The views of children in particular, as well as the families and communities to which children return, should always be sought."
>
> Paris Principles, 3.14

> "[C]hildren affected by emergencies should be encouraged and enabled to participate in analysing their situation and future prospects. Children's participation helps them to regain control over their lives, contributes to rehabilitation, develops organizational skills and strengthens a sense of identity. However, care needs to be taken to protect children from exposure to situations that are likely to be traumatic or harmful."
>
> Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12

The right of the child to express their views, and have these views taken into consideration in accordance with the age and maturity of the child, is enshrined in the twelfth article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In its general comment no. 12, the Committee on the Rights of the Child provides guidance on the meaning and implementation of this right.[236] The Committee emphasises that "particular assistance may be needed for children formerly involved in armed conflict to allow them to pronounce their needs."[237] It is critical that practitioners take seriously the opinions and perspectives expressed by all children, including those within communities of return. When safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles, consultations may also involve organisations for children's rights, persons with disabilities, women, and youth.

Participation of children in programme assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation is central to appropriately identifying the needs, experiences, and vulnerabilities of children of different ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds and advancing the inclusion of perspectives that may be overlooked by adults. Yet participation can place children at considerable risks, including risks to their physical security such as reprisals by armed forces or armed groups.[238] Operational planning should therefore delineate safe and secure methods to encourage and ensure the full and meaningful participation of diverse groups of children, including those formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups and those within communities of return. Security risks may differ for children of different ages, sexes, and gender identities and may be influenced by the length of association with the armed force or armed group, among other factors. Existing guidance addresses ways to facilitate the safe and secure participation of all children.[239]

As such, clear identification of the risks of child participation must be identified prior to the facilitation of participation, including consultations with local actors. Prevailing guidance does not recommend child participation as an automatic component of operational planning given the potential for harm.[240] Practitioners may also consider receiving input from technical working groups on reintegration programme proposals.[241] If input is requested, then practitioners should ensure the technical working group includes experts on age-appropriate and gender-sensitive reintegration and reintegration for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable communities.

Child participation should be integrated into the assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation stages of all reintegration approaches and programmes. Since children affected by conflict, children in vulnerable situations, and their communities and families can participate in reintegration programmes, facilitating participation and consultations may be extensive. Practitioners may consider developing community child committees to provide a forum for community leaders and representatives, selected by children in the community, to facilitate participation, or developing children's committees across reintegration sectoral programming.[242]

Note on considerations for older children

Practitioners should consider supporting older children in engaging in available political opportunities for youth or adults, particularly for those turning eighteen during reintegration. "[Children] have political rights and should be heard in decisions that shape their future. Efforts should be made to ensure that children's voices are heard in local-level decision-making processes that affect them. Not only is this a rights-based issue, but it is also an important way to address some of the grievances that may have led to their recruitment (and potential re-recruitment). For children nearing the age of majority, having a voice in decision-making can be a key factor in reducing intergenerational conflict."[243]

Any such opportunities should focus on the contributions that older children can make to peacebuilding, rather than casting formerly associated children as a threat to societies that must be mitigated through reintegration programming.[244] Political engagement, when appropriate, should consider shifting power dynamics in the post-conflict situation, which may see children stripped of the power and responsibilities they had while associated with armed forces or armed groups. These power dynamics are particularly gendered and may be more pronounced for girls and children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations who return to communities with traditional gender and cultural norms. Children may also navigate new political identities during reintegration. Child soldiers in Nepal, for example, "characterized their reintegration process as being removed from a political agenda that had once animated their childhood," with one girl soldier referencing the betrayal she felt after "play[ing] a role in changing the structure of the ruling system of [her] country" and not being able "to continue with the vision that prompted [her] to join."[245] Inclusive and participatory political engagement may address these feelings, as well as feelings that political figures minimise the experience of the recruitment and use of children.[246]

For reintegration programmes, when an informed decision has been reached that child participation is safe, such participation may provide information on, inter alia, potential negative impacts of reintegration support to children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities; potential negative impacts of and solutions to shifting power dynamics, including as they relate to harmful gender and cultural norms; security risks for girls, boys, and children of marginalised gender identities; security risks for children who held different roles and experienced different forms of violence during armed conflict, including in relation to their gender identity; anticipated community responses and reactions to returning children of different ages, sexes, and gender identities; mechanisms for prevention of (re-)recruitment; mechanisms for children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, and disability statuses to access reintegration programmes; and mechanisms to ensure that specific groups of children, including girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, are not excluded from reintegration programmes.[247]

Participation can also support identification of protective measures, such as opportunities to reach children who held different roles and had different experiences in conflict; ways to use narratives and reintegration stories from children of different ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds to promote peace; and mechanisms to support reintegration without creating additional forms of stigmatisation.[248] It may also support identification of barriers to accessing reintegration programmes that differ based on age and gender identity, such as a lack of support for vulnerable children, including those with disabilities; lack of secure transportation; or lack of childcare.[249]

Reference Materials *Relating to Child Participation*
Action for the Rights of the Child (ARC) Resource Pack (2009)
African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child Guidelines on Child Participation (2022)
Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019)
Save the Children Building Peace with Children: Expanding Children's Participation in Peace Processes (2023)
Save the Children Guidance: Children's Consultations in Humanitarian Contexts (2023)
Save the Children Guidelines for Children's Participation in Humanitarian Programming (2013)
Save the Children Practice Standards in Children's Participation (2005)
Save the Children Strengthening Accountability to Children and Communities in Conflict Areas (2021)
Save the Children When We Are Asked, Not Questioned: Consultations with Children on the Move (2014)
Save the Children Norway A Compilation of Tools Used During a Thematic Evaluation and Documentation on Children's Participation in Armed Conflict, Post Conflict and Peace Building (2008)
Search for Common Ground Children, Youth and Conflict: An Introductory Toolkit for Engaging Children and Youth in Conflict Transformation (2009)
Search for Common Ground Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding (2014)
Search for Common Ground Youth-Inclusive Guide to Peace Mediation (2023)
United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12 on the Right of the Child to be Heard (2009)

5.2.2. Programme Analysis and Assessments

Reintegration support delivered through time-bound programmes "cannot match the breadth, depth, or duration of the reintegration process, which is part of local, national and regional recovery and development."[250] The information collection and assessment phases of operational planning are thus critical in determining reintegration programming that aligns with the specific needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds within the given conflict and cultural context. Informed data collection during reintegration "will elucidate the unique and varying needs, capacities, interests, priorities, power relations and roles of women, boys, girls, and non-binary individuals," thereby supporting the long-term efficacy of reintegration by ensuring all persons benefit.[251]

Developing reintegration programmes requires analyses and assessments such as situational analysis, risk assessments, and security planning, which will be tailored to the conflict dynamics of a given situation. Analyses and assessments specific to economic, social, and psychosocial reintegration will also be required. All data utilised in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of reintegration programmes should be disaggregated by age, sex, and disability status. Child-inclusive and gender-responsive approaches to design and implementation of analyses and assessments include, *inter alia*,

On preparation for organising human resources:

- *Include* staff who are specialised in child-inclusive and gender-responsive approaches and trained in appropriate communication techniques with children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities.
- *Include* male and female staff within teams planning and conducting analyses and assessments and include staff of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles.
- *Include* staff within teams planning and conducting analyses and assessments who are from diverse backgrounds, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles, including staff with disabilities or staff of marginalised ethnicities. For staff with disabilities, ensure that appropriate accommodations are in place to facilitate their full participation.
- *Address* with staff their potential biases relating to and assumptions about children formerly or presently associated with armed forces or armed groups that may negatively influence the planning and execution of analyses and assessments. Such biases and assumptions may include, for example, the belief that girls do not participate in combat roles during armed conflict.
- *Develop* a child safeguarding policy and code of conduct for all staff to mitigate the potential of abuse or exploitation of children and safeguard the protection of children throughout programming, and ensure all staff agree to uphold these policies, particularly in light of cultural or traditional norms that may contradict them.

- *Identify* partners and volunteers of diverse backgrounds within the community, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles.
- *Support* capacity building within communities when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles.

On preparation for gathering information and facilitating child participation:

- *Establish* and *uphold* child protection protocols as well as previously agreed-upon child safeguarding policies and code of conduct.
- *Ensure* participants understand that participation is voluntary and consent-based, and that consent can be revoked at any time.
- *Obtain* informed consent from children or from their parents or guardians, in line with their age and maturity.
- *Ensure* balanced representations of children of different identities and backgrounds, including, inter alia, age, gender identity, disability status, and ethnicity, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles.
- *Identify* and *reduce* barriers and risks to child participation, including ensuring accommodations for children with disabilities, such as safe and accessible transportation.
- *Identify* referral services for children who may indicate needing access to services or who disclose concerns during their participation.
- *Implement* safe and accessible complaint mechanisms for children to report abuse, exploitation, or violence committed on part of staff.
- *Ensure* that girls, boys, and children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations are separated when being interviewed.
- *Ensure* that female staff are available to interview girls, particularly for disclosures of sexual violence.

On preparation for implementing risk mitigation approaches:

- *Prioritise* the best interests of the child and advance humanitarian do no harm principles.
- *Identify* potential risks of analyses and assessments prior to their implementation. The Paris Principles Operational Handbook outlines the following potential risks to children, in addition to risks to communities and agencies:
    - Armed forces or armed groups deliberately attacking or targeting children, particularly those who have already been released or escaped.
    - Armed forces or armed groups deliberately recruiting more children.
    - Armed forces or armed groups hiding children to prevent their release.
    - Armed forces or armed groups informally releasing children to give the impression that they do not have children within their ranks, potentially limiting access to services and support.

    - Community members rejecting or targeting children due to perceived association with armed forces or armed groups.
    - Children experiencing an increased risk of re-recruitment or abuse, violence, or exploitation by authorities if their status as formerly associated becomes known.
- *Identify* risk mitigation measures.
- *Develop* security plans, which should be regularly updated.

On preparation for conducting analyses and assessments:

- *Ensure* that analyses and assessments are conducted using age-appropriate language.
- *Ensure* that appropriate accommodations are provided for children with disabilities, such as assistive listening systems and devices or sign language and oral interpretation.
- *Conduct* analyses and assessments in languages that children are more likely to understand, when possible, keeping in mind that children who are born into armed forces or armed groups may have learned the language of their captors.
- *Establish* monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning approaches to ensure that reintegration programmes are appropriately targeting children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, and backgrounds.
- *Include* indicators for gender, age, and disability status in monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning approaches, including those that measure ongoing risks of formal processes to see whether such risks have been mitigated.[252]

Risk monitoring during reintegration will need to include the risks experienced by children of different ages, sexes, and gender identities relating to (re-)recruitment and will need to develop strategies to capture children who have self-demobilised or informally exited armed forces and armed groups.

> "Preparation should include a strategy to meet the needs both of children who enter a release process ***and*** those who do not go through any kind of process but leave armed forces or armed groups and either return to their family and community or seek to integrate elsewhere."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.5

Note on informal exit from armed forces and armed groups

Planning for programmes that reach children engaging in informal release may include identifying processes and strategies that children are using for informal exit, developing processes to identify children who informally exit, estimating the number of children who may be informally exiting, identifying the age and gender profiles of children informally exiting, and determining the barriers to formal release and motivations for informal exit.[253] Keep in mind that these dynamics are likely to differ for children of differing ages,

sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds, so it is critical to apply an intersectional approach to understanding the various risks and motivations experienced by children. This will help inform the development of programmes that can reach all children either formally or informally leaving armed forces or armed groups. For example, girls may informally exit armed forces or armed groups because they fear stigmatisation upon returning to their communities and families.

Note on children born of sexual violence in conflict

While reintegration programmes are intended to address all vulnerable children, practitioners should additionally consider implementing special provisions to ensure that programmes are accessible for children born of sexual violence in conflict, who experience unique and heightened forms of vulnerability. This may include establishing processes to identify these children, including those who may have self-demobilised or may have been abandoned by or separated from their parents. Any such approach should only be implemented when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles.

Operational planning should analyse the benefits of different reintegration approaches, such as individual targeted support or community-based support, and components, such as economic and psychosocial reintegration.[254] Best practice indicates that a combination of individual and community-based support should be integrated into time-bound reintegration programmes.[255] Care must be taken to ensure that reintegration programme design does not result in the real or perceived privilege of or provision of rewards to children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups.[256] This can be done by providing reintegration opportunities to other children in the area, including other children affected by conflict, children in vulnerable situations, and children born of sexual violence in conflict.

> "Measures to secure the reintegration of children into civilian life should not stigmatise or make any negative distinction between children who have been recruited or used and those who have not, nor between children who have been recruited or used for temporary or short periods of time and those who have been recruited or used permanently or for longer periods of time. It is also detrimental to all conflict-affected children if other vulnerable children who have not been associated with armed forces or armed groups are placed at a disadvantage vis-à-vis those who have been so associated."
>
> Paris Principles, 3.3

Provisions will need to be adopted during reintegration to protect the identity of all children, including their identification as formerly associated with an armed force or armed group or the name of the armed force or armed group with which they were associated. Care should

be taken to ensure that the identity of children does not become visibly identifiable through participation in reintegration programmes. In northern Uganda, for example, one programme provided recognisable shoes to beneficiaries, meaning that "women who had such pairs of shoes were said to have been raped."[257] Integrated programmes can reduce the possibility for such marginalisation.

To uphold, respect, and promote the rights of all children, practitioners involved in various stages of reintegration programming may need to receive training and capacity development support on child-inclusive and gender-responsive approaches. This may be particularly important for reintegration programmes available to both children and adults. Training should also extend to communities, who may bear the burden of supporting reintegration programmes in the short- and long-term. Since women are often caregivers, this burden may be exacerbated for them, and training should extend to women within the community and among returnees "to provide support and specialized training on how to understand and cope with traumatized children."[258]

It is also important to develop an exit strategy for when time-bound reintegration programmes end, including measures for capacity building and ownership by local and national actors.[259] Actors who continue longer-term reintegration programming should have the necessary expertise relating to or receive training on the ongoing, diverse, and changing needs and vulnerabilities of children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities as they continue to develop and acquire new capacities. Follow-up mechanisms should be designed at the outset of operational planning to establish continued communication with reintegration participants and beneficiaries, facilitating the monitoring and evaluation of programmes to identify whether reintegration programmes have successfully supported transitions to civilian life.

Reference Materials *Relating to Operational Planning*
Child Protection Working Group Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit (2012)
Keeping Children Safe Safeguarding Children in Emergencies Toolkit (2012)
The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Competency Framework (2022)
The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups Programme Development Toolkit (2022)
The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019)
Paris Principles Operational Handbook Situation Analysis (2022)
Paris Principles Operational Handbook Risk Assessment, Security Planning, and Risk-Informed Planning (2022)

Paris Principles Operational Handbook Human Resources and Capacity (2022)
Paris Principles Operational Handbook Programme Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (2022)
Save the Children Feedback and Reporting Mechanism (2020)
Save the Children Situation Analysis Tool, Programme Guidelines on Addressing Recruitment and Use by Armed Forces (2018)
UNICEF Child Protection Resource Pack: How to Plan, Monitor, and Evaluate Child Protection Programmes (2015)
UNICEF Guidance on Risk Informed Programming (2018)
United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12 on the Right of the Child to be Heard (2009)

Of note, literature and evaluations currently do not address the needs, experiences, and vulnerabilities of persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations in reintegration programmes. Practitioners should consult with local, national, regional, international, or civil society organisations for persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations if they exist, and when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles, to understand culturally sensitive approaches to reducing the potential victimisation, harm, and vulnerability of children and create service referral networks. Practitioners should also be aware of any criminalisation of same-sex conduct or gender nonconformity in the context in which they are operating, as domestic legislation or local cultures and norms may limit or prohibit entirely safe engagement with persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations, including through data collection. In some circumstances, criminalisation "provides a justification for the arbitrary arrest of individuals on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity," which may put children at further risk of torture or ill-treatment, especially in conflict situations.[260] Critically, practitioners engaging with persons of marginalised gender identities or sexual orientations must abide by and guarantee strict confidentiality protocols for personal information and data.

Practitioners may consult existing research to understand generally the experiences of persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations in education, housing, medical care, and other sectors, as this research may illuminate potential barriers to address in programming. When safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles, practitioners should also use inclusive language so that these children are not de facto excluded from services, programmes, and guidelines.[261] As with participation, this requires understanding domestic legislation and local cultures and norms, as inclusive language may cause harm to persons of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations.

Children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations may also require specific safety measures to ensure they are not targeted for abuse or violence during their engagement in reintegration. Complaint mechanisms that are accessible to children in their language of understanding should be in place for prompt identification of risks or harms. Planning should also consider best practices developed to respond to forced displacement and humanitarian crises. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for example, developed guidance on working with persons of marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations in forced displacement, and this guidance addresses several operational protection risks, including the creation of safe environments for self-disclosure and provision of access to inclusive services and programmes. The guidance also addresses making accountability mechanisms inclusive and child-friendly, which involves the use of multiple and accessible communication formats and consultations to identify appropriate communication needs and preferences.

Reference Materials *Relating to Persons of Marginalised Gender Identities and Sexual Orientations*
International Rescue Committee When "We Know Nothing": Recommendations for Ethical Research and Learning with and for LGBTQI People in Humanitarian Settings (2021)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Need to Know Guidance: Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ+) Persons in Forced Displacement (2021)
UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration Training Package on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) and Working with LGBTIQ+ Persons in Forced Displacement (2021)

Note on children with disabilities

Practitioners should also incorporate the needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences of children with disabilities in programme analysis and assessment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are gaps in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in reintegration.[262] No child with disabilities should be denied access to reintegration programmes based on the belief that they have certain cognitive or mental impairments, and access to age- and gender-appropriate accommodations should be established as opposed to the creation of parallel processes that marginalise and segregate children with disabilities.[263] Diverse and individualised accommodations should be made available, when necessary, to respond to the range of disabilities present within society. Existing guidance further recommends a twin-track approach for programming, wherein programmes are made access to all children, including children with disabilities, alongside the development of interventions that address the specific needs of children with disabilities.[264] This ensures that children with disabilities are not segregated from other children affected by conflict while receiving support.

5.2.3. Eligibility Criteria and Child-Specific Provisions for Reintegration Programmes

> "The situation analysis required in planning for the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups should include careful attention to the circumstances of other war-affected children and families in the areas to which they will return."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.30

Eligibility criteria for reintegration programmes includes all children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, regardless of their age, sex, gender identity, or the nature of their former association. Eligibility also extends to other children affected by conflict and in vulnerable situations within communities and families of return. This may include, for example, children born of sexual violence in conflict. Processes should be implemented to help identify eligible children, including those who have informally exited armed forces or armed groups or have been excluded from formal release processes. Reintegration programmes may also be implemented in sites for internally displaced persons and refugees, and practitioners should ensure that these programmes are accessible to children of all ages, sexes, gender identities, disability statuses, and backgrounds. Child-specific provisions for reintegration programmes available to children and adults should recognise the full continuum of eligibility for children.

Child-specific provisions should additionally address differences in cultural perceptions of childhood and adulthood, which may influence the opportunities that children can pursue during reintegration programmes. Delineations between childhood and adulthood may not be clear, for example, for girls who are mothers or girls who are perceived to be sexually active but are not married. These girls may be perceived culturally as women and thus undertake roles expected of female adults. Yet girls may miss "developmental and cultural transitions" during armed conflict, with their experience of girlhood being "inverted and distorted."[265] Other cultural expectations that may define the perceived development of the child includes such factors as circumcision practices, and conflict situations of precarity may also force youth to take on adult responsibilities.[266] Reintegration programmes should recognise and address cultural expectations of children that may influence how children engage with available opportunities.

As with release, public information campaigns and other forms of communication about reintegration should be adapted to their audiences, including the use of child-friendly language or age-appropriate pictures and wording. Messaging should be inclusive of children of all gender identities, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles, to ensure they understand their eligibility for reintegration.

5.3. Economic Reintegration

Economic reintegration is central to the development of livelihoods, the "capabilities, assets (including both material and social assets) and activities required for a means of living. A

livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, and maintain or improve its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base."[267] Economic reintegration is shaped by a number of factors relating to the conflict situation: increased rates of mortality and disability, which can disproportionately impact vulnerable and marginalised populations; increase in informal, non-contractual, or unregistered work and illicit economies, which can disproportionately impact youth; and decreased social protections.[268]

Age, sex, and gender identity directly influence prospects of economic reintegration for children. Access to the labour market can be limited for children with low skill or education levels and no prior work experience, which is likely true for older children who joined or were recruited into armed forces or armed groups at a young age. Gendered divisions of labour within society can additionally limit opportunities for girls "because of a return to pre-conflict labour patterns, and because women are often associated only with informal work."[269] Labour opportunities will also differ in urban and rural areas, as certain skills acquired during armed conflict may have different value depending on the setting.[270] Children of different ages, sexes, and gender identities may thus experience different barriers to economic reintegration depending on their location.

Economic reintegration programmes should recognise the abilities and skills that children gained during armed conflict. This includes, for example, abilities and skills girls learn that contradict traditional gender and cultural norms, such as girls who held combat or intelligence roles or who exercised power over other children while so-called 'wives' of commanders. Importantly, such programmes should recognise that these abilities and skills may make girls "feel different, lost and alone—pushing them even more to the periphery because within the community they were expected to adhere to traditional gender roles and responsibilities."[271]

Child-specific provisions included in economic reintegration programmes generally should ensure that opportunities do not lead to the exploitation of children. At a farm in northern Uganda that offered an alternative form of reintegration support, for example, individuals reported exploitation of girls who were mothers and further concerns about sexual exploitation.[272] International Labour Organisation Conventions 29, 138, and 182 provide guiding principles to minimise the potential for exploitative environments.

5.3.1. Opportunity Mapping

> "An adequate technical analysis of the livelihood systems, market opportunities, and household economies in the places to which children are returning should be used to develop economically relevant training, alternative forms of education, and opportunities for economic reintegration."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.83.0

Economically, reintegration programmes must consider how to link training programmes with other forms of employment creation or support to entrepreneurship initiatives, which is aided by economic opportunity mapping.[273] Mapping can help to identify viable sectors of the economy with market-driven opportunities, especially given that many economies collapse in the wake of violence, armed conflict, and insecurity, which can affect the livelihoods and opportunities available to all persons affected by conflict.

Mapping analysis should ensure there is a level playing field between children who are reintegrating and children who are already present in the community, ensuring that equal opportunities are available to all children regardless of how they may be affected by the conflict.[274] Opportunity mapping can identify, for example, relevant access and cultural relationships to land and natural resources, as well as patterns of historical access to employment and labour market opportunities. It should further take into consideration the gendered division of labour within the given context, which is the "result of how society divides work between men and women according to what is considered suitable or appropriate to each gender."[275] Understanding the gendered division of labour will help to identify potential reintegration opportunities. Such opportunities should encourage non-traditional forms of employment, including those that build on skills learned or acquired during the conflict.

5.3.2. Education

> "Educational activities should take into account the children's lost educational opportunities, the age and stage of development, their experiences with armed forces or armed groups and the potential to promote psychosocial well-being, including a sense of self-worth. Children with disabilit[ies] should be included in educational activities with their peers."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.78

Armed conflict disrupts education trajectories for children and can exacerbate existing barriers to education for vulnerable children, including girls and children with disabilities. Education as a component of reintegration programmes may be implemented in countries where education infrastructure has been attacked or occupied for military purposes, that lack a well-functioning education system, and that have low rates of enrolment, particularly among girls. Yet education is a vital component of reintegration as it supports economic security, social reintegration, and the prevention of (re-)recruitment, and it also provides a sense of normalcy, safety, security, and peer support for children.[276]

Education can also allow children and youth "to see themselves as someone other than soldiers or victims. Educational or vocational programs foster an active means of overcoming the 'lost time' due to war; they may also help to 'normalize' life for returning child soldiers and allow them to develop an identity and a sense of self-worth separate from that of a soldier."[277] This is because education programmes provide an opportunity for children to develop a sense of

purpose and receive support from peers.[278] Not all children, however, will experience equal access to educational opportunities during reintegration.

Girls, for example, may be less likely to return to an education after their return, in part because they are less likely to receive an education more generally. Girls who are mothers have also been associated with an increased likelihood of not receiving an education, or of being at an increased likelihood of dropping out of or falling behind in programmes.[279]

Some girls in Sierra Leone were actively discouraged from pursuing an education. Practitioners believed that girls who were mothers, particularly those without husbands, should pursue skills training instead of education to earn an income. Skills training, however, was difficult to access due to a lack of available childcare. There was also a misperception that older girls were too old to gain an education. Beliefs regarding the value of education for children who are parents or older in age did not extend to boys.[280] Additionally, education programmes that require completing a formal release process may discriminate against girls, who often do not enter formal programmes.[281]

Children with disabilities may face additional barriers to education. Education may be inaccessible due to a lack of accessible education environments, assistive devices, trained staff, or inclusive programmes, and children with disabilities may face stigmatisation and discrimination. Girls with disabilities may experience compounded vulnerability and increased barriers to accessing educational opportunities.

Shorter-term education programmes may be appropriate for children who will not be reintegrating into the formal school system but need to acquire, *inter alia*, basic literacy skills, including those who may be under pressure to start families or need to support other family members.[282] This may provide an opportunity for girls, who are disproportionately impacted by these pressures, to access an education.

When teachers and counsellors are provided with appropriate training, education programmes can also equip children with coping techniques to mitigate negative psychosocial consequences of conflict. This may include training teachers on how to address sensitive topics or provide strategies to manage emotional responses.[283] Any such training should consider strategies that are appropriate given the age ranges of the children and that are sensitive to children of different gender identities and sexual orientations, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles. Practitioners must consider domestic legislation and local cultures and norms to understand whether such training would be unsafe and impracticable. If healing activities are incorporated into school environments, then they should be careful not to reproduce harmful gender norms.

If psychosocial support is to be provided in education programmes, including by teachers, then an established referral network should be accessible by educational staff to support children. Any such referral network should be inclusive of providers who can create safe and secure spaces for children of all gender identities. Children may experience stigmatisation in school

if they react with anger, aggression, or violence, and may be subject to name-calling from their peers.[284] In these situations, it may be helpful for teachers to be equipped with tools on nonviolent conflict resolution.

Reference Materials *Relating to Education in Reintegration Programmes*
Alliance for Child Protection for Humanitarian Action Education Interventions for [Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups] Technical Note (2023)
Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Guidance Note on Conflict Sensitive Education (2013)
INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises, and Early Reconstruction (2004)
International Rescue Committee Creating Healing Classrooms: Helping Children Cope After Crisis (2011)
Save the Children Safe Schools Common Approach Proposal (2020)
The MPHSS Collaborative Thriving Through Play: A Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Classroom Approach for Educators in Crisis-Affected Settings (2024)
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Education in Emergencies Handbook (2013)

5.3.3. Life Skills and Vocational Training

> "[Vocational and skills training] to support [children's] own and their family's livelihoods are essential elements for reintegration."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.77

Life skills and vocational training are often offered as a form of economic reintegration for children, although best practice shows that training must be accompanied by economic opportunity employment and employment-generation programmes to be successful in leading to economic security.[285]

As indicated, life skills and vocational training may be appropriate for children who face pressure to fulfil parental obligations or domestic responsibilities. Girls who are mothers, for example, face the additional burden of needing an income to support both themselves and their children. Yet they have had difficulty accessing reintegration programmes in the past due to a lack of childcare.[286] In Sierra Leone, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) partnered to create programmes that "[combined] childcare and food with vocational training and basic literacy skills" to facilitate attendance.[287]

Other barriers that children may face is a lack of programme availability in certain regions, such as smaller villages, or a lack of adequate supplies to complete programmes. For girls, they may not be able to participate in learning skills that may be more beneficial in a given economic market, such as construction, because these skills contradict traditional cultural and gender norms. They may then resort to other activities, including harmful ones, to earn an income. For example, in Sierra Leone, many girls who were mothers resorted to transactional sex or prostitution to earn an income. "Although the elders felt strongly that prostitution was undesirable, they also acknowledged that some girls had no other way to survive. In most cases, this was not organized prostitution, but girls having a relationship with one or more men for monetary support or a place to live."[288] When economic reintegration programmes are not designed with children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities in mind, they can force children into dangerous, vulnerable, and criminal activity to establish an income.

Evaluations also indicate that a variety of skills should be included in reintegration programmes. In northern Uganda, one girl noted that all the girls at the reception centre learned tailoring.[289] A narrow approach can limit future economic opportunities by restricting competition if all children of a single gender identity possess the same skillset. Such a consideration can be integrated into opportunity mapping to ensure that children learn valuable and marketable skills.

5.3.4. Employment

> "Provision should be made for relevant vocational training and opportunities for employment, suitable for the needs of all girls and boys including those with disabilities."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.83

Children may experience differential levels of satisfaction with employment opportunities based on their own identities. Among formerly associated children in post-war Liberia, those who believed that reintegration programmes failed were those who could not establish sustainable livelihoods. Female formerly associated children were at an increased disadvantage as they were not viewed as combatants and faced difficulty accessing support. Some formerly associated children reported not receiving assistance that was promised to them, including monetary support, tools to support skills acquisition, and educational courses. Disruptions in assistance undermined the success of programmes. Not all formerly associated children who completed vocational training programmes received access to employment assistance, as was promised. Formerly associated children felt they were ultimately powerless in these situations but continued to convey their dedication to learn and work, if provided with opportunities.[290] One male participant stated:

> "When we try to inquire about our benefits, some of us were threatened with arrest. As for me, I was jailed for challenging. Since then, I have decided to

> pursue no further. I'm praying for long life. I've decided not to ask. Asking the first time took me to prison. It was my father who came far away from Nimba County to rescue me. But if given the chance to attend a new program, I will attend it."[291]

This anecdote suggests that there were limited opportunities for recourse in circumstances where reintegration assistance was promised but not provided. As a result of continued economic hardship, housing insecurity, and poor social support networks, formerly associated children reported feeling there was no or only partial reintegration. While economic hardship is common throughout the country, the situation of formerly associated children may be worsened through the limited reintegration assistance received. An inability to participate in valued work within their communities may have contributed to their barriers to social reintegration.[292]

In Burundi, by contrast, a study showed that formerly associated children held high employment rates and felt reintegrated within their communities. It was hypothesised that this result was due to awareness-raising aspects of the reintegration programme, which supported community acceptance of children, as well as satisfaction of children with the services provided.[293] Taken together, these two studies suggest that a sense of powerlessness relating to services made available through reintegration programmes may correlate with levels of actual or perceived economic reintegration. In response, practitioners may consider "increased participation in designing reintegration services to augment the match between needs and services and build on [children's] positive coping (and developed skills) as a result of being recruited, in order to increase satisfaction."[294]

Employment may also be limited for individuals with disabilities, as was noted among girls who were mothers in northern Uganda.[295] Girls also face barriers to identifying employment that builds on skills they acquired during the conflict, as they are often forced to return to roles and responsibilities that align with traditional gender expectations. Practitioners should consult with children of all gender identities, where safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles, to identify relevant skills they have that can allow them to establish sustainable livelihoods and contribute economically to support themselves and their families.

Reference Materials *Relating to Livelihood Support in Reintegration Programmes*
Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Livelihood for [Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups] Technical Note (2023)
International Labour Organisation (ILO) Economic Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Groups (2010)
ILO "How to" Guide for Economic Reintegration (2010)

5.3.5. Land and Property Rights

> "Specific issues that only emerge over time, such as land and property rights, have presented major obstacles to the reintegration of children in some contexts. Where necessary, children must be represented and assisted in the appropriate fora."
>
> Paris Principles, 8.17

Reintegration programmes may need to address land and property rights, including through the potential effect of armed conflict on land tenure security through, *inter alia*, violence and displacement.[296] Child-headed households and children who cannot access familial land rights, such as children without kinship ties or a known birth origin, may be particularly vulnerable. This includes boys, who may access land rights through patrilineal relations, and girls, who may head households following conflict.

5.4. Social and Psychosocial Reintegration

> "Social and psychosocial reintegration support recognizes that individuals have undergone a conditioning or socialization to the use of violence, experienced and/or witnessed traumatic events, including sexual violence, that have led to nervous system dysregulation, often experienced shifts in gender roles and identities (including violent or militarized masculinities and femininities), and may use/abuse substances to cope with these experiences or their adjustment to civilian life."[297]

Children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups may experience stigmatisation and other psychosocial and physical health issues, such as those related to identity and traumatisation, that can impede their ability to reintegrate. Reconciliation initiatives and psychosocial and social support can contribute to mitigating these concerns. Social and psychosocial reintegration both contribute to developing and supporting individual and community resilience.[298] Research has documented the significant resilience of children returning from armed conflict, including among those who report experiencing psychosocial distress.[299]

5.4.1. Opportunity Mapping

Opportunity mapping for medical, mental health, and psychosocial support programmes requires identification of existing services and local capacities to support the development of referral networks for children who need access to medical care. Opportunity mapping for this purpose should be inclusive of programmes and organisations that provide age- and gender-sensitive awareness-raising and behaviour change programmes addressing reproductive health, gender identity, transformation of harmful cultural norms, and prevention of sexual

and gender-based violence; age- and gender-sensitive health services for sexual violence recovery, reproductive health, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) care; and age- and gender-sensitive social support services for children living with HIV and AIDS, trauma, drug abuse counselling, and disability rehabilitation.[300] Children with disabilities should be able to access age-appropriate and gender-sensitive services, including specialised services when available. Consulting with organisations for persons with disabilities, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles, may help support mapping exercises and ensure that the ongoing and diverse needs of children with disabilities are recognised. Any such consultations should address barriers to participation, including accessibility concerns, and ensure that diverse disabilities are represented. Opportunity mapping should also include an assessment and understanding of local cultural and religious traditions that may be available to address mental health concerns and trauma.[301]

After services are identified through the mapping process, practitioners should ensure that the identified programmes and organisations cater to children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities without discrimination. Any referral should clearly indicate if the service provider is able to support vulnerable child populations, including children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations and children with disabilities. It is critical to know that children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations would not be subjected to mistreatment, such as conversion therapy, if their provider became aware of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Conversation therapy refers to the set of practices and methods "aimed at effecting a change from non-heterosexual to heterosexual and from trans or gender diverse to cisgender" identities, and such therapy may be clandestine.[302] Providing referrals that indicate where services are safe and secure for children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations should be done when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles. Domestic legislation or local cultures and norms may prohibit such referrals, and where such referrals are established, practitioners must guarantee strict confidentiality protocols for information and data, including for service providers.

5.4.2. Medical, Mental Health, and Psychosocial Support

> "Children who have been associated with armed forces or armed groups are likely to have a variety of health-related needs that may be apparent immediately or may emerge over time."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.68

> "Female and male health workers should be trained in dealing with children who have been used by armed forces or armed groups and respect the basic principles of confidentiality."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.69.5

Medical, mental health, and psychosocial support are critical aspects of reintegration into civilian life. Medical attention, such as testing and treatment, should be available during all reintegration programmes, including at reception centres, where established. In situations where providers cannot provide care, children should receive referrals to other healthcare provides. In northern Uganda, for example, nurses reported that they informed girls about the dangers of HIV but that they could not offer care.[303]

In some reintegration programme contexts, local staff are trained in diagnostic procedures or medical interventions. Such training can help fill gaps in service provision, particularly in areas where healthcare infrastructure was damaged during the armed conflict. When such training occurs, however, practitioners should advocate for additional training in trauma-informed, survivor-centred, child-sensitive, and gender-sensitive approaches to ensure that local staff do not unintentionally marginalise or retraumatise children, especially those who may have experienced sexual violence.

> "Reintegration can be viewed as transforming one's identity, and this process can involve the psychological burden of hiding one's ex-combatant status and experiences as a combatant. This psychological burden is likely felt differently depending on one's age and gender."[304]

Research on mental health concerns in children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups in Sierra Leone revealed several trends by gender: more girls than boys experienced clinical depression and anxiety; boys experienced greater vulnerability than girls after experiencing rape or the loss of a caregiver; girls and boys experienced near equal amounts of abuse, including being forced to take drugs; and girls had lower levels of confidence and prosocial attitudes than boys.[305] This suggests that children of different gender identities may have different psychosocial support needs, although all children should have access to services without discrimination. Research does not tend to disaggregate findings by age.

In contrast to these findings, other research has found that, of formerly associated children who experienced rape, females had poorer mental health outcomes than males, and that female former abductees demonstrated high levels of resilience but suffered from a greater number of psychological challenges than male abductees and peers who were never abducted.[306] A study in Burundi, which compared experiences of formerly associated children to peers who were never recruited, found that there were not significant differences in mental health concerns, but that girls who were formerly associated experienced higher levels of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder than girls who were never recruited.[307] This suggests that findings from one conflict situation should not necessarily inform reintegration programmes in another conflict situation. It is important that, where programmes do inform one another, they are adapted to the local culture.[308]

Children may also need to access psychosocial support to cope with negative community responses to their returns. Traditional and religious methods of psychosocial support may contribute to healing for some children. In South Sudan, for example, girls who were formerly

associated reported that prayer helped them cope with their experiences during armed conflict and find forgiveness during reintegration: "The prayers help me to change all the memories about the war and the life I experienced in the bush."[309] Boys in Mozambique also reported benefits of traditional ceremonies, including in helping them to create a new image of themselves and release themselves from overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame. While all the boys in this study continued to experience traumatic memories nearly two decades after their release, they reported that they were able to use coping mechanisms to mitigate the negative effects of these symptoms.[310]

Practitioners should consider the medical and mental health support necessary to support children with disabilities. Children with disabilities experience difficulties accessing assistive devices, prosthetics, rehabilitation services, early intervention services, or therapies, particularly as their needs change as they grow older. When children do have access to assistive devices, they may be inappropriate for the needs of a child, including their developmental stage. Children may need new assistive devices as they age and grow, but these may be unavailable, or organisations may not consider that assistive devices are not universally applicable for all children. Access may also be limited by a lack of trained professionals. Limited access to services can mean that medical conditions and injuries lead to long-term impairments.

5.4.2.1. Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

> "Reproductive health responses should be based on a thorough cultural analysis of gender relations, in order to ensure the most effective response."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.69.3

It is critical that sexual and reproductive health services are made available to children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities, without discrimination.[311] Sexual violence recovery services should be culturally appropriate, as well as child inclusive and gender responsive. Services should recognise that girls are not the only victims and survivors of sexual violence, and that survivor-centred, trauma-informed approaches require the creation of safe and secure spaces for children of all gender identities and sexual orientations to receive care. Sexual violence recovery services include, *inter alia*, pep kits, sexual assault evidence collection kits, and fistula repair. Access should be provided and communicated to children of all gender identities.[312] Reintegration programmes should further include sexual violence prevention programmes.[313]

Establishing services that are safe and secure for children of all gender identities and sexual orientations should be done in a manner that is safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles. Domestic legislation or local cultures and norms may prohibit such services, and where such services are established, practitioners must guarantee strict confidentiality protocols for information and data, including for service providers.

Programmes for the prevention, treatment, and care of HIV/AIDS should be designed with the best interests of the child in mind. Children should be able to access information on HIV/AIDS

that "is tailored appropriately to age level and capacity and enables them to deal positively and responsibly with their sexuality in order to protect themselves from HIV infection."[314] Health services should be provided in child- and adolescent-friendly manners that are accessible to children of all gender identities and disability statuses, and practitioners should remember that children may be heavily stigmatised if they are affected by HIV/AIDS, so discreet service locations should be considered.[315]

Practitioners should also support development of safe and secure awareness-raising initiatives for children of all gender identities that address safe parenthood, sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, family planning, and other information relating to reproductive health.[316] Any awareness-raising or information campaign on sexual and reproductive health should include culturally appropriate language that aims to reduce the stigmatisation of girls who are mothers and their children, as well as stigmatisation of sexual violence perpetrated against boys.

Note on responding to sexual violence against boys

Boys who have experienced sexual violence, including being forced to witness or perpetrate sexual violence, face additional barriers to accessing recovery and support services. While sexual violence is under-reported across all ages, sexes, and gender identities, there is a gap in knowledge about how sexual violence affects boys and how best to approach its prevention and response.

Boys who experience sexual violence, particularly when perpetrated by a male, may be perceived as losing their masculinity, behaving like a girl, or becoming homosexual. This fuels stigmatisation and shame, and traditional notions of masculinity and male invulnerability can dissuade boys from reporting or accessing services. Silence about sexual violence against boys can detrimentally limit the protection strategies that are designed and implemented to address their needs, experiences, and vulnerabilities.

As a result of this knowledge gap, sexual violence recovery services frequently only address girls. Reintegration or dignity kits, for example, are often designed specifically for girls and contain girls' clothing and sanitary products, which do not address the recovery needs of boys. When services are provided to boys, they often do not account for their unique needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences. Service providers may even be unfamiliar with how to identify sexual violence against boys.

Research into the response to sexual violence against boys in reintegration programmes in the Central African Republic and Colombia culminated in several recommendations for response efforts. Specific recommendations are included below. When necessary, more inclusive language has been provided, and all recommendations should only be implemented when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles:

- *Facilitating* safe disclosure by boys to ensure provision of specialised services, including providing opportunities for disclosure throughout programme participation. This may require building trusting relationships between children and carers and creating safe spaces that allow children to discuss their traumatic experiences.
- *Supporting* boys in recognising and understanding sexual violence. Often, acts of sexual violence are not recognised as such when perpetrated against boys.
- *Improving* access to services for child victims and survivors.
    - *Providing* information about how to access available services and the applicable principles of confidentiality and discretion.
    - *Ensuring* access to appropriate and quality healthcare that is sensitive to age, gender identity, disability status, and other backgrounds.
    - *Conducting* mapping and analysis of services for all children, including boy victims and survivors of sexual violence.
- *Strengthening* responses for all child victims and survivors of sexual violence.
    - *Adopting* survivor-centred approaches that generate knowledge concerning age-, gender-, and disability-specific vulnerabilities to sexual violence.
    - *Considering* whether services should be provided specifically to boys, including allowing them to speak to a male or female when disclosing or accessing services, or together with children of other gender identities, including in small group discussions.
    - *Adapting* services to the needs of children of all gender identities, including design of age-, gender-, and disability-specific dignity kits.
- *Building* effective responses for boy victims and survivors within reintegration programming.
    - *Researching* social perceptions and practices of sexual violence against boys.
    - *Researching* how age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, disability statuses, and other backgrounds influence vulnerabilities and responses to sexual violence.
    - *Researching* drivers of perpetration of sexual violence against boys to inform survivor-centred responses.
    - *Enhancing* the visibility of boys in relevant public information campaigns.
    - *Integrating* boys into all reintegration strategies and plans to ensure their needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences are addressed.

- *Facilitating* the participation of boys, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles, in the assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation of programming.

- *Providing* training, awareness-raising, and sensitisation programming to practitioners, communities, and families.
  - *Building* capacity, including through age-, gender-, and disability-inclusive training on identifying and responding to sexual violence.
  - *Ensuring* that practitioners do not perpetuate misconceptions about sexual violence, particularly against boys.
  - *Ensuring* that communities and families understand the existence of sexual violence against all children, the risks and consequences of such violence, and how to access relevant support services.[317]

Ensuring that service provision is designed with children of all gender identities in mind will further facilitate access to services for children of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations.[318] Establishing services that are safe and secure for children of all gender identities and sexual orientations should be done in a manner that is safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles. Domestic legislation or local cultures and norms may prohibit such services, and where such services are established, practitioners must guarantee strict confidentiality protocols for information and data, including for service providers.

Sexual and reproductive health care services may also include psychosocial support, as survivors often experience social exclusion and marginalisation.[319] This may be particularly true for girls, including girls with disabilities, who may be seen as "sexually promiscuous or defiled" upon their return to communities and families, which can limit prospects for marriage and community reintegration.[320] Psychosocial support should also be made available for children who are forced to perpetrate sexual violence, who may disproportionately be boys. The need for this support may be particularly urgent in communities where the child who was forced to perpetrate violence lives alongside the individuals subjected to the violence.

> "Appropriate responses should be developed to meet the particular needs of girls including those who are pregnant or child mothers and their children; health care should be provided with a mother and child perspective."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.71

Obstetric, prenatal, and postnatal health services should also be provided, recognising that girls who are mothers may not have previously received care during their pregnancies or after giving birth. Referral systems should be inclusive of reproductive and maternal health care providers, including those for pregnant girls, who also may not have received care earlier on in their pregnancy and may need immediate or urgent treatment.[321]

Similarly, practitioners may need to identify medical service providers offering safe access to abortion for unwanted pregnancies, when safe and appropriate and in alignment with do no harm principles. Practitioners will need to understand domestic legislation and local cultures and norms, which may limit or prohibit entirely safe access to abortion. Girls may experience an increase in unwanted pregnancies due to disruptions in contraceptive use and access, as well as increased exposure to sexual violence, transactional sex, and trafficking in persons. Yet access to abortion is difficult in conflict and post-conflict situations, particularly for children residing in areas where abortion is criminalised.[322] Health care professionals may need to receive training in the provision of services accompanied by workshops addressing misconceptions about or stigmatisation of abortion. Appropriate equipment and medication should be provided, and girls who are or may become pregnant should be made aware of pathways to access services, when they exist.[323] Severe complications from unsafe abortion practices may be more likely in crisis-affected settings, and unsafe abortion is one of the leading causes of maternal mortality.[324]

Reference Materials *Relating to Medical, Mental Health, and Psychosocial Support*
Center for Reproductive Rights Improving Access to Abortion in Crisis Settings: A Legal Risk Management Tool for Organizations and Providers (2021)
Global Code of Conduct for Gathering and Using Information About Systematic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence ('Murad Code') (2022)
Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery (2015)
IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007) and its Advocacy Package (2011)
IASC Information Note on Disability and Inclusion in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (2024)
IASC Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Minimum Service Package (2022)
Institute for International Criminal Investigations Guidelines for Investigating Conflict-Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Men and Boys (2016)
Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings (2018) and the Companion Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Toolkit for Humanitarian Settings (2020) and its Supplemental Guide (2024)
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Broken Links: Psychosocial Support for People Separated from Family Members: A Field Guide (2014)

International Rescue Committee (IRC) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse: Guidelines for Health and Psychosocial Service Providers in Humanitarian Settings (2012)
Justice Rapid Response Investigating Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children Occurring in Humanitarian Settings: Reflections from Practice (2022)
Physicians for Human Rights Foundational Principles for Applying the Concepts of Consent, Assent, Dissent and Evolving Individual Capacity to Ensure Trauma-Informed Documentation, Justice, and Reparations Processes for Child Survivors of Sexual Violence (2024)
Save the Children Advocating for Change for Adolescents: A Practical Toolkit for Young People to Advocate for Improved Adolescent Health and Well-being (2017)
Save the Children Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Cross-Sectoral Strategic Framework in Humanitarian Settings (2019)
Save the Children Psychological First Aid Training Manual for Child Practitioners (2013) and Psychological First Aid II: Dealing with Traumatic Responses in Children (2017)
UNICEF Programming Guidance Procurement and Use of Breastmilk Substitutes in Humanitarian Settings (2021)
UNICEF and IRC Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse (2012)
UNICEF and Women's Refugee Commission Supporting Young Male Refugees and Migrants Who Are Survivors or At Risk of Sexual Violence: A Field Guide for Frontline Workers in Europe (2021)
UNICEF and The MPHSS Collaborative Resource Package: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups Programmes [Operational Guidance, Evidence Review, Contextualization Guidance, and Advocacy Brief] (2022)
Women's Refugee Commission Minimum Initial Service Package for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Crisis Settings (2021)
World Health Organisation (WHO) Abortion Care Guideline (2023)

5.4.3. Social Support

Strengthening social capital and social acceptance is central to social reintegration. Support networks should be facilitated and encouraged, such as peer groups between children, and provided with appropriate information, training, or guidance to support their reintegration.[325]

Research suggests that girls have difficulty obtaining social support during reintegration, in part because of feelings of shame and stigmatisation upon returning to their communities.[326] In Colombia, one formerly associated girl felt embarrassed about her actions during her

involvement, which led to self-isolation. In other conflict situations, such as Sierra Leone, returning girls were rejected by hostile communities, limiting their reintegration.[327] Other research has identified that girls may also perceive their reintegration differently than boys: "while boys used a discourse of abdicated responsibility or 'It wasn't my choice' to support their reintegration, girls internalized stigma and blame, particularly relating to their sexual abuse."[328] In some conflict situations, however, it is possible that boys experience greater stigmatisation. In Nigeria, boys reintegrating after association with Boko Haram are subject to more discrimination than girls because of the perception that they were more active in their choice to join the group.[329] Social reintegration programmes may include reconciliation processes that rely on cultural traditions or indigenous practices. Where such processes are adopted, it is important to adopt survivor-centred and trauma-informed approaches to mitigate the potential for re-traumatisation or further stigmatisation. The autonomy, dignity, and safety of victims and survivors should be paramount, especially for children who have experienced sexual or gender-based violence.[330]

Sports can provide a key form of social support between formerly associated children, including among peers of similar ages, that can include children with disabilities. Sports and physical activity can also contribute to positive developments in physical health, mental health, education, and financial capital. In an interim care centre in northern Uganda, a sports programme also instituted mechanisms to handle conflict non-violently through peaceful resolution. In this programme, scheduled sports were held for boys, girls, and teams of boys and girls, and training sessions were also held for children with disabilities to facilitate their social inclusion.[331]

5.4.3.1. Community and Family Sensitisation

> "Children may be reunited or integrated with families and communities that have suffered displacement, disruption, deprivation, and loss of social cohesion as a result of conflict. To enable children's return and reintegration, it is vital to prepare the family and community and also to provide mediation and support following children's return."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.41

Children will receive different levels of community and family support upon their return. While some will be welcomed back into support networks, others will be resented and face rejection. For some children, the initial acceptance that they experienced may decrease over time, including in situations where children do not receive extra relief items that could benefit their families.[332]

Sensitisation, which can occur before, during, and after reintegration, is "the process of making community members (whether they are ex-combatants or not) aware of the effects and changes [that release and reintegration] creates within the community," such as "that reintegration can

be a long-term, challenging process before it leads to stability; that ex-combatants might not readily take on their new livelihoods; [and] that local capacity building will be an important emphasis for community building."[333] In some contexts, it may be important to have facilitators who can mediate between communities, families, and returned children.[334] One component of sensitisation is meeting with families to inform them about their children and their interests, and to reassure them that the children have not committed wrongs but, in many cases, were forced into their circumstances.[335]

> "A risk assessment, including on the basis of gender, will indicate where it is likely that children will be feared, become targets of hostility for having been in enemy groups or be ostracised or neglected. In these cases, intensive community sensitisation should be undertaken before children return. Similarly, children who need to be integrated into new communities or different ethnic groups may require individual preparation and support."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.42

Children returning to their communities and families may face stigmatisation, abuse, and violence. For young women and girls returning from the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) in Sierra Leone, such abuse was in part a response to the violent acts the girls witnessed or committed during the conflict, which contradicted traditionally defined gender roles.[336] Mothers reportedly said that "a child who committed such an atrocity could not have been born from my womb."[337] For some parents, it was helpful to recognise that their children were not only perpetrators of violence but also victims of commanders.[338]

Community and familial sensitisation should also include awareness programmes that address mental health and psychosocial symptoms and their effects on children.[339] Any such programme should include information on access to care, inclusive of providers that can provide age-appropriate and gender-sensitive care. In Sierra Leone as well, one community member related that: "[The NGO] advised us that although these children had committed atrocities, we should still accept them and [they] should be placed in formal schools or vocational institutions. Although we were reluctant to accept them, [the NGO] advised us that for peace to be sustained we must forgive them. We performed a ceremony on their behalf, and we were able to accept them back in the community. Now we all work together."[340]

Yet children may also face considerable barriers to reintegration in their communities. Children reintegrating after association with the Lord's Resistance Army, during which many of them perpetrated extreme violence, faced threats of reprisals and rejection. In this cultural and conflict context, cleansing and healing rituals offered, for some, an ability to repair these relationships "by increasing the sense of acceptance of the former child soldier by the family and community, by reducing the sense of guilt and shame over past misdeeds, and [by representing] a form of protection for community members who have fear of the returned child soldier."[341] These ceremonies also offered a pathway to reconciliation for children who were perceived to have transgressed cultural norms during the armed conflict.

Formerly associated children, however, expressed conflicting opinions about the cleansing and healing rituals. One relative believed that these practices may be harmful:

> "[F]or a traumatized child, like [this one], she was scared, as the rites have got some scaring situations: at some stage, they slaughter animals on the victim, and use spears to simulate the act of killing, when rebuking the spirits of the dead who may be hovering around the person. The sight of blood alone may trigger their [the children's] bad memories, that is why she was very scared."[342]

Yet another informant, who did not believe in the rituals, felt that they were useful because others in the communities would be fearful that harm of violence experienced in the community would be a result of a failure to perform the rituals. One informant also noted that economic reintegration support was important in contributing to desires within communities and families for reconciliation.[343]

A narrative project in Colombia, which brought together formerly associated children and other young survivors of conflict, found that active engagement in shared narrative could transform perceptions of formerly associated children. This project allowed formerly associated children to be heard and listened to and supported reintegration and reconciliation within the community, including among children of different ages and experiences.[344] Innovative participatory approaches such as these can advance the right of the child to be heard while also influencing perceptions of children's association with armed forces and armed groups. Research from the Nigerian context has also suggested that direct participation from communities in designing reintegration programmes may improve their perception of reintegration. Community members expressed that reintegration was in part limited by their lack of trust and their experiences of trauma at the hands of Boko Haram.[345]

It is possible that girls with disabilities will face discrimination or stigmatisation if they are no longer able to perform roles related to traditional gender norms, such as responsibilities within the household. Girls with disabilities may also face difficulty getting married, especially if they are no longer able to bear children. Similarly, boys with disabilities may face discrimination or stigmatisation if they are no longer able to sustain employment and contribute economically or physically to the household.

Children with disabilities may also have trouble reintegrating into communities and families if they were separated or abandoned by their families, or if their families are unable or unwilling to care for them due to their disabilities. Communities and family may also view children with disabilities differently based on their gender identity if they perceive boys as having heroically obtained their injury while performing a traditional masculine role.[346] Data disaggregated by age, sex, and disability status is needed to document these realities so that they can be appropriately addressed in reintegration programmes. Practitioners may also consider providing services to parents and caregivers so that they are prepared to support their children with disabilities.

5.4.3.2. Girls Who Are Mothers

Note on language

This working paper uses the terminology of *girls who are mothers* as opposed to *girl mothers* to avoid reducing the identity and value of girls to their status as mothers.

> "Some girls associated with armed forces or armed groups and girl mothers in particular may require a period of intensive, additional or lengthier support during reintegration."
>
> Paris Principles, 7.62

While girls who are mothers have received considerable attention in the literature and in guidance on reintegration programmes, their experiences are rarely nuanced or contextualised, which may have implications for the development of social support programmes across different contexts that can support their needs, vulnerabilities, and experiences. In northern Uganda, researchers highlighted the importance of considering the following dynamics affecting girls who are mothers, *inter alia*,

1. The high proportion of underage mothers present in internally displaced persons camps, where individuals received support at reception centres. In this context, the terminology of girl mothers to reference solely those formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups was misleading.
2. The classification at reception centres of many females as girls who were mothers, despite these females being over eighteen years of age. *Note* that many of these females were nevertheless abducted and recruited and used as children.
3. The differential attitudes and experiences of girls who are mothers, including those who desire reunification with their so-called 'husbands' from captivity.
4. The potential for lineage status and clan rights to shape social attitudes towards girls who are mothers, particularly as it relates to the exchange of bride price, which has implications for the family unit and claims to land.
5. The existing historical and cultural practice of early marriage.[347]

An understanding of these context- and conflict-specific dynamics is critical for developing appropriate social support programmes that are attuned to the given context. Girls who are mothers may also not be a unified and cohesive group, as there may be intergroup conflict relating to desires for reunification or differences in experiences, such as those who sustained mutilation.[348] This can create tensions within programmes that are designed for girls who are mothers.

In Sierra Leone, girls who were mothers experienced some of the worst forms of marginalisation. Communities and families, despite understanding that girls who were mothers were often abducted and forced to experience repeated sexual violence, often could not readily accept them because their experiences were contrary to traditional gender and cultural norms. In some situations, girls who were mothers and their children were referred to as rebels. In response to this rejection and marginalisation, some girls and their children left their communities, either to head their own household or move to urban settings.[349] Stigmatisation, in this way, may be more severely experienced by girls: "Although stigma is also experienced by boys returning home, because girls have 'violated' gender norms about role behaviours and sexuality more fully than boys, the stigma is far more pronounced for them—especially when girls return with children. For example, most returning girls were no longer virgins and were stigmatized as a result. This was not the case with the boys who engaged in sexual activity."[350] Critically, girls who are mothers who return with their children cannot deny their involvement in the armed conflict because of the visibility of their experiences.[351]

Girls who are mothers may experience additional shame, stigmatisation, and dehumanisation in trying to find a marriage partner, which influences their ability to perform traditional gender roles and expectations. In Sierra Leone, girls are expected to be virgins upon marriage. "Significant shame was associated with sexual violence and not being able to carry out traditional gender behaviour […] They were called 'rebels' and 'faded cloth,' raped, and their children were taunted, leading to feelings of shame and indicating the perceived lack of usefulness in society."[352]

While some formerly associated young mothers may be welcomed by their families, they may be perceived as spiritually polluted, which can limit reintegration into communities. Mothers whose children are rejected by community members may themselves have trouble socially reintegrating, and this can lead to mothers viewing motherhood negatively. Since community acceptance correlates with positive psychosocial adjustment, this presents concerns for the reintegration of girls who are mothers.[353] They may face heightened difficulty when reintegrating into communities where there is impunity for crimes of conflict-related sexual violence.[354]

A participatory intervention adopted across site locations with vulnerable young mothers, including those formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, had promising results for addressing the needs of girls who are mothers and producing positive individual and collective emotions and group cohesion. Within these interventions, mothers used different communication methodologies to represent their experiences and the stigmatisation they faced, as well as engaged in social actions such as agriculture and literacy training to develop skills and contribute to their communities. These interventions led to positive emotional development, engagement with local leaders and communities, and increased attention to critical issues facing these women with relation to education and access to healthcare. Importantly, these interventions engaged others in the communities, including girls and boys, in order to not

exclude and stigmatise young mothers. Young mothers, placed at the centre of the intervention, were able to contribute to their social reintegration and make improvements within their communities.[355]

Reference Materials *Relating to Social Support in Reintegration Programmes*
Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (2016) and Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (2017)
Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Reflective Guide: Community-Level Approaches to Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2020)
Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action Toolkit (2022)
Inter-Agency Group on Children's Reintegration Guidelines on Children's Reintegration (2016)
Inter-Agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit (2013)
International Rescue Committee and Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Intervention Curriculum: Growing Stronger Together: A Parenting Intervention in Armed Conflict Settings (2021)
United Nations Guidelines for Alternative Care (2010)

6. APPENDIX: NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

Disarmament, demobilisation, release, and reintegration occur within the context of an international normative framework that guides child protection in post-conflict situations. In addressing the rights, guidance, and norms relating to child protection and inclusion, the normative framework establishes the obligation of Member States to address explicitly the diverse needs, experiences, and vulnerabilities of children of all ages, sexes, and gender identities in reintegration.

Normative Framework

Relating to the Reintegration of Children Associated or Formerly Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

Legal Framework

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its Optional Protocol on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000)

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and its Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1966)

Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols (1977)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966)

International Labour Organisation Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour (1930)

International Labour Organisation Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age (1973)

International Labour Organisation Convention No. 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999)

Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children ('Palermo Protocol') (2000)

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

International Standards

Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict (2014)

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998)

Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019)

Paris Commitments to Protect Children from Unlawful Recruitment or Use by Armed Forces or Armed Groups (2007)

Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups ('Paris Principles') (2007)

Safe Schools Declaration (2015)

Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers ('Vancouver Principles') (2017)

United Nations Security Council Resolutions

On children and armed conflict, 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015), 2250 (2015), *and* 2427 (2018), *including the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict*

On women, peace, and security, 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), *and* 2493 (2019)

On youth, peace, and security, 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), 2535 (2020)

Sustainable Development Goals

On access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food, target 2.1

On eliminating gender disparities in education and vocational training, target 4.5

On ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls, target 5.1

On eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, target 5.2

On forced labour and the worst forms of child labour, target 8.7

On the promotion of social, economic, and political inclusion, target 10.2

On ensuring equal opportunities and ending discrimination, target 10.3

On reduction of violence and related deaths, target 16.1

On all forms of violence and torture against children, target 16.2

[1] The Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University and the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict would like to thank Nelly Sabarthes for her coordination and review and the Princeton University students who served as researchers in the summer of 2023: India Behl, Kristy González, Noah James, Angel Ndubisi, and Aviva Schwarz. This paper is the result of a partnership agreement between both institutions.

[2] Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict of 3 June 2024 (A/78/842-S/2024/384), para. 5.

[3] United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "About Us."

[4] United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers."

[5] *See*, for example, Paris Principles Steering Committee, "Justice Systems in Relation to Recruitment and Use," Paris Principles Operational Handbook (2022).

[6] Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), Module 1.20: Glossary: Terms and Definitions (August 1, 2006), p. 1.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1.

[9] Principles and Guidelines of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups ('Paris Principles') (February 2007), p. 7.

[10] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 3.

[11] Ibid., p. 4.

[12] IDDRS, Module 1.10: Introduction to the IDDRS (May 9, 2014), p.2. See also Secretary-General, Note to the General Assembly of 24 May 2005 (A/C.5/59/31), para. 1(c).

[13] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 6.

[14] IDDRS, Module 1.10, p. 2. See also A/C.5/59/31, para. 1(a).

[15] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 6.

[16] United Nations Free and Equal, "Definitions."

[17] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 8.

[18] United Nations Free and Equal, "Definitions."

[19] Ibid.

[20] Note by the Secretary-General on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity [Report of the Independent Expert] of 19 July 2017 (A/72/172), para. 2.

[21] United Nations Free and Equal, "Definitions."

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Paris Principles, p. 7.

[25] IDDRS, Module 1.10, p.2. See also Secretary-General, A/C.5/59/31, para. 1(d).

[26] United Nations Free and Equal, "Definitions." Note the IDDRS definition of sex: "The biological differences between men and women, which are universal and determined at birth." IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 22.

[27] United Nations Free and Equal, "Definitions."

[28] Ibid.

[29] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 27. Note that Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) differentially defines youth "as persons of the age of 18-29 years old."

[30] "2023: Alarming levels of violence inflicted on children in situations of armed conflict," United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (June 13, 2024).

[31] A/78/842-S/2024/384, para. 5.

[32] Ibid., para. 4, 6.

[33] Ibid., para. 5, 11.

[34] Ibid., para. 16, 24.

[35] Ibid., para. 66.

[36] Ibid., para. 200.

[37] Ibid., para. 38.

[38] "My Special Representative and the United Nations made progress in engaging with parties to protect children in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Israel and the State of Palestine, Nigeria, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Engagement with parties to conflict resulted in positive changes for children. More than 12,460 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups received protection or reintegration support during 2022." Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict of 5 June 2023 (A/77/895-S/2023/363), para. 5. "The United Nations made progress in engaging with parties to protect children in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian African Republic, Ukraine and Yemen. More than 10,600 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups received protection or reintegration support during 2023." A/78/842-S/2024/384, para. 7. See also Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict of 5 June 2023 (A/77/895-S/2023/363), para. 4.

[39] *See* Appendix: Normative Framework.

[40] For a more detailed discussion, see IDDRS, Module 2.10: The UN Approach to DDR (November 19, 2019).

[41] Ibid., p. 2.

[42] DDR-related tools "include pre-DDR, transitional weapons and ammunition management (WAM), community violence reduction (CVR), initiatives to prevent individuals from joining armed groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, DDR support to mediation, and DDR support to transitional security arrangements." Ibid., p. 3.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., p. 3, 6.

[45] "Gaps and Needs for Successful Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Groups or Armed Forces," Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers (2021), p. 3–4.

[46] Ryunosuke Goto, Thomas Frodl, and Norbert Skokauskas (2021), "Armed Conflict and Early Childhood Development in 12 Low- and Middle-Income Countries," *Pediatrics*, 148(3); Jonathan Hall et al., "Child Development and Resilience in War, Conflict and Displacement," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [Topical Backgrounder] (2021); and Ayesha Kadir, Sherry Shenoda, and Jeffrey Goldhagen (2019), "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development: A Systematic Review," *PLoS ONE*, 14(1). *See also*, for example, L. Dimitry (2012), "A Systematic Review of the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in Areas of Armed Conflict in the Middle East," *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 38(2), and Kathleen Kostelny and James Garbarino (1994), "Coping with the Consequences of Living in Danger: The Case of Palestinian Children and Youth," *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 17(4).

[47] Theresa Stichick Betancourt and Kashif Tanveer Khan (2008), "The Mental Health of Children Affected by Armed Conflict: Protective Processes and Pathways to Resilience," *International Review of Psychiatry*, 20(3), and Michelle Slone and Ayelet Peer (2021), "Children's Reactions to War, Armed Conflict and Displacement: Resilience in a Social Climate of Support," *Current Psychiatry Reports,* 23(7).

[48] *See*, for example, International Criminal Court, "Policy on Children" (2023), p. 16–17. This framing is also present in the general comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

[49] "Defining and Measuring Child Well-Being in Humanitarian Action: A Contextualization Guide," The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021), p. 9.

[50] Age-appropriate interventions are not limited to a consideration of the needs of children. Programming in humanitarian crises, emergency settings, and conflict or post-conflict settings frequently excludes the specific needs and experiences of older persons, who must be included in age-appropriate approaches. *See*, for example, "Older People in Disasters and Humanitarian Crises: Guidelines for Best Practices" and "Protection Interventions for Older Persons in Emergencies," HelpAge International.

[51] Kate Macfarlane (2023), "Child Soldiers in Nepal: Re-Conceptualizing Reintegration and Identity," *International Affairs*, 99(3), p. 1216. For a discussion on narratives of victimhood, resiliency, and agency in the international system regarding children, *see* Alison M. S. Watson (2015), "Resilience is its Own Resistance: The Place of children in Post-Conflict Settlement," *Critical Studies on Security*, 3(1).

[52] Gerison Lansdown, "The Evolving Capacities of the Child" (2005), UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, p. ix. *See* the publication for a discussion on the evolving capacities on the child as the concept relates to child development and the realisation of the rights of the child, as well as discussion on the application of the concept across contexts.

[53] Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007), p. 110–115.

[54] Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General comment no. 7 on implementing child rights in early childhood" (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1) (September 20, 2006), para. 4.

[55] *See*, for example, International Criminal Court Office of the Prosecutor, "Policy on Children."

[56] Goto, Frodl, and Skokauskas, "Armed Conflict and Early Childhood Development," and Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.

[57] Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC), "Guidance Note on Abduction" (April 2022), p. 25–26.

[58] *See*, for example, "Defining and Measuring Child Well-Being," p. 9.

[59] V Kandice Mah and E Lee Ford-Jones (2012), "Spotlight on Middle Childhood: Rejuvenating the 'Forgotten Years,'" *Paediatric Child Health*, 17(2).

[60] *See*, for example, International Criminal Court, "Policy on Children."

[61] *See*, for example, Alvhild Strømme et al., "Stop the War on Children: Gender Matters," Save the Children (2020).

[62] OSRSG-CAAC, "Guidance Note on Abduction," p. 25–26.

[63] Richard J. Bonnie and Emily P. Backes, eds., *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* (2019), p. 2. *Note* the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action define early childhood as zero to eight years of age, and adolescence as nine to seventeen years of age.

[64] Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General comment no. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence" (CRC/C/GC/20) (December 6, 2016), para. 5.

[65] "Defining and Measuring Child Well-Being," p. 9.

[66] Mariam Arain et al. (2013), "Maturation of the Adolescent Brain," *Neuropsychiatric Diseases and Treatment*, 9.

[67] *See*, for example, International Criminal Court, "Policy on Children."

[68] OSRSG-CAAC, "Guidance Note on Abduction," p. 25–26.

[69] Interviews document, for example, that in the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, girls became so-called wives of commanders after reaching puberty. *See* Helen Nambalirwa Nkabala (2014), "Gender Perspectives in the Lord's Resistance Army in Relation to the Old Testament," *Old Testament Essays*, 27(3). Pregnancy can be an intended or unintended consequence of sexual violence, including of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, or forced marriage. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is the first binding instrument to explicitly define forced pregnancy as a crime under international criminal law, including that it can constitute a crime against humanity or war crime. See Soh Sie Eng Jessie (2006), "Forced Pregnancy: Codification in the Rome Statute and its Prospect as Implicit Genocide," *New Zealand Journal of Public and International Law*, 4, and "Forced Pregnancy: A Commentary on the Crime in International Law," Amnesty International (2020). Per article 7(2)(f) of the Rome Statute, forced pregnancy is "the unlawful confinement of a woman forcibly made pregnant, with the intent of affecting the ethnic composition of any population or carrying out other grave violations of international law." This definition does not require that the perpetrator impregnated the victim or that the victim gave birth to the child. *See* "Forced Pregnancy: A Commentary," p. 9. Rather, it focuses on unlawful confinement, understood as "unlawfully placing the victim in a position in which she cannot choose whether to continue the pregnancy." *See Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen*, No. ICC-02/04-01/15, Decision on the confirmation of charges against Dominic Ongwen of Pre-Trial Chamber II of 23 March 2016, para. 99.

[70] *See*, for example, Paris Principles Steering Committee, "Paris Principles Operational Handbook" (2022), p. 343–377.

[71] "The age group between 14 and 18 years is particularly vulnerable, as seen, for instance, in the treatment of children above a certain age as adults or as 'young' adults, often under the cover of traditional or cultural values, or counter-terrorism or national security responses, with dramatic implications." Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict of 27 July 2023 (A/78/247), para. 15.

[72] United Nations, "Definition of Youth" [Fact Sheet], p. 1.

[73] Lansdown, "The Evolving Capacities," p. 13.

[74] Lansdown, "The Evolving Capacities," p. 15.

[75] *See* Section 2: Definitions.

[76] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 8–9.

[77] This working paper adopts the terminology of persons, or children, of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations to reference persons, or children, who do not identify with the heteronormative, cisgender binary. *See* Section 2: Definitions for definitions of the terms gender, gender identity, sex, and sexual orientation. Cisgender is "a term that describes people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth (i.e., not transgender). A cis person may have any sexual orientation, gender expression or sex characteristics. Used next to a noun *i.e.* cisgender man, cis woman." United Nations Free and Equal, "Definitions."

[78] Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz on the law of inclusion of 3 June 2021 (A/HRC/47/27), para. 7.

[79] *See* United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change [Phase III (2018-2021)] on Gender Responsive and/or Transformative Approaches" (2020), p. 1. The joint evaluation provides definitions of gender scales of programmes, which has been adapted to describe the levels of gender-based approaches defined herein.

[80] "LGBTQ Lives in Conflict and Crisis: A Queer Agenda for Peace, Security, and Accountability," Outright International (February 2003), p. 2. The term "sexual orientation" refers to a "person's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards others." The term "gender identity" refers to "a person's self-perceived identity, which may be different from the sex assigned at birth, as well as the expression of gender identity." See Note by the Secretary-General on Protection against violence and discrimination based

on sexual orientation and gender identity [Report of the Independent Expert] of 19 July 2017 (A/72/172), para. 2. *See also* Section 2: Definitions.

[81] Melinda W. Moore and John R. Barner (2017), "Sexual Minorities in Conflict Zones: A Review of the Literature," *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 35.

[82] *See*, for example, Ligia Kiss et al. (2020), "Male and LGBT Survivors of Sexual Violence in Conflict Situations: A Realist View of Health Interventions in Low- and Middle-Income Countries," *Conflict and Health*, 14(11); Alon Margalit (2018), "Still a Blind Spot: The Protection of LGBT Persons During Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence," *International Review of the Red Cross*, 100; and "'Everyone Wants Me Dead': Killings, Abductions, Torture, and Sexual Violence Against LGBT Persons by Armed Groups in Iraq," Human Rights Watch (March 23, 2022).

[83] "LGBTQ Lives in Conflict," Outright International, p. 6.

[84] Ibid., p. 2, 6. Scholarship on masculinities in conflict also considers the ways in which gender norms and roles shape violence. See, for example, Sanjukta Nath (2022), "Examining Militarized Masculinity, Violence, and Conflict: Male Survivors of Torture in International Politics," *International Studies*, 59(1). Cisgender is "a term that describes people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth (i.e., not transgender). A cis person may have any sexual orientation, gender expression or sex characteristics. Used next to a noun *i.e.* cisgender man, cis woman." United Nations Free and Equal, "Definitions."

[85] "LGBTQ Lives in Conflict," Outright International, p. 2, and Margalit, "Still a Blind Spot," p. 239.

[86] *See*, for example, Sanne Weber (2021), "Defying the Victim-Perpetrator Binary: Female Ex-Combatants in Colombia and Guatemala as Complex Political Perpetrators," *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 15(2).

[87] Sex-disaggregated data "are collected and presented separately on men and women. The availability of sex-disaggregated data, which could describe the proportion of women, men, girls and boys associated with armed forces and groups, is an essential precondition for building gender-responsive policies and interventions." IDDR, Module 1.20, p. 22.

[88] "Summary Conclusions: 2021 Global Roundtable on Protection and Solutions for LGBTIQ+ People in Forced Displacement," United Nations High Commission for Refugees, August 16, 2021, p. 24–25.

[89] "Gender with Age Marker: Improving Humanitarian Effectiveness," Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap), November 2020.

[90] Phoebe Donnelly, "Gender and DDR: Lessons Learned from DDR Research," Folke Bernadotte Academy (2022), p. 4.

[91] Ibid., p. 12.

[92] "Humanitarian Principles," United Nations Refugee Agency (January 30, 2024).

[93] Paris Principles Operational Handbook, p. 132, 141, 187.

[94] United Nations Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind (2022), p. 8.

[95] International Criminal Court, "Policy on Children,", p. 17.

[96] United Nations Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit, p. 9.

[97] "In 2023, boys were more frequently subjected to recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and abduction. Girls experienced a disproportionately higher incidence of conflict-related sexual violence. The number of verified cases of grave violations saw a particularly high surge in the recruitment and use of boys. Factors including gender, age, ethnicity, race and disability were determining factors in adversely shaping the vulnerability of children to these violations." A/78/842-S/2024/384, para. 11.

[98] These factors are delineated in the Paris Principles Operational Handbook, an implementation guide that accompanies the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups ('Paris Principles'). See Paris Principles Operational Handbook, p. 51.

[99] Ibid., p. 51.

[100] IDDRS, Module 2.10, p. 20–27.

[101] Ibid., p. 21.

[102] Ibid., p. 22. Such standards include, *inter alia*, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998) (*see*, in particular, articles 37 and 40 and general comment no. 24), United Nations Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System ('The Vienna Guidelines') (1997), United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency ('The Riyadh Guidelines') (1990), United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty ('The Havana Rules') (1990), United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders ('The Bangkok Rules') (2010), United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice ('The Beijing Rules') (1985), and United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures ('The Tokyo Rules') (1990).

[103] IDDRS, Module 2.10, p. 22.

[104] This approach is similarly adopted by the International Criminal Court Office of the Prosecutor Policy on Children. *See* p. 5, footnote 7: "The Court uses the word 'victim' when referencing the language of its legal framework. However, consistent with the survivor-centred approach, the Office takes the position that it is for an individual to decide if they prefer to be identified as a 'victim', 'survivor', or both."

[105] Henri Myrttinen, "Men, Masculinities and Humanitarian Settings: A Mapping of the State of Research and Practice-Based Evidence," United Nations Women (2023), p. 11–12.

[106] Ibid., p. 12.

[107] Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern (2009), "Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC)," *International Studies Quarterly*, 53(2), p. 499.

[108] Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, and Dina Haynes, "Masculinities and Child Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies," in *Masculinities and the Law: A Multidimensional Approach* (2012), p. 234.

[109] Ní Aoláin, Cahn, and Haynes, "Masculinities and Child Soldiers," p. 234. *Citing* Angela P. Harris (2000), "Gender, Violence, Race, and Criminal Justice," *Stanford Law Review*, 52, p. 793.

[110] Ní Aoláin, Cahn, and Haynes, "Masculinities and Child Soldiers," p. 243.

[111] Baaz and Stern, "Why Do Soldiers Rape," p. 505–506.

[112] Ibid., p. 508–510.

[113] Eduardo Aguirre-Dávila (2020), "Identity Development of Female Adoelscents Belonging to Illegal Armed Groups in Colombia," *Universitas Psychologica*.

[114] Ibid., p. 8.

[115] Ní Aoláin, Cahn, and Haynes, "Masculinities and Child Soldiers," p. 235.

[116] IDDRS, Module 4.30: Reintegration (September 26, 2022), p. 8.

[117] Ibid., p. 21.

[118] Myrttinen, "Men, Masculinities and Humanitarian Settings," p. 7.

[119] Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson, "From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone," Hunt Alternatives Fund (2004), p. 5.

[120] Myriam Denov (2010), "Coping with the Trauma of War: Former Child Soldiers in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone," *International Social Work*, 53(6), p. 795.

[121] Lorenzo I. Bordonaro and Ruth Payne (2012), "Ambiguous Agency: Critical Perspectives on Social Interventions with Children and Youth in Africa," *Children's Geographies*, 10(4), p. 365.

[122] Ibid., p. 366.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Tatek Abebe (2019), "Reconceptualising Children's Agency as Continuum and Interdependence," *Social Sciences*, 8(41).

[125] Ibid.

[126] Grace Akello, "Child Agency and Resistance to Discourses within the Paris Principles in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Processes of Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda," in Mark A. Drumbl and Jastine C. Barrett, eds., *Research Handbook on Child Soldiers* (2019), p. 446.

[127] Michael Wessells, "Do No Harm: How Reintegration Programmes for Former Child Soldiers Can Cause Unintended Harm," in Mark Drumbl and Jastine Barrett, eds., *Research Handbook on Child Soldiers* (2019).

[128] Akello, "Child Agency and Resistance," p. 447.

[129] *See* Section 4.2: Documented Experiences of Children in Armed Conflict, notably, sub-sections on 'abduction and recruitment' and 'combat and intelligence.'

[130] *See* Section 4.2: Documented Experiences of Children in Armed Conflict, notably, sub-sections on 'forced perpetration and witnessing of violence and atrocities' and 'sexual violence.'

[131] Omer Aijazi, Evelyn Amony, and Erin Baines, "'We Were Controlled, We Were Not Allowed to Express Our Sexuality, Our Intimacy Was Suppressed': Sexual Violence Experienced by Boys," in Mark Drumbl and Jastine Barretts, eds., *Research Handbook on Child Soldiers*, (2019).

[132] Ibid.

[133] Mats Utas (2005), "Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's Social Navigation of the Liberian War Zone," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 78(2), p. 408. On social navigation of youth during war, *see also*, Henrik Vigh (2010), "Youth Mobilisation as Social Navigation: Reflections on the Concept of *Dubriagem*," *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 18(18/19).

[134] *See* Federica Cavazzoni, Alec Fiorini, and Guido Veronese (2023), "When Agency Turns Into a Risk Factor: A Literature Review of the Negative Consequences of Children's Agentic Behaviors on Their Physical and Psychological Well-Being," *Trauma, Violence, Abuse*, 24(2).

[135] Omer Aijazi and Erin Baines (2017), "Relationality, Culpability and Consent in Wartime: Men's Experiences of Forced Marriage," *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 11(3), p. 465. The authors further address the victim-perpetrator dichotomy,

stating that "Regardless of their complicity, women are regarded as victims first, whose decisions are motivated by survival and lack of choice. Yet in this same formulation, men are endowed with choice, even as they may be victims. Indeed, the word 'perpetrator' implies men in reference to rape. In effect, women are somehow less culpable than their male counterparts, regardless of whether or not both carried out the same work, or were both forced to perform different types of labour because of their gender-ascribed roles."

[136] Carse Ramos, "Dominic Ongwen on Trial: Problematizing Definitional Boundaries and Exploring the Possibilities of Socialization," in Mark Drumbl and Jastine Barretts, eds., *Research Handbook on Child Soldiers* (2019). Citing Krispus Ayena Odongo, a lawyer for Dominic Ongwen, in their opening statement of September 18, 2018 at the International Criminal Court, edited slightly by Ramos for flow. *See* footnote one of the chapter.

[137] Paris Principles Operational Handbook, p. 44. See also Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, eds., *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict* (2018), p. 32.

[138] "States Parties that permit voluntary recruitment into their national armed forces under the age of 18 years shall maintain safeguards to ensure, as a minimum, that: a. Such recruitment is genuinely voluntary; b. Such recruitment is carried out with the informed consent of the person's parents or legal guardians; c. Such persons are fully informed of the duties involved in such military service; d. Such persons provide reliable proof of age prior to acceptance into national military service." Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000), article 3(3). "Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years." Ibid., article 4(1). *Note* that article 1 urges States Parties to "take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities."

[139] "States Parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces." Ibid., article 2. *See also* article 4.

[140] Alexandra H Blackwell et al. (2023), "Drivers of 'Voluntary' Recruitment and Challenges for Families with Adolescents Engaged with Armed Groups: Qualitative Insights from Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo," *PLOS Global Public Health*, 3(5).

[141] Paris Principles Operational Handbook, "How and Why Children Become Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups," p. 42–49. See also "Child Recruitment and Use" [Webpage], United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (February 1, 2023) and Macfarlane, "Child Soldiers in Nepal."

[142] Alexandra H Blackwell et al., "Drivers of 'Voluntary' Recruitment."

[143] Paris Principles Operational Handbook, "How and Why Children Become Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups," p. 42–49.

[144] Brandon A. Kohrt et al. (2016), "Recruitment of Child Soldiers in Nepal: Mental Health Status and Risk Factors for Voluntary Participation of Youth in Armed Groups," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22(3).

[145] For more on the link of trafficking in persons and armed conflict, see "Trafficking in Persons in the Context of Armed Conflict," United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2018).

[146] Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict of 23 June 2022 (A/76/871-S/2022/493).

[147] "Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Against Boys Associated with Armed Groups During the Process of Reintegration in Colombia," United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) and the All Survivors Project (ASP) (2024), p. 22.

[148] "Children in Conflict at Highest Risk of Violence Since Records Began," Save the Children (February 13, 2020).

[149] *See*, for example, Jocelyn TD Kelly, Lindsay Branham, and Michele R Decker (2016), "Abducted Children and Youth in Lord's Resistance Army in Northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Mechanisms of Indoctrination and Control," *Conflict and Health*, 10.

[150] Report of the Secretary-General on Women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence and children born of sexual violence in conflict of 31 January 2022 (S/2022/77), para. 2.

[151] *See* Paris Principles Operational Handbook, p. 52, 55, 56, 265, 299.

[152] S/2022/77, paras. 6–7. On data limitations, *see also* Charli Carpenter, *Forgetting Children Born of War: Setting the Human Rights Agenda in Bosnia and Beyond* (2010), p. 22. On methodological approaches and challenges, see also Ingvill Constanze Ødegaard and Elke Kleinau, "Reflections on Methodological Approaches and Challenges in Researching Children Born of War," in Baard Herman Borge, Elke Kleinau, and Ingvill Constanze Ødegaard, eds., *Children and Youth at Risk in Times of Transition: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2023).

[153] Carpenter, Forgetting *Children Born of War*, p. 27.

[154] Kimberly Theidon (2015), "Hidden in Plain Sight: Children Born of Wartime Sexual Violence," *Current Anthropology*, 56, p. S194.

[155] Ibid., p. S193–S194.

[156] Ibid., p. S195. Translating the testimony of Georgina Gamboa García, provided in a public hearing to the truth commission in Huamanga on April 8, 2002.

[157] Myriam Denov and Atim Angela Lakor (2017), "When War is Better than Peace: The Post-Conflict Realities of Children Born of Wartime Rape in Northern Uganda," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 65, and S/2022/77, para. 7. *Note* that children were also born due to sexual violence perpetrated by other armed actors such as the national armed forces, the Uganda People's Defence Force. *See* Eunice Apio, "Uganda's Forgotten Children of War," in *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones*, ed., Charli Carpenter (2007).

[158] Denov and Lakor, "When War is Better," p. 260.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid., p. 260–261. See also Lindsay McClain Opiyo, "Alone Like a Tree: Reintegration Challenges Facing Children Born of War and Their Mothers in Northern Uganda," Justice and Reconciliation Project (2015).

[161] Opiyo, "Alone Like a Tree," p. 4–5.

[162] Denov and Lakor, "When War is Better," p. 261–262. See also Myriam Denov et al. (2023), "The Meaning of Land and Place for Children Born of War in Northern Uganda," *Children's Geographies*, 21(4), p. 700.

[163] Opiyo, "Alone Like a Tree," p. 5–6.

[164] Jeannie Annan et al. (2024), "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 55(6).

[165] Joanne Neenan, "Closing the Protection Gap for Children Born of War: Addressing Stigmatisation and the Intergenerational Impact of Sexual Violence in Conflict," London School of Economics Centre for Women, Peace and Security (2017). *See also* S/2022/77.

[166] "SRSG Patten Video Message for the 'Launch of the EuroWARCHILD Project—What Does it Mean to be a Child Born of War?'" [Website Article], Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 1, 2022.

[167] *See* Appendix: Normative Framework.

[168] Jeannie Annan et al., "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender."

[169] Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson, "From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone," Hunt Alternatives Fund (2004), p. 14.

[170] Ibid., p. 14.

[171] Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, "Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict," United Nations University (2018).

[172] International Criminal Court, "Policy on Children," p. 12, para. 24.

[173] Mazurana and Carlson, "From Combat to Community," p. 12. Note this is a quotation from the authors summarising the narrative under discussion.

[174] *See*, for example, Section 5.1: Introduction to Reintegration Programmes and Section 5.2: Operational Programming.

[175] Jo Becker (2020), "The Detention of Children in the Context of Armed Conflict," *ALLONS-Y Journal of Children, Peace, and Security*, 4, p. 87–89.

[176] Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 24 on children's rights in the child justice system (CRC/C/GC/24) (2019), para. 99.

[177] Becker, "The Detention of Children," p. 94.

[178] Ibid., p. 88.

[179] Ibid., p. 89.

[180] "'I Lost My Dignity': Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Syrian Arian Republic," Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [Conference Room Paper] (A/HRC/37/SRP.3) (March 8, 2018); "International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women: Tenth Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria Mostly at the Hands of the Syrian Regime," Syrian Network for Human Rights (November 25, 2021); Statement by Ms. Mariana Karkoutly at the United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict of 13 April 2022.

[181] "Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Detention Settings: Principles and Commentary," All Survivors Project and the Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic (2020), and Report of the Independent Expert leading the United Nations global study on children deprived of liberty of 11 July 2019 (A/74/136).

[182] Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of 5 January 2016 (A/HRC/31/57). *Citing* to International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, case No. ICTR-96-4-T, *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, judgment of 2 September 1998, and International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, case No. IT-96-12-Abis, *Prosecutor v. Mucić*, et al., judgment of 8 April 2003. *See also* United Nations Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (2022).

[183] "Strengthening Responses to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Against Boys Deprived of Their Liberty in Situations of Armed Conflict," Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2022).

[184] Such standards include, *inter alia*, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998) (*see*, in particular, articles 37 and 40 and general comment no. 24), United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency ('The Riyadh Guidelines') (1990),

United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders ('The Bangkok Rules') (2010), United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice ('The Beijing Rules') (1985), and United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures ('The Tokyo Rules') (1990).

[185] Rezhna Mohammed and Frank Neuner (2022), "Putative Juvenile Terrorists: The Relationship between Multiple Traumatization, Mental Health, and Expectations for Reintegration among Islamic State Recruited Adolescent and Young Adult Fighters," *Conflict and Health*, 16(58).

[186] Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities of 19 July 2021 (A/76/146). *See also* "Towards Greater Inclusion: A Discussion Paper on the CAAC Mandate and Children with Disabilities in Armed Conflict," United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2023), p. 10–11. For information generally on disability and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration, see IDDRS, Module 5.80: Disability-Inclusive DDR (July 26, 2021).

[187] Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Thematic study on the rights of persons with disabilities under article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies of 30 November 2015 (A/HRC/31/30), para. 3. *See also* Note by the Secretariat on protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies of 30 March 2021 (CRPD/CSP/2021/2), Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

[188] Hannah Wild et al. (2021), "Pediatric Casualties in Contemporary Armed Conflict: A Systematic Review to Inform Standardized Reporting," *Injury*, 52(7).

[189] "Afghanistan: Children are the Main Victims of Unexploded and Abandoned Weapons," International Committee of the Red Cross, July 31, 2023.

[190] "UN: High Risk in Conflicts for Children with Disabilities: Urgently Strengthen Protection, Assistance, Inclusion," Human Rights Watch, February 2, 2022.

[191] "Towards Greater Inclusion.," United Nations, p. 28.

[192] Mari Koistinen et al., "Five Facts to Know About Violence Against Women and Girls With Disabilities," World Bank Blogs (2019).

[193] Emina Ćerimović (2023), "At Risk and Overlooked: Children with Disabilities in Armed Conflict," *International Review of the Red Cross*, 105(922); "Children with Disabilities in Situations of Armed Conflict," UNICEF (2018); Dustin Johnson and Shelley Whitman (2016), "Child Soldiers and Disability: Gaps in Knowledge and Opportunities for Change," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 1(3); Valerie Oosterveld (2011), "The Gender Jurisprudence of the Special Court for Sierra Leone: Progress in the Revolutionary United Front Judgments," *Cornell International Law Journal*, 44(1); "Study on the Evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict Mandate, 1996–2021," Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2022); "The State of the World's Children: Children with Disabilities," UNICEF (2013); "Towards Greater Inclusion," United Nations; "UN: High Risk," Human Rights Watch.

[194] For information on data, see "Towards Greater Inclusion," United Nations, p. 10 and "Children with Disabilities," UNICEF, p. 14. For guidance on data, see the Disability Data Disaggregation Joint Statement by the Disability Sector (2016).

[195] "Democratic Republic of Congo: Children at War," Amnesty International (2003), p. 10.

[196] Dara Kay Cohen (2017), "The Ties That Bind: How Armed Groups Use Violence to Socialize Fighters," *Journal of Peace Research*, 54(5).

[197] Dara Kay Cohen, "The Ties That Bind." *See also, cited*, Bernd Beber and Christopher Blattman (2013), "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion," *International Organization*, 67(1), and Jeffrey T. Checkel (2017), "Socialization and Violence: Introduction and Framework," *Journal of Peace Research*, 54(5).

[198] Annan et al., "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender."

[199] R. Charli Carpenter (2006), "Recognizing Gender-Based Violence Against Civilian Men and Boys in Conflict Situations," Security Dialogue, 37(1), p. 95.

[200] Waltraud Queiser Morales (2011), "Girl Soldiers: The Other Face of Sexual Exploitation and Gender Violence," *ASPJ Africa & Francophile*, p. 64.

[201] Tim Allen and Mareike Schomerus (2006), "A Hard Homecoming: Lessons Learned from the Reception Center Process in Northern Uganda: An Independent Study," United States Agency for International Development and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), p. vi.

[202] Carpenter, "Recognizing Gender-Based Violence," p. 96.

[203] Ibid., p. 97. Note the author is here referencing explicitly adult males.

[204] International Criminal Court, "Policy on Children," p. 12, para. 23.

[205] Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Foreword to the United Nations Framework, p. 4.

[206] This definition first appeared in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence on 20 April 2016 (S/2016/361, para. 2) and has been reaffirmed and referenced in subsequent reports (S/2017/249, S/2018/250, S/2019/280, S/2020/487,

S/2021/312, S/2022/272, and S/2023/413). This link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, often a state or nonstate armed group, the profile of the victim, the climate of impunity, cross-border consequences, or violations of the provisions of a ceasefire agreement.

[207] United Nations Security Council resolution 1820 (2008), para. 4 notes that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide." Sexual violence has also been legally acknowledged as a component of ethnic cleansing campaigns including, notably, in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, case No. IT-98-33-T, *Prosecutor v. Krstić*, judgment of 2 August 2001. Note that ethnic cleansing is not codified in international law.

[208] Dara Kay Cohen (2013), "Explaining Rape During Civil War: Cross-National Evidence (1980–2009)," *American Political Science Review*, 107(3); Dara Kay Cohen, *Rape During Civil War* (2016); Elisabeth Jean Wood (2006), "Variation in Sexual Violence During War," *Politics and Society*, 34(4); and Elisabeth Jean Wood (2009), "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When is Wartime Rape Rare?" Politics and Society, 37.

[209] *See*, for example, the finding that, according to the Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset, state actors may perpetrate sexual violence to greater degrees than nonstate armed actors. Dara Kay Cohen and Ragnhild Nordås (2014), "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Introducing the SVAC Dataset, 1989–2009," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59(5).

[210] The report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence on 23 March 2015 made reference to conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations (S/2015/203, para. 61). This link was made explicit and further unpacked in the report on 20 April 2016 (S/2016/361, para. 1 and 20), following Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) recognizing that sexual violence can be part of the strategic objectives and ideology of certain armed groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations. Security Council resolution 2331 (2016) further recognises the link between trafficking in persons, sexual violence, and terrorism.

[211] Carpenter, "Recognizing Gender-Based Violence"; Jerker Edström and Chris Dolan (2019), "Breaking the Spell of Silence: Collective Healing as Activism amongst Refugee Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in Uganda," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 32(2); Sandesh Sivakumaran (2007), "Sexual Violence Against Men in Armed Conflict," *European Journal of International Law*, 18(2); Laura Sjoberg, *Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping* (2016); Richard Traunmüller, Sara Kijewski, and Markus Freitag (2019), "The Silent Victims of Sexual Violence During War: Evidence from a List Experiment in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 63(9); and Joshua Tschantret (2018), "Cleansing the Caliphate: Insurgent Violence against Sexual Minorities," *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(2).

[212] United Nations Framework (2022), p. 16, and Wood, "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence."

[213] Kerry F. Crawford, *Wartime Sexual Violence: From Silence to Condemnation of a Weapon of War* (2017); Inger Skjelsbæk (2001), "Sexual Violence and War: Mapping Out a Complex Relationship," *European Journal of International Relations*, 7(2); United Nations Framework (2022), p. 16; and Elisabeth Jean Wood (2014), "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and the Policy Implications of Recent Research," *International Review of the Red Cross*, 96(894).

[214] Elisabeth Jean Wood (2018), "Rape as a Practice of War: Toward a Typology of Political Violence," *Politics Society*, 46(4).

[215] Cohen, *Rape During Civil War*; Dara Kay Cohen and Ragnhild Nordås (2015), "Do States Delegate Shameful Violence to Militias? Patterns of Sexual Violence in Recent Armed Conflicts," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59(5); Amelia Hoover Green, *The Commander's Dilemma: Violence and Restraint in Wartime* (2018); Michele L. Leiby (2009), "Wartime Sexual Violence in Guatemala and Peru," *International Studies Quarterly*, 53(2); Mara Redlich Revkin and Elisabeth Jean Wood (2021), "The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices," *The Journal of Global Security Studies*, 62(2); and Beth Elise Whitaker, James Igoe Walsh, and Justin Conrad (2019), "Natural Resource Exploitation and Sexual Violence by Rebel Groups," *Journal of Politics*, 81(2).

[216] Ragnhild Nordås and Dara Kay Cohen (2021), "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24.

[217] "Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, January–December 2023" [Infographic Accompanying the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292), Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (2024).

[218] Aijazi and Baines, "Relationality, Culpability and Consent," p. 475.

[219] Annan et al., "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender."

[220] International Criminal Court, "Policy on Children," p. 12, para. 24.

[221] Ní Aoláin, Cahn, and Haynes, "Masculinities and Child Soldiers," p. 240–241.

[222] Carpenter, "Recognizing Gender-Based Violence," p. 94–95.

[223] Annie Barry Bruton (2019), "Bacha Bazi and Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan: Should the U.S. Military Have Done More to Protect Underage Boys?" *Kentucky Law Journal*, 108(1); and Amalendu Misra (2023), "Men on Top: Sexual Economy of *Bacha Bazi* in Afghanistan," *International Politics*, 60.

[224] O'Neil and Van Broeckhoven, "Cradled by Conflict," p. 73.

[225] Gary Risser, "As Conflict Changes, So Do the Dangers for Children" [Opinion], United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), April 8, 2022.

[226] At the time of this writing, there is a gap in the research on the use of technologies by children in armed conflict generally.

[227] "LGBTQ Lives in Conflict," Outright International, p. 7–8. *See also* International Criminal Court, "Policy on Children," p. 12, para. 24, and "Everyone Wants Me Dead," Human Rights Watch.

[228] IDDRS, Module 1.10, p.2. *See also* Secretary-General, Note to the General Assembly of 24 May 2005 (A/C.5/59/31), para. 1(d).

[229] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 1.

[230] Ibid., p. 6.

[231] See, *for example*, Donnelly, "Gender and DDR."

[232] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 7.

[233] Ibid. *See also* Module 2.40: Reintegration as Part of Sustaining Peace (November 19, 2019), p. 5.

[234] M. E. Burman and S. McKay (2007), "Marginalization of Girl Mothers During Reintegration from Armed Groups in Sierra Leone," *International Nursing Review*, 54, p. 319.

[235] Silke Rusch, "Coordination of DDR Initiatives with Transitional Justice Efforts in the Context of Sustaining Peace" [Prepared to inform the Guidance Note of the United Nations Secretary-General on Transitional Justice: A Strategic Tool for People, Prevention and Peace] (2023). On the perspectives of conflict-affected youth in the Central African Republic, see Pauline Zerla, "Trauma, Violence Prevention, and Reintegration: Learning from Youth Conflict Narratives in the Central African Republic," RESOLVE Network (2024). For information on community-based reintegration generally, see "Guidance Note on Supporting Community-Based Reintegration of Former Members of Armed Forces and Groups," United Nations Development Programme (2024).

[236] Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12 on the right of the child to be heard (CRC/C/GC/12) (2009).

[237] Ibid., para. 124.

[238] Paris Principles Operational Handbook, p. 89–90.

[239] *See* reference materials at the end of this section. For additional materials, see also Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Boreckhoven, "No Research About Us Without Us," United Nations University (2019); "The Participation of Children and Young People in Emergencies: A Guide for Relief Agencies, Based Largely on Experiences in the Asian Tsunami Response," United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2007); and "Youth Voices: Participatory Action Research with Adolescents Affected by the Syria Crisis in Egypt and Lebanon," Save the Children (2018).

[240] Paris Principles Operational Handbook, p. 90 (referencing Child Protection Working Group, "Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit," Save the Children (2012)).

[241] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 31.

[242] IDDRS, Module 5.20: Children and DDR (November 9, 2021), p. 36, 41.

[243] IDDRS, Module 5.20, p. 40.

[244] *See*, for example, Jaremey R. McMullin (2022), "Hustling, Cycling, Peacebuilding: Narrating Postwar Reintegration through Livelihood in Liberia," *Review of International Studies*, 48(1). McMullin discusses critical themes of agency, voice, and authority.

[245] MacFarlane, "Child Soldiers in Nepal," p. 1225.

[246] *See*, *for example*, Ibid., p. 1226.

[247] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 26–27.

[248] Ibid., p. 27.

[249] *See*, for example, Donnelly, "Gender and DDR."

[250] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 1.

[251] Ibid., p. 21.

[252] *See* "Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups Programme Development Toolkit," The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2022); "Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Competency Framework," The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2020); "Child Protection Resource Pack: How to Plan, Monitor and Evaluate Child Protection Programmes," United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2015); Child Protection Working Group, "Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit" (2012); "Feedback and Reporting Mechanism," Save the Children (2020); "Guidance on Risk Informed Programming," UNICEF (2018); Paris Principles Steering Committee, "Situation Analysis," "Risk Assessment, Security Planning and Risk-Informed Planning," "Human Resources and Capacity," and "Programme Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning," Paris Principles Operational Handbook; Yvonne Kemper, "Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA): A Practical Guide and Toolkit for UNICEF and Partners," UNICEF (2020); "Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action," Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019); "Safeguarding Children in Emergencies Toolkit," Keeping Children Safe (2012); and "Situation Analysis Tool, Programme Guidelines on Addressing Recruitment and Use by Armed Forces," Save the Children (2018).

[253] Paris Principles Operational Handbook, p. 95.

[254] Targeted individual support facilitates the reintegration of an individual, and a needs-based approach to individual support can address specific needs and vulnerabilities. This type of support is not possible for persons who cannot be identified, which may disproportionately impact girls. Community support empowers a community by allowing them to contribute to design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, including through a reliance on local capacities, committees, and organisations. Since communities may not include stakeholders to represent persons of all ages, gender identities, and disability statuses, this approach can exclude the specific needs of certain populations from consideration, leading to exclusion and participation. See IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 13–17.

[255] Ibid., p. 1.

[256] Ibid., p. 2.

[257] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 42.

[258] Donnelly, "Gender and DDR," p. 24.

[259] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 4–5.

[260] "LGBTQ Lives in Conflict and Crisis," Outright International, p. 29.

[261] *See*, *for example*, United Nations reports on sexual violence and gender identity. These include, inter alia, recent reports of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity of 27 July 2022 (A/77/235) and 25 July 2023 (A/78/227); report of the Independent Expert on data collection and management as a means to create heightened awareness of violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity of 14 May 2019 (A/HRC/41/45); report on the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health of persons, communities and populations affected by discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals of 14 June 2022 (A/HRC/50/27); and report on socio-cultural and economic inclusion of LGBT people of 17 July 2019 (A/74/181).

[262] Janet E. Lord and Michael Ashley Stein (2015), "Peacebuilding and Reintegrating Ex-Combatants with Disabilities," *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 19(3), p. 278.

[263] Derived from the first principle advanced in the International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities (2020).

[264] "Children with Disabilities," UNICEF, p. 13.

[265] Burman and McKay, "Marginalization of Girl Mothers," p. 319.

[266] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 27.

[267] Ibid., p. 13.

[268] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 38–39.

[269] Ibid., p. 33.

[270] Ibid.

[271] Burman and McKay, "Marginalization of Girl Mothers," p. 317. In this study, the authors interviewed community, religious, educational, ethnic and political leaders, healthcare workers, girl mothers, and family members. On average, the girl mothers interviewed were between sixteen and twenty-two years of age and were between twelve and seventeen years of age at the time of abduction. Their children were, on average, between three and five years of age.

[272] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 35–36, 82.

[273] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 2.

[274] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 4.

[275] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 11.

[276] Betancourt et al. (2008), "High Hopes, Grim Reality: Reintegration and the Education of Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone," *Comparative Education Review*, 52(4), p. 570, 575.

[277] Ibid., p. 570.

[278] Ibid., p. 581–582.

[279] *See* Annan et al., "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender," and Betancourt et al. (2008), "High Hopes, Grim Reality."

[280] Mazurana and Carlson, "From Combat to Community," p. 22.

[281] Betancourt et al. (2008), "High Hopes, Grim Reality," p. 569.

[282] Ibid., p. 568.

[283] Ibid., p. 582.

[284] Angela Veale and Aki Stavrou (2007), "Former Lord's Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees: Explorations of Identity in Reintegration and Reconciliation," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 13(3), p. 287.

[285] *See*, for example, IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 39.

[286] Mazurana and Carlson, "From Combat to Community," p. 25.

[287] Ibid.

[288] Burman and McKay, "Marginalization of Girl Mothers," p. 319.

[289] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 47.

[290] Gracie Brownell (2020), "A Phenomenological Study of Ex-Child Soldiers' Perceived Meaning of Reintegration in Post War Liberia," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 30(2).

[291] Ibid., p. 182.

[292] Brownell, "A Phenomenological Study."

[293] Mark JD Jordans et al. (2012), "Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Burundi: A Tracer Study," *BMC Public Health*, 12(905).

[294] Ibid., p. 10.

[295] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 25–26.

[296] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 47.

[297] Ibid, p. 13.

[298] Ibid, p. 2.

[299] *See* Annan et al., "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender," and N. Boothby, J. Crawford, and J. Halperin (2006), "Mozambican Child Soldier Outcome Study: Lessons Learned on Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts," *Global Public Health*, 1.

[300] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 30.

[301] Ibid., p. 51.

[302] Report of the Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity on practices of so-called "conversion therapy" (A/HRC/44/53) (May 1, 2020), para. 17. Cisgender is "a term that describes people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth (i.e., not transgender). A cis person may have any sexual orientation, gender expression or sex characteristics. Used next to a noun i.e. cisgender man, cis woman." United Nations Free and Equal, "Definitions."

[303] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 42.

[304] Donnelly, "Gender and DDR," p. 17.

[305] Theresa S. Betancourt et al. (2011), "Sierra Leone's Child Soldiers: War Exposures and Mental Health Problems by Gender," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 49(1).

[306] Angela Veale, Miranda Worthen, and Susan McKay (2017), "Transformative Spaces in the Social Reintegration of Former Child Soldier Young Mothers in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Northern Uganda," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 23(1), p. 58–59. *Citing* to Theresa S. Betancourt et al. (2014), "Context Matters: Community Characteristics and Mental Health Among War-Affected Youth in Sierra Leone," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 55, and Annan et al., "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender."

[307] Jordans et al., "Reintegration of Child Soldiers."

[308] Violeta Ramírez-Guarín, Nuria Codina, and José Vicente Pestana (2023), "A Systematic Review of Psychosocial Interventions for Child Soldiers: Types, Length and Main Findings," *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 37(1).

[309] Lujang John Jangaling and Jatswan S. Sidhu (2022), "Traditional and Religious Approaches as a Psychosocial Support in the Reintegration of Former Girl Soldiers in South Sudan," *African and Asian Studies*, 21(4).

[310] N. Boothby, J. Crawford, and J. Halperin (2006), "Mozambique Child Soldier Life Outcome Study: Lessons Learned in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts," *Global Public Health*, 1(1).

[311] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 53.

[312] Ibid.

[313] Ibid.

[314] Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 3 on HIV/AIDS and the Rights of the Child (CRC/GC/2003/3), para. 16.

[315] Ibid., para. 20–21, 36–37, and IDDRS, Module 5.20, p. 31. See also IDDRS, Module 5.60: HIV/AIDS and DDR (August 1, 2006).

[316] IDDRS, Module 5.20, p. 30–31.

[317] "Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Against Boys Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups in Reintegration Programmes," United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) and the All Survivors Project (ASP) (2022), and "Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Against

Boys Associated with Armed Groups During the Process of Reintegration in Colombia," OSRSG-CAAC and ASP (2024).

[318] *See*, *generally*, "The Health of Male and LGBT Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," All Survivors Project (2020).

[319] Amisi et al. (2018), "The Impact of Support Programmes for Survivors of Sexual Violence: Micro-Level Evidence from Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 34(3), p. 201–223.

[320] Theresa S. Betancourt et al. (2010), "Past Horrors, Present Struggles: The Role of Stigma in the Association Between War Experiences and Psychosocial Adjustment Among Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone," *Social Science and Medicine*, 70(1), p. 18, 25.

[321] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 53.

[322] "Supporting Access to Safe Abortion in Conflict and Humanitarian Settings" [Statement], International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) (2023); Center for Reproductive Rights, "Improving Access to Abortion in Crisis Settings: A Legal Risk Management Tool for Organizations and Providers (2021); and Ruvani Jayaweera et al. (2021), "The Potential of Self-Managed Abortion to Expand Abortion Access in Humanitarian Contexts," *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*, 2(681039).

[323] "Supporting Access to Safe Abortion," FIGO.

[324] "Abortion: Women More at Risk of Death in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings," Medecins Sans Frontieres (2023), and "Unsafe Abortion: A Preventable Danger," Medecins Sans Frontieres (2023). *See also* Estelle Paquier et al. (2023), "High Severity of Abortion Complications in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings: A Cross-Sectional Study in Two Referral Hospitals in Sub-Saharan Africa (AMoCo Study)," *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 23(143).

[325] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 50.

[326] Jeannie Annan et al., "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender."

[327] Veale, Worthen, and McKay, "Transformative Spaces," p. 59. Citing to J. Annan, M. Brier, and F. Aryemo (2009), "From 'Rebel' to 'Returnee.' Daily Life and Reintegration for Young Soldiers in Northern Uganda," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24; Burman and McKay, "Marginalization of Girl Mothers"; C. Coulter, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone* (2009); and M. Denov and I. Marchand (2014), "'One Cannot Take Away the Stain': Rejection and Stigma Among Former Child Soldiers in Colombia," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 20.

[328] Veale, Worthen, and McKay, "Transformative Spaces," p. 59. *Citing* to S. Shepler, *Childhood Deployed: Remaking Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone* (2009).

[329] Luigi Achilli (2024), "Caught in the Crossfires: Unravelling the Complex Interplay of Exploitation and Agency in Children Associated with Boko Haram," *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 22, p. 30.

[330] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 49.

[331] Dean M. Ravizza, "The Use of Sports for Former Child Soldiers: The Faces, Forces and Barriers Behind Social Inclusion," in Jim Cherrington and Jack Black, eds., *Sport and Physical Activity in Catastrophic Environments* (2022).

[332] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 14.

[333] IDDRS, Module 1.20, p. 4–5.

[334] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 10.

[335] Ibid., p. 93–94.

[336] Mazurana and Carlson, "From Combat to Community," p. 13.

[337] Ibid., p. 22.

[338] Ibid., p. 23.

[339] IDDRS, Module 4.30, p. 51.

[340] Theresa S. Betancourt et al. (2008), "High Hopes, Grim Reality," p. 574–575.

[341] Benjamin Alipanga and Ibrahim Luberenga (2024), "Reconciliation Programs from the Experiences of War-Affected Persons in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda," *International Perspectives on Stress and Coping*, 29(6), p. 624.

[342] Ibid., p. 630.

[343] Ibid., p. 631–634.

[344] Matthew H. Charles and Karen Fowler-Watt (2023), "'Storylistening' as a Methodology for Peacebuilding among Young Survivors of Conflict and Their Communities in Colombia," *Methodological Innovations*, 16(1).

[345] Tarela Juliet Ike et al. (2022), "Reintegration of Former Boko Haram Members and Combatants in Nigeria: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Community Members' Experiences of Trauma," *Third World Quarterly*, 43(12).

[346] Janet E. Lord and Michael Ashley Stein (2015), "Peacebuilding and Reintegrating Ex-Combatants with Disabilities," *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 19(3), p. 282.

[347] Allen and Schomerus, "A Hard Homecoming," p. 10, 23–27.

[348] Ibid., p. 26–27.

[349] Burman and McKay, "Marginalization of Girl Mothers," p. 317.

[350] Ibid., p. 318–319.

[351] Ibid., p. 319.

[352] Ibid., p. 321.

[353] Veale, Worthen, and McKay, "Transformative Spaces," p. 59. *Citing to* Annan et al., "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender"; E. Apio, "Bearing the Burden of Blame—The Children Born of the Lord's Resistance Army, Northern Uganda," Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2008); A. Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa* (2006); S. McKay and D. Mazurana, "Where Are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War," International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (2004); F. Shanahan and A. Veale, "The Girl is the Core of Life: Violence and the Sacred in Social Reintegration, Northern Uganda," in B. Maeland, ed., *Culture, Religion and the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda* (2010); and M. Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* (2006).

[354] Veale, Worthen, and McKay, "Transformative Spaces," p. 59.

[355] Veale, Worthen, and McKay, "Transformative Spaces."

TERMS OF USE

In downloading or otherwise employing this information, users indicate that:

a. They understand that the materials downloaded from the website are protected under United States Copyright Law (Title 17, United States Code). This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

b. They will use the material only for educational, scholarly, and other noncommercial purposes without written permission.

c. They will not sell, transfer, assign, license, lease, or otherwise convey any portion of this information to any third party. Republication or display on a third party's website requires the express written permission of the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University or the Princeton University Library.

d. They understand that any quotations from interviewees or authors reflect their personal points of view. Although all efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information collected, Princeton University does not warrant the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, or other characteristics of any material available online.

e. They acknowledge that the content and/or format of the archive and the site may be revised, updated or otherwise modified from time to time.

f. They accept that access to and use of the archive are at their own risk. They shall not hold Princeton University liable for any loss or damages resulting from the use of information in the archive. Princeton University assumes no liability for any errors or omissions with respect to the functioning of the archive.

g. In all publications, presentations or other communications that incorporate or otherwise rely on information from this archive, they will acknowledge that such information was obtained through the Liechtenstein Institute of Self-Determination at Princeton University website. Our status (and that of any identified contributors) as the authors of material must always be acknowledged and a full credit given containing the following information:

> Author(s) or Editor(s) if listed, Full title, Year of publication, "Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination, Princeton University", Number of Paper.