

OG 5.30: Children and DDR

Objectives

This module will:

- ✓ explain that the demobilization or release of children should take place at all times: before conflicts are settled, during peace negotiations and after conflicts are settled;
- ✓ highlight key issues in developing child-specific DDR programmes; and
- ✓ suggest measures to prevent the recruitment and re-recruitment of children.

1. Introduction

There is a growing international consensus that the recruitment of children – girls and boys under the age of 18 – and their use in hostilities by both armed forces and groups are illegal and among the worst forms of child labour. *The recruitment and use of children under 15 in armed forces and groups are war crimes.*

This consensus is expressed in a comprehensive set of international legal instruments (see Box 5.30.1). *Therefore, child demobilization (or 'release') and reintegration should not depend on any political negotiation during or after a peace settlement.* The mechanisms and structures for the release and reintegration of children can be set up before a formal peace agreement is signed, a peacekeeping mission is deployed,

Box 5.30.1: Children and conflict

Children are protected from recruitment and use by armed forces and groups under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. International and regional instruments, such as the Optional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, offer a legal framework for the protection of children. In addition, it is also worth noting that all human rights instruments also apply to children. These instruments are used to:

- protect children in armed conflicts;
- prevent their recruitment;
- secure their release from armed forces and groups;
- protect children within the judicial framework; and
- prosecute those who are responsible for recruiting children for military purposes.

an adult DDR programme is agreed upon and broader security sector reform (SSR) is established.

Child DDR requires that release and reintegration be carried out at all times, even during a conflict, and that actions to prevent child recruitment be continuous. Equally, because children are associated with armed forces and groups in a variety of ways, and given the complexities involved in their social reintegration, child-specific DDR mechanisms should remain in place after national reintegration of adult combatants is complete.



For more information on the protection of children under international law, see Annex B in IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR.

Box 5.30.2: Key terms and definitions for child-specific DDR

The *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices* (1997) defines a **'child soldier'** as: "Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms."¹

The term **'children associated with armed forces and groups'** is now used to avoid the perception that the only children of concern are combatant boys. *This term also suggests that children eligible for release and reintegration programmes are: a) those who remain with armed forces and groups; b) those who fled armed forces and groups (often considered as deserters by the armed forces/groups, and therefore requiring support and protection); c) those who were abducted; d) those who were forcibly married; and e) those in detention.*



For additional guidance on how to support the DDR of children/youth between 15 and 18 years of age, see OG 5.20 on Youth and DDR. For specific guidance on how to support the DDR of girls associated with armed forces and groups, see OG 5.10 on Women, Gender and DDR.

2. Advocacy for including child-related issues in peace negotiations and agreements

Though the demobilization or release of children from armed forces and groups should take place at all times, DDR practitioners shall also actively call on UN agencies, donors, representatives of the parties to the conflict and other stakeholders to take children into consideration when negotiating peace agreements.

The immediate and unconditional release of all girls and boys associated with armed forces and groups should be clearly specified in appropriate clauses in peace agreements and relevant documents. The parties to a conflict often resist acknowledging the presence of children in their ranks, and such clauses help specialized child agencies and implementing partners to speed the process of release.

The willingness of parties to a conflict to release children early on and to stop further child recruitment should be a way of measuring the level of their commitment to the peace negotiations and process.

3. Key issues in developing child-specific DDR programmes

Box 5.30.3 shows guiding principles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child that shall be applied at all stages of DDR programmes, from conflict analysis and detailed assessments through to design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation:

Box 5.30.3: Guiding principles for child-specific DDR programmes

- *The child's right to life, survival and development:* The right to life, survival and development is not limited to physical integrity, but includes the need to ensure full and harmonious development, including at the spiritual, moral and social levels, where education plays a key role.
- *Non-discrimination:* States must ensure respect for the rights of all children within their jurisdiction – including non-national children – regardless of race, sex, age, religion, ethnicity, opinions, disability or any other status of the child, or of the child's parents or legal guardians.
- *Child participation:* Children should be allowed to express their opinions freely, and those opinions should be “given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”. Children should be consulted at all stages of the demobilization and reintegration process. In particular, children should participate in making decisions with regard to family reunification, and vocational and educational opportunities.
- *Considering the child's best interests at all times:* Actions that affect the child should be based on an assessment of whether those actions are in the child's best interests.

3.1. Planning

Specialized child protection agencies should be called upon for the necessary political, technical and operational leadership on child-specific DDR programmes within the framework of the UN mission or country team.

When child-specific DDR programmes are planned, the following issues should be considered in addition to the principles that guide the UN DDR approach explained in section 4 of OG 2.10 on the UN Approach to DDR:

- the establishment of inclusive programmes for all war-affected children;
- appropriate interventions for each age group;
- the training in all matters relating to children of all personnel, civilian and military, involved in the operational aspects of DDR programmes; and
- the observance of ethical rules and strict confidentiality when gathering, processing and creating databases on children to protect them and provide for their security.

■ *Conflict analysis and detailed assessments*

These should cover child issues, such as the circumstances, patterns, causes, conditions and extent of child recruitment, the emotional and behavioural consequences of children's living conditions and experiences, the extent of children's participation in armed forces and groups, and their reintegration expectations.



Do you know how to carry out a child-focused conflict analysis? Annex C in IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR gives some key questions to include.



For more detailed information on assessments, see section 2 of OG 3.20 on DDR Programme Design.

■ *Awareness-raising and communication*

It is important to manage expectations and increase the understanding of key stakeholders about child-specific issues through awareness-raising and communication. However, the media should be encouraged to respect rules governing reporting on and interviewing children to avoid any adverse impact on the social reintegration of children.



For more detailed information on awareness-raising and communication, see OG 4.60 on Public Information and Strategic Communication in Support of DDR.

■ *Funding*

Funding should be made available to child protection actors as early as possible, including in the absence of a formal peace process and formal disarmament, demobilization and reintegration planning. Funding shall remain available even in the case of the failure of formal peace and DDR processes, and for the time required to ensure full reintegration.



For more detailed information on funding issues, see OG 3.41 on Finance and Budgeting.



Prosecution of children: With regard to offences that children are deemed to have committed while associated with an armed force or group, alternative mechanisms shall be applied where applicable law and judicial proceedings are not appropriate, or where systems do not have adequate mechanisms for protecting children. Mechanisms for accountability involving children associated with armed forces or groups shall occur within a framework of restorative justice that guarantees the psychological and social rehabilitation of the child, and shall be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards for juvenile justice.²

3.2. Disarmament

DDR practitioners should ensure that children associated with armed forces and groups:

- are disarmed, preferably by a military authority rather than a child protection agency, but they shall not be required to demonstrate their capacity to use a weapon;
- participate in the DDR programme irrespective of whether they present themselves at pick-up or other assembly points with weapons or ammunitions; and
- are given the option of receiving a document certifying the surrender of their weapons, if there is a procedure requiring them to do so, and if this is in their best interest, i.e. if it can protect the child against any doubt over his or her surrender of the weapon, but not if it will be seen as an admission of guilt and participation in violence in an unstable or insecure environment.

As stated in section 2 of OG 2.30 on Participants, Beneficiaries and Partners, eligibility should never be based on the submission of a weapon or proof of familiarity with weaponry, because not all children associated with armed forces and groups have used weapons or been fighters.



OG and IDDRS 4.10 on Disarmament

3.3. Demobilization or release

The time children spend in cantonment sites should be as short as possible. Where possible, children should be identified before arrival, so that the documentation process (identification, verification, registration, ascertaining of medical needs) and other procedures that apply to them in the reception and care phases last no longer than 48 hours, after which they should be transferred to an interim care centre (ICC) or to another location under civilian control.

■ *Cantonment*

Box 5.30.4 shows key steps that should be taken when children reach cantonment sites and mobile demobilization teams:

Box 5.30.4: Key steps for dealing with children during cantonment/mobile demobilization

- Admission lists of children that are submitted by commanders should be treated with caution and supported by a screening system that is established before individual verification.
- Children should be physically separated from adult combatants, and a security system should be established to prevent adult access to them.
- Girl mothers should not be separated from their children.
- In situations of forced marriage, girls and young women should remain secure and separated from their partners to give them time both to be reunited with family members and to think about whether or not to rejoin their partners.
- Violent protests from men separated from their 'wives' should be expected and planned for.
- Cantonment sites and mobile demobilization teams should be sufficiently far from conflict zones to ensure security for children and prevent re-recruitment. Activities aimed at children should be carried out by trained child protection staff.



The presence of girls in armed forces and groups should always be presumed, even if they are not visible. No distinction should be made between combatants and non-combatants when eligibility criteria are determined, as these roles are blurred in armed forces and groups, where children, and girls in particular, perform numerous combat support and non-combat roles that are essential to the functioning of the armed force or group.



For more information on girls, and girl mothers and their children, go to IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR, section 6.

■ *Interim care centres*

These should be run along the same lines as cantonment sites, with the same rules of staffing, care and security. However, emphasis should be on reunifying children with their families and communities as soon as possible. Similarly to cantonment, ICCs also have advantages and disadvantages.



See the table in section 8.2 of IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR for more information about the advantages and disadvantages of ICCs.



Do you know how an ICC should be managed? Annex D in IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR explains how this is done.

Box 5.30.5 shows what should be done in ICCs:

Box 5.30.5: Key considerations for ICCs

- Information on children's identity, their family, the history of their recruitment and their special needs should be collected as early as possible and safely stored.
- Children should be grouped according to age, except for girl mothers, who should receive appropriate and adequate assistance.
- Health check-ups and specialized health services should be provided, e.g. reproductive health and antenatal services, diagnosis of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and voluntary and confidential HIV counselling and testing, while nutritional deficiencies and war-related injuries should receive treatment.
- Children should receive counselling, including help to overcome trauma, develop self-esteem and gain life skills, learn about reintegration and livelihood opportunities, and receive peace education and non-violent conflict resolution training to help them regain a sense of the social norms and routines of civilian life.
- Age- and gender-appropriate sports, and cultural and recreational activities should be provided to keep children occupied and help them build trust, but there should be no formal education or training activities, apart from assessments of literacy.
- Family tracing and verification should be started. Family reunification will follow after mediation and an assessment of the situation. Monitoring should take place to facilitate the integration of children into their families and communities.



OG 5.10 on Women, Gender and DDR, 5.20 on Youth and DDR, 5.60 on HIV/AIDS and DDR and 5.70 on Health and DDR


 *Children who have already found their way back to their families and communities should under no circumstances be removed to enter cantonment sites and a formal demobilization process. Flexible systems should be put in place to link them to other reintegration procedures and activities, so that children who demobilize spontaneously can also benefit from the care and protection services they need. These children should be reached through alternative community-wide reintegration programmes that are designed both to reduce disruption in the lives of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups and to benefit other war-affected children.*

Table 5.30.1 provides further guidance on the demobilization of children:

Table 5.30.1: Child-specific demobilization elements	
Cash payments and benefits packages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monetary payments to children during the demobilization phase should be avoided. Children, families and communities should be clearly informed about the benefits provided by programmes during the reintegration phase, and they should understand who these benefits are for, and why they are being provided. All benefits and services should support the development of the child within the community.
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official identification documents certifying children's demobilization may be made available to them when this protects them from re-recruitment and assures them access to reintegration programmes. Civilian documents giving the identity of the child with no mention of his/her participation in an armed force or group should be made available as soon as possible.
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient, appropriate and secure means of transportation should be planned in order to transport children in the shortest time possible, and they should be attended by civilian protection staff. Children should be informed in advance of all movements arranged for them.

 **For more detailed information on child demobilization, see section 8 of IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR.**

 **See the box in section 8.9 in IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR for more detailed guidance on how to determine the age of a child.**

3.4. Reintegration

The aim of child reintegration is to offer children a specifically designed and participatory support programme that gives them a viable long-term alternative to military life. For this reason, child reintegration should extend over a period of five years or more, and requires appropriate funding early on to build capacity in the communities of return.

Although a certain level of standardized assistance is necessary to ensure fairness and expediency, child reintegration should accommodate as far as possible:

- differences in age, sex and individual resilience;
- the capacity of the child to make informed decisions; and
- an individual's length of stay and experiences within the armed force or group.

Wherever possible, children should be provided with an opportunity to access formal education. Where this is not possible, appropriate income-generating opportunities will have to be developed, while non-formal and informal learning opportunities may also be offered. In all cases, the long-term success of child reintegration programmes depends on the capacities of local actors and communities.



DDR practitioners should be aware that children under 18 are not eligible for incorporation into security services as a part of security sector reform (SSR) that may take place together with DDR.

Table 5.30.2: Guidance for child-specific reintegration

<p>Psychosocial support and special care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Psychosocial support based on a community approach should be offered instead of individual therapy. This should be designed to help children overcome distress, adopt new patterns of behaviour and improve their self-esteem. ■ Injured and disabled children and the chronically ill need specifically designed care adapted to their environment, which should include assistance for community-based rehabilitation and long-term care projects.
<p>Inclusive support for all war-affected children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The needs of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups should be dealt with in line with the needs of other war-affected children, in particular through the restoration of basic social services such as schooling, health care or vocational training.
<p>The role of communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communities should be prepared for returning children through awareness-raising and education. ■ Cultural, religious and traditional rituals can play an important role in the protection of girls and boys and their reintegration into their communities. ■ Particular attention should be paid to rumours that might circulate among communities about returning boys and girls (e.g. reports of real or presumed rates of prevalence of HIV among children). These should be effectively countered to create a nurturing environment for the return of children, especially those who are indeed terminally ill.
<p>Education, training and livelihoods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Short-term accelerated learning classes and other remedial schooling programmes for children who have been out of school for long periods can provide catch-up education.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vocational training activities (skills training and apprenticeship) should be designed in line with labour market demand. A wide range of professional training options should be available to children to help them adapt successfully, but income-generating activities for children should be consistent with legal norms on child labour (minimum age, working conditions, etc.). ■ Boys and girls, particularly those of legal working age, should benefit from an adapted version of socio-economic support options for demobilized adult ex-combatants.
Follow-up and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Regular follow-up or monitoring activities by professional social workers should be carried out to monitor the living conditions of the demobilized children, the quality of their relationship with family members and the level of their reintegration into the community, and will allow mediation of disputes when necessary.

 For more detailed information on child-specific reintegration, see section 9 of IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR.

4. Preventing the recruitment and re-recruitment of children

Prevention of the recruitment of children should take place continuously throughout a conflict. Prevention of the re-recruitment of children should take place while the child-specific and adult DDR programme is ongoing, and should continue after it ends.

Box 5.30.6: Key considerations for the prevention of child recruitment and re-recruitment

- How does child recruitment occur? Are there monitoring mechanisms in place?
- What measures are necessary to create a protective environment for children?
- How can awareness of the problem among combatants and commanders be raised?
- How can communities and families be supported to understand the problem and protect their children from becoming associated with armed forces and groups?
- What child protection services and legal and police support services are necessary?

 For more detailed information on preventing the recruitment and re-recruitment of children, see section 7 of IDDRS 5.30 on Children and DDR.

5. Summary of key guidance on children and DDR

- ✓ There is a growing international consensus about the illegality of recruiting children into armed forces and groups. Therefore, the demobilization and

release of children do not depend on political negotiation, but should be carried out immediately and unconditionally by state and non-state authorities with the support of specialized child agencies.

- ✓ Where there are formal DDR processes, special provisions should be made for children. The absence of a formal DDR process should not prevent activities in pursuit of the release of children from armed forces and groups. These actions may require/include separate negotiations with such armed forces and groups; with such negotiations being unrelated to the broader agenda driven by security reform or other formal negotiations processes.
- ✓ Child-specific DDR programmes are very different from adult DDR programmes, and have a different scope and time-frame. Children should be separated from adult combatants, and should receive assistance specifically designed for their needs. The funding for child-specific programmes needs to be secured independently from that of adult DDR programmes.
- ✓ Planning for child-specific DDR should keep children's best interests in mind at all times.
- ✓ Children associated with armed forces and groups, other war-affected children and the community as a whole should participate in the development of reintegration support so that inequalities and unfair treatment are avoided.
- ✓ Funding should be made available to child protection actors as early as possible, including in the absence of a formal peace process and formal disarmament, demobilization and reintegration planning. Funding shall remain available even in the case of the failure of formal peace and DDR processes, and for the time required to ensure full reintegration.