

# Study Guide

## Week 8

### Child Soldiers in Central African Republic (CAR)

## TLDR:

The African Council is addressing the issue of child soldiers in the Central African Republic (CAR), where over 10,000 children remain exploited by armed groups despite international efforts. The key areas of focus are: preventing child recruitment, rehabilitating and reintegrating former child soldiers, and holding armed groups accountable. Boys are recruited as fighters, suffering violence and indoctrination, while girls face sexual exploitation and social stigmatization. Rehabilitation programs are underfunded, with only 40% of child soldiers receiving formal support. Collaboration with armed groups remains inconsistent, allowing the recruitment crisis to persist.

## 1) Introduction

The African Council is convened to address the critical issue of child soldiers in the Central African Republic, a longstanding crisis that has devastated communities and hindered progress in the region. This topic faces three key areas. The rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers, the gender-specific vulnerabilities faced by both boys and girls and the persistent lack of accountability for those responsible for their recruitment. The recruitment of child soldiers is an issue that has faced the continent of Africa for years.

## 2) Background information

The issue of child soldiers in the Central African Republic (CAR) is a persistent problem fueled by ongoing conflict, weak governance, and widespread poverty. According to the United Nations' recent report, over 1,432 children were affected by grave violations between July 2021 and June 2023, with 713 of these children being forcibly recruited and used by armed groups, including factions of the CPC (Coalition of Patriots for Change) and other militias.

Despite international efforts, these groups continue to recruit children as combatants, porters, and even for sexual exploitation, with girls being particularly vulnerable. Past

policies, including the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (2019), have seen limited success, with only partial demobilisation of child soldiers.

Rehabilitation efforts have also faced challenges; in 2023, only 134 children were released from armed groups, a significant decrease from previous years. Reintegration programs, though supported by organisations like UNICEF and MINUSCA, struggle with underfunding, logistical challenges, and ongoing conflict, leaving many children without sustainable reintegration opportunities. Additionally, accountability for child recruitment remains weak, with armed groups rarely facing consequences for these violations.

The situation remains dire, with approximately 10,000 children still fighting alongside armed groups more than a decade after the civil war began. These children are exploited as fighters, spies, messengers, cooks, and even sex slaves, according to Marthe Kirima, the Minister for Family and Gender. In 2015, leaders of ten armed groups committed to releasing all children from their ranks, ending child recruitment, and granting UNICEF unrestricted access to their territories to secure the release of child soldiers.

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## 3) Key issues

### 3.1) Prevention of child soldier recruitment

The recruitment of child soldiers remains a critical issue in conflict zones, with children being exploited based on gender-specific vulnerabilities. Boys are often forcibly recruited as fighters, exposed to high levels of violence, and indoctrinated into accepting extreme ideologies, which can distort their understanding of right and wrong. As a result, these boys not only face physical harm and death but also psychological trauma that leaves them disconnected from society and at risk of continuing the cycle of violence.

For girls, the threat is different but equally devastating; many are subjected to sexual violence and forced into roles as sex slaves within armed groups. This abuse leaves them with lasting physical and emotional scars, along with social stigmatisation and isolation from their communities. These gender-specific challenges highlight the complex effects of child soldier recruitment, as both boys and girls are robbed of their childhoods, safety, and futures.

Implementing robust prevention strategies and targeted rehabilitation efforts could potentially solve this issue. Prevention must include a combination of legal measures, such as enforcing international laws like the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and community-based initiatives that protect children from recruitment. Alongside prevention, rehabilitation programs must address the distinct needs of boys and girls.

For boys, this includes psychological support to undo the effects of indoctrination, vocational training, and education to help them reintegrate into society. For girls, rehabilitation must focus on trauma-informed care, offering medical treatment, safe spaces for recovery, and community-based efforts to reduce stigma and ensure their reintegration. By focusing on both prevention and gender-sensitive rehabilitation, these

children can be offered a chance to heal, rebuild their lives, and escape the cycle of violence.

### 3.2) Rehabilitation and reintegration of previous child soldiers

One of the key issues in addressing former child soldiers in conflict zones is the lack of sustained mental health and reintegration support, which significantly hampers their ability to reintegrate into civilian life. Former child soldiers, especially in countries like the Central African Republic (CAR), often suffer from severe psychological trauma, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety due to prolonged exposure to violence.

Without proper mental health care and support systems, many children feel alienated and struggle to adapt to everyday life. This is further compounded by the fact that only about 40% of former child soldiers in CAR receive formal disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) support, leaving thousands without the necessary help to rebuild their lives.

The effects of this lack of support are profound, as children not only suffer from untreated trauma but also face educational gaps, social stigma, and difficulties in finding stability. Girls, in particular, face the additional challenge of overcoming the stigma of sexual violence, while male survivors often experience feelings of emasculation, helplessness, and failure.

Increasing funding and expanding the scope of rehabilitation programs to provide sustained mental health care, vocational training, education, and psychosocial support tailored to the unique needs of both boys and girls. This approach would help former child soldiers heal from their trauma, reintegrate into society, and reduce the risk of re-recruitment into armed groups.

### 3.3) Collaboration with armed groups

Addressing the recruitment of child soldiers is the need for effective collaboration with non-state armed groups, which are often the primary recruiters. In 2015, UNICEF and the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA) facilitated a National Reconciliation Forum where ten armed groups committed to releasing all children from their ranks, ending child recruitment, and granting UNICEF unrestricted access to controlled zones. Between 2015 and 2016, 6,300 children were released as a result. However, despite these efforts, ongoing conflict and weak enforcement have allowed the recruitment of children to continue.

The effects of this lack of sustained collaboration are profound—without consistent engagement, children continue to be recruited and exploited, leading to long-term psychological trauma, social stigmatisation, and difficulty reintegrating into civilian life. Reintegration programs, while essential, remain underfunded and insufficient, leaving many children without the necessary support to rebuild their lives.

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## Sources

[4 out of 10 child soldiers are girls](#)

[Children and DDR](#)

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