



F DFA Action Plan for the protection of children associated with armed forces or groups in armed conflict 2014 – 2016



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Confederaziun svizra

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A. Introduction

Armed conflicts have a devastating effect on the lives of children, directly or indirectly leading to the death of many. During and after hostilities children face a multitude of dangers threatening their physical and psychological integrity including forced displacement, forced labour, and physical abuse. Girls as well as boys risk being raped or subjected to other forms of sexual violence. They may also be forced into prostitution or end up as victims of human trafficking. Additionally, conflicts have a serious impact on their education, making it difficult for them to continue their studies or apprenticeships. Children are often the first to suffer the consequences of armed conflict, which in many cases threaten their food security and leave them particularly vulnerable to disease. These various factors may encourage children to voluntarily enlist in armed forces or armed groups in the hope of a better life. Children are also recruited by force in many cases.

Today, there are about a quarter of a million children under the age of 18 enlisted in or associated with armed forces or armed groups. As many as 40% are said to be girls. Their experiences, and the consequences, vary considerably: some live with their families while others are separated from them, and whereas some have military duties others never see combat, being assigned to the provision of various services to armed forces or armed groups. All however are exposed to danger of one kind or another. The reintegration of these children in civilian life involves a complex process that can have consequences for the future stability and development of the societies concerned.

The international community began to take concerted action at the end of the 1990s, focusing on the protection of children in armed conflict in the wider sense

Within the UN it is above all the Security Council that deals with the issue as well as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, on a mandate from the General Assembly. The SRSG is specifically responsible for combating the following six categories of violations against children:

- the killing or maiming of children;
- the recruitment and use of child soldiers rape and other grave; acts of sexual violence involving children;
- attacks on schools or hospitals;
- denial of humanitarian access;
- abductions.

In the context of the recent Dispatch to Parliament on International Cooperation in the 2013-2016 period, the Swiss government clearly underlined its desire to strengthen its commitment in fragile contexts and to those affected by armed conflict. The Action Plan therefore applies to such situations as well as to post-conflict contexts.

Switzerland considers the protection of civilians in armed conflict a matter of great importance and is the first country to have adopted a strategy on this subject, in 2009¹ (revised in 2013). The aim of this strategy is to achieve greater coherence and impact with all such efforts – be it in the field or in the framework of multilateral fora. To make this strategy for the protection of civilians in armed conflict operational, Switzerland is committed to improving the protection of children associated with armed forces or armed groups through this Action Plan.

By increasing its activities in situations of fragility Switzerland's objective is to make a more sustained effort on behalf of the most vulnerable populations while helping to address the causes of instability and poverty. In maintaining this commitment in difficult contexts, often characterised by insecurity and an absence of the rule of law, it is Switzerland's intention to make a sustainable contribution to the stabilisation of partner countries, notably through peacebuilding measures and by strengthening government institutions. This Swiss Action Plan, which is above all aimed at preventing the recruitment of children by armed forces or armed groups through educational, vocational training and psychosocial rehabilitation programmes, conforms perfectly to the objective of helping to prevent and alleviate the consequences of instability and conflicts throughout the world.

This objective is also made manifest through a commitment to the creation of a secure legal environment that guarantees respect for children's rights. This is reflected in Switzerland's close involvement in the definition of standards with regard to the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict as one of the worst forms of child labour (ILO Convention 182), and in the negotiations that led to the adoption in May 2000 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Switzerland will continue to support concrete initiatives while encouraging the international community to do more to protect children affected by armed conflict.

1 Strategy on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (revised version), Swiss Confederation, Bern 2013. http://www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edazen/doc/publi/phumig.Par.0008.File.tmp/PoC_Strategie_140109_Vollversion_FR_Web.pdf.



B. Strengthening Switzerland's commitment to the protection of children associated with armed forces or groups in armed conflict

Switzerland is determined to put an end to the use of girls and boys in armed conflict through greater involvement in this specific area. Only an approach that is innovative, multi-disciplinary and sustainable can effectively strengthen this commitment. In particular the emphasis will be on greater efforts to prevent child recruitment and on the reintegration of the children concerned through support for projects that can concretely improve their daily lives and future prospects. With the adoption of this Action Plan Switzerland has sets itself the following objectives:

1. Strengthening respect for and dissemination of the normative framework on children
2. Strengthening its commitment to promoting the protection of children in the multilateral framework
3. Strengthening the commitment of both Switzerland and its partners in the field

Axis 1 – Strengthening respect for and dissemination of the normative framework on children

International humanitarian law (IHL) provides for the special protection of children in all types of armed conflict. In view of the particular vulnerability of children the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 provide for a special protection regime on their behalf (in addition to the general protection afforded to civilians).

The recruitment of children under the age of 15 and their participation in hostilities is prohibited both by IHL and international criminal law.² The recruitment of children under 15 and using children to participate actively in hostilities are considered serious violations of IHL. This prohibition is equally well established in customary international law. States are not only expected to abstain from committing such violations but are also required to investigate and prosecute all perpetrators of such violations.

The Rome Statute includes using children under the age of 15 to participate actively in hostilities, their recruitment in national armed forces during an international or non-international armed conflict, or by armed groups during a non-international armed conflict, in its definition of war crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The verdicts pronounced in 2012 by international jurisdictions against the DR Congo rebel leader Thomas Lubanga and the former Liberian President Charles Taylor, as well as the recent transfer to the ICC of the former head of the Tutsi militia of North Kivu, Bosco Ntaganda, are an indication of the significant progress that has been made. These measures send a clear signal: the recruitment of children is a war crime and the perpetrators of violations involving children must be held accountable.

In international human rights law the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict sets the mini-

² Notably Article 77 of the Additional Protocol 1 and Article 4, par. 3 (c) of the Additional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions and Article 8 (2) (b) (xxvi) and (e) (vii) of the Rome Statute.

minimum age for the compulsory recruitment and direct participation in hostilities at 18³, as does Swiss military law.⁴ The Swiss Criminal Code (Art. 264f) on the other hand prohibits only the recruitment of children below the age of 15. It is worth noting that the Optional Protocol does not prohibit voluntary recruitment in the armed forces prior to the age of 18.

With regard to the two coexisting standards Switzerland feels that, to avoid any direct participation in hostilities, no child below the age of 18 should be recruited by armed forces or armed groups. The Confederation is committed to the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to ensuring that ratifying states undertake to adopt 18 as the minimum age for recruitment in all circumstances.

1. Respect for and dissemination of international humanitarian law

IHL obliges all states to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. This obligation does not only concern states involved in an armed conflict but also third countries. The latter may meet their IHL obligation through diplomatic demarches or on the occasion of official visits or indirectly by providing financial support to organisations working with the states concerned.

International humanitarian law can only protect victims during an armed conflict if it is respected, and to ensure this respect appropriate measures must be taken already prior to the outbreak of such armed conflicts. States must for example integrate their international obligations in laws adopted at the national level while taking measures to ensure that IHL violations are prevented or, when necessary, sanctioned. It is indispensable for the parties to a conflict to have sufficient knowledge of IHL so that they may respect it. It is for this reason that Switzerland, in accordance with its strategy on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (PoC), supports organisations that make the normative framework known to the political actors, armed forces, armed groups, security forces and private military and security companies as well as to civil society.

³ Article 1 of the Optional Protocol

States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities

Article 2 of the Optional Protocol

States Parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces.

⁴ Article 7 of the Federal Law on the Armed Forces and Military Administration: persons liable for military service are enrolled at the beginning of the year in which they reach the age of 18.

Most current armed conflicts are non-international. In the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict for the year 2014, 51 of the 59 armed actors identified as the perpetrators of specific human rights and international humanitarian law violations against children are non-state armed groups.

Like states, as parties to an armed conflict armed groups are bound by IHL. They too are required to take the necessary steps to prevent the recruitment of children under the age of 15. Armed groups may not adhere international agreements and are in principle excluded from the standards development process. Because of this some armed groups say they do not feel bound by IHL rules and feel that these are imposed on them without being able to give their consent. These actors are often unaware of their obligations under IHL.

It is essential therefore to establish dialogue with these actors. Switzerland has demonstrated on a number of occasions that direct dialogue with such groups is possible. The task of disseminating IHL and entering into dialogue with non-state armed actors with regard to the recruitment of minors is undertaken by institutions specialised in this field such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or Geneva Call, and these will continue to receive Swiss financial support.

Through the financial support provided to Geneva Call, Switzerland makes an important contribution to the protection of children in armed conflict. Geneva Call is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) whose objective is to encourage non-state armed actors to respect IHL. Its activities are focused on consultation with and the training of armed groups with regard to IHL. Armed groups are encouraged to sign a "Deed of Commitment" in which they undertake to respect IHL. The Deed of Commitment is the essential instrument which Geneva Call has developed for the protection of children from the consequences of armed conflict. The specific Deed of Commitment contains both negative obligations (e.g. prohibiting the recruitment of children under the age of 18) and positive obligations including access to healthcare, food and education.

Lines of action

- Switzerland takes care to pay particular attention to children in the implementation of Axis 1 of its PoC strategy, and in particular supports:
- activities relating to the dissemination of the normative framework concerning children and respect for it,
 - organisations which encourage and assist states in the integration of international standards for the protection of children in national legislation,
 - organisations which make the normative framework concerning children known to armed groups and solicit their commitment to respect it.

- Switzerland supports the dissemination of the Draft Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.⁵
- Whenever necessary Switzerland approaches through diplomatic “demarches” or via multilateral institutions, parties to an armed conflict that persist in committing violations of the normative framework concerning children.

2. Switzerland promotes ratification of the Optional Protocol of 2000 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict

During the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent at the end of 2011, an Action Plan for the implementation of IHL was adopted. One of its objectives is to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict by means of measures which the states and national societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent agreed to implement by the 32nd international conference, due to take place at the end of 2015. In particular, these measures aim to prevent the recruitment of children by armed forces or armed groups, promote the ratification and implementation at the national level of the relevant instruments of international law, and the rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflicts. Switzerland undertook together with other states to promote the universalisation and effective implementation of the Optional Protocol of 2000. For this purpose the Confederation will take advantage of appropriate bilateral (e.g. official visits or diplomatic demarches) and multilateral meetings (e.g. open debates on children in armed conflict in the Security Council, interactive dialogue with the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Universal Periodic Review, etc.) to encourage states to ratify this Protocol.

⁵ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) Draft Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/draft_lucens_guidelines_fr.pdf.

Lines of action

- Switzerland's approach is to give priority within its diplomatic demarches to countries that have not yet ratified the Optional Protocol of 2000 and are recruiting or using children in governmental armed forces and security forces.
- Switzerland will also approach states that have not yet ratified the Optional Protocol of 2000 and on whose territory non-state armed actors are recruiting and deploying children.
- For all other states that have not yet ratified the Optional Protocol of 2000, the coordinators responsible for the regions where these states are found will systematically include this topic on the agenda of the relevant bilateral meetings.
- During Universal Periodic Reviews recommendations will be made to states which despite having ratified the Optional Protocol of 2000 continue to recruit and use children in their armed forces and security forces.
- Switzerland is committed to continuing its efforts to promote the universalisation and effective implementation of the Optional Protocol of 2000 by other states during the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.



Axis 2 – Strengthening commitment to the promotion of child protection in the multilateral framework

1. Support for multilateral mechanisms

The effective protection of children in armed conflict has assumed ever greater importance in multilateral debates, notably in the forum of the UN, but also in the framework of international and regional conferences outside this forum. Within the UN the question of children in armed conflict is above all addressed by the Security Council, and also by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, on the mandate of the General Assembly.

In accordance with the provisions of Security Council Resolution 1612 of 2005 (complemented by Resolutions 1882 and 1998) a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) was set up under the supervision of the Special Representative and in cooperation with UNICEF and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). This mechanism documents the six grave violations committed by armed state and non-state actors against children in armed conflict.⁶ The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict regularly examines the reports of the MRM and makes recommendations on the measures to be taken to improve the protection of children in a given situation.

The Security Council asks the parties to a conflict mentioned in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict to prepare Action Plans to remedy grave violations against children. These signed written commitments define the concrete measures to be taken by the party concerned and a timeframe for their implementation, in order to qualify for removal from the lists.

⁶ Killing or maiming of children; recruitment or employment of children; sexual violence against children; attacks on schools and hospitals; denial of humanitarian access to children; abduction of children.

Lines of action

- In the multilateral context Switzerland is involved in decision-making with the aim of improving the protection of children and to the implementation of multilateral mechanisms, and will continue to influence the debates to this end.
- Switzerland maintains its appeal to the Security Council for the adoption of clear language for the protection of children in relation to all political and peacekeeping missions.
- Switzerland will help to maintain pressure, through bilateral efforts and multilateral initiatives, on parties to a conflict who persist in committing violations.
- Switzerland supports research aimed at improving accountability with regard to children in situations of armed conflict, and the implementation of Action Plans.
- Switzerland takes advantage of international and regional summits and conferences, and notably the World Humanitarian Summit, to promote strengthening of the protection of children in armed conflict.

a. Support to the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict

In 2006 Canada founded the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, over which it still presides and which with Switzerland now includes 38 states. Based in New York, this informal group presents a common front in encouraging the UN Security Council to adopt stricter measures against parties to a conflict who commit grave violations against children.

Thanks to its participation in the Group of Friends, Switzerland is able to associate itself with the positions taken jointly by the group and participate in collective demarches at the multilateral level with regard to alleged violations of international law, committing itself to combating impunity and to fact finding (notably through the granting of mandates to commissions of inquiry). Within the Group of Friends, Switzerland is able to exchange views with like-minded countries and to create alliances with a view to identifying joint guidelines, initiatives and projects for the better implementation of multilateral mechanisms.

Lines of action

- Through the Group of Friends, Switzerland contributes to the thematic debates of the Security Council.
- Switzerland participates in regular dialogue with the other members of the Group of Friends on the subject of the protection of children in armed conflict, helping to identify possible avenues for joint initiatives or projects for the purpose of strengthening the multilateral mechanisms.

b. Support to the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

The General Assembly created the mandate for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in 1996. The current Special Representative, Ms Leila Zerrougui, is responsible for efforts to combat six categories of violations against children.⁷ Cooperation and dialogue with the member states remains one of the essential aspects of the job of the Special Representative. These take place in such forums as the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, regional organisations and groups, and at bilateral meetings. The Special Representative relies to a great extent on the member states for the mobilisation of political support and for the support of efforts relating to the protection of children in armed conflict.

Lines of action

- Switzerland makes an expert available to the Office of the Special Representative and will continue to do so in the 2015–2016 period while conducting regular high-level dialogue with the Special Representative.
- Switzerland supports the activities and the mandate of the Special Representative in open debates of the Security Council as well as in the framework of interactive dialogue in the Human Rights Council.
- Switzerland is in favour of renewing the mandate of the Special Representative in suitable conditions and with allocation of the necessary resources.
- Switzerland supports the participation of the Special Representative in the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2015 as an opportunity for presenting a preliminary assessment of her campaign “Children, not Soldiers”.

⁷ See footnote on page 6 above.

2. Efforts to improve collaboration between the various UN agencies and non-governmental organisations concerned in Geneva

In recent years efforts to protect children in armed conflict have been strengthened thanks to improvements in coordination and collaboration between the UN agencies and civil society. This trend/collaboration must be continued as the activities of these different institutions are complementary and make an important contribution to the protection of children in armed conflict.

Since 2012 Switzerland has supported the activities of the Geneva-based Child Protection Working Group (CPWG), under the coordination of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The CPWG is a worldwide network of NGOs, UN agencies, academic institutions and other partners working together to ensure responses that are more predictable, accountable and effective regarding the protection of children in emergency situations. The CPWG feels that the protection of children in situations of emergency must include prevention, while at the same time responding to cases involving abuse, negligence, exploitation and violence against children. To this end specific programmes are carried out by specialists in the protection of children, including child soldiers, and similar efforts are integrated in all other humanitarian sectors. The Geneva-based CPWG coordinator and a rapid response team provide support to groups coordinating the protection of children in the field.

Lines of action

→ Switzerland supports the work of the Geneva-based CPWG, in particular by financing the post of a Deputy Coordinator as well as through the deployment of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA) for its Rapid Response Team.

3. Awareness/training of police and military personnel involved in peacekeeping missions (peacekeepers) with regard to the reintegration of children previously associated with armed forces and armed groups

It is extremely important to ensure the training of personnel responsible for the protection of children and to strengthen their capacities. Particularly essential is the training in child protection of personnel engaged in peacekeeping operations, prior to deployment. Police, military and civilian personnel need special training in child protection in accordance with their respective roles. Switzerland will therefore provide financial support for the integration of aspects of child protection and rights in training programmes designed to improve the well-being of children in UN peacekeeping operations.

Lines of action

- Switzerland supports the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) through a project to analyse the impact of child protection advisers (specialists seconded to assist mission personnel in the protection of children), to compile instances of good practices in order to make them an integral part of the efforts and activities of all missions and for the training in child protection of recently deployed "Blue Helmets".

Axis 3 – Strengthening the commitment of Switzerland and its partners in the field

Thanks to their presence in the field and their expertise, Switzerland's partners – in particular organisations that have a clear mandate such as the ICRC, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNICEF – have a fundamental role to play in ensuring the protection of children associated with armed forces or armed groups. That said, the UN agencies and the NGOs do not always have sufficient resources to fulfil this role and are facing ever greater demands. So the financial or technical assistance provided to these organisations can make a significant difference to their efforts on behalf of children in need of protection. Switzerland takes into consideration the Paris Principles on children associated with armed forces or armed groups when selecting the organisations that are to benefit from its financing.⁸

1. Financial and technical support for international and non-governmental organisations

While ICRC has a mandate to protect civilians, UNHCR's mandate focuses on refugees. UNICEF in turn plays a fundamental role in the protection of children. These same organisations are Switzerland's main partners in so far as the specific protection of children associated with armed forces and armed groups is concerned. Through their engagement in a number of areas, they make in particular a major contribution to the prevention of child recruitment.

Switzerland supports the UNHCR, the ICRC and UNICEF with an annual contribution at the global level. The three organisations also receive financial contributions for specific activities in the regions and countries concerned. This support can also be of a technical nature, with the secondment to these organisations (UNICEF, UNHCR) of experts in child protection from the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA).

A great number of international NGOs such as Save the Children and the Child Soldiers International to name but two are also closely involved with the protection of children in the context of armed conflict and have considerable expertise in this

⁸ The Principles of Paris were adopted at the "Free children from war" international conference in Paris, in February 2007.
<http://www.unicef.org/french/protection/files/ParisPrincipesFrench310107.pdf>.

area. It is also worth mentioning that Switzerland makes annual financial contributions to Swiss NGOs which through their commitment to child protection in the wider sense are indirectly involved in work with children associated with armed forces or armed groups (Enfants du Monde, Pestalozzi Children's Foundation).

Lines of action

- Switzerland continues to provide financial support at the global/regional levels to international organisations that have a mandate for the protection of civilians and children in armed conflict.
- Switzerland continues to make financial contributions to NGOs dedicated to the protection of children in armed conflict.
- Switzerland seconds experts to organisations active in child protection, through the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA) and the Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding (SEP).

2. Thematic focus

When children return to their communities the need for protection is often multi-faceted and acute: death in the family, harassment or discrimination, poverty, unemployment, lack of training and education, domestic violence, marginalisation, stigmatisation, etc. During this delicate phase they are in need of special support. Reintegration is decisive for a child's future well-being in the community. Switzerland's commitment in this respect is focused in the following two areas:

a. Reintegration of victims of sexual violence

At times of armed conflict girls as well as boys are exposed to the risk of rape or other sexual violence posing a threat to their physical and mental health. One tragic consequence of such practices is contamination by sexually transmissible diseases including HIV/AIDS. Girls associated with armed forces or armed groups may be forced into marriage and face the risk of pregnancy or forced abortions. In many cases even after committing themselves to freeing the children, certain armed groups refuse to let girls leave, keeping them prisoners as "wives". The reintegration of girls and boys who have been victims of sexual violence can be extremely difficult as they are often rejected by their own communities due to their links with a rebel group, and the "stain" that results from the stigma of rape.

In many cases girls, who are in the greatest need of care and services, are "forgotten" by programmes designed to create awareness and reintegration. One of the reasons is that a number of girls are reticent about making themselves known, fearing to be identified as members of an armed group or as "bush wives" with their

children labelled as “rebel babies”. Another reason is that girls are not recognised as combatants in the full sense. It is important therefore to pay greater attention to their special needs by means of effective programmes of prevention, demobilisation, awareness and reintegration.

In so far as boys are concerned, a problem that tends to be underestimated is that of the trauma to which they are subjected when witnessing or committing acts of sexual violence. They can be forced to commit sexual atrocities under the direct order of their commandant or indirectly through peer pressure. In some cases boys traumatised by the violence of war have themselves subsequently committed acts of sexual violence.

Switzerland finances a Child Soldiers International project dealing with the obstacles to reintegration faced by girl soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The aim is to prepare a national strategy with the DRC government so as to identify girl soldiers (current and former) and their children and provide assistance for their reintegration. The project’s long-term objectives are to enable all girl soldiers to benefit from aid programmes tailored to their needs, eliminate prejudices and promote gender equality.

Lines of action

→ Switzerland seeks to strengthen programmes for the reintegration of victims of sexual violence.

b. Psychosocial support, education and vocational training

The recruitment of children as soldiers can result in serious mental and psychological suffering. It is important to care for these children and to offer them long-term protection within the community. The children must be able to consult with competent adults that can help them to manage and overcome the trauma.

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) are three essential and inter-dependent components of post-conflict peacebuilding. Reintegration is undoubtedly the most difficult component in this process. This is particularly true in so far as young members of armed groups are concerned (boys especially). Generally speaking these individuals have not had access to formal education (school), training or vocational experience. Consequently most of these youths find themselves without basic knowledge or skills (literacy), or indeed specific, vocational or technical skills that would facilitate their social and economic reintegration.

Efforts to prevent the recruitment of children by armed forces or armed groups are more effective when part of a long-term strategy designed to create prospects for

young people in fragile contexts. They are often frustrated due to the absence of any vocational opportunities or access to basic services. To deal with this frustration it is important to provide fresh opportunities in the areas of education, training and employment. Furthermore, when selecting organisations to benefit from financing, Switzerland above all takes into consideration those that adopt a community approach so as to avoid discrimination with regard to other children suffering from the consequences of war.

Programmes to develop basic technical and vocational skills for these young people are essential to the process of socioeconomic reintegration, and therefore peacebuilding. To be effective, these programmes must address the specific needs (psychosocial support, basic education and training) of these children and youths. Schools are often inadequate and unable to fulfil this task. Nor, in contexts of fragility or conflict, do they have the necessary resources. It seems important therefore to be able to support programmes that are adapted to the specific needs of former combatants with the possibility of developing skills that will enable them to make the transition to normal citizenship and meet their own needs in a sustainable manner. In the framework of development cooperation, Switzerland has a great deal of experience in supporting educational structures borne and supported by local communities (informal education and training programmes, notably in western Sub-Saharan Africa: Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin).

Lines of action

- Switzerland provides financial contribution to projects that offer psychosocial support and vocational guidance during the process of transition from military to civilian life.
- Switzerland identifies and supports organisations that offer children guidance in education and vocational training.



C. Annex: Summary table

Switzerland's commitment to the protection of children associated with armed forces or armed groups

Axis 1: Strengthening respect for and for children, dissemination of the normative framework on children

- Promotion of the universalisation and effective implementation of the Optional Protocol of 2000 on the involvement of children in armed conflict: encouraging the ratification of this text in relevant bilateral or multilateral meetings.
- Support for activities relating to the dissemination of a normative framework for children and respect for it.
- Support for organisations which encourage states to integrate international standards for the protection of children in their national legislation and which assist them in these efforts.
- Support for organisations which make the normative framework for children be known to armed groups and solicit their commitment to respect it.
- Switzerland supports the dissemination of the Draft Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
- Whenever necessary Switzerland approaches parties to an armed conflict that persist in committing violations of the normative framework for children, or to the multilateral institutions.

Axis 2: Strengthening its commitment to promoting the protection of children in the multilateral framework

- Switzerland is committed to promoting decisions that will improve the protection of children, and to the implementation of multilateral mechanisms.
- Switzerland maintains its appeal to the Security Council for the adoption of clear language concerning the protection of children in relation to all political and peacekeeping missions.
- Switzerland will help to maintain pressure on parties to a conflict who persist in committing violations, through bilateral efforts and multilateral initiatives.
- Switzerland supports research for the purpose of improving accountability with regard to children in situations of armed conflict, and for the implementation of action plans.
- Switzerland takes advantage of all international and regional summits and conferences to promote strengthening of the protection of children in armed conflict.
- Support for the DPKO: training of peacekeeping personnel and police officers.
- Support for the Special Representative:
 - Continuation of regular high-level dialogue with the Special Representative and secondment of a Swiss expert to her office,
 - Support for the activities and mandate of the Special Representative.
- Switzerland supports the work of the Geneva-based CPWG, in particular by financing the post of a deputy coordinator as well as through the deployment of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA) for its rapid response team.

Axis 3: Strengthening the commitment of both Switzerland and its partners in the field

- Switzerland continues to provide financial support at the global/regional levels to international organisations that have a mandate for the protection of civilians and children in armed conflict, as well as the relevant NGOs.
- Switzerland seconds experts to organisations active in child protection, notably UNICEF and the UNHCR, through the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA) and the Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding (SEP).
- Swiss development efforts that have an indirect impact on recruitment and reintegration (access to employment, education and/or training).
- Contribution by the SDC Institutional Partnerships division to Swiss cooperation organisations which, through their commitment to the protection of children, are indirectly involved with the subject of child soldiers (Enfants du Monde, Pestalozzi Children's Foundation).
- Switzerland finances a project of the NGO "Child Soldiers International" dealing with obstacles to the reintegration of girl victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



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