

CHILD PROTECTION IN EMERGENCIES

FACT SHEET

War and natural disaster result in millions of families and children witnessing or being victims of unthinkable atrocities. Save the Children is working to minimize the harm children experience during and after an emergency. It is working to ensure children are protected from participating in armed forces or groups, stay together with their families and are not subject to exploitation and sexual abuse.

Armed conflicts and increasingly frequent natural disasters scar millions of children's lives every year.

- In the last decade, an estimated **20** million girls and boys¹ have been forced to flee their homes;
- More than **one** million children have been orphaned or separated from their families by an emergency².
- Just over **one** billion children live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict³.
- Several **tens of thousands** of children have been coerced or induced into armed forces or groups to serve as child soldiers⁴.
- Over the next decade, **175** million children are likely to be affected every year by natural disasters⁵.
- Rape and other forms of sexual violence were cited as being used as a war tactic in **16** countries and territories from 2000 to 2007⁶.

Child protection in emergencies

Save the Children works to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation of and violence against children in emergencies. An emergency is defined as 'a situation where lives, physical and mental wellbeing, or development opportunities for children are threatened as a result of armed conflict, disaster or the breakdown of social or legal order, and where local capacity to cope is exceeded or inadequate⁷'.

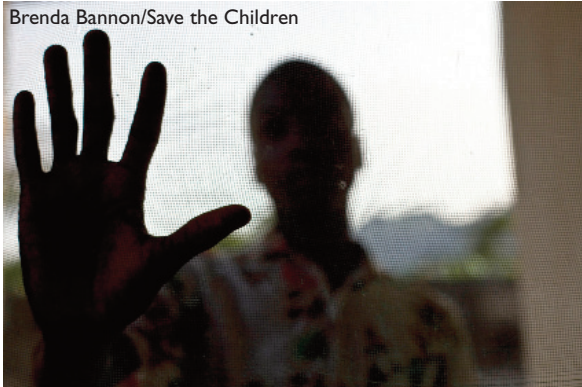
Recruitment into armed forces or armed groups

The recruitment of girls and boys by a variety of armed actors is recognized as one of the most

"Since we are the ones who have undergone these horrible experiences, we know and can articulate our problems better than anyone else"-15 year old boy in Northern Uganda.



A young boy is comforted after having lived through a terrible earthquake in Italy. Save the Children works to be the first organisation ready to help children and their families when crisis strikes.



This young boy, 13, was paid by UN Peacekeepers to find young girls for them to use for sex in Côte d'Ivoire. Once the peak of an emergency is over, children are still at risk of being abused and exploited in camps and food distribution sites. Save the Children works to ensure post-emergency camps, shelters and distribution sites are safe for children.

egregious violations of children's rights. Still, tens of thousands of children remain in the ranks of non-state armed groups in at least 24 different countries or territories. Nine governmental forces still deploy children in armed conflict⁸.

Children are targeted for recruitment because they are easier to control and manipulate and because they look to adults to protect them. This involvement may be forced or voluntary. The children take on a range of roles including fighting, acting as spies or messengers, cooks and porters, to lay mines, as suicide bombers and for sexual purposes. Usually unpaid, they are used to do tasks adults do not want to do and may also be coerced into carrying out grotesque acts of violence, including killing family members.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence of children and women has increasingly become a characteristic of conflict and during the aftermath of natural disaster. It is perpetrated against girls and boys when there is no rule of law and is exacerbated by a culture of impunity. In some cases, sexual violence has been used as a tactic of war designed to humiliate and exterminate a population, force them to displace or simply to destroy their social fabric.

Unfortunately, sexual abuse is also quite common after the major crisis is finished. When in relief camps it is easy for people to abuse their power and ask for sexual favours in exchange for basic necessities.

The effects of sexual abuse are devastating. Survivors are vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies, psychological trauma, to the spread of HIV and AIDS and other diseases. It can tear families and communities apart and increases maternal and child mortality rates. Girls and boys who report sexual violence are often not listened to or even blamed for the violence they experience. Though the majority of children affected are girls, boys are also sexually abused and exploited.

Family Separation

During population displacement, such as fleeing a disaster or a war and being trucked to a new camp for Refugee or Internally Displaced People, children can easily become separated from their families. Young and differently-abled children are particularly at risk, as they may be unable to move as quickly as others.

Separated children are at risk of being recruited into armed forces or armed groups, abducted, trafficked, or sexually abused or exploited. Sometimes, as first resort, they are put into institutional care or made available for international adoption, instead of being reunified with their families and extended families.

Separation can also be triggered when families lack the services they need to care for their children and believe such services would be available elsewhere, such as in residential childcare facilities.

This kind of separation can often develop unnoticed in the weeks and months following a humanitarian crisis, falling under the radar of emergency response personnel focused on the impact of the initial shock.

International law and policy

Nearly two-thirds of States are now party to the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. This Protocol, which came into force in 2002, establishes 18 as the minimum age for compulsory recruitment into armed forces and requires States to do everything they can to prevent individuals under the age of 18 from taking a direct part in hostilities.

These overarching protective mechanisms have been supplemented with many policies that have helped guide governments and international aid agencies. For example, rape and other forms of sexual violence constitute a war crime, or a crime against humanity, if committed as part of a widespread and systemic attack against a civilian population under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Court also prohibits the use of children under 15 years old in hostilities and provides for its punishment as a war crime.



Erickson, 8, is reunited with his mother in Haiti. He was found and brought to his parents with the help of Save the Children. The organisation registers separated children and traces their families. Once found, the organisation reunites the children with their families and ensures families are able to provide for their children.

During the mass displacements of the Liberian civil war, Save the Children staff would drive alongside the lines of people fleeing, using a loud speaker to encourage families to prevent involuntary separation, by keeping their children close and having them walk closely in front of the adults.

When we ask children what Save the Children should do to address child protection in emergencies, they have some very good ideas. Here is a list of priorities children have identified⁹:

- Protection from abduction and being used as soldiers, sex slaves and other forms of abuse and from hunger and disease.
- Projects that build on self-esteem, reduce stigma and provide hope for the future are of much greater value than those that oblige children to relive the negative experiences of conflict.
- Parents and extended families need opportunities to relieve poverty and the conflict in order to provide adequate support to children.
- Aid and support should be distributed fairly and evenly and criteria should be clear and transparent.
- The experience of participation and of adults and children listening to your opinion helps to develop personal confidence

What is Save the Children doing about it?

Save the Children uses a child-rights based approach to address child protection in emergencies. It networks with other international organisations and donors as well as works with and through partner NGOs. Save the Children advocates for child protection to be part of Disaster Risk Reduction in order to equip local authorities and communities with tools to reduce child protection risks when a natural disaster strikes. It addresses immediate needs and advocates for long term solutions.

Recruitment of children into armed forces or groups

Save the Children believes **the best protection is to prevent children from being recruited or abducted** in the first place. The organisation, therefore, aims to strengthen the ability of communities and young people to prevent recruitment of children into armed forces or groups. It also supports communities to discuss and tackle root causes of conflict such as poverty, discrimination and unequal power relations between adults and children, and men and women. This is done through a variety of initiatives such as developing community protection systems, encouraging dialogue and conflict resolution, the establishment of community protection committees, and strengthening the ability of families and young people to earn income.

Save the Children advocates for the immediate and unconditional release of all children by all armed actors; ceasefire or peace agreements should never be a condition for release.

Save the Children also works with the victims- ensuring those who have been associated with armed forces or groups are integrated back into their communities, as part of programmes that support all children who have been affected by the conflict. Proper and long term focus on the reintegration of children associated with armed forces is essential for return to peace for entire countries.



Anna Kari

Elisabeth (not her real name), 18, is an ex-combatant from Liberia. She is holding her baby at a skills training centre supported by Save the Children. Elisabeth is learning to be a tailor. The organisation is helping former child soldiers and other children affected by the conflict to learn a trade so they can earn a living as poverty is a key cause of exploitation and abuse.

Sexual violence

Save the Children focuses on **strengthening systems to prevent sexual violence**. It advocates for food and supply distribution systems, for example, to be structured to reach particularly vulnerable groups, such as separated children and child-headed households, so that they are not forced to engage in exploitative behaviour to survive. The organisation also trains humanitarian staff, peacekeepers and government officials in conflict and disaster situations on children's rights, on how children are affected by armed conflict and disasters and on codes of conduct on sexual exploitation and abuse. The organisation is also working to ensure children and their communities are aware of their rights, and a reporting structure is set up to report and act on any violations. Save the Children also provides psychological support and legal aid.

Family separation

Save the Children works immediately when a crisis hits and in its aftermath, to **put systems in place and inform people of what to do to ensure children are not separated from their families**. When separation does occur, the organisation sets up tracking systems for rapid reunification of separated children. The organisation works with governments, ICRC, UNICEF and other NGOs to register children, trace parents and provide reunification packages for families. In addition, Save the Children supports governments to develop systems for registration and to provide identification cards to vulnerable children, to ensure that they are registered. It is important to continue this work and to ensure that interagency tools on Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) are adopted and implemented in emergency situations and that government's capacity to register children is strengthened.

Save the Children in Chile did an assessment that indicated that there were extremely high child sexual abuse rates in the area in which it was working. The assessment also showed that no one was reporting abuse because of cultural reluctance to be a witness in the justice system. Then the earthquake hit in February 2010 and Save the Children feared the rate of abuse would increase even more.

In response, Save the Children partnered with the police and the Department of Social Work within the Chilean government. The organisation conducted training and awareness raising sessions with schools, health centres and village counsels. The training focused on explaining what sexual abuse and violence was and information on the reporting mechanisms available in post-earthquake Chile. At the same time, Save the Children lobbied the national government to increase the number of social workers and budgets for the affected areas, in order to ensure that any increased reporting would have services available to them.

Bonny Amin and his family lost everything, including their house when Cyclone Sidr hit Bangladesh in 2007. A week later Save the Children invited Bonny and other children in the area, to spend his days at a nearby 'safe space.'

After a cyclone parents have a lot to do: look for work, rebuild their houses, and collect food and water. "Where will my son stay while we are away from home?" asked Bonny's mother.

Save the Children sets up child-friendly spaces- supervised locations where children aged five to 14 can play with other children and begin to restore a sense of normalcy to their lives. This allows parents time to rebuild their lives while children are playing safely. Parents also are assured their children will not be lost. Staff in safe spaces provides children with psychosocial support, they inform them about how to remain safe in the current situation and help them understand and cope with the crisis.

End notes

¹ UNICEF, UNICEF's role in emergency, http://www.unicef.org/emerg/index_33296.html

² ibid

³ UNICEF (2007) Machel Study 10-year strategic review, p. 19

⁴ UNICEF (updated) Factsheet: Child Soldiers www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf

⁵ Save the Children (2007) Legacy of Disaster

⁶ Machel Study 10 year strategic Review, Children and Conflict in a Changing World, 2009.

⁷ This definition was adopted by the Global Child Protection Sub-Cluster Working Group at its January 2010 meeting.

⁸ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, quoted in Machel Study 10 year strategic Review, Children and Conflict in a Changing World, 2009

⁹ Save the Children Norway, Global Evaluation, Children Affected by Armed Conflict, Displacement or Disaster, 2005, p. 16.

Quick reference guide

Action for the Rights of Children:

www.arc-online.org

UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict:

<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/index.html>

Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in

Armed Conflict: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc-conflict.htm>

UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict:

<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/securitycouncilwg.html>

International Criminal Court: <http://www.icc-cpi.int/>

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers:

<http://www.child-soldiers.org/home>

Watchlist on children and armed conflict:

<http://watchlist.org/>

This fact sheet was produced by the Child Protection Initiative, November 2010.

For more information please check the website: www.savethechildren.net or contact cpi@rb.se