



1 CONTEXTS OF INSECURITY

This Strategy refers to contexts of insecurity to indicate the presence of organized crime, terrorism and conflict. In such contexts, crime and violence are widespread or are more restricted but engrained.[26]

This Strategy focuses on a group of children who face a specific set of dangers in contexts of insecurity: those who are recruited and exploited by organized criminal and armed groups, including terrorist groups.[27] United Nations annual reports covering 2012 to 2017 document almost 30,000 verified cases of child recruitment.[28] In 2020 alone, the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict confirmed 8,521 cases of child recruitment and use. [29] These numbers are likely underreported and limited to conflict situations; child recruitment and exploitation also take place in otherwise peaceful environments, often undetected and unseen.

Upon recruitment, children can become victims of many types of crimes such as sexual slavery, forced labour, forced marriage, or even be exploited in combat-related and support roles that serve the purposes of the groups. These children are often exposed to extreme dangers including enslavement, physical beatings and abuse including sexual violence, sometimes leading to death.

[26] Contexts of insecurity overlap but do not coincide with humanitarian contexts, as their scale does not necessarily reach the threshold of natural disasters, man-made emergencies or complex emergencies.

[27] In this context, "armed groups" is used to refer to armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State, and that engage in the recruitment and exploitation of children (see art. 4 Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (A/RES/54/263) on the involvement of children in armed conflict; "organized criminal groups" is used to refer to a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing serious offences whose organization is criminalized by national law, and that engage in the recruitment and exploitation of children, as defined in art. 2 (a), United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2003; in the absence of an international consensus on the definition of terrorism, the term "terrorist groups", refers to the entities designated by the Security Council on the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List and the Taliban sanctions list, and Al-Shabaab, as well as groups designated as terrorist groups at the national or regional level, that engage in the recruitment and exploitation of children. (Having given citations needed for the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List and the Taliban sanctions list, and Al-Shabaa)

[28] Reliefweb, "Child soldier levels doubled since 2012 and girls' exploitation is rising", 11 Feb 2009.

[29] S/2021/437, para. 4.



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During their exploitation, these children may at times be involved in acts that pose a security threat and/or constitute a criminal offence. As a result, even when they manage to exit these groups, they are often exposed to further violence: they can be rejected by their families, stigmatized in the communities, imprisoned, tortured and addressed through punitive approaches. In other words, the specific vulnerabilities of this group of children may expose them to further victimization.

It is a priority for UNODC to promote specialized research, advocacy, awareness-raising, normative work, and technical assistance aiming to support Member States in preventing and responding to violence against children. This approach aims to ensure that they are seen and treated as children first, rather than as a security threat, recognizing that they are primarily victims.[30] Work in this area focuses on bridging the gap between security and child protection, advocating for child rights as an effective basis of long-term peace and security.

Accordingly, this Strategy supports integrated interventions to:

- 1 Prevent child recruitment and exploitation;
- 2 Foster the recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of recruitment; and
- 3 Support justice and security responses that are in line with child rights and conducive to recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.

[30] See UNODC, Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System (2017); idem, Justice for Children in the Context of Counter-Terrorism: A Training Manual (2019); idem, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Child Victims of Recruitment and Exploitation by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: A Training Manual (2019), Prevention of Child Recruitment and Exploitation by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System: A Training Manual (2020)