

## UNICEF submission to the report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children on Gender, Peace and Security

Around 35% of detected victims of trafficking are children.<sup>1</sup> Armed conflicts, armed violence, climate change-induced disasters, as well as rising economic and food insecurity are exacerbating existing vulnerabilities of individuals and communities globally, and increasing trafficking in persons.<sup>2</sup> Displaced and migrant children are especially vulnerable to trafficking: whether they are escaping war and violence or pursuing education and livelihood opportunities, too few children find pathway to move regularly and safely- instead turning to irregular routes. Unaccompanied and separated children are particularly at risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation.

UNICEF works at the global, regional, and country level to combat trafficking in persons, specifically child trafficking. UNICEF has a ‘policy to practice’ approach which:

- advocates for and supports comprehensive policy responses to end child trafficking,
- supports implementation of cross-sectoral programmes, including cross-border solutions, which keep children safe, **prevent** child trafficking, **protect** survivors, and ensure **access to justice** and
- promotes **partnerships** to end child trafficking through inter-sectoral cooperation between child protection, justice, and other allied systems.

UNICEF’s support to children on the move includes working with partners to strengthen multidisciplinary child protection systems in countries of origin, transit and destination, including strengthening national child protection systems to become inclusive of the needs of children on the move, supporting transnational child protection mechanisms, facilitating the development of regional guidelines or protocols or bilateral agreements and improving cross-border collaboration between child protection authorities. In 2023, UNICEF reached more than 253,000 unaccompanied and separated boys and girls in humanitarian contexts through alternative care and/or reunification support, many of them displaced and migrant children.

**National action plans on women, peace and security which include comprehensive measures to prevent and respond to trafficking in persons for all purposes of exploitation**

National Action Plans (NAPs) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) are increasingly including anti-trafficking measures, recognising it as a critical issue. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Canada, the Philippines and Nigeria are updating their NAPs to include comprehensive strategies, including improved legal frameworks, specialised training for peacekeepers and targeted support for

<sup>1</sup> [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#), UNODC (2022)

<sup>2</sup> [A WORLD IN CRISIS: Global Humanitarian Crises and Conflicts Increase Human Trafficking Concerns](#), Call to Action, ICAT (December 2022)

vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees. These plans also emphasise community engagement, digital tools for prevention, and regional cooperation to effectively address cross-border trafficking.

Key innovations include the use of artificial intelligence to detect patterns of human trafficking, holistic models of support for survivors, and educational programmes targeted at young people. Integrating these anti-trafficking measures into WPS NAPs will better equip countries to prevent exploitation and support victims, ensuring a coordinated and effective response to the complex challenges of trafficking in conflict and post-conflict situations.

**Disarmament demobilization and reintegration programmes which incorporate gender perspectives**

Data from the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict have documented that an increasing proportion of children associated with armed forces or armed groups are girls; in 2023, 14.5% of verified cases in which sex disaggregation was available were girls. UNICEF reintegration programming shows that this number is likely to be much higher, as 31 per cent of formerly associated children who were reached with protection and reintegration support in 2023 were girls. Children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG) have a right to release at any time, without precondition, including without a peace agreement. Girls often face significant stigma due to their association and may avoid formal DDR programmes. Therefore, all programmes for release and reintegration, including not only formal DDR programmes, but also informal release, or identification programmes should incorporate gender sensitive approaches to increase the likelihood of safely identifying girls. Similarly, programme design should consider gender specific issues, such as support for children of released girls, addressing sexual violence or stigma, and supporting girls empowerment and safety. Specific gender considerations can be found in the following technical documents: [\*Technical Note: Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups: Lessons Learnt and Good Practices on Prevention of Recruitment and Use, Release and Reintegration\*](#); [\*CAAFAG Programme Development Toolkit: Training Guide and Guidelines\*](#); [\*Paris Principles Operational Handbook \(chapter 27\)\*](#). In the DRC and Nigeria, for example, specific outreach and interventions aimed at girls are embedded in programme design and delivery.

**Peace agreements which address trafficking in persons for all purposes of exploitation, and crimes of enslavement and sexual slavery; peace agreements which include anti-trafficking measures, prevention, protection and accountability; incorporation of a gender perspective into monitoring of implementation of peace agreement.**

The Colombian Peace Agreement of 2016 includes several anti-trafficking measures, among which protection measures for women and children, who are highly vulnerable to trafficking, are emphasised, along with psychological support, health care and legal assistance. Accountability is enforced through the Special Peace Jurisdiction (JEP) and Truth Commission, which investigate crimes of human trafficking and

ensure justice for victims.<sup>3</sup> Case No. 7 involving recruitment and use of children by armed groups has been opened in Colombia by the JEP.

Colombia's peace agreement with the FARC in 2016 integrated gender perspectives through a gender subcommission and included specific measures to promote women's rights and participation. The monitoring mechanism included a gender expert to oversee these initiatives.

In Liberia, women have been central to the post-civil war peace process, leading to the integration of gender perspectives in the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the subsequent National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security (2019-2023), which has a robust monitoring framework.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in the Philippines, substantial input from women's groups in the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro led to the inclusion of women in the Joint Normalisation Commission.

**Trafficking in persons, enslavement and sexual slavery and transitional justice processes.**

**Transitional justice and peacebuilding mechanisms that address all forms of trafficking in persons particularly affecting LGBT persons and gender diverse persons.**

In 2023, UNICEF supported 156 countries to assess and strengthen the maturity of their child protection system and 113 countries in strengthening specialized justice systems for children, including to respond to cases of trafficking. A total of 34 countries reported complying with all six indicators of specialized justice system during the period (minimum age of criminal responsibility above 14, legal aid in law and practice, child friendly investigation, prosecution and adjudication, specialized training, multi sectoral and special measures for child victims and witnesses). 46 countries (up from 41 countries in 2021) reported the availability of a quality assurance system for social service workforce whose work includes trafficking cases. One key component of strengthening the SSW is to develop the normative framework that outlines and defines functions, such as roles and responsibilities, work procedures and SOPs for social service workers at the national and/or subnational level.

The UN supported gender-responsive transitional justice processes in a number of countries and territories in 2023, including Colombia, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Mali and South Sudan.

**National procedures for early identification, assistance and referral to protection services for victims or potential victims of trafficking, including gender and child sensitive measures in conflict and post-conflict settings, including in context of forced displacement and forced migration**

As part of UNICEF's work to strengthen access to multi-sectoral services for child survivors of trafficking, the organization partners with Governments to strengthen the capacity of frontline responders and the social service workforce to identify and refer child victims of trafficking and those at-risk so that they can

<sup>3</sup> [Colombia: the Special Jurisdiction for Peace one year after – ICJ analysis | International Commission of Jurists](#)

<sup>4</sup> [LIBERIA'S SECOND PHASE OF THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY | UN Women – Africa](#)

access protection and other key services. This includes building the capacity of frontline responders, including professionals from the border police and statutory social workers, in identification and referral of potential or actual victims, child safeguarding and child sensitive communication.

In 2022, UNICEF developed and rolled out a [Practical Guide on Identification of Victims and Persons ‘At-Risk’ of Trafficking in Human Beings](#) for frontline responders in the context of large-scale displacement from Ukraine and trained more than 500 frontline responders in Moldova and Slovakia.

In Venezuela, UNICEF worked with the National Prosecutor’s Office to develop criminal investigation guidelines for cases of human trafficking that incorporate child friendly justice procedures, prevention of revictimization and a human rights-based approach. After the launch of the guidelines, a comprehensive training module was used to build the capacity of 150 prosecutors in three states that are incorporating the aforementioned guidelines on preventing sexual abuse, preventing human trafficking and the roles and responsibilities of prosecutors. Furthermore, UNICEF will support the data generation and systematization of information on female and child victims of trafficking and sexual violence crimes in 2024.<sup>5</sup>

UNICEF is also supporting countries across the globe on so-called ‘one-stop centers’ of integrated multi-disciplinary services for child victims of sexual exploitation, severe forms of violence, and often potential or actual victims of trafficking. These centers bring together counselling, forensic services, medical help, and support with legal proceedings and referral to other services. In Zambia, for example, UNICEF has collaborated with Government counterparts and UN partners under the United Nations Joint Programme on GBV to facilitate the provision of a coordinated, sustainable, and comprehensive package of response services and prevention mechanisms at national and sub-national level that addresses Gender Based Violence. The centers coordinate survivor-centered support from health workers, police social workers and legal personnel.

**Inclusion of early warning and early-screening to detect victims and potential victims of trafficking in conflicts within the framework of the women peace and security agenda**

Incorporating early warning and early screening measures to detect trafficking victims and potential victims in conflict zones within the WPS agenda requires a coordinated approach involving different sectors—health, education, law enforcement, and social services—also to ensure a comprehensive response to trafficking. Training local authorities, peacekeepers, and humanitarian workers to recognize signs of trafficking is essential, including understanding the profiles of potential victims and traffickers. It is key to ensure that any service providers or other individuals supporting victims or potential victims of trafficking have up-to-date information about available services for women and girls, in particular health, security, legal and GBV case management or other psychosocial support service. Other key priorities include training individuals on safe referrals and ensuring that any screenings integrate questions on safety and aim to identify priority needs for women and girls. Engaging with local women’s organizations

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<sup>5</sup> UNICEF Country Office Annual Report Venezuela (2023) [RAM3 COAR.rdl \(unicef.org\)](#)

and local communities and leaders who are often the first to notice unusual activities can enhance early detection.

**Mandatory trainings for peacekeeping personnel on trafficking in persons for all purposes of exploitation**

Mandatory training for peacekeeping personnel should include training on the GBV Pocket Guide and on Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). The [GBV Pocket Guide](#) resource package provides basic guidance, following a Psychological First Aid (PFA) model, to non-GBV specialized humanitarian actors on how to safely and appropriately respond to a GBV disclosure even in situations where the survivor cannot be referred for additional services. The Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) course is designed to raise awareness about Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, become familiar with a range of measures to combat Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, understand the impact of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse on victims and the consequences for UN Personnel who commit Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Finally, peacekeeping personnel should be trained on the referral protocols in place and where to direct women and girls seeking services.

It is recommended that child protection modules for pre-deployment training for peacekeeping personnel, including in relation to protection from recruitment and use, and from sexual violence, be mandatory for troop contributing countries. This is not currently a requirement.

**Design of gender sensitive responses and programmes on prevention, protection and recovery from conflict-related sexual violence, psycho-social and medical support services, which mainstream trafficking in persons**

Gender sensitive programming should ensure comprehensive support for women and girls and trafficking victims. This should prioritize the availability of GBV services, including medical services equipped with post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and trained in responding to sexual violence. Ensuring training for all stakeholders involved, including local authorities, healthcare providers, frontline social workers, and law enforcement, on gender-sensitive approaches and the intersection between trafficking and sexual violence. This should include training on Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse (CCS Guidelines). Develop and promote safe, confidential, and accessible reporting mechanisms for victims of trafficking and sexual violence, available in multiple languages and formats. One key strategy is engaging with local women’s organizations as these are often the first and most trusted entry point for women and girls.