War, Displacement, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers

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Introduction

Displacement is one of the most common products of violent conflict. When weighing

the risks posed by civil war, many people decide that their best chance of safety lies

elsewhere. Sometimes the chaos and destruction of war arrives so suddenly that families

become separated—children flee from school, farmers leave their fields, mothers escape

their homes. In other situations, soldiers force an evacuation at gunpoint and whole

villages are exiled en masse. Displacement does not necessarily lead to safety, however.

Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) may become targets of attack or simply

languish indefinitely in squalid, disease-ridden camps.[1] For the most vulnerable,

especially children, the dangers of displacement may rival those of the conflict they

hoped to escape.

The 1996 United Nations report on the "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children"

determined that children separated from their families during conflict are one of the most

at risk categories of becoming child soldiers.[2] These "unaccompanied minors," as

international organizations term them, include children orphaned by war or disease, as

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[1] The standard definition of a refugee is found in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. The convention defines a refugee as "[Any person who]…owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have fled their homes, but have not crossed national borders.
[2] Graça Machel, "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children," United Nations, 1996.

well as those separated from family in the chaos of conflict. Unaccompanied minors lack parental protection and generally live in a less supervised environment than other displaced children. The United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly recognized that "unaccompanied refugee minors are among the most vulnerable refugees and the most at risk of neglect, violence, forced military recruitment and sexual assault."[3]

Even when children remain with their parents, forced displacement can disrupt family and social networks. In a refugee or IDP crisis, parents often lose customary sources of authority, as they lack the ability to provide for their children. This can increase the difficulty of controlling adolescents and transmitting traditional values. Refugee children generally receive inadequate education and have little hope of permanent employment in the refugee receiving state, even if they manage to complete secondary school. The combination of disruption and desperation increases displaced children's vulnerability to military recruitment.

The literature on child soldiers offers numerous explanations for the increasing use of children in war. P.W. Singer cites three main factors: social disruptions and failures of development caused by globalization and war; the proliferation of lightweight small arms; and the increase in economic motivations for civil war.[4] These explanations can be applied to refugees and internally displaced people, even if the literature does not directly consider displacement. As discussed above, the experience of displacement often includes traumatic social disruption and drastically reduced economic opportunities.

Very little scholarship explicitly addresses the relationship between displacement and child soldier recruitment. The systematic study by Vera Achvarina and Simon Reich

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[3] See for example UN General Assembly Resolution no. 56, par. 136, Dec. 19th, 2001.
[4] P. W. Singer, *Children at War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005), 38.

provides a valuable first step. They persuasively argue that "large numbers of children congregated together in easily identifiable locations, if left unprotected, make an easy target as recruits for belligerents." Achvarina and Reich assess competing explanations of child soldier rates of recruitment and suggest that refugee protection is an important, and generally overlooked, factor.[5] My research builds on that finding and offers a deeper analysis of the conditions of displacement that increase the likelihood of the recruitment of child soldiers.

Militarization and Insecurity: Causal Paths

There are two main patterns, or causal paths, through which displaced children are recruited as fighters. Children can become targets of recruitment when the displaced population is militarized or when the population lacks security (see Figures 1-3). My specification of the militarization and insecurity paths expands on the more general causal framework advanced by Achvarina and Reich.

International law mandates respect for the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and prohibits refugee participation in military activity.[6] Yet the militarization of some refugee populations has led to cross border raids by militias based in or near refugee camps, attacks on the refugee population by the sending state, and even international war. The term militarization describes non-civilian attributes of refugee populated areas, including inflows of weapons, military training, and recruitment. Militarization also includes actions of refugees or exiles who engage in non-civilian

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[5] Vera Achvarina and Simon Reich, "Why Do Children 'Fight'? Explaining the Rise of Child Soldiers," *International Security* (forthcoming), quote on p. 35. [OR CITE THE RELEVANT CHAPTER]
[6] See the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, *Chapter* 1, General Provisions, Article 1 and the *Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*, Organization of African Unity, 1969.

activity outside the refugee camp, yet who depend on assistance from refugees or international organizations.[7] Militarization can occur due to the presence of soldiers or militant exiles (including war criminals) who live in or near the refugee populated area and interact with the refugees. Refugees or exiles who store arms and train outside the camp, yet return to the camp for food, medical assistance, and family visits, create a militarized refugee population.

The militarization explanation for recruitment of child refugees posits that in such a generally mobilized population, it will be easier for militants to recruit children (see Figure 1). Militarization implies that the refugee population lacks the protection mandated by international law and has lost its civilian character. As militants are able to operate freely, perhaps even with the support of the refugee population, children will become vulnerable to recruitment. During the Sudanese civil war, the SPLA rebels in Sudan took militarization to an extreme by creating a series of boys-only refugee camps on the Ethiopian border. Separated from their families and surrounded by war, the boys became a valuable fighting force for the rebels.[8]

A similar pattern is likely among internally displaced populations, although there is insufficient scholarship available to know with certainty. IDPs have fled their homes, but not their countries. Therefore, international law presumes that they are under the protection of their government. In reality, of course, IDPs flee because their government cannot or will not protect them. The legal distinctions between IDPs and recognized refugees likely affects their patterns of militarization.
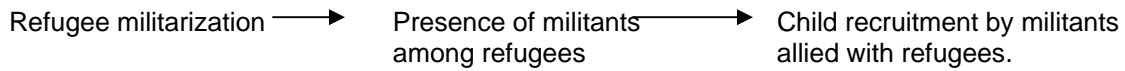
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[7] The term exiles refers to people, including soldiers and war criminals, who left their country of origin but who do not qualify for refugee status. Exiles and refugees may live indistinguishably in camps, as they did in Zaire after the 1994 exodus from Rwanda.
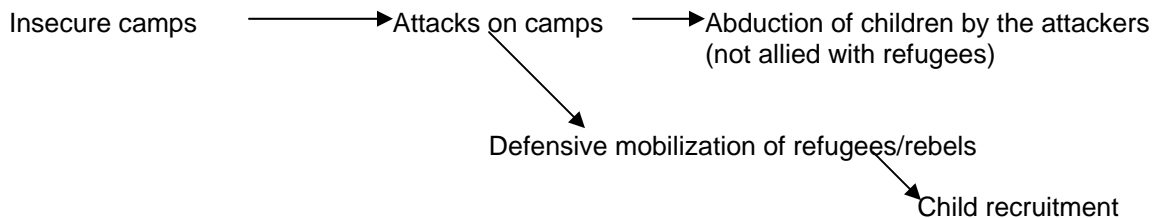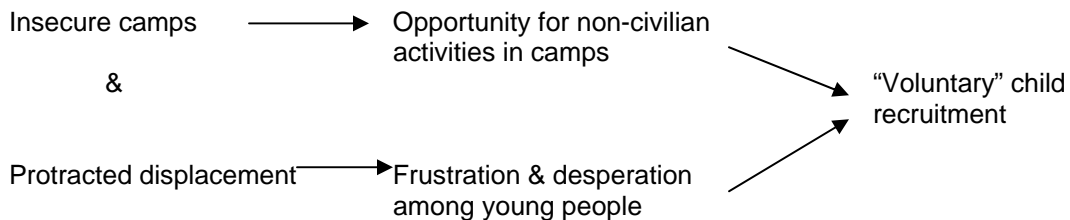[8] Singer, 24.

Figure 1. Militarization path

Refugee militarization ⟶ Presence of militants among refugees ⟶ Child recruitment by militants allied with refugees.

Figure 2. Insecurity path

Insecure camps ⟶ Attacks on camps ⟶ Abduction of children by the attackers (not allied with refugees)

⟶ Defensive mobilization of refugees/rebels ⟶ Child recruitment

Figure 3. Insecurity over time

Insecure camps ⟶ Opportunity for non-civilian activities in camps ⟶ "Voluntary" child recruitment

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Protracted displacement ⟶ Frustration & desperation among young people ⟶ "Voluntary" child recruitment

The militarization pattern of recruitment parallels the broader literature on child soldiers that emphasizes life in a war zone as a high risk factor for recruitment. Singer describes children in a civil war environment as "surrounded by violence," usually combined with a situation of extreme poverty.[9] Rather than functioning as the safe haven intended by international law, a militarized refugee camp approximates conditions of a conflict zone.

The second explanation for child recruitment examines the physical security of the displaced population (see Figures 2 and 3). This suggests that, regardless of the

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[9] Singer, 43.

political or military motivations of the refugees, poorly protected camps are vulnerable to raids in which the attackers abduct children for military purposes. Achvarina and Reich argue that "child soldiers will constitute a larger percentage of belligerent forces where camps are relatively vulnerable to infiltration or raiding."[10]

In addition to that straightforward mechanism for recruitment, attacks on camps may also spur the refugees to mobilize defensively. In some instances, opportunistic leaders convince refugees to mobilize by manipulating their fear of attack. That may lead to further militarization and child recruitment by fighters allied to the refugees.

Living conditions and expectations about the future add a conditional factor to explanations of child soldier recruitment. My earlier study of refugee militarization suggests that poor living conditions are an insufficient explanation for military activity.[11] In other words, refugees' militarization does not necessarily increase when their living conditions, measured in terms of mortality rates, malnutrition rates, and levels of humanitarian assistance, decrease. However, examination of militant refugee groups does show that expectations about the future, such as the likelihood of resettlement abroad or finding employment in the receiving state, affect the likelihood of militarization. Protracted refugee situations lead to reduced expectations for the future and thus a higher receptivity to military activity.[12] Thus, one would expect that children are more easily recruited from long-term displaced populations who have few educational or employment opportunities (Figure 3).

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[10] Achvarina and Reich, 12.
[11] See Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), Chapter 2.
[12] Gil Loescher and James Milner, "The Significance of Protracted Refugee Situations," Adelphi Paper, 45, 375 (July 2005).

For the purposes of clarity, I have diagrammed these paths as though they are mutually exclusive. It is certainly possible, however, that these paths interact with each other. In some instances, militarization can reduce the security of the camps by making them more likely targets for attack. Conversely, insecure camps increase refugees' vulnerability, making militarization an attractive option for opportunistic leaders.

Given these probable causal paths whereby refugee children are recruited into armed conflict, a logical follow-up question becomes: Which causal path is more common? A major hindrance to charting the patterns of recruitment in camps is the dearth of reliable data. Systematic data on child recruitment does not exist for refugee populations, much less for internally displaced persons. The existing evidence on refugee militarization, however, suggests that insecurity and youth desperation play an important role in child soldier recruitment.

Conditions of Camp Insecurity

Regardless of their level of militarization, a poorly protected displaced population is more likely to suffer attacks and abduction of children. Refugee camps display a wide variation in their vulnerability to attacks. Four main attributes determine camp vulnerability. These are: the capability of the receiving state to provide security and maintain order; the porosity of international borders; the presence of international protection; and the security measures taken within the camp. As I discuss at the end of this section, these factors apply most directly to refugees but can also be applied to IDP settlements.

Capability of the receiving state

According to international law, the refugee receiving state is responsible for maintaining the civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps.[13] This includes providing adequate policing to maintain law and order in and around the camps. A capable receiving state also has a functioning judicial system to handle any militants or criminals among the refugees.

A weak, or failed, receiving state is unable to provide basic physical protection to its own citizens, much less to refugees. Most refugee camps are located in poor countries, often with a history of civil strife. Additionally, refugees generally reside in the geographic periphery of the receiving state. These peripheral regions are often the first areas to lose the protection of the central government. In Zaire during the Rwandan refugee influx of the mid-1990s, the eastern areas of the country had carved out virtual autonomy from the decaying central government. Political order collapsed and refugees (and local civilians) found themselves at the mercy of capricious, greedy local leaders and militias. UNHCR notes that the banditry rampant in remote areas in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania threatens locals and refugees alike.[14]

In some instances a capable receiving state may condone refugee militarization or even send government agents to recruit refugees for fighting. This may occur if the receiving state is allied with the refugees for ethnic or political reasons. Such an alliance

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[13] The OAU Convention states that "Signatory States undertake to prohibit refugees residing in their respective territories from attacking any member state of the OAU." OAU, "Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa," 1969, Article 3. The Organization of American States (OAS) also urges the institution "of appropriate measures in the receiving countries to prevent the participation of the refugees in activities directed against the country of origin." OAS, "Cartegena Declaration on Refugees," 1984. In a more recent document, the Security Council reaffirmed "the primary responsibility of States to ensure [refugee] protection, in particular by maintaining the security and civilian character of refugee and internally displaced person camps." UN Security Council Resolution 1265, adopted Sept. 17, 1999, UN Doc. S/RES/1265 (1999).
[14] UNHCR, *State of the World's Refugees, 2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 70.

formed between the Afghan refugees and their Pakistani hosts during the 1980s, leading to a high level of militarization and recruitment among the refugees. When the receiving state encourages military activity, the pattern of child soldier recruitment is likely to follow the militarization path outlined in Figure 1.

Porosity of borders

Closely tied to the capability of the receiving state is the security of international borders. A weak receiving state cannot prevent illegal border crossings by rebels, state military forces, criminals, or smugglers. Refugee camps are usually sited near the border of their home state—for reasons of convenience and politics. When the receiving state is unable to protect the camp from hostile cross-border raids, recruitment becomes more likely.

In certain situations, the receiving state has the capability to police its border but chooses to allow military activity in the refugee camps. If the receiving state is allied with the sending state, it may allow hot pursuit raids across the border. Or the government of the receiving state may attempt to destabilize a rival neighbor by encouraging rebels to use the refugees as a recruitment pool. As discussed earlier, Sudanese rebels situated militarized refugee camps across the border in Ethiopia where they trained thousands of boy fighters. When the regime in Addis Ababa changed, the new government proved hostile to the SPLA and forced closure of the camps.[15]

International protection

The presence of international protection forces, such as a UN peacekeeping mission, can ameliorate some of the problems posed by weak or hostile receiving states. In 2003,

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[15] Singer, 24.

ECOMIL (Economic Community of West African States Mission in Liberia) deployed troops to the refugee and IDP camps around Monrovia. Commenting on the ECOMIL mission, UNHCR observed that "The rapid deployment of humanitarian and security personnel in and around the refugee-populated areas during the initial phase of a humanitarian emergency helped deter armed elements from infiltrating the population or targeting refugees."[16]

Missions such as ECOMIL are the exception, however. Most insecure refugee camps do not benefit from an effective international protection force. Lack of funding and political will are the usual reasons why refugees do not receive international protection. In some cases, UN agencies and NGOs hire private forces or provide funds to train local forces. Overall, these efforts have fallen short of preventing militarization and, in some situations, have worsened insecurity.

As a last resort, many humanitarian organizations attempt to protect the refugees by their presence in the camps. UNHCR and NGOs hope that their ability to witness any abuses and advocate on behalf of the victims will deter the more blatant offenses, such as abduction of children. This "protection by presence" usually breaks down in the face of life-threatening security situations. Recent riots in a camp for internally displaced persons in Darfur, Sudan forced the evacuation of aid workers and journalists from the camp. The only security force consisted of a handful of unarmed African Unions soldiers who barricaded themselves in their quarters in fear of their lives.[17] Such a dangerous and chaotic situation surely leaves children vulnerable to manipulation and recruitment, although the lack of witnesses makes it difficult to quantify the threat.

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[16] UNHCR, *State of the World's Refugees, 2006*, 77.
[17] Lydia Polgreen, "Violence Forces U.N. to Evacuate Darfur Camp," *New York Times*, May 8, 2006.

Camp security measures

Most observers agree that refugee camps "are unnatural, closed environments which can leave refugees vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation, with the danger increasing where such situations are prolonged."[18] Planning measures within the camp can either threaten or reinforce the security of children. This includes layout and organization that permits maximum supervision and protection of vulnerable groups like unaccompanied minors.[19] Some observers note that allowing parents input into camp organization and governance will help them maintain responsibility for their children. Similarly, extended educational and vocational opportunities can be viewed as a security measure if they dissuade adolescents from participating in military activity.[20]

Threats to refugees and humanitarian workers have convinced UNHCR to attempt to "mainstream" security concerns into all of its programs. The new plans include a two-year work plan to incorporate 80 new recommendations on security such as "strengthening policing in refugee camps and planning safer site locations, shelter, food and water."[21] Additional suggestions include implementing "comprehensive global birth registration, the prevention of family separation and where that is not possible, promotion of family reunification; and education for all (including girls and adolescents) even during conflicts and an explanation to children of their basic human rights."[22] Despite

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[18] UNHCR, *State of the World's Refugees, 2006*, 85.
[19] Singer notes that UNHCR initially set up housing for unaccompanied minors in separate areas of Sudanese refugee camps, making SPLA abductions even easier. Singer, 59.
[20] UNHCR, *State of the World's Refugees, 2006*, 87.
[21] UNHCR, "Life Is Precarious, Unpredictable, and Sometimes Deadly," *Refugees*, vol. 2, no. 139, (2005) 9.
[22] Rachel Brett, "Recruiting Child Soldiers," *Refugees*, vol. 1, no. 122 (2001), 19.

these goals and intentions, however, the vulnerability of refugee camps varies markedly and frequently fails to provide adequate protection for children.

The above discussion focuses on protection issues affecting formal refugee camps. Yet many displaced people, especially those displaced within their own countries, live in informal settlements, squatter camps, or dispersed among local residents. These internally displaced people (IDPs) generally lack even the minimal security measures provided in organized refugee camps. Internally displaced populations do not share the same international legal protection as refugees, in theory because they are still under the protection of their home state. In reality, the type of violence that causes their displacement—often government persecution—makes them even more vulnerable than refugees.

The conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan provides an example of the heightened vulnerability of IDPs. Since the war began in 2003, nearly two million people have been displaced from their homes. Nearly all the displaced are crowded in makeshift camps within Darfur. These camps have become targets for attack by the government-allied militias, as well as recruitment pools and staging grounds for various rebel groups. The United Nations reported eight aid workers killed in the month of July 2006 and increased levels of theft, including hijacking.[23]

Youth Desperation

High levels of physical insecurity combined with conditions of youth desperation increase the likelihood that displaced children will participate in military activity.

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[23] United Nations, "Humanitarian Efforts in Darfur Jeopardized by Aid Workers' Deaths," United Nations Press Release, Aug. 6, 2006.

Children interviewed by aid workers and human rights activists give varying reasons for their participation (in addition to physical coercion). The most common reasons cited include: the lack of food and other basic necessities, pressure from adults to join, witnessing atrocities committed against family members or peers, the desire to alleviate their family's suffering, and the perception that there are no alternative options. As a measure of youth desperation, I use the following indicators (and discuss each one in detail below):

- Length of time displaced;

- Economic trends in the affected region;

- Legal status;

- Availability of education;

- Family status; and

- Traumatization.

Length of time displaced. Quite often, refugees' desperation increases as their crisis drags on. The initial enthusiasm of international donors quickly wears off and the displaced people feel forgotten. The length of the displacement crisis could also serve as a proxy for the length of the conflict. A longer war may increase the chance that combatants exhaust the supply of willing adult recruits and turn to children.

Economic trends in the affected region. It is important to look specifically at the region of the state affected by the displacement. Often these areas are peripheral to the central government and receive fewer resources. The displaced population may experience economic discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics.

Relying solely on state-level economic statistics could mask important regional variation. This measure should examine GNP per capita over time, employment statistics, and levels of humanitarian assistance. Declining economic status will affect children's well-being in terms of the availability of food, health-care, and other basic necessities. Young teenagers will realize that their families are suffering and their own future prospects are slim.

In the Liberian civil war, for example, both the government forces and the LURD rebels preyed on civilians, increasing the levels of desperation and vulnerability. Refugees from Liberia explained the seemingly wanton brutality that caused their flight: "[LURD rebels] burned the whole town. Everyone fled into the bushes...Government troops were behind us. They came into the bush and took our clothes and materials."[24] Achvarina and Reich report that child soldiers constituted over half of the fighting forces in the Liberian conflict.[25] Government soldiers routinely crossed the border to recruit young Liberian refugees as mercenaries. For example, in one instance at Nicla camp in Ivory Coast the recruiters, brandishing machine guns, signed up 150 young Liberians (including many teenagers) for the equivalent of $17 each. One new recruit explained, "We want money. Here we are nothing and we have nothing."[26] In this situation it seems that a combination of camp vulnerability and poor living conditions enticed the recruits.

Legal status. Refugees and internally displaced people receive varying levels of legal protection, depending on their status. Internationally recognized refugees have the greatest level of legal protection, at least in theory. Many internally displaced people, on

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[24] Human Rights Watch, "Liberian Refugees in Guinea: Refoulement, Militarization of Camps, and Other Protection Concerns" (New York: November 2002), 8.
[25] Achvarina and Reich, 33. [CITE RELEVANT CHAPTER]
[26] UNHCR, "Turning Refugees into Gunmen," *Refugees*, no. 131 (June 2003), 18.

the other hand, live as illegal squatters or have been sent to quasi-concentration camps by a vengeful government. It follows that children without legal protections are more vulnerable to both abduction and recruitment. One might expect that internally displaced children are more often recruited than refugee children, since refugees benefit from an international structure of laws and institutions meant to protect them.

Availability of education. UNHCR has recognized that education can function as a protection tool in two ways.[27] First, when schools are secure, they allow children a safe place to gather. Second, providing refugees with education gives them more choices about their future and hopefully reduces the allure of military recruitment.

Family status. As discussed earlier, separated and orphaned children are more at risk for recruitment into military forces than children living with their parents.

Traumatization. Many child soldiers interviewed during demobilization cite violent trauma as a catalyst for their recruitment. Such traumas include war-related violence as well as domestic violence (especially for girls). Child soldiers recall witnessing the murders or torture of family members and friends as turning points in their lives. This factor relates to the earlier discussion of length of displacement and conflict duration. It stands to reason that children are more likely to suffer trauma in a longer conflict.

Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo

A brutal civil war raged in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1998 to 2003. Pockets of conflict continue to erupt following the peace agreement, particularly in the

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[27]"Prima Facie" The newsletter of UNHCR's Department of International Protection (Geneva, April 2002), 4.

eastern provinces. The conflict has cost over three million lives and displaced millions more from their homes. The scholarly consensus is that greed, rather than grievance, sustains this war. All parties to the conflict pillage natural resources such as diamonds, gold, copper, and coltan. For the most part, the combatants aim to terrorize civilians, not win them over to any particular ideology or political program. Some of the violence has an ethnic component, particularly the Hema-Lendu conflict in northeastern Congo, but that factor is deeply entwined with economic motivations.[28]

Throughout the civil war, all sides conscripted children for use as soldiers, porters, and sex slaves. Early in the civil war, the government of President Laurent Kabila issued a call on national radio for youth between 12 and 20 to enlist and fight the rebels.[29] Kabila's action followed the pattern he established as a rebel fighter in the first Congolese civil war (from 1996-1997) in which his ADFL rebels included at least 10,000 child soldiers.[30] Groups allied with Kabila's government, such as RCD-ML and Mai-Mai militias, recruited children in large numbers. NGOs estimate that children under 18 make up half of the Mai-Mai combatant forces.[31] The RCD-Goma rebel factions focused on child recruitment when its ally Rwanda began withdrawing troops in 2002. According to Human Rights Watch, RCD-Goma relied on forced recruitment, abducting boys and young men from their homes, in the market, at school, and on the way to church.[32] By

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[28] For more in-depth analysis, see François Misser, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Prospects for Peace and Normality," Writenet, March 2006. Found at: http://www.unhcr.ch.

[29] Human Rights Watch, "The Use of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo," 1999. Found at http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp/congo.htm.

[30] Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)," New York, June 2003, 24.

[31] *Child Soldiers Global Report, 2004*, "The Democratic Republic of the Congo."

[32] Human Rights Watch, "Democratic Republic of the Congo, Reluctant Recruits: Children and Adults Forcibly Recruited for Military Service in North Kivu," Human Rights Watch Report, Vol. 13, No. 3 (A), May 2001, 6.

April 2003, the UN mission to Congo estimated that 20 percent of RCD-Goma's frontline combatants were under eighteen.

In addition to the DRC government and rebel groups, foreign soldiers also conscript Congolese children. During the 1996-1997 civil war, Rwandan government troops aided Kabila's Congolese rebel forces. One Rwandan commander bragged about the army of children put in place by Kabila's forces: "it was an army made up of youngsters, obedient and disciplined, but who needed to be better supervised, better trained."[33] The United Nations force in the Congo (MONUC) estimates 10,000 to 12,000 foreign fighters are still in eastern Congo.[34] For example, the Rwandan rebel group Forces Democratique de Liberation du Rwanda (FDLR) faces difficulty in recruiting and retaining adults, so it has turned to children. Child soldiers can be frightened more easily by propaganda (for example, that all returning Hutus will be killed in Rwanda). Defection rates are lower for child soldiers, especially girls.[35] There are also reports of children being abducted and sent to Uganda and Rwanda for training.[36]

Reliable statistics on child soldiers in the DRC are difficult to obtain, but most observers agree that child recruitment is rampant. In 2002, the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers estimated tens of thousands child soldiers were active in DRC.[37] Aid workers and the United Nations suggest that at least 30 percent of the

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[33] Quoted in Human Rights Watch, "Democratic Republic of the Congo," May 2001, 10.
[34] Refugees International, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Demobilization of Rwandan Soldiers Going Slowly," Refugees International Bulletin, Dec. 16, 2005.
[35] Refugees International, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Demobilization of Rwandan Soldiers Going Slowly," Refugees International Bulletin, Dec. 16, 2005.
[36] BBC News, "UN Finds Congo Child Soldiers," Feb. 21, 2001.
[37] Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)," New York, June 2003, 22.

combatants are children under 18.[38] UNICEF calculated that in 2005 there were 33,000

children associated with the fighting forces just in North Kivu province.[39]

The following pages explore the ways in which displacement and youth

desperation interact and affect child participation in military activity in DRC. This

analysis does not serve as a definitive test of the causal paths presented in Figures 1-3.

Such a test will require more comparative case studies and, if possible, a large-n

statistical analysis of many cases over time. In addition, the DRC case study does not

suggest that displacement is a necessary condition for child recruitment. The literature

offers many examples of children who join military forces during conflict even if they are

not displaced.[40] The chapter by Achvarina and Reich more directly compares

displacement to alternate explanations. My research does not evaluate those alternate

explanations, rather I specify the logic by which displacement might affect child

recruitment.

Patterns of displacement

The vast majority of people displaced by the Congo conflict remain within the DRC

borders. At the height of the crisis in 2003, there were over three million internally

displaced Congolese out of a total estimated population of 49 million (See Figure 4). The

United Nations estimated that 1.6 million people remained displaced as of June 2006. Of

these, only around 250,000 are refugees in neighboring states (primarily Tanzania).

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[38] Rodrique Ngowi, "War Has a Baby Face in the Congo," *The Star* (South Africa), July 10, 2003; and Watchlist, "The Impact of Armed Conflict," 23.

[39] Refugees International, "Refugee Voices: One Female Child Soldier's Story in the Democratic Republic of Congo," Refugees International, Nov. 7, 2005. Found at: http://www.refugeesinternational.org.

[40] See, for example, Save the Children, "Congo Case Study: Aimerance, Girl Soldier," Reuters AlertNet, July 7, 2006.

Some IDPs fled to the bush and lack food, medicine, and shelter. A 2005 Refugees

International mission found IDP camps located on the outskirts of Kinshasa containing

"displaced people from areas throughout the country who had been living in deplorable

conditions for years" with virtually no humanitarian assistance.[41] Another study found

that some of the newly displaced people in Katanga province did not even have clothes to

wear.[42]

Figure 4.   Displacement during the civil war

	1998	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**
Refugees from DRC in neighboring states (primarily in Tanzania, Rep. Congo, & Zambia)[43]	158,833	255,950	371,713	392,146	421,362	453,465
Refugees from neighboring states in DRC (primarily from Angola & Sudan)[44]	240,214	285,270	332,509	362,012	332,978	234,033
Internally displaced within DRC (primarily in the east)	131,000[45]	Not enough data	Not enough data	2 million[46]	2.2 million[47]	About 3 million[48]

It is important to note that the national displacement statistics can be misleading,

since there are wide variations among regions. Four provinces in the east—Orientale,

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[41] Refugees International, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Internally Displaced Unable to Return Require Alternative Resettlement Possibilities," Refugees International, June 23, 2005. Found at: http://www.refugeesinternational.org.

[42] Misser, "Democratic Republic of the Congo," 14.

[43] UNHCR, "2003 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, Democratic Republic of the Congo," Geneva, UNHCR, p.128-129.

[44] UNHCR, "2003 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, Democratic Republic of the Congo," Geneva, UNHCR, p.128-129.

[45] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Refugees and IDPs in the Democratic Republic of Congo," ReliefWeb, Feb. 1, 1998. Found at: http://www.reliefweb.int.

[46] UN OCHA, "DRC, Affected Populations by Province, Refugees and Internally Displaced ," Map prepared by UN OCHA Great Lakes Regional Office, Nairobi, Sept. 2001.

[47] UN OCHA, "Affected Populations in the Great Lakes Region," UN OCHA Regional Support Office-Central and East Africa, July 31, 2002, 2.

[48] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "DR Congo: Some 40,000 Flee Ongoing Fighting Every Month," March 1, 2006. Found at http://www.reliefweb.int. Also United Nations OCHA, "DRC Affected Populations by Province Internally Displaced (August 2003)."

North Kivu, South Kivu, and Katanga—account for over 90 percent of internal displacement. For example, Ituri district in Orientale province has a population of four million, of which 500,000 have fled their homes since 1999.[49] Refugees International estimates that 6,200 of the 15,000 combatants in Ituri are children.[50]

In addition, the numbers reported as annual figures do not reflect the fluidity of the displacement. People may be displaced multiple times within a year. Or they may be displaced and return home within the same year. Population movements are a response to the unpredictable ebb and flow of fighting in the region.[51]

The patterns of displacement in DRC underline the importance of distinguishing between refugees and internally displaced persons when analyzing the role of displacement in child soldier recruitment. Refugee protection measures offer a misleading picture of the security situation. First of all, the internationally recognized refugees within the DRC are mostly from Angola and live primarily in regions that are distant from the conflict zones. In addition, the refugees generally do not reside in formal camp settlements. UNHCR indicates that only about 5,000 of 150,000 refugees lived in camps as of 2003. The majority live in informal settlements, rural areas, or dispersed among local populations.[52]

Refugees from the Congo currently live in Tanzania, Republic of Congo, Zambia, Burundi, and Rwanda. These refugees, especially the 150,000 in Tanzania, enjoy greater security and standards of living than those displaced within DRC. Congolese refugees in

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[49] Francis Mwepu, "Ituri: The Congo's Own Rwanda," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, July 27, 2006.

[50] Refugees International, "Refugee Voices: Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," Refugees International, June 22, 2005. Found at: http://www.refugeesinternational.org.

[51] Internal Displacement monitoring Centre, "DR Congo: Some 40,000 Flee ongoing Fighting Every Month," March 1, 2006.

[52] UNHCR, "2003 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, Democratic Republic of the Congo," Geneva, UNHCR, p.128-129.

Tanzania are not highly militarized or politicized (unlike Burundian refugees in

Tanzania). Based on those general facts, it seems reasonable to suggest that Congolese

refugee children are less likely to participate in military activity than IDP children.

Low levels of protection

Inadequate protection, especially for displaced people, increases the likelihood of child

recruitment. As discussed earlier, measures of protection include the capability of the

state, porosity of borders, presence of international protection, and security measures

within camps and IDP settlements. For the most part, eastern DRC is characterized by

impotent state authority, completely porous borders, and ineffective security measures.

The central government is unable to provide political order in the war-affected

eastern regions of DRC. One former soldier explains: "There has never been security in

North Kivu…we live like we are in the Wild West where everyone makes his own law.

The state is nonexistent in the province."[53] Some regions are under the control of various

militias or rebel groups, who have little accountability or incentives to provide services to

the population. The United Nations Mission in the DRC (MONUC) reports that over 80

percent of attacks on civilians in North Kivu are perpetrated by the regular army.[54]

The presence of MONUC, with about 16,000 soldiers, has been unable to

counteract the rampant insecurity. MONUC's mandate includes overseeing disarmament,

demobilization, repatriation, resettlement, and reintegration. It is authorized under

Chapter VII of the UN Charter and is allowed to use force to protect civilians "under

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[53] IRIN, "DRC: Security Situation in North Kivu Remains Precarious," IRIN News, Aug. 8, 2006.
[54] IRIN, "DRC: Security Situation in North Kivu Remains Precarious," IRIN News, Aug. 8, 2006.

imminent threat of physical violence."[55] The continuing violence and high levels of

displacement testify that civilians cannot put their trust in the protection offered by the

international community.

Most of the internally displaced Congolese do not live in formal camps. Thus, the

earlier discussion of security measures does not directly apply to eastern Congo. For the

most part, both IDPs and local residents live in highly insecure situations. In 2002, the

United Nations estimated that over 20 million Congolese were vulnerable due to "adverse

effects of the conflict and chronic insecurity."[56] Thus, it is clear that the security problems

of IDPs cannot be solved separately from the general security needs in the east.

There are two important additions to the general discussion of IDPs and they both

affect children. Two particularly vulnerable groups in DRC are unaccompanied children

and demobilized child soldiers. Aid organizations have found that unaccompanied

children are targets of conscription and abduction. Human Rights Watch reported that

rebel forces abducted children from local NGOs that worked with unaccompanied

minors.[57] In 1998, the United Nations reported 4,600 "officially" unaccompanied children

in DRC.[58] That figure does not count street children or others that do not receive

international assistance.

Another disturbing finding is that demobilized child soldiers are often re-recruited,

sometimes from the very demobilization centers meant to prepare the children to return

home. In one instance, Human Rights Watch reported that Laurent Kabila's ADFL rebel

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[55] Statement of MONUC's mandate from www.monuc.org. Accessed Aug. 22, 2006.

[56] UN OCHA, Affected Populations in the Great Lakes Region," July 31, 2002, 14.

[57] Human Rights Watch, "The Use of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo," 1999. Found at http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp/congo.htm. See also, Human Rights Watch, "Child Soldier Use 2003: A Briefing for the 4th UN Security Council Open Debate on Children," 2004. Found at: http://hrw.org/reports/2004/childsoldiers0104/6.htm.

[58] UN OCHA, "Refugees and IDPs in the Democratic Republic of Congo," ReliefWeb, Feb. 1, 1998. Found at: http://www.reliefweb.int.

forces re-enlisted about 100 demobilized children from a UNICEF-run transit center.[59] In another example, the rebel group RCD-ML re-recruited "dozens" of children who had just been demobilized by the Mai-Mai militia.[60] This phenomenon suggests that the poorly protected demobilization centers have become a tempting target of child recruitment. After all, the children gathered in the demobilization centers have already been "trained" and brutalized. They are separated from their families and generally lack even basic necessities for subsistence. Many child soldiers find that their families have disappeared or died during their absence which increases the likelihood that they will be re-recruited.

High levels of desperation

A variety of economic and social factors increase children's vulnerability to so-called voluntary recruitment. Among displaced children, these factors are likely exacerbated by the breakdown of traditional structures of protection, such as the extended family. As discussed earlier, the factors that increase desperation include: the length of time displaced, worsening economic trends, unstable legal status, lack of education, separation from parents, and traumatization.

The length of time that particular groups have been displaced is difficult to measure since it varies for different populations and regions of eastern Congo. Overall, the displacement crisis began with the influx of over a million Rwandan Hutu refugees and militants in 1994. This led to civil war from 1996 to 1997 which reignited in 1998 and ended (at least on paper) in 2003. The UN estimates that over 1.5 million people

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[59] Human Rights Watch, "The Use of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo," 1999. Found at http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp/congo.htm.
[60] *Child Soldiers Global Report, 2004*, "The Democratic Republic of the Congo."

remain displaced and their homes and livelihoods are destroyed. Even as some groups return home, others are newly displaced when the fighting shifts to their towns and villages.

It is impossible to exaggerate the severity of the economic situation for the displaced residents of eastern DRC. Numerous NGOs report that the generalized poverty is manifested by acute food insecurity and a lack of water, sanitation, and health care. These problems are magnified during displacement when people lose access to their land and traditional coping systems. A 2002 United Nations map attempted to convey the scope of the problem by color-coding areas according to vulnerability. Vast swathes of eastern DRC are colored red, signifying the highest level of danger. As the map key explains: "these populations, continuously on the move, are considered as the most vulnerable in the DRC. The malnutrition rates registered in these areas are the highest in the country, sometimes beyond 50%. These populations are located in the most inaccessible areas of the country…rendering the delivery of assistance almost impossible."[61]

A Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) study confirmed the dire situation described by the United Nations. MSF followed 16,000 displaced people who descended on the town of Dubie (population 10,000) in Katanga province. Among the IDP population the crude mortality rate was 4.3 deaths per 10,000 per day, which well exceeds the threshold for a humanitarian emergency (1 death per 10,000 per day).[62]

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[61] UN OCHA Geneva, "Humanitarian Briefing Pack—Democratic Republic of the Congo," May 2002, map titled "Access and Vulnerability in the DRC" on p. 43.
[62] Médecins Sans Frontières, "Food, Nutrition, and Mortality Situation of IDPs in Dubie, Katanga, 23-25 March 2006," MSF, March 2006, 3.

Many children interviewed by aid workers cite the suffering of their families as an impetus for recruitment. They hoped to protect their families by joining the rebels or to relieve their parents of having to provide for one extra mouth to feed. Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict noted that "In the context of generalized poverty and breakdown of basic social services, unaccompanied children or orphans may be seeking protection, food and/or a place in society."[63]

The conflict and accompanying insecurity has wiped out any social services and made education beyond the reach of most families. UNHCR commented on the appalling state of social programs at the height of the conflict: "Government spending on children's programs is nearly non-existent. Primary school education is not compulsory, free, or universal."[64] Children, especially displaced or unaccompanied children, have little hope of using education as a means to a better future. Further disrupting the educational system, schools have become a target for forced recruitment by military forces. Many former child soldiers report being abducted at school or en route to and from school.

Former child soldiers who joined voluntarily often describe a traumatic event as the catalyst for their decision. Fourteen year old Patric Baraka explained, "I became a soldier two years ago after watching Lendus kill my parents and five siblings."[65] Fifteen year old "Furaa" joined the military forces after her father beat her and tried to kill her with a machete.[66] A teenage girl recounted how at age twelve she witnessed the rape and murder of her mother and sisters by RCD-Goma fighters. As she later explained to Amnesty International: "I was scared and I thought that if I joined the army, I would be

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[63] Watchlist, "The Impact of Armed Conflict," 23.
[64] UNHCR, Centre for Documentation and Research, "Background Paper on Refugees and Asylum Seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo," Geneva: UNHCR, May 2000, 26.
[65] Quoted in Ngowi, "War Has a Baby Face."
[66] Save the Children, "Congo Case Study: Furaa, Girl Soldier," Reuters AlertNet, July 7, 2006.

protected. I wanted to defend myself."[67] Most of these children find, however, that further

trauma and abuse awaits them in the military.

Conclusion

Currently, there is no comprehensive source of information about displacement,

insecurity, and child recruitment. Obtaining numbers of refugees is difficult enough,

much less describing the various levels of security affecting displaced populations and

the detailed characteristics of camp organization. Even basic information, such as the

percentage of children in the population, is not always available. For example, recent

UNHCR figures present demographic data for only 11.7 million out of over 19 million

persons of concern.[68] Gathering sufficient information will require a large-scale and

detailed data collection effort.

The anecdotal evidence provided by aid workers and human rights reports is

useful, but does not offer a generalizable picture of child soldier recruitment.

Further data is needed to attain a more systematic understanding of the relationship

between displacement and child recruitment. It would also be beneficial to disaggregate

data between refugees and internally displaced people, since each group receives

different types of international protection.

The absence of a universal data set on child soldiers and displacement should not

dampen policy efforts to stem recruitment, however. The reports from various crisis

zones, in conjunction with the existing scholarly literature, indicate the need for better

refugee protection policies and specific attention to unaccompanied minors. Evidence

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[67] Amnesty International, "DR Congo: Child Soldiers Tell Their Stories," AI index AFR 62/038/2003, Sept. 9, 2003.
[68] UNHCR, *2004 Global Refugee Trends*, Tables 1 and 10. Found at: http://www.unhcr.ch.

indicates that modifications in camp structure and management can increase security for the residents. Additionally, the literature on child soldiers and civil wars points to certain types of conflicts, for example "greed" wars, as more prone to rely on children as fighters. With the constraint of limited resources, donors and aid agencies can concentrate their initial efforts on improving security for the most at-risk displaced children.