

Forum: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3)

Issue: Ensuring the safety and reintegration of children recruited by armed groups in South Sudan

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TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Child soldiers are underage soldiers who join armed militias and are used in combat as fighters, spies and suicide bombers. Nations all over the world continue to use child soldiers recruited by both armed forces and groups beyond government control. Due to reduced regulation, non-state forces recruit soldiers of young age, further adding on to the gravity of this issue. These groups often recruit children by force, either through abduction or coercion or lure them with financial or drug-related assurances. However, some also join voluntarily, arguably with little comprehension of what participation will involve.

Since its independence in 2011, South Sudan has experienced many harmful outbreaks. According to the United Nations, ever since the eruption of the civil war in 2013, both military and opposing armed groups in the conflict have recruited about 19,000 children as soldiers.¹ In 2015, parties to the conflict signed the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS). In this accord, the warring parties agreed to refrain from recruiting and using child soldiers.² However, in interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch (HRW), former child soldiers stated that commanders from both government forces and rebel groups have been abducting, detaining and forcing children, some as young as 13, into their ranks.³ South Sudan has been taking in adolescent soldiers for over 12 years, since December of 2013.⁴ Underage recruitment is one of six grave violations against children that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and local partners work tirelessly to combat.⁵ It defies existing laws, and robs the most vulnerable of the childhoods every one of them deserves. In Yambio, South Sudan, UNMISS and its partners have been

¹ Matiyas, Eden. "The Challenges of Reintegrating Child Soldiers in South Sudan." *JusticeInfo.Net*, 23 May 2018, www.justiceinfo.net/en/37569-the-challenges-of-reintegrating-child-soldiers-in-south-sudan.html#:~:text=And%20accounting%20to%20the%20United,about%2019%2C000%20children%20as%20soldiers.

² "South Sudan: Warring Parties Break Promises on Child Soldiers." *Human Rights Watch*, 27 Oct. 2022, www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/06/south-sudan-warring-parties-break-promises-child-soldiers.

³ "We Can Die Too." *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Mar. 2023, www.hrw.org/report/2015/12/15/we-can-die-too/recruitment-and-use-child-soldiers-south-sudan.

⁴ "Stolen Childhoods." *UNICEF South Sudan*, www.unicef.org/southsudan/stolen-childhoods.

⁵ *UNMISS trains members of South Sudan's forces in Pochalla on upholding child rights | United Nations Peace Operations*. (2021). Unmiss. <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/unmiss-trains-members-south-sudans-forces-pochalla-upholding-child-rights?>

supporting the release of children that have been recruited into armed forces and Malakal. With the help of the initiatives made by the UN Peacekeeping Missions, families reunite with their abducted children. Yet not every process unfolds the same way, some contexts present greater challenges than others. The challenges of social reintegration go deep. Some demobilised children described feeling useless, excluded, discriminated against and unfairly blamed for many community problems.⁶ Adults commonly described behavioural problems and said that the children had become used to having their own way and quickly became frustrated and aggressive when thwarted.

Many adults also complained that the children were idle and that their frustrations led them to rejoin the military or leave for urban areas under government control. Parents and relatives have found it difficult to respond to these challenges. The creation of special centres or boarding schools for children needing to be “oriented” to have behaviour to the expectations of their elders was the most occurring response by parents. Some local education officials expressed the need to train and support teachers to cope with these children's challenging behaviour but had no specific ideas about how this might be done.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Child Recruitment

“Any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.”⁷

Demobilization

The action of releasing someone from one of the armed forces, especially at the end of a war. “Demobilisation of a military force means breaking up its component formations and units and discharging its personnel from military control and responsibility.”⁸

Disarmament

⁶ “The Return and Reintegration of ‘child Soldiers’ in Sudan: The Challenges Ahead.” *Forced Migration Review*, 27 Aug. 2024, www.fmreview.org/robertson-mccauley/.

⁷ *Child Recruitment and Use* | Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. (2016). Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/en/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers>

⁸ *Demobilization* - Oxford Reference, www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095709676.

The act of taking away or giving up weapons. “Disarmament and arms control by states is about accounting for, controlling and eliminating weapons, as they work together in community to make the world a safer place.”⁹

Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial support is defined as assistance aimed at addressing the mental health and psychosocial needs of individuals, particularly in contexts such as refugee care, which includes resources and services that facilitate well-being and recovery from trauma.¹⁰

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is defined as “a set of interventions designed to optimize functioning and reduce disability in individuals with health conditions in interaction with their environment. Rehabilitation helps a child, adult or older person to be as independent as possible in everyday activities and enables participation in education, work, recreation and meaningful life roles such as taking care of family”.¹¹

Reintegration

“A process which enables individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity and inclusion in civic life. At the individual level, the specific needs of beneficiaries should be covered and support for these provided upon return. The notions of return and reintegration are intimately interlinked with that of sustainability. Reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers.”¹²

⁹ “What Does Disarmament Mean?” *Disarmament and Security Centre*, www.disarmsecure.org/disarmament-101-resources/what-does-disarmament-mean.

¹⁰ *Psychosocial Support - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics*. (n.d.). www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/psychosocial-support. Retrieved July 18, 2026, from

¹¹ World Health Organization. (2024). *Rehabilitation*. World Health Organisation; World Health Organization: WHO. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/rehabilitation>

¹² *Reintegration | INEE*. (2024). Inee.Org. <https://inee.org/eie-glossary/reintegration>

Child Protection

“The prevention of, and response to, exploitation, abuse, neglect, harmful practices and violence against children” with laws and policies enforced. “Child Protection is the prevention of, and response to, exploitation, abuse, neglect, harmful practices and violence against children. It is embedded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals. Child Protection is universal: it is for all children everywhere, from low- to high-income countries.”¹³

Family Reunification

Locating and returning children to their parents legally, safely and whenever it's in the sake of the child/children. “Family reunification helps bring family members living in different countries together. Sometimes, families are forced to leave their homes and get separated. If one family member is recognized as a refugee or given other protection status in another country, they may be able to ask for their close family to join them, depending on the rules of the country. This process is called refugee family reunification, and it helps families live together again in safety. This process is managed by the government of the country you wish to be reunited in.”¹⁴

Community Reintegration

Helping former children recruits feel accepted in their communities by putting them in environments with their said communities like education and programs i.e, support groups. “Community reintegration is a return to productivity through functional independence and resumption of social roles at premorbid or new levels postinjury. Effective community reintegration is best achieved with a diverse interdisciplinary team that can use a collaborative approach to treat patients' physical, cognitive, and psychological deficits.”¹⁵

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan

The war that has been going on in Sudan for 3 years is one of the largest humanitarian issues globally, with the displacement of almost 14 million people and 4 million refugees seeking help in countries nearby. As the United Nations states, approximately 34 million Sudanese people, which is 65% of Sudan's population, depend on and cannot live without humanitarian aid.¹⁶ Juvenile soldiers often go through psychological and physical trauma as they constantly are exposed to malpractice, depression and anxiety, resulting in it being extremely difficult for

¹³ “Child Protection Strategy.” UNICEF, www.unicef.org/documents/child-protection-strategy.

¹⁴ “Family Reunification.” UNHCR, help.unhcr.org/global/family-reunification/.

¹⁵ “Community Reintegration - an Overview | Sciencedirect Topics.” *Community Reintegration*, Science Direct, www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/community-reintegration.

¹⁶ “Sudan: 14 Million Displaced; Hunger and Attacks on Health Continue as War Enters Fourth Year | UN News.” *United Nations*, United Nations, news.un.org/en/story/2026/04/1167281.

these children to return to their normal state. The risk of substance abuse, criminal behaviour, social isolation and anger management issues increase as their conditions worsen.

In severe circumstances, actions like murder, sexual assault/violence, and suicidal behaviour can be seen in the children's behaviour.¹⁷ Vulnerable groups such as children and women have been affected as they arrive at refugee camps traumatised and both physically and mentally exhausted. The extreme conditions in the camps lead to overcrowding, limited access to food, water and basic healthcare; further emphasising the urgent need for more/ongoing humanitarian aid.¹⁸

This conflict has affected many civilians in Sudan due to displacement, physical fatigue, not enough food or water and the lack of basic necessities. Families have to constantly live in fear and move houses because of the conflict which leads to the families losing access to food, healthcare and many other living essentials.

The numbers of children requiring humanitarian assistance were above 17 million, indicating that children are mostly affected in this occurring issue. These children constantly face abduction, rape, assault, murder and being taken away from their families. The children in Sudan had one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the world. Disease outbreaks constantly come up in Sudan, like measles and malaria which affect a large number of children; also "water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) related diseases like diarrhoea and cholera remain a high risk due to lack of safe water and adequate sanitation."¹⁹

The attacks on infrastructure have created many problems for civilians as they have a lack of access to clean water and electricity. This disruption leads to the healthcare conditions rapidly dropping because of the loss of electricity and clean water which are vital for a functioning hospital. The lack of access to clean water harms public health, which can create an even bigger environment for cholera outbreaks and other health crises.²⁰

The Agreements Signed in South Sudan

Signed on September 12, 2018, the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) is the primary peace accord establishing the country's current transitional governance structure. The framework seeks to end the civil war that began in 2013 by outlining power-sharing, a permanent constitution, security sector reform, and transitional justice. It further provided general principles and specific guidance on resource, economic and financial management, which say that the wealth of South Sudan would be shared equitably and for institutional reform of the Anti-Corruption Commission, amongst other institutions. The provisions in the Agreement in many ways reconfirm what was provided in the previous agreement.

¹⁷ Watch, Genocide. "The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Sudan." *Genocidewatch*, genocidewatch, 18 Mar. 2025, www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/the-recruitment-and-use-of-child-soldiers-in-sudan.

¹⁸ "War Child in Sudan." *War Child in Sudan | War Child*, War Child, 28 Apr. 2025, www.warchild.net/sudan/.

¹⁹ "The Sudan Crisis - a Children's Crisis." *UNICEF Sudan*, UNICEF, www.unicef.org/sudan/sudan-crisis-childrens-crisis-0.

²⁰ "Sudan: Attacks on Critical Civilian Infrastructure Surge amid Escalating Fighting." *International Committee of the Red Cross*, 28 Apr. 2025, www.icrc.org/en/news-release/sudan-attacks-critical-civilian-infrastructure-amid-escalating-fighting.

The Recruitment of Child Soldiers

Some child soldiers are recruited as young as seven or ten years old, they spend most of their childhood carrying guns instead of toys. Until the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), together with South Sudan's National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SSNDDRC), and UNICEF, facilitated an exercise to identify minor soldiers in the armed ranks. "Children cannot be soldiers. This is the policy of the military based on our constitution which states that no person below the age of 18 should be recruited or used by men and women in uniform," explains Oluku Andrew Holt, National Coordinator, for the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups.²¹

The recruitment of children into the military can also be used as messengers, spies, and cooks. Due to the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, more and more children are being forced to be in armed groups by abduction and other measures of force; with UNICEF estimating 19,000 children being used in military groups in South Sudan.²²

Several treaties aim to protect children in armed conflict. According to the UN Human Rights Council, the recruitment of children by armed groups for any form of exploitation, including combat roles, constitutes a violation of human rights, a serious crime, and a breach of international humanitarian law. The Rome Statute also establishes the enlistment of children into armed forces or groups as a war crime.

Despite all the legal protections for the case of recruited children, South Sudan continues to forcefully take vulnerable children and use them for military purposes. The Security Council extended the mandate of UNMISS to the 30th of April, 2025, which was implemented on February 16th, 2024 up till the 15th of July, 2024. The SC extended the mission due to the findings of 40 verified recruited minor individuals in South Sudan, by UNMISS.²³

As a child leaves an armed group, the long term affects to the child's life could be that they lose access to education, have their families being separated from them, and need psychosocial help. Furthermore, reintegration helps remove children from armed forces, gain access to education, lowers the chance of being recruited to the military again, and most importantly lets them be reunited with their families. With the help of UNICEF, programmes in

²¹ "UNMISS and Partners Support the Release of Children Recruited into Armed Forces: United Nations Peace Operations." *UNMISS*, United Nations Peace Operations, unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/unmiss-and-partners-support-the-release-of-children-recruited-into-armed-forces.

²² "Children and Armed Groups." *UNICEF South Sudan*, UNICEF, www.unicef.org/southsudan/children-and-armed-groups.

²³ "United Nations S/2024/572 Security Council Distr.: General 29 July 2024." *Situation in South Sudan*, United Nations, Security Council, unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/secretary-generals_report_on_the_situation_of_south_sudan_29_july_2024.pdf.

South Sudan have helped the adolescent gain the needs mentioned prior as a way to combat the issue of child recruitment.²⁴

Identification and Release of Children from Armed Groups

In 2025, South Sudan will continue to experience a protracted child protection crisis, particularly in conflict-affected and underserved areas across the country. Key child protection issues include family separation, recruitment into armed groups, physical and sexual violence, exploitation, and psychosocial distress, particularly among adolescent girls. Children, especially in urban areas, experience high levels of exploitation and resort to enrollment in gangs as an extreme coping mechanism. Children with disabilities and child survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV), particularly girls, are disproportionately at risk with limited access to essential services such as health, psychosocial support and legal aid.

Identifying the children in armed groups isn't easy to find as it is very difficult to safely reach them. The collaboration between UNMISS and UNICEF helped to verify and find the ages of the underage recruited individuals before releasing them. This process helps the organisations involved like UNMISS and UNICEF find the families of the children.

Immediate medical care, food and drink, clothing and any basic living essentials are given to the released children who have been verified by UNICEF and UNMISS while they arrange for them to be given back to their families or legal guardians.²⁵

The process of finding every single child in the army force continues to be extremely difficult as child recruitment is often done in secret, trying to hide any evidence. UNICEF plans to keep monitoring and also making identification/verification necessary for this issue.²⁶

Physical and Psychological Effects on Child Soldiers

Whilst many children are harassed or intimidated into recruitment by armed forces, others are driven to join militias as a means of surviving Sudan's widespread extreme poverty. Some families see recruitment as employment, with parents even pushing their children into the military. New RSF recruits are being rewarded with stolen food and aid. The UN Special Rapporteur for contemporary slavery, Tomoya Obokata, stated that recruiting children in exchange for food and safety amounts to forced labor and contemporary slavery under international law. Local leaders are key facilitators of child recruitment in Sudan, acting at the request of local RSF chiefs or RSF allied militias.

²⁴ "South Sudan Conflict: 5,000 Children Reunited with Family by Save the Children, UNICEF and Partners." UNICEF, www.unicef.org/press-releases/south-sudan-conflict-5000-children-reunited-family-save-children-unicef-and-partners.

²⁵ "South Sudan: Children Giving up Their Guns to Go to School | Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict." *United Nations*, United Nations, childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/en/south-sudan-children-giving-up-their-guns-to-go-to-school.

²⁶ "Stolen Childhoods." *UNICEF South Sudan*, www.unicef.org/southsudan/stolen-childhoods.

Child soldiers are exposed to extreme physical and psychological trauma; they also frequently suffer from fear, anxiety, depression, impulsiveness, hyperactivity, and low self-esteem, making it difficult for them to reintegrate into society. They are also at higher risk of substance abuse, anger issues, criminal behavior, and social isolation. In extreme cases, they may engage in serious violent crimes such as murder, sexual violence, or mutilation, or struggle with suicidal tendencies.

Reintegration Approaches

Discussion about reintegration pivots around community-based reintegration approaches. Arguments in support of individually targeted assistance tend to revolve around two main issues: whether children need a financial or material incentive to persuade them to leave the military and, secondly, whether they need some targeted support to help them begin to reintegrate. During the first phase in 2001, children were given kits on arrival at the transit centres and on their return home. In contrast, in the second phase in 2002 to 2003, no individual benefits or packages were provided. This policy met with considerable opposition from the civil administration, the families and the children themselves. But while many children expected support, there appear to have been many other, more powerful, reasons for leaving the military than a one-off reintegration package. Reunification with their families, access to education and freedom from the risks and rigid discipline of the military were probably the most significant.

Challenges of Reintegration Assistance

Poverty was often cited as a major factor contributing to voluntary recruitment and it is reasonable to assume that living conditions did not improve during their time in the military. A returning child would be yet another person for the family to feed and support, and therefore targeted assistance might help in facilitating the child's acceptance. While initially most of the people interviewed favoured a package of some kind, evidence from Sudan actually indicates that children are at a major risk and need help. Recent evidence from Tam in Upper Nile shows that children being demobilised were generally well fed, shod and clothed while children in the general population exhibited obvious signs of malnutrition, were barefoot and few had clothes. In southern Sudan the number of children who have deserted from the army is high, further evidence that incentives are unlikely to be necessary to entice children away. It also indicates that individual packages for those being formally demobilised will miss a significant and equally needy group. Providing packages exclusively to children who have been demobilised is seen by some as a reward for involvement with the military, can reinforce the separateness of the ex-child soldiers and provoke resentment and discrimination. Individual reintegration packages can also generate expectations of continuing support and reinforce dependency.

Current Action Being Taken

There is currently action being taken covering all grave violations is the first of its kind since the creation of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate. “This long-awaited commitment to South Sudanese boys and girls by the authorities is the culmination of months of engagement with the principal parties to conflict and comes with a significant decrease in grave violations against children and steady child releases over the past year,” said the Special Representative during a four-day visit to South Sudan, her second to the country since she took office.²⁷ The Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (SHNRP), launched in 2026, aims to support the groups at most risk such as women, girls, the elderly and the disabled, combatting exploitation, exclusion, recurring displacement, violence and so forth. “The Action Plan comes at a crucial moment for South Sudan, as it has the potential to build confidence between the parties in the context of the peace process and because it carries a strong message of prevention. Ultimately, peace remains the best protection possible from hostilities for boys and girls and the only road to sustainable development.”, said by Antonio Gueterres.²⁸

He commended the thorough consultations and positive cooperation between the Government of South Sudan and armed groups signatory to the Revitalized Peace Agreement in the development of the Action Plan. The armed groups committed to the Action Plan, which will apply to them as their forces unify with the government forces following the expected formation of the transitional government later in February.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Chad

²⁷ *South Sudan: Comprehensive Action Plan to End & Prevent All Grave Violations against Children Signed by Government - South Sudan* | Reliefweb, reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-comprehensive-action-plan-end-prevent-all-grave-violations-against.

²⁸ *South Sudan: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026 (January 2026)* | Ocha, www.unocha.org/publications/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2026-january-2026

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) have been aiding the Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad, with 90 percent being women and children, since April of 2023; an additional 400,000 Sudanese refugees who have sought shelter in Chad before the war in Sudan started.²⁹ As the newcoming refugees continue to cross the border of Sudan and Chad, the IRC grows and develops health, protection services, nutrition, access to clean water, and mental as well as physical support. Teams of the IRC are being deployed out to the refugee camps to have standard living conditions. As Chad shares a border with Sudan, many refugees flee there as a desperate attempt to get better lives; Chad's government has allowed refugees to pass, having an "open door" policy, relocating them away from the border and closer to places where medical and educational institutions are. The government of Chad also provides basic services as well as protection.³⁰

Ethiopia

The IRC is also providing emergency aid and general long term support like health care, education, food and water, most importantly, the protection of women and children to refugees and local vulnerable communities that are affected by the war and climate shocks in Ethiopia. With the program being active in 9 regions, the IRC proceeds to help the Sudanese refugees reconstruct their lives for the better. Ethiopia's government has been working with the UNHCR and other organisations, also providing protection and asylum, which is legal protection to people who flee their country due to wars, crises or similar issues. Although the pressure is increased on local communities and humanitarian services of Ethiopia because of new coming refugees, they still continue to aid and support them.³¹

Sudan

Sudan is a signatory to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 18 be allowed to participate in armed conflicts. The RSF, Sudanese government and allied forces have been recruiting children to serve for them, despite the legal frameworks against their actions. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have created conditions where children are constantly at risk and exposed to violence, where these leave long term physical and mental health problems. The displacement

²⁹ *How is the war in Sudan impacting Chad?* | International Rescue Committee (IRC). (2023, August 18). [Www.Rescue.Org. https://www.rescue.org/article/how-war-sudan-impacting-chad-0](https://www.rescue.org/article/how-war-sudan-impacting-chad-0)

³⁰ "Fleeing and Waiting: The Path of Sudanese Refugees Crossing the Border into Chad - Chad | Reliefweb." *Refugees Fleeing Sudan Face Months without Shelter, Water or Healthcare in Eastern Chad*, Relief Web, reliefweb.int/report/chad/fleeing-and-waiting-path-sudanese-refugees-crossing-border-chad.

³¹ 2026, 5 August, et al. "Ethiopia." *UNHCR*, United Nations, UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/ethiopia?dataset=POP&yearsMode=range&selectedYears=%5B2012%2C2025%5D&level=OPR&category=PTY&fundingSource=ALS&compareBy=%5B%22category%22%5D&levelCompare=%5B%5B%22OETH_ABC%22%5D%5D&viewType=chart&chartType=bar&contextualDataset=BUD&tableDataView=absolute.

issue in Sudan is large-scale due to these factors.³² Therefore, the Sudanese Government has been trying to prevent the recruitment of children by collaborating with international organisations to fight against this issue; but this is very difficult to combat as most armed groups are in Sudan and have connections to the government.

Danish Refugee Council (DRC)

Operating in Sudan since 2004, the Danish Refugee Council has been providing vital aid to the people who have been displaced by wars; the DRC works mainly in protection; establishing community based networks, providing individual protection, assistance, mental support and effective coping mechanisms for vulnerable people. In severe emergencies, the DRC gives out shelter, medical kits and supports households from flood damage.³³ They also monitor protection risks and give the people in need the correct services. The DRC identifies the protection risks and develops better ways to respond to these risks opposed to them such as violence and displacement. Working in South Sudan as well, they provide emergency support to communities in need.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF offers critical lifesaving assistance to 17.3 million children who are directly impacted by the conflict and catastrophic food insecurity in Sudan. Teams on the ground are vigorously engaged to revive water and sanitation, cure severe malnutrition, deliver emergency healthcare, and facilitate safe learning spaces. UNICEF has been on the ground supplying immediate and life saving humanitarian aid to the impacted children of Sudan. In spite of the difficult humanitarian and security situation and considerable access restraints, UNICEF and its associates have been working relentlessly to deliver the necessary assistance to children and their families which are deeply affected by the war.

³² "Sudan Conflict: 24 Million Children Exposed to a Year of Brutality and Rights Violations, UN Committee Says | OHCHR." *Sudan Conflict: 24 Million Children Exposed to a Year of Brutality and Rights Violations*, OHCHR, www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/sudan-conflict-24-million-children-exposed-year-brutality-and-rights.

³³ Council, Danish Refugee. "Sudan." *Danish Refugee Council*, DRC, <https://drc.ngo/en/locations/sudan/>

United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

The United Nations Missions in South Sudan operates in order to protect civilians, assist in the safe delivery of humanitarian aid, promote human rights, and build durable peace. Civilian and uniformed peacekeepers execute diverse duties under a command determined by the United Nations Security Council. As an independent arbiter, UNMISS uses focused, diplomatic mediation in support of the peace process and to prevent escalation of political violence. It also observes and reports on progress on the security sector and legal reforms as well as election related processes and transitional justice mechanisms.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
2011	UNICEF supported the SSDDRC with the release and reintegration of 208 children. ³⁴
8 February 2012	UNICEF has provided support to the RSSDDRC to facilitate the release and reintegration of 208 children. ³⁵
31 October 2013	Seeking to end the use and recruitment of children in the South Sudanese army, UNMISS completed a two-day training. ³⁶
27 January 2015	UNICEF and partners had secured the release of approximately 3,000 children. ³⁷
12 February 2015	An initial group of 249 children – ranging from 11 to 17 years of age – was released. ³⁸
30 June 2016	45 SPLA officers took part in a training workshop aimed at sensitizing them against the recruitment of children. ³⁹
27 October 2016	A total of 145 children were today released by armed groups in South Sudan. ⁴⁰

³⁴ UNMISS, “Fresh start for children demobilized from RMGs” — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/fresh-start-children-demobilized-rmgs>

³⁵ ReliefWeb, “DDRC, UNICEF Welcome Release of Child Soldiers” — <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan-republic/ddrc-unicef-welcome-release-child-soldiers>

³⁶ UNMISS, “Akobo SPLA trained in child rights” — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/akobo-spla-trained-child-rights>

³⁷ UNMISS, “Armed group to release thousands of children from its ranks” — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/armed-group-release-thousands-children-its-ranks-unicef>

³⁸ UNMISS, “Another 300 child soldiers released in Jonglei” — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/another-300-child-soldiers-released-jonglei>

³⁹ UNMISS, “45 SPLA officers attend workshop” — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/45-spla-officers-attend-workshop-against-recruitment-children-armed-forces>
⁴⁰ ReliefWeb, “145 children released by armed groups” — <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/145-children-released-armed-groups-south-sudan-unicef>

17 April 2018	More than 200 children were released by armed groups in South Sudan. ⁴¹
17 May 2018	210 children were formally released from armed groups. ⁴²
7 August 2018	UNICEF South Sudan requires US\$45 million to support release, demobilization and reintegration of 19,000 children. ⁴³
24 July 2019	32 children were released from armed opposition groups in Leer county. ⁴⁴
24 September 2019	Government forces hand over captured child soldiers. ⁴⁵
29 January 2020	The Action Plan covering all grave violations is the first of its kind. ⁴⁶
26 February 2020	15 children associated with armed forces and armed groups were released in South Sudan. ⁴⁷
19 November 2021	Seven children associated with armed forces were released. ⁴⁸
19 September 2024	Prevention of the recruitment of child soldiers tops the agenda at the national conference in South Sudan. ⁴⁹
10 June 2026	"UNMISS and partners support the release of children recruited into armed forces." ⁵⁰

⁴¹ UNMISS, "More than 200 children released from armed groups in Yambio" — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/more-200-children-released-armed-groups-yambio>

⁴² Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, "Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers" — <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/en/global-coalition-for-reintegration-of-child-soldiers>

⁴³ ReliefWeb, "More children released from South Sudanese armed groups" — <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/more-children-released-south-sudanese-armed-groups-unicef>

⁴⁴ ReliefWeb, "32 children released from opposition groups" — <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/32-children-released-opposition-groups-south-sudan>

⁴⁵ UNMISS, "Government forces hand over captured child soldiers" — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/government-forces-hand-over-captured-child-soldiers>

⁴⁶ Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, "Comprehensive Action Plan signed by Government" — <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2020/02/south-sudan-comprehensive-action-plan-to-end-prevent-all-grave-violations-against-children-signed-by-government/>

⁴⁷ ReliefWeb, "15 child soldiers released in South Sudan" — <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/15-child-soldiers-released-south-sudan>

⁴⁸ UNICEF South Sudan, "UNICEF welcomes release" — <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/press-releases/unicef-welcomes-release>

⁴⁹ UNMISS, "National conference on protection of children" — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/prevention-recruitment-child-soldiers-tops-agenda-national-conference-south-sudan>

⁵⁰ UNMISS, "UNMISS and partners support the release of children" — <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/unmiss-and-partners-support-the-release-of-children-recruited-into-armed-forces>

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UN Security Council Resolution 1539 (2004)

Condemns using child soldiers and requires UN-listed groups to create action plans to stop, while simultaneously also deploys child-protection advisers to UN peacekeeping operations, directly supporting the work of UNMISS in South Sudan. This emphasises on the protection and monitoring of the children in armed groups and conflict, as it calls for action plans to be in place to stop the recruitment of children in armed groups entirely. These action plans include reintegration plans, the release of children from armed forces and letting child protection services on to military bases.⁵¹ Resolution 1539 also states that the children in armed forces should undergo reintegration, demobilisation and disarmament procedures, focusing on the children getting their education and the prevention of being recruited again.

UN Security Council Resolution 2427 (2018)

This resolution prioritizes preventing child recruitment and supports the long-term release and reintegration of affected minors. It secures sustainable funding for mental health and psychosocial programs while establishing that children joined with armed groups must be treated as victims, not criminals. This resolution also calls for the children who are occupied by the armed forces to release the children and give them to civil protective services. It focuses on the fact that reintegration should be long term and not short term, as well as sustainable with access to healthcare, education and basic necessities to live. It provides a framework that supports the released children and the children who are currently in armed forces which is beneficial and well performed.

The Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II, (1977)

The Geneva Conventions protocol regulate conduct during non-international armed conflicts such as the conflict in South Sudan. Article 4 of Additional Protocol II states that children under 15 must not be recruited into armed forces or armed groups or allowed to participate in hostilities. South Sudan's accession to the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols took effect on 25 January 2013. The Additional Protocol II requires children affected by armed conflict to receive support, protection, education, healthcare and help to be reunited with their families; with the reintegration programs in South Sudan being framed by this. Although this protocol sets the minimum age to 15, other agreements have stronger protection to those who are under the age of 18.

⁵¹ "Security Council Resolution 1539 (2004) [on Children in Armed Conflict] | Refworld." *Security Council Resolution 1539 (2004) [on Children in Armed Conflict]*, United Nations, Security Council, www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unsc/2004/en/14849.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989)

This convention calls for the states to protect children that have been impacted by armed conflict. Article 38 prohibits minors under the age of 15 to be recruited into national armed forces, while Article 39 demands that the children being affected by abuse and exploitation in armed conflict get physical and psychological support; South Sudan acceding to the Convention on January 23rd, 2015. Articles 38 and 39 both focus on taking measures to protect children in armed conflict, but Article 39 also prioritises reintegration; This states that protection for the children will not only be while they're occupied in the armed forces of South Sudan, but also when they are released from the military groups, helping them recover from the trauma and trying to put them back into their communities. This entered the force of the country on the 22nd of February, 2015.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

UNMISS Child Protection Training

On the 3rd of November 2021, UNMISS announced that 50 South Sudanese military commanders in Akobo acquired child protection training. The training ensured essential measures, given the fact commanders play a crucial role in shaping the behaviour of soldiers and in enforcing discipline in shaping the behavior of soldiers, while also enforcing discipline within armed forces. Major steps towards the ending goal have been achieved : by implementing the Comprehensive Action Plan to stamp out violations of the rights of these affected children, both the South Sudan's People Defense. However, the fruit of the labour was limited, since training alone does not guarantee that children will no longer be recruited, mistreated and / or abused. With strong monitoring missing systems, repeated follow-up and accountability for violations, such training can remain more educational than transformative.⁵²

Reintegration of Children in Armed Forces

A secondary undertaking was through "Reintegration". That specifies the reintroduction back into society of children which were formerly associated with armed groups or armed forces in a peaceful and sustainable way. Regardless of whether they were active combatants, or scouts, cooks or porters, their experiences leave them scarred and robbed of a childhood. Deliberation about reintegration pivots around the perennial debate concerning the provision of individual assistance to CAFF versus broader community-based reintegration approaches. Corroborating points in support of the individual targeted assistance tend to gravitate towards

⁵² "50 South Sudanese Military Commanders in Akobo Receive Child Protection Training on Request." *United Nations Mission in South Sudan*, 3 Nov. 2021, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/50-south-sudanese-military-commanders-akobo-receive-child-protection-training-request>. Accessed 17 July 2026.

resolving the two main issues : irrespective of whether children require a financial or material incentive to convince them to leave behind their military careers and whether they need some tailored assistance to help them begin to reassimilate.

Reintegration Kits and Support

In the opening stages, children were given kits upon arrival at the intermodal facilities and on their return home. Whether actual apparent promises to proffer community infrastructure in northern Bahr el Ghazal whereby alternatives to the army, which would be offered, were not quite yet fully realised. Conversely, in the following stage, no individual benefits, nor packages were given out. The mentioned policy met with considerable opposition from the local implementers, the civil administration, the families and the children themselves. But while many children expected support, the reality was perceived much more certain : there appeared to have been many other, more severe and powerful reasons for leaving the military than a lump-sum reassimilate allowance. Reunification with the families, allow the access to education and freedom from hazards or liabilities of the military, which tend to be the most significant.

UNMISS Training in East Equatoria

UNMISS worked with the State Committee for Child Protection in the Eastern Equatoria to train military personnel on 22 July 2021, with significant effort to spread awareness of children's rights among hostile groups and to reinforce stronger/clearer cooperation with the United Nations and local organisations; however, the efficacy of this relied on whether the training provided truly impacted and changed the behaviours of such. Institutional collaboration cannot resolve the problem at hand when governmental institutions stay under-resourced or are unable to enforce child protection standards consistently is a major weakness.⁵³

UNMISS Training in Pochallon

UNMISS opted to train members of the South Sudan forces in Pochallon on October 1st, which were meant to uphold children rights. This enterprise was precious, given the fact it tried to address the pressing issue directly within areas affected by insecurity and military presence. These are composed of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts, killing and maiming, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions, and the denial of humanitarian access to children in desperate need. Nevertheless, the attempt had clear limitations, seeing that awareness programs do not automatically dismantle the deeper causes of child recruitment such as poverty, displacement, weak rule of law, and the reliance of armed

⁵³ "UNMISS Collaborates with the State Committee for Child Protection in Eastern Equatoria to Train Uniformed Personnel on Violations against Children." *United Nations Mission in South Sudan*, 22 July 2021, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/unmiss-collaborates-state-committee-child-protection-eastern-equatoria-train-uniformed>. Accessed 17 July 2026.

actors on children during conflict. For prospective efficacy, training should be alongside disarmament and long term community based protection systems.⁵⁴

UNMISS Training for Children's Rights

Child rights were emphasized by UNMISS on May 9th 2023 through the training in Greater Mundri. This illustrated that child protection abided on the agenda, while international actors still simultaneously remain to attempt to reduce abuse through educational and institutional engagement. Nonetheless, this effort mainly addressed prevention at the level of awareness rather than rehabilitation or reintegration itself. It yielded scant results to the long term needs of children who had already been recruited, such as trauma recovery, family reunification, schooling and stable economic support.⁵⁵

Release and Case Management

226 children were discharged from armed forces and received case management services in June 2020, this being one of the most meaningful attempts to combat the recruitment of underage children as it focused more on the actual separation from the military, then providing individual support which is extremely important for cases like these; although the process remained weak. After being released, if children return to communities where there isn't proper or any education, mental/emotional support, there could be a risk of being shamed or recruited again.⁵⁶ With the help of the United Nations, thousands of child soldiers have been allegedly released from the armed forces and have been brought back to their families or legal guardians over time. This spotlights that the coordinated humanitarian action taken and the pressure have been making beneficial progress. However, the fact that recruitment of child soldiers still takes place despite the international pressure and endeavours being made shows that there are still weaknesses in the initiatives put against this. These plans being created to

⁵⁴ "UNMISS Trains Members of South Sudan's Forces in Pochalla on Upholding Child Rights." *United Nations Mission in South Sudan*, 1 Oct. 2021, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/unmiss-trains-members-south-sudans-forces-pochalla-upholding-child-rights>. Accessed 17 July 2026.

⁵⁵ "Upholding Child Rights Focus of UNMISS Training in Greater Mundri." *United Nations Mission in South Sudan*, 8 May 2023, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/en/news/upholding-child-rights-focus-unmiss-training-greater-mundri>. Accessed 17 July 2026.

⁵⁶ UNICEF. *Child Protection in South Sudan: Briefing Note, Major Developments, April–June 2020*. UNICEF South Sudan, June 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/media/5141/file/Child-Protection-Briefing-Note-June-2020.pdf>. Accessed 17 July 2026.

combat these problems rarely address the root causes of recruitment and mostly fixate on the consequences of enlistment.⁵⁷

Comprehensive Action Plan

The Government of South Sudan signed a Comprehensive Action Plan with the UN in 2020, in order to put an end and prevent grave violations against young victims, comprising recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups. This pertained to be a significant political and institutional step, since it created a formal framework for state responsibility and cooperation with the UN. Nevertheless, the plan's weakness lies in implementation. Signing commitments tends to be far easier than enforcing them, while the continued presence of violations shows that stronger domestic follow through, clearer benchmarks and regular public reporting is needed.⁵⁸

Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the South Sudanese Conflict

The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan which was signed in 2018, was made to reduce violence and make the conditions necessary for protecting the children. Child recruitment increases vastly during live conflict which is why Peace Agreements are crucial for preventing the escalation of abuse; but this solution was only partially effective as instability in local areas still continues. A Peace Agreement with a lack of full implementation can't guarantee the full protection of the children, especially when armed groups are active.⁵⁹

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The Creation of Socio-economic Frameworks

Developing frameworks for long term socio-economic reintegration with the help of UNICEF, the United Nations and international donors would help South Sudan develop multi-year demographic reintegration programmes for the released children from the armed groups. These initiatives should incorporate proper education as well as vocational education.

⁵⁷ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. "Children, Not Soldiers." *Children and Armed Conflict*, United Nations, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/en/children-not-soldiers>. Accessed 17 July 2026.

⁵⁸ UNICEF. "15 Child Soldiers Released in South Sudan." *UNICEF South Sudan*, 26 Feb. 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/press-releases/15-child-soldiers-released-south-sudan>. Accessed 17 July 2026.

⁵⁹ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. *Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS)*. 12 Sept. 2018, *PA-X Peace Agreements Database*, University of Edinburgh, https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag2112_5be57be98faf9.pdf. Accessed 17 July 2026.

Kits to support livelihood, small business grants and help with employment would be beneficial. Help should also be provided to vulnerable families and other young people in the receiving community so that children with a past of recruiting are not seen as getting unfair privileges. UN reintegration standards dictate that sustainable reintegration depends on economic, social, political and legal conditions that enable children to maintain their livelihoods, dignity and civilian identities.

Establishing Available Birth Registration Systems

The government is urged to institute a free and accessible universal birth registration system, which shall include mobile registration teams in order to reach rural communities, displacement camps and conflict affected areas. For the purpose of helping to prevent armed forces or groups from mistakenly treating minors as adults, birth certificates are legal proof of a child's age. It should be legally mandatory for military recruitment centres to check age documents, keep recruitment records and permit independent United Nations inspections. Criminal penalties for recruiting a child or deliberately bypassing age verification should be punishable.

Protection Towards Children in Armed Forces

The need for the children to give up their weapons, provide information about military matters, or be involved in peace talks should not be taking place in these circumstances.. Children should be released immediately and unconditionally without being forced to do any of the above. Food, clothes, medical check ups and safe accommodation should be made available at neutral centers run by civilians trained in child protection. The young victims should not be detained in military custody solely due to their connection to an armed force. UNICEF has constituted intern care centers in South Sudan for released Children before their reintegration takes place. UNMISS, UNICEF and South Sudan's Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SSDR) could further work together with the armed forces to seek insight on the children and find ways to release the children. Strengthening existing systems would be far more beneficial; trained staff, suitable care institutions and collaboration from the government could further strengthen this idea as these would lead to lowering the risk of being recruited again and better reintegrating individuals to their communities.

Safe Rehabilitation for the Children and Their Families

Special teams are requested in order to find the child's family members and ensure that it is safe for the child in question to go back home, and that both the child and its family are prepared for the grand reunion. Temporary help will be given to the families, which will consist of food, employment opportunities, parent skills training and social services in order to prevent the child from being abandoned because of poverty, getting exploited or getting recruited again into

armed groups into armed groups because of the same reasons. Family tracing could be carried out by social workers and organisations focused on child protection, which UNICEF could support. If there are instances where a child cannot safely be returned to their family, temporary support and care should be provided while trying to find ways to safely give them back to their family. After being returned to their families, follow ups should take place by social workers to ensure that children are getting education, access to healthcare and general support. This could be led by UNICEF, UNMISS or any other Sudanese Child Protective Organisations. Strengthening the already implemented child protective programs would also be better than creating an entirely new system.

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