
TERMS OF REFERENCE
RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN BY ARMED FORCES AND ARMED GROUPS IN
AFRICA – A MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDY
(TWO (2) RESEARCHERS)

FEBRUARY 2026

BACKGROUND

1. Armed conflict continues to have a profound and lasting impact on children in Africa. Among the most serious violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict is the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups, which is internationally recognised as one of the six grave violations against children in the context of armed conflict. In many conflict and post-conflict affected countries in Africa, children continue to be recruited involuntarily or voluntarily and used in hostilities and related roles. The recruitment of children by armed groups is driven by various factors, including persistent conflict, political instability, weak governance, impunity, poverty and inequality, limited access to education and services, displacement, weak civil registration systems, community-level grievances, and cross-border dynamics that enable armed forces and armed groups to recruit children. The involvement of children in armed conflict violates children's rights, including the right to life, education, health and family. It deprives children of access to fundamental services, putting their health and future at risk.¹
2. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child obliges States Parties, under Article 22, to take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain in particular, from recruiting any child.² In furtherance of this mandate, the ACERWC developed normative guidance through the adoption of General Comment No. 6 on Article 22 of the Charter,³ providing guidance on States' obligations in situations of armed conflict, including the prevention of child recruitment. The Committee has also developed a Model Law on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and established a Special Rapporteur on Children in Conflict Situations to strengthen monitoring, advocacy, and standard setting on the protection of children affected by armed conflict in Africa.
3. The African Union has also undertaken a range of initiatives to protect children affected by armed conflict and prevent grave violations, including the recruitment and use of children by armed groups.⁴ Notably, following a decision of the AU Executive Council, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) has increasingly integrated the rights of the child into its agenda and strengthened its cooperation with the ACERWC on issues affecting children in situations of armed conflict.⁵
4. Regional Economic Communities (RECs), on the other hand, have taken steps to mainstream child protection within early warning mechanisms, peace support

¹ ACERWC 'The impact of conflict and crises on children in Africa' (2016) 1.

² Article 22(2) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

³ General Comment No. 6 on Article 22 of the ACRWC, Children in Situations of Conflict (2020).

⁴ For example, the development of a Policy on Mainstreaming Child Protection in African Peace and Security Architecture, Policy on Child Protection in AU Peace Support Operations and the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflict.

⁵ See *Decision EX.CL/Dec.712 (XXI)*.



operations, and post-conflict responses, although the extent and consistency of these efforts vary across regions.⁶

5. While there have been positive developments, significant challenges remain in preventing and responding to the recruitment and use of children by armed groups in Africa. Whilst Aspiration 9 of Agenda 2040 seeks to ensure that every child is free from the impact of armed conflicts, assessments of progress towards this aspiration indicate persistent gaps in prevention, protection, accountability, and rehabilitation and reintegration measures. Recruitment continues, particularly by non-state armed forces and armed groups, as consistently reported by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In this context, systematically mapping patterns, trends, progress, and challenges relating to the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups can inform targeted advocacy, strengthen policy and programmatic responses, and promote coordinated action among all relevant stakeholders.
6. Against this background, and pursuant to a request of the AU Executive Council as set out in **Decision No. EX.CL/Dec.1248 (XLIV–2024)**, the ACERWC decided, during its 46th Ordinary Session held from 26 November to 6 December 2025, to undertake a Study on the recruitment of children by armed forces and armed groups in Africa. In line with this decision, the ACERWC seeks the services of **two (2)** researchers to undertake the Study and support the preparation of findings for submission to the relevant AU Policy Organs for consideration.
7. The Study will cover selected conflict-affected countries, reflecting regional diversity and varying patterns of recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups, including situations currently on the agenda of the UN Security Council. The Study will integrate a gender-sensitive analysis, examining how recruitment patterns, motivations, experiences, and reintegration needs differ for girls and boys, and will identify gender-responsive prevention, protection, and rehabilitation measures. The geographic focus will be allocated as follows:
 - **Researcher 1** will cover **West and Central Africa**, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Chad, Nigeria, Niger, the Central African Republic (CAR), Burkina Faso, and Mali.
 - **Researcher 2** will cover **North, East, and Southern Africa**, including Sudan, Libya, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Mozambique.

OBJECTIVE

8. The primary objective of the Study is to generate evidence-based, multidisciplinary analysis on the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups in conflict and post-conflict contexts in Africa, drawing on legal, political, socio-economic, security, and child protection perspectives to support the ACERWC in strengthening prevention, protection, monitoring, advocacy, and policy engagement aimed at ending this violation.
9. The specific objectives are to:

⁶ AU & ACERWC ‘Stocktake of the AU responses to child protection in conflict situations’ (2020).

- Examine the nature, scale, patterns, and drivers of the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups in the identified countries, including political, socio-economic, security, governance, and community-level factors, as well as emerging trends and risk factors.
- Assess the adequacy and effectiveness of existing responses by analysing legal, policy, and institutional frameworks and practices at national, regional, and continental levels, including prevention, accountability, and rehabilitation and reintegration measures, and their alignment with the African Children's Charter and relevant regional and international standards.
- Identify gaps, good practices, and actionable recommendations to strengthen coordinated, multidisciplinary responses by States Parties, AU organs, RECs, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society organisations, communities, and other stakeholders in preventing and responding to the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups.

METHODOLOGY

10. The Study will be conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining a desk review with primary qualitative data collection. The desk review will draw on relevant legal and policy frameworks, reports, studies, academic literature, and documentation from Member States, the AU, RECs, CSOs, UN agencies, and international organisations. Primary data will be collected through questionnaires disseminated to key stakeholders, as well as through key informant interviews and focus group discussions with selected stakeholders. In addition, consultations with children and young people, including those formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, may be undertaken, subject to strict ethical safeguards, informed consent, and child-sensitive approaches.
11. The research is a home-based assignment. The Researchers will be required to participate in consultative meetings with the ACERWC Secretariat. The Researchers may also be required to travel to participate in a validation workshop and/or attend ACERWC Ordinary Sessions to present the draft Study.

TIME FRAME, DELIVERABLES & REPORTING LINES

12. A total of 30 payable working days is allocated to each Researcher for completing the Study, with the schedule to be agreed upon by the Researchers and the ACERWC Secretariat.
13. The main deliverables are as follows:
 - i. An inception report outlining the methodology, scope, and work plan for the Study.
 - ii. An initial draft Study submitted to the ACERWC Secretariat and revised based on comments and feedback received from the Secretariat.
 - iii. A presentation of the first draft of the study at the 47th Ordinary Session of the ACERWC, scheduled for April 2026, and revised based on comments and feedback from the ACERWC.
 - iv. A presentation of the final draft study during a validation workshop, to be held on a date to be determined by the ACERWC Secretariat.

- v. A final Study incorporating all comments and feedback received through the validation process, to be submitted by September 2026

14. The Researchers will report to the ACERWC Special Rapporteur on Children in Conflict Situations, through the Secretariat.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

15. The Researchers who will be recruited for this task must have the following qualifications and experience:

- Advanced university degree in law, human rights, children's rights, political science, humanitarian law, and or other related social science field.
- A minimum of 5-7 years of experience working directly on children's rights, preferably with the African human rights mechanisms.
- Demonstrated professional experience on matters related to child protection, child rights monitoring and reporting, children affected by conflicts, peace and security, in the African context.
- Demonstrable knowledge and understanding of the Charter and the mandate and functions of the ACERWC.
- Excellent writing and analytical skills (both qualitative and quantitative methods).
- Proficiency in at least one official working language of the African Union. For **Researcher 1**, proficiency in **French** is a compulsory requirement. For **Researcher 2**, proficiency in English is a compulsory requirement. Knowledge of **Portuguese and/or Arabic** will be considered an added advantage.

CHILD SAFEGUARDING

16. The selected Researchers will receive the AU Policy on Child Safeguarding and the ACERWC Code of Conduct upon engagement. The Researchers shall read, sign, and adhere to these instruments, which constitute binding standards applicable to all external experts engaged by the ACERWC. Compliance with the AU Child Safeguarding Policy, the ACERWC Code of Conduct, and all related safeguarding standards shall be a mandatory condition of the contract and shall apply throughout the duration of the assignment and during any activity conducted under the auspices of the ACERWC. Failure to comply with these safeguarding obligations may result in termination of the contract and other appropriate measures.

APPLICATION

17. The ACERWC invites eligible individual researchers to indicate their interest in providing the services. Interested candidates must provide information demonstrating that they have the required qualifications and relevant experience. The application document should consist of the following:

- A cover letter summarising the background of the applicant and with names and contacts of three references.
- A Customized Curriculum Vitae not exceeding three pages.

- A Technical Proposal on understanding and interpretation of the TOR, methodology to be used, time and activity schedule.
- A Financial proposal inclusive of the Researcher's daily rate in US\$ and other costs, e.g. travel and Daily Subsistence Allowance, and Total cost.

The Financial Proposal shall be sent separately in a PDF format, and it should be password protected. The Researcher will submit the password to the ACERWC only upon request and after concluding the technical evaluation.

- Evidence of educational background and professional experience.
- Sample of relevant previous work (e.g. publications, research reports, policy papers or similar work related to children's rights, armed conflict, or related areas).

APPLICATION DEADLINE

18. The application should be submitted to the Secretariat of the ACERWC no later than **10 March 2026**. Applications should be sent to Opportunities-acerwc@AfricanUnion.org with the subject '**Application-Study on recruitment of children by armed forces and armed groups.**'