

Strengthened Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict

Title of Programme	Strengthened Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict
Donor	Kingdom of Belgium
Total Proposed Budget	Euro 2 million
Programme Duration	2 years
Programme Outcome	Grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict are prevented through sustained engagement based on safe and secure data generated through the UNSCR 1612 monitoring and reporting mechanism
Relevant SDGs, UNICEF Strategic Plan Outcome Areas	<p>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.</p> <p>SDG Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.</p> <p>SDG target 5.2: Eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.</p> <p>UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014–2017 Outcome 6: Child Protection.</p> <p>UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021 Goal Area 3: Every Child Is Protected from Violence, Exploitation and Harmful Practices.</p>
Geographical Focus	Global and 4-6 selected countries
Key Partners	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG CAAC); United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations; United Nations Entities and Child Protection NGOs supporting human rights monitoring in situations of armed conflict; Government, communities, children in target countries.
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UNICEF Contact	<p>Cornelius Williams, Associate Director Child Protection, Section, Programme Division, UNICEF NYHQ, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY, USA, email: cowilliams@unicef.org; tel.: +1 (212) 824-6670</p> <p>Segolene Adam, Chief, Humanitarian Policy Section, Office of Emergency Programmes, UNICEF NYHQ, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY, USA email: seadam@unicef.org</p>

Background

The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict (MRM) is a Security Council-mandated mechanism to increase compliance by parties to conflict with their child protection obligations. The MRM documents the following violations: killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children; rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; attacks on schools or hospitals; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access.

When a country is added as a situation of concern in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), monitoring, verification and reporting processes must be established at country level to collect information on the six grave violations. In addition, after any party to an armed conflict has been listed in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on CAAC, a formal MRM must be established along with a UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), to continue regular monitoring and reporting and to engage with all parties to the conflict to prevent and end violations.

In 2019, nearly 1 in 5 children were living in situations of armed conflict around the world, and as warring parties continue to commit [grave violations of children's rights](#),¹ millions of children are deeply and directly affected.² Over the past decade, the United Nations has verified over 170,000 grave violations against children. Tens of thousands of girls and boys remain in the ranks of national armed forces and non-state armed groups, whether directly engaging in combat roles or serving in support roles. Children actually or allegedly associated with armed groups are often detained for extended periods without charge, in poor conditions and without access to basic services. Children continue to be killed and maimed at an alarming rate, including by landmines and unexploded remnants of war while the use of explosive devices in densely populated areas proliferates. Children are abducted, often for specific purposes that may include recruitment and use, forced marriage or sexual exploitation. Conflict-related rape and other forms of sexual violence equally remain of serious concern, with girls and young women suffering disproportionately from gender-based violence and often isolated and stigmatized if it becomes known. Moreover, attacks on schools and hospitals – traditional safe-havens – have become commonplace, as much as has denial of humanitarian access. Furthermore, the protracted nature of conflicts mean that children are often exposed to violence throughout childhood and into adulthood, with devastating immediate and long-term physical, psychological and emotional consequences.

The consequences that arise from these violations are multifold and the scope of child protection challenges increasingly complex. Risks include threats of death and serious injury, abduction, increased gender-based violence, multiple displacements, family separation, interrupted education, destruction of essential health infrastructure and denial of access to humanitarian assistance. In the time of COVID-19 pandemic, despite the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, conflict has not abated. Rather, in some corners, it has increased or stayed the same. There is also great concern that the economic effects of COVID-19 will be a destabilizing source of conflict and violence.

UNICEF's role in implementing the UN Security Council CAAC agenda

UNICEF is the Child Protection sector lead and provider of last resort and continues to be at the forefront of global efforts to monitor and report on grave violations against children, in accordance with its mandate and responsibilities under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005). At the global level, UNICEF co-chairs with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG/CAAC) the MRM Technical Reference Group, which serves as a platform for consultation and agreed guidance on technical issues pertaining to the development of working tools and

¹ Peace Research Institute Oslo, [Conflict Trends 10:2018, Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990-2017](#)

² [Stop the War on Children: Protecting Children in 21st Century Conflict](#), (Save the Children 2019)

implementation of the MRM. This information is particularly important to provide specific guidance and support to Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs). UNICEF also pursues its critical engagement with the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (SCWG/CAAC), including by providing it with relevant and timely information and analysis. Particularly, UNICEF leads the presentation of quarterly updates to SCWG/CAAC on the situation of children and armed conflict (Global Horizontal Notes) and supports the SCWG/CAAC and its chair as a technical resource on monitoring and reporting and child protection, including in support of the development of conclusions to the Secretary-General's country specific reports on CAAC. In addition, UNICEF engages with Security Council Member States on CAAC-related advocacy and protection issues, including on draft resolutions on CAAC, mandate renewals, and presidential statements. Similarly, UNICEF engages with the diplomatic community, particularly the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict (GoF/CAAC) which is another important forum to raise awareness and spark action on the situation of children affected by armed conflict.

At country level, UNICEF co-chairs the CTFMRs, both at high and technical levels, which ensure the full operationalization of the MRM. Through the deployment of the secure MRM Information Management System (MRMIMS+)³ and subsequent training of CTFMRs, members and partners in concerned countries, UNICEF continues to provide support with the necessary tool to effectively and securely collect and analyse data on the grave violations against children in times of armed conflict.

CTFMRs also play a key role in preventing and responding to grave violations against children, including through active and strategic engagement with parties to conflict⁴. For example, in 2019, three new Action Plans to prevent and end grave violations against children were signed between the United Nations and non-state armed groups in the Central African Republic (two) and Syria (one) and in 2020, the armed forces of South Sudan signed the first action plan addressing all six grave violations. In addition, in Nigeria, the CTFMR continued to conduct joint verification missions and engage with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) since its signing of an Action Plan in September 2017. As a result, by the end of 2019, the CJTF had released 2,188 children from its ranks. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the CTFMR's engagement with parties to conflict throughout the year led to the release of more than 2,000 children.

Overall, in 2019, more than 13,000 were released from armed forces and armed groups. UNICEF contributions following the secure release of children from armed forces and groups include the provision of a wide range of services to ensure full, effective and sustainable reintegration of released children. In 2019, UNICEF provided a range of care and services, including specialized family tracing, psychosocial support, recreational activities, economic reintegration, education and life skills, to more than 28,000 children who had exited armed groups over the course of several years.

Key Challenges to UNICEF's implementation of the UN Security Council CAAC agenda

UNICEF's expertise and engagement at global, regional and national levels have been essential to advance the credibility and functioning of the Security Council's children and armed conflict agenda, including the MRM since its inception in 2005. At the same time, UNICEF has recognized that challenges to its monitoring and reporting mandate and responsibilities persist⁵. The key challenges and gaps identified include:

³ The MRMIMS+ is an interagency tool that was officially adopted as the information management system to document grave violations against children by UNICEF, the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the Office of the Special-Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC).

⁴ In accordance with their mandate per UN Security Council resolution 1612 (2005).

⁵ Several of the gaps and needs mentioned in this note were identified during regional consultations held in 2019-2020, which brought together UNICEF, OSRSG/CAAC and DPO principals and staff based at global, regional and national levels.

Increasing demand on UNICEF’s monitoring and reporting capacities

The monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children constitute a unique area of work, which is demanding, highly sensitive and human resources intensive. Critical challenges currently facing UNICEF include resource constraints and increasingly complex operating environments⁶, which have in turn put a heavier demand on UNICEF to systematically and sustainably address all its human resources needs, including long-term, quick deployment and gap-filling options. These pressures vary by context, including pressure for quick set-up of monitoring systems in new situations of concern, to improving remote monitoring methods in situations where access is highly constrained, and to handling politically and operationally sensitive information and engaging with parties to conflict, government, and the OSRSG/CAAC.

UNICEF recognizes that all those directly involved in monitoring and reporting on grave child rights violations – from field monitors to CTFMR co-chairs and other UNICEF senior management at country, regional, and global levels – must be provided with the necessary skills and skills-development opportunities, as well as the technical tools, support and guidance necessary to fulfill the mandate. Moreover, due to sensitivity and need for confidentiality, child protection staff who document grave violations against children, including atrocities amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, often work separately from other colleagues and sometimes in isolation. This takes a direct professional and personal toll. In line with the [UN’s Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy](#)⁷, and as part of its duty of care responsibility, UNICEF recognizes the need to better connect colleagues working on monitoring and reporting and scale up efforts to offer them the necessary support for their well-being.

Obstacles to evidence generation, data management and use

At country level, effective analysis and subsequent use of data on grave violations is critical to invigorate targeted advocacy initiatives and engagement with parties to conflict, as well as to inform UNICEF’s programmatic responses. However, UNICEF recognizes that use of data to inform responses is not systematically incorporated into response planning processes. There is therefore a need to further activate evidence-generation processes, including through the identification of lessons learned and good practices. Similarly, the production of global and regional trends and analysis on grave violations against children remains limited and needs to be scaled up to ensure that calls for accountability are effectively carried out at country, regional and global levels.

In addition, monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children require highly confidential and secure systems to collect, manage, analyse and store data. While all CTFMRs have established systems to manage data in their respective countries, UNICEF leads the implementation of a standardized and secure information management system – the MRMIMS+ – with the objective to make it available to, and subsequently used by, all CTFMRs. By doing so, UNICEF aims to put all CTFMRs on equal footing with regards to data protection and management, while promoting consistent data analysis and use. Hence, UNICEF continues the upgrade and roll-out of the MRMIMS+ to all relevant countries and sustain (and scale up where needed) the necessary support and guidance to country instances, including mandatory training on the system, to ensure its full operationalization.

⁶ The increasingly protracted and complex nature of current conflicts, as well as the emergence of new situations or expansion of existing ones (including across borders) have put a heavier pressure on UNICEF capacity to deliver its monitoring and reporting mandate.

⁷ The United Nations Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy is a five-year approach to address the needs the United Nations personnel and improve organizational capacities to prevent and protect mental health. It has been endorsed by the heads of management of all UN system entities and it applies to the whole of the UN system.

Furthermore, UNICEF started presenting visual supports to accompany the quarterly GHN presentations to the SCWG CAAC. Where possible, additional aids to visually translate the data collected through the MRM should be produced to inform action, this might include infographics and visual representation of grave violations trends and patterns. The SCWG CAAC should continue to lead its calls for accountability and should be provided with the evidence base to inform its interventions.

Actions Required

To address these critical areas, over the next two years, **UNICEF will strengthen its monitoring and reporting capacities at all levels of the organization** – including by:

- ✓ strengthening field monitoring capacity of staff and networks in selected high need countries,
- ✓ securing data collection and analysis
- ✓ enhancing sustained engagement and functioning of Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting and their leadership,
- ✓ improving HQ and Regional technical support and coordination.

1. Strengthen UNICEF headquarter Office of Emergency Programmes and Programme Division capacity to support the Security Council Working Group on CAAC and UNICEF regional and country offices to meet their accountabilities for the children and armed conflict (CAAC) agenda, by

- providing guidance and supporting strategic engagement related to monitoring and reporting, the Secretary-General's Annual Report on CAAC and other periodic reporting,
- supporting sustained engagement and functioning of Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting,
- engaging with parties to conflict and third-party influencers to prevent and end grave violations of child rights.

UNICEF HQ coordinates and facilitates overall UNICEF's engagement on the CAAC agenda. It serves as the primary advisory and support team globally. It manages engagement with Security Council members on CAAC, including the SCWG/CAAC, coordinates UNICEF's relationship with the Office of the SRSG/CAAC, and co-chairs the CAAC Technical Reference Group developing guidance on monitoring and reporting. The engagement at global level includes, for example, briefings to the Security Council on CAAC, working closely with the OSRSG/CAAC in the review of all countries' quarterly Global Horizontal Notes (GHN), country reports and annual report, briefings to the SCWG/CAAC, policy advice to Member States, civil society actors, UN entities and partners on CAAC-related issues, advocacy with parties and third-party influencers.

In addition to ensuring quality and timely briefings to the SCWG/CAAC and contributions to the review of GHNs, country reports, and the annual report, UNICEF HQ hopes to continue to serve as a technical resource for the SCWG/CAAC, including the chair, on issues related to CAAC and child protection. UNICEF will also explore ways to strengthen support to the field representatives to better leverage the conclusions of the SCWG in their advocacy at country level.

UNICEF HQ also provides regular CAAC mandate implementation policy and technical guidance and support to regional and country offices, including directors and representatives, Country Task Forces, as well as child protection teams and partners. UNICEF support and guidance includes the establishment and management of information networks, the data collection, verification and documentation of grave violations. UNICEF HQ also advises on the engagement with parties to conflict, third party influencers and the diplomatic community, including CAAC Group of Friends at global and field level. This support can take

different form depending on the context and situation of the specific country. These include joint missions and interventions with the SRSG CAAC Office both at technical and principal level. Every year, UNICEF HQ also conducts up to ten in-person or remote field missions, supports over 15 meetings with CTMFR members, including UN agencies and NGOs, and countless targeted support and guidance for principal-level or technical-level UNICEF colleagues working on the CAAC agenda.

As cochair of the TRG with OSRSG/CAAC, UNICEF is jointly responsible for the development and dissemination of guidance related to monitoring and reporting on grave child rights violations. Several pieces of guidance are slated to be finalized and rolled out in 2021 that will support CTMFRs and those engaged in monitoring and reporting in non-MRM settings.

In late 2016, the MRMIMS+ was developed by UNICEF HQ and adopted by the TRG as the Information Management System of choice to store, standardize and analyse MRM data. UNICEF HQ is currently working together with users in three countries to develop upgrades planned to boost the reporting functions and support full performance of the system. It is then envisaged to roll-out the MRMIMS+ to all 14 MRM countries by December 2022. The finalization and roll out of an advanced MRMIMS+ will constitute a veritable landmark in the ongoing development of the methodological framework of the MRM CAAC and it will leverage the experience and good practices developed during the first ten years of implementation of the mechanism.

2. Strengthen the capacities of UNICEF Country and Regional Offices facing ongoing situations of armed conflict to implement MRM or related monitoring structures. This includes, among other things:

- strengthening monitoring and reporting networks,
- establishing an evidence base for action and accountability,
- implementing secure information management systems, and
- engaging parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations.

There are 21 countries on the agenda of the Security Council related to Children and Armed Conflict in 2020. Of these, 14 are countries with a formal MRM (Afghanistan, CAR, Colombia, DRC, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen) and 7 of which are situations of concern with child rights monitoring and reporting processes in place (India, Israel and State of Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, and most recent additions, Cameroon and Burkina Faso.) These countries are among the most challenging contexts in the world for human rights monitoring and humanitarian action. Despite UNICEF's Security Council mandate to effectively support the implementation of the CAAC agenda, UNICEF receives only voluntary contributions and few predictable resources to support this work, which requires significant and highly specialized staff capacity.

Each country has differing needs and capacities related to MRM due to a range of factors, including country status on Security Council agenda, magnitude and length of existing conflict, number of listed parties, size of geographic coverage area and the overall sensitivity of the file. In addition, depending on the interest of the international community, the scale of the need, and the political complexities, some countries are unable to mobilize resources at the country level for critical needs.

For example, **Libya** has been a CAAC situation of concern since 2012. No formal MRM mechanism is in place as no parties to the conflict have been listed in Annexes of the Secretary-General's Annual Report on CAAC. UNICEF has so far supported monitoring and reporting without dedicated human resource capacity to systematically monitor, verify and attribute cases of violations against children. As the conflict escalated in April 2019, the impact on children has been severe. Violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in the course of the conflict continue to be committed with impunity, including summary executions and other unlawful killings, abductions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, ill-treatment as well as gender-based violence. Tackling the scale of humanitarian and human

rights violations and abuses against children in Libya requires increased attention and resources. By comparison, **Somalia and Yemen** each have large geographic areas, protracted conflict and multiple listed parties, including some with whom engagement is ongoing. These situations have so far required significant investment in international staff capacity to manage the sensitive information and engagement.

Similarly, **Burkina Faso and Cameroon** were placed on the agenda of the Security Council in the S-G Annual Report on CAAC in June 2020. As “situations of concern” they will be required to provide periodic reports to the SRSR CAAC. Although they will not have CTFMRs, as they have no listed parties, informal coordination structures will need to be established to meet the obligation to monitor and report violations. Moreover, grave violations against children are being committed in other countries in the region that constitute the Lake Chad Basin, while the latest SG’s Report provides language calling on them to “promote enhanced monitoring capacity in the Lake Chad Basin”. These developments will require dedicated human resource capacity to support monitoring and reporting at country level, and due to the regional nature of the Lake Chad basin area, at the regional level. Development of child rights monitoring network, capacity building, and risk assessment and mitigation will all need to be undertaken. In addition, places like **Mozambique** where the international community is seeing dramatic escalation in human rights violations, including against children, UNICEF is being called upon to step up monitoring of the situation so that the UN and partners can adequately plan and provide a response.

These are only a few examples of the many contexts that require continued investment in monitoring capacity. Given the variety of contexts, with the support of the Kingdom of Belgium, UNICEF will select between 4 and 6 situations of armed conflict where investment in additional capacities would have the greatest impact.

Budget

Below is a core budget to implement the MRM globally, which UNICEF is mobilizing on an ongoing basis. Donors can contribute to any of these components as per funding availability and greatest need UNICEF can provide greater detail for specific locations.

	Estimated Annual Budget
Global Support for the MRM (includes core staffing, MRMIMS+, capacity building, development of technical guidance, travel for field support and official CAAC mandate missions)	\$ 1,250,000
Regional Support (West/Central Africa; Syria/Middle East North Africa) (includes core staffing, support costs, capacity building)	\$ 750,000
Country level support (includes core staffing, MRM network, MRMIMS+, capacity building)	\$250,000- \$1,000,000 per country
Total estimate annual budget (includes new situations and early warning monitoring)	\$15,000,000