ENDING
THE RECRUITMENT & USE
OF CHILD SOLDIERS
BY 2025

PRIORITY ACTIONS

On 6 May 2021, Alliance 8.7 and its Partner War Child organized a webinar aimed at mobilising action to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by 2025, as set out in Sustainable Development Target 8.7. The event was accompanied by a week-long online discussion.
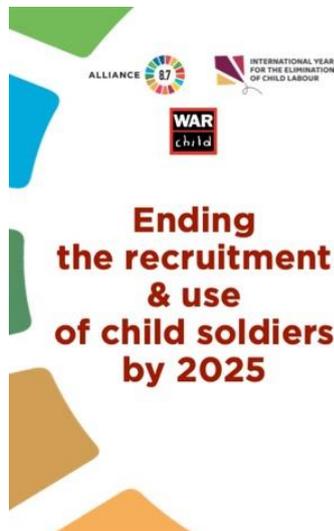
SDG TARGET 8.7
Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

This document sets out the key messages from all 139 participants, including seven expert speakers. Detailed notes on the presentations by each speaker are further down, as are links to resources shared by all.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Two-fifths (60%) of participants feel that ending recruitment and use of child soldiers by 2025 is not achievable, with 40% saying it was achievable or 'maybe achievable'. However, there was general agreement that there is so much we, as the Alliance 8.7 community, can do to move towards Target 8.7. The following actions are most urgent.

SPEAKERS
(in order of apperance)

Simon Hills (Chair)
ILO Technical Specialist & co-lead of the Child Labour task force at the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

Dieu-Beni (recorded message)
Former child soldier, Central African Republic

Virginia Gamba (opening address)
UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

Jorge Macias (panelist)
The Guillermo Toriello Foundation, Guatemala
Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Country

Sandra Olsson (panelist)
Reintegration Adviser, War Child

Cherubin Denamgane (recorded message)
Head of base Ouham-Pendé, War Child, Central African Republic

Jennifer Fendrick (panelist)
Senior International Relations Officer, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor & Human Trafficking, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, US Department of Labor

Action 1: Raise awareness and mobilize action

This year is the [International Year for the Eradication of Child Labour](#). We need to make the most of the current spotlight on child labour to raise awareness of the needs of children affected by armed conflict.

A regular conference on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, including monitoring of Target 8.7 achievement, would help to give the issue a higher profile on a longer-term basis. Such a conference, undertaken in a special country or sub-region, should include the private sector.

Action 2: Increase funding amounts and duration

Funding for initiatives working to prevent and end the recruitment and use of child soldiers has often been low and short-term. The COVID-19 crisis has made this worse and organizations in the field report a desperate need for additional funding.
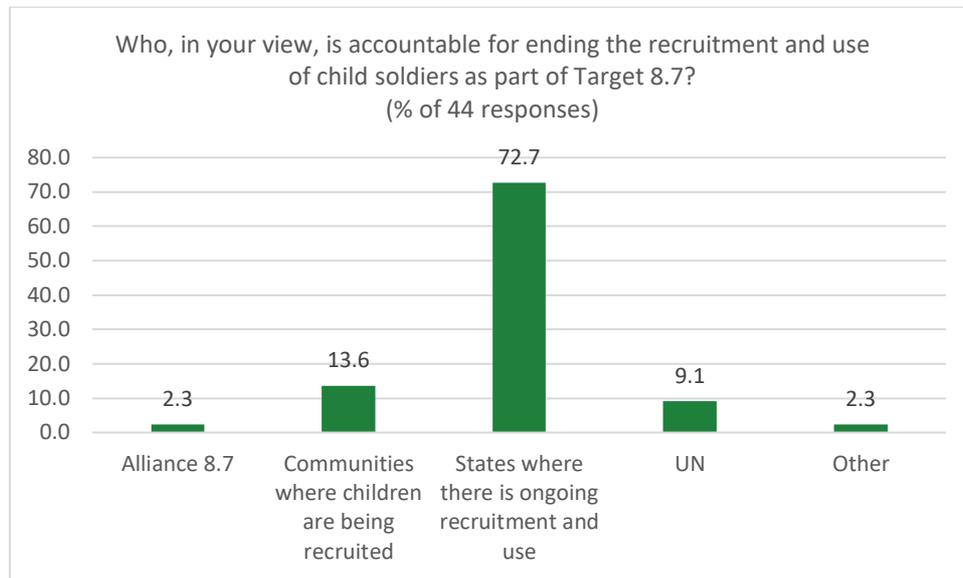
When armed groups release child soldiers, reintegration programmes need to be in place to provide children with an incentive to leave and to stay out. A full 12 years of education is key to offering child soldiers an alternative to being in an armed group. Children and their families need support to make sure they can stay in education.

Action 3: Involve communities to make interventions sustainable and relevant

Interventions need to be more relevant and sustainable to ensure lasting impact and prevent child recruitment. This can be achieved by better listening to the children and communities themselves. Communities should be empowered and involved in a meaningful way to both guide and take on some of the reintegration programming.
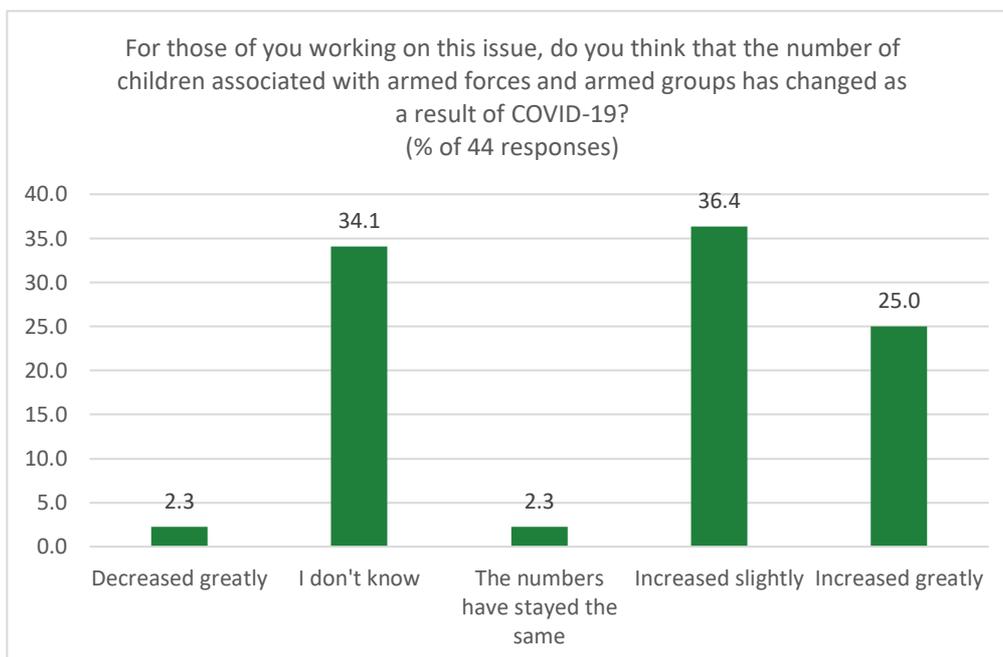
Moreover, while not all non-state armed groups will engage, it is usually possible to engage communities to tackle the drivers of recruitment. In areas where community-based armed groups (paramilitary, vigilantes, self-defence militias) are the main

recruiters and thus where the armed group *is* the community, this direct engagement is crucial in preventing recruitment.

Who, in your view, is accountable for ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers as part of Target 8.7?
(% of 44 responses)

Category	%
Alliance 8.7	2.3
Communities where children are being recruited	13.6
States where there is ongoing recruitment and use	72.7
UN	9.1
Other	2.3

Action 4: Tackle root causes, especially given the socio-economic impact of COVID-19

Armed groups are often willing to discourage child recruitment, but poverty and insecurity drive children to (re)join. COVID-19 is exacerbating poverty and insecurity. In countries such as CAR, the disease is less of an issue but the effect on livelihoods, including through border closures, has forced already vulnerable children to look for work in mines and they are now at increased risk of recruitment.

For those of you working on this issue, do you think that the number of children associated with armed forces and armed groups has changed as a result of COVID-19?
(% of 44 responses)

Category	%
Decreased greatly	2.3
I don't know	34.1
The numbers have stayed the same	2.3
Increased slightly	36.4
Increased greatly	25.0

Action 5: Improve monitoring

Monitoring is critical to raising awareness of violations and ensuring accountability. Raising awareness is necessary to allow children and their communities to get a realistic picture of what it is like to be a child soldier. Independent and credible organizations need to be able to access communities and report back on the situation without fear of repercussions (to themselves, or the communities). The work in Colombia of the ombudsman, or the *Defensor del Pueblo* is an example of this.[1] Such monitoring also allows for better early warning systems and prevention measures to ensure the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict can be managed and eliminated.

Action 6: Prevent conflict goods from entering supply chains

The private sector must ensure it is not supporting exploitative supply chains and be made accountable if this is the case. Many products such as gold and precious stones can be linked to child recruitment as in some areas, for example in the Democratic Republic of Congo, mines are often controlled by armed groups.

SPEAKERS' PRESENTATIONS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Simon Hills (Chair)
ILO Technical Specialist and co-lead of the Child Labour task force at the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

Simon Hills opened the webinar noting that child labour and the recruitment and use of child soldiers are interchangeably linked and brought together by SDG Target 8.7. Given that 2021 is the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour (IYECL), and with the Target 8.7 deadline looming, we should all place the ending of the use of child soldiers at the top of our priorities.

This year offers an opportunity to reinvigorate action through strengthened interagency and inter-governmental cooperation, amongst others through a reinvigorated Alliance 8.7 Action Group on Conflicts and Humanitarian Settings, as well as Alliance 8.7 Partners making IYECL action pledges.

Dieu-Beni
Former child soldier, Central African Republic (CAR)

In his video message Dieu-Beni tells his story of joining an armed group to seek revenge for the killing of his father and then being convinced to come back home by his mother. Despite initial rejection, she convinced Dieu-Beni's family and friends to

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[1] For more information on the *Defensor del Pueblo* please see
https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defensor%C3%ADa_del_Pueblo_de_Colombia (accessed on 26 May 2021)

not be afraid of him, or keep their distance, but to support him. Going back to school helped Dieu-Beni both to form relationships with peers and to learn new things. His involvement in War Child's [VoiceMore](#) youth advocacy programme has helped him to express himself in front of an audience and to stand up for himself and his peers.

Virginia Gamba
United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

Professor Gamba stressed the need for long-term sustainable adequate funding for reintegration programming that supports local actors. Community-led reintegration programming is the most efficient way to ensure rehabilitation and recovery of affected children, to break the cycle of violence, and prevent future occurrences of child recruitment.

Professor Gamba also addressed the additional challenges of COVID-19 for the prevention, monitoring and response to the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. She warned that more children could be pushed into joining armed groups with increasing poverty due to the pandemic

Jorge Macias
The Guillermo Toriello Foundation, Guatemala

Jorge Macias shared his personal experience of involvement in armed conflict. He stressed that peace can only take hold if there is a collective, shared memory and understanding of the conflict. Without this, truth and reconciliation cannot happen.

The true story of [Chepito,](#) a child soldier, is a key tool in raising awareness among children in Guatemala of the horrific reality of what it means to be with an armed group, and thus prevents future recruitment.

Finally, armed groups were often willing to discourage child recruitment, but as recruitment is also driven by poverty and insecurity, support programmes must be available when children are released.

Cherubin Denamgane
Head of base Ouham-Pendé, War Child, Central African Republic

Projects are too often short-term, Cherubin said. Any project of up to 12 months generally fails to offer sufficient follow-up support and risks children re-joining armed groups. The volatile CAR context with numerous armed groups and already huge needs has been exacerbated by decreased funding due to COVID-19 as well as recent post-election violence. Despite these setbacks, War Child has increased the successful outcomes of its projects by switching to promoting stronger community engagement so that communities and youth identify and carry out activities themselves.

Sandra Olsson
Reintegration adviser, War Child

Sandra outlined key challenges to the successful reintegration of conflict-affected children, including:

1. The localised and protracted nature of today's conflicts, with increased numbers of community-based actors
2. Short-term funding and decreasing levels of funding
3. The lack of adaption of interventions to the local context and needs
4. Social reintegration and community acceptance, which are often overlooked or misunderstood by interventions
5. Insufficient engagement of community members and the children themselves as key reintegration actors
6. Prevention as a key part of reintegration programming is not sufficiently recognised and integrated across humanitarian, development, and peace-building sectors.

Jennifer Fendrick
International Relations Officer, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor & Human Trafficking, Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB), US Department of Labor

The recruitment and use of child soldiers are old practices and it is time to break the cycle, in particular by focusing on preventing recruitment. Research on drivers of recruitment and the double victimisation of children once released, is crucial, as is leveraging power and reach of local actors. The full impact of COVID-19 also needs to be understood and addressed.

RESOURCES

The resources below were shared during the webinar and the online discussion. The webinar recordings (in English, French and Spanish) can be accessed here on the Alliance 8.7 website.

Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers 2020. *Gaps and Needs for the Successful Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Groups or Armed Forces* https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/GCR-Gaps-and-Needs-10.2020.pdf

Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers 2020. *Financing Support for Child Reintegration : Issues & Options Study* https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/GCR-Financing-modalities-11.2020.pdf

The Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers has further useful resources on its website https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/global-coalition-for-reintegration-of-child-soldiers/

Hoyos P., Palencia S., Méndez N. and de la Cruz, B. *De Domingo Sánchez a Chepito Ixil*. http://mvam.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Portada-e-interiores-libro-De-Domingo-Sanchez-a-Chepito-Ixil.pdf

To see a short video of a Guatemalan school commemorating Chepito, please visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPEF0M8nrUk

ILO & IOE 2015. *Child Labour Guidance Tool For Business* *https://d306pr3pise04h.cloudfront.net/docs/issues_doc%2Flabour%2Ftools_guidance_materials%2FILO-IOE-child-labour-guidance.pdf*

OECD 2013. *OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas* https://www.oecd.org/corporate/mne/GuidanceEdition2.pdf

Office of the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict 2021. *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict* https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-violations-against-children-in-situations-of-armed-conflict-1.pdf

PACE Consortium. *Democratic Republic of Congo: Mineral supply chain mapping and labour market assessment* https://delvedatabase.org/uploads/resources/DRC_Mineral_Supply_Chain_Mapping_and_LMA_May_2020.pdf

PACE Consortium. *Central African Republic - Value Chains Assessment Report* https://delvedatabase.org/uploads/resources/CAR-Value-Chains-Assessment-2020.pdf

Thomson Reuters Foundation, 6 May 2021. *From teaching to football, communities seen as key to ending use of child soldiers.https://news.trust.org/item/20210506185604-7xbed/*

UNOPS 1999. *Guatemala Memoria Del Silencio* *https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/379513?ln=en*

USDOL 2020. *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods

USDOL 2019. *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor Report*

https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings

To access all of USDOL's research and reporting on the worst forms of child labor please visit https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/our-work/child-forced-labor-trafficking

For more information on relevant projects funded by USDOL please see https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/projects

USDOL have amassed significant amounts of data, which can be downloaded here https://developer.dol.gov/others/sweat-and-toil/

Also see USDOL's supply chains app for companies on child and forced labour https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/our-work/supply-chains