

RISK 7

FORCED RECRUITMENT AND ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN IN ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS



WHAT ACTS OR SITUATIONS CONSTITUTE THE PRESENCE OF THE RISK?

This protection risk refers to all situations in which a person is compelled to serve in the forces of a hostile power, by means of coercion, threats or other means. Forced recruitment is prohibited by the Hague regulations, the third and fourth Geneva Convention, repeated in the list of war crimes in the Statute of the International Criminal Court and according to Rule 95 of the ICRC’s Customary International Humanitarian Law Study is considered a specific type of forced labour that is prohibited in international armed conflicts. If the victim is a child, the recruitment is always considered forced because of the impossibility for a child to give free and informed consent. A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to 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 those used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes⁴. The recruitment and use of children is considered as one of the worst forms of child labour, and is listed as one of the six grave violations of children’s rights according to the monitoring and reporting mechanisms established by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612.



WHAT FACTORS MUST BE IDENTIFIED FOR MONITORING?

The monitoring of this protection risks should look at the recruitment of person and the identification of any forceful act compelling the person to join armed forces, and when the person expressed will under coercion or the threat of any harm. In relation to children, recruitment and use might be forced or appear voluntary, but must be adequately monitored and reported. Boys and girls might suffer extensive forms of exploitation and abuse, including gender-based violence. Children become part of an armed force or group for various reasons. Some are abducted, threatened, coerced or manipulated by armed actors. Others are driven by poverty, compelled to generate income for their families. Others associate themselves for survival, to protect their communities or for social status. Their participation in conflict bears serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being, and for their development. They are commonly subject to abuse and most of them witness death, killing, and sexual violence, or are forced to commit violent acts. The reintegration of these children into civilian life is an essential part of the work to help them cope with their past experience, rebuild their lives and frame the conditions for a successful reintegration into society.



WHAT INFORMATION & DATA CAN ILLUSTRATE THE PRESENCE OF THE RISK?

Resolution 1612 of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and its monitoring and reporting mechanisms (MRM) provides for the systematic gathering of accurate, timely, objective and reliable information on six grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict, including the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups. The information gathered through the MRM is used in United Nations reporting, including the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and country-specific reports. These reports trigger action by the Security Council and other actors. In countries in which the MRM has not been activated by the Security Council, data and information on forced recruitment and children associated with armed forces and armed groups may be obtained from the following: in-country studies or specialised assessments, existing data bases and records, non-specialist KIIs providing information on whether they are aware of forced recruitments (making sure to not publish estimated numbers or locations); HHs surveys (providing a proper risk assessment and solid identification on whether the data can be published); specialized FGDs or expert interviews that can provide valuable information on the underlying drivers and locations of recruitment. It is important to always conduct a **risk assessment**, as it is very sensitive information that could do harm to respondents and their communities.

⁴ 'Unlawful' recruitment and use refers to the recruitment or use of children under the minimum age allowed in relevant international treaties or national law. In all cases, International Humanitarian Law and the Convention of the Rights of the Child prohibit all child recruitment under the age of 15.