

Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations

27 June 2025

IED-25-005



INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

Project team members include:

Hanife Cakici, Team Leader
Wenxin Zhang, Team Member

Contact Information **OIOS-IED Contact Information:**
phone: +1 212-963-8148; fax: +1 212-963-1211; email: ied@un.org

Srilata Rao, Chief of Section

Tel: Tel: +1 212-963-3550, email: rao3@un.org

Demetra Arapakos, Director

Tel: +1 917-367 6033, e-mail: arapakos@un.org

Contents

Summary 3

I. Introduction and objective..... 4

II. Background..... 4

III. Methodology 8

IV. Evaluation Results..... 9

V. Conclusion 20

VI. Recommendations 21

VII. Annex 1: Management responses 22

VIII. Annex 2: OIOS Responses to MONUSCO and MINUSCA..... 32

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability of the contribution of peacekeeping operations to ending and preventing grave violations against children affected by armed conflict in their respective areas of operation. It covered five peacekeeping operations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Abyei and Mali, spanning the period from 2018 to 2024.

Missions carried out their mandate to prevent and end grave violations against children under challenging security, humanitarian, and political conditions. Grave violations remained significant in most contexts, and the missions faced persistent operational challenges amidst a deteriorating security landscape. Furthermore, dire humanitarian conditions in all settings, compounded by the lack of reintegration services due to inadequate capacities of the United Nations country team and national authorities, left children with few alternatives, increasing the likelihood of their joining armed elements or turning to criminality for survival.

Despite these conditions, the missions effectively implemented three core modalities on behalf of their respective Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting– monitoring and reporting, advocacy and engagement with the listed parties to conflict, and capacity building – to make positive contributions to protect and rescue children from the cycle of armed conflict and/or criminality. These efforts led to notable achievements, including the release of children and reductions in recruitment by armed groups and forces, as well as the reinforcement of political commitments to ending and preventing violations. In addition, the missions also implemented four supportive modalities – mine action service, normative assistance, rule of law support and programmatic activities – to create an enabling environment to prevent future violations. The effective implementation of these modalities was enabled by each mission’s comparative advantages, including its wide presence, logistical and human resource superiority, and political mandate.

The missions’ drawdown, withdrawal and exit further undermined the sustainability of gains made towards preventing and ending violations against children. In Mali and the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where peacekeeping operations had ceased, the security situation worsened, exacerbating the protection risks for children. While efforts were made to address capacity gaps following the missions’ exit, some core tasks were not adequately transferred to successor entities due to time and resource constraints, thus leading to shortcomings in transition planning and implementation.

OIOS makes two important recommendations:

1. Under the leadership of OSRSG-CAAC, the Technical Reference Group at UNHQ (DPO, DPPA, OSRSG-CAAC, UNICEF) should review, with due recognition given to the leadership exercised at the Mission level, the process of handover of the political tasks related to the CAAC mandate during mission drawdown, withdrawal and exit in order to further strengthen that process.
2. MINUSCA, MONUSCO, and UNMISS should each develop a scenario-based contingency plan for the handover of their respective CAAC tasks in line with the ongoing or early transition planning that might be taking place at the Mission.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The objective of the OIOS evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability of the contribution of peacekeeping operations to ending and preventing grave violations against children affected by armed conflict in their respective areas of operation. The evaluation conforms with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System.¹
2. Comments were sought from the evaluands for management response, which are presented in Annex 1. OIOS wishes to also acknowledge and thank the evaluation focal points who assisted with the conduct of the evaluation.

II. Background

CAAC mandate, objectives, stakeholders and reporting

3. The United Nations CAAC mandate, established by the General Assembly resolution 51/77(1996), aimed to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict. In 1999, the Security Council, through its resolution 1261, formally acknowledged that the protection of children in armed conflict is a peace and security concern. Since then, through subsequent resolutions on CAAC², the Council developed a framework and tools to respond to grave violations against children, including the establishment of a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) for the following six violations³:
 - Recruitment and use of children
 - Killing and maiming of children
 - Rape and sexual violence against children
 - Attacks on schools and hospitals
 - Abduction of children
 - Denial of humanitarian access
4. The CAAC mandate is collectively implemented by various United Nations entities, including:
 - the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for CAAC who is the leading United Nations advocate for children affected by armed conflict;
 - the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which advocates for children's rights and co-leads the MRM with the SRSG for CAAC at the global level;
 - the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) which support peacekeeping operations and special political missions with implementing their child protection mandates;
 - the Development Coordination Office (DCO)⁴ and Resident Coordinator (RC) system which co-chairs the Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) with UNICEF in certain contexts.

¹ United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). Norms and Standards for Evaluation, 2016.

² Security Council resolution 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1469 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015), 2427 (2018), 2601 (2021), 2764 (2024).

³ Hereafter, the term 'violations' in this report refers specifically to these six grave violations.

⁴ The DCO is not referenced in the 2014 MRM guidance, as it was established after the adoption of the MRM guidance.

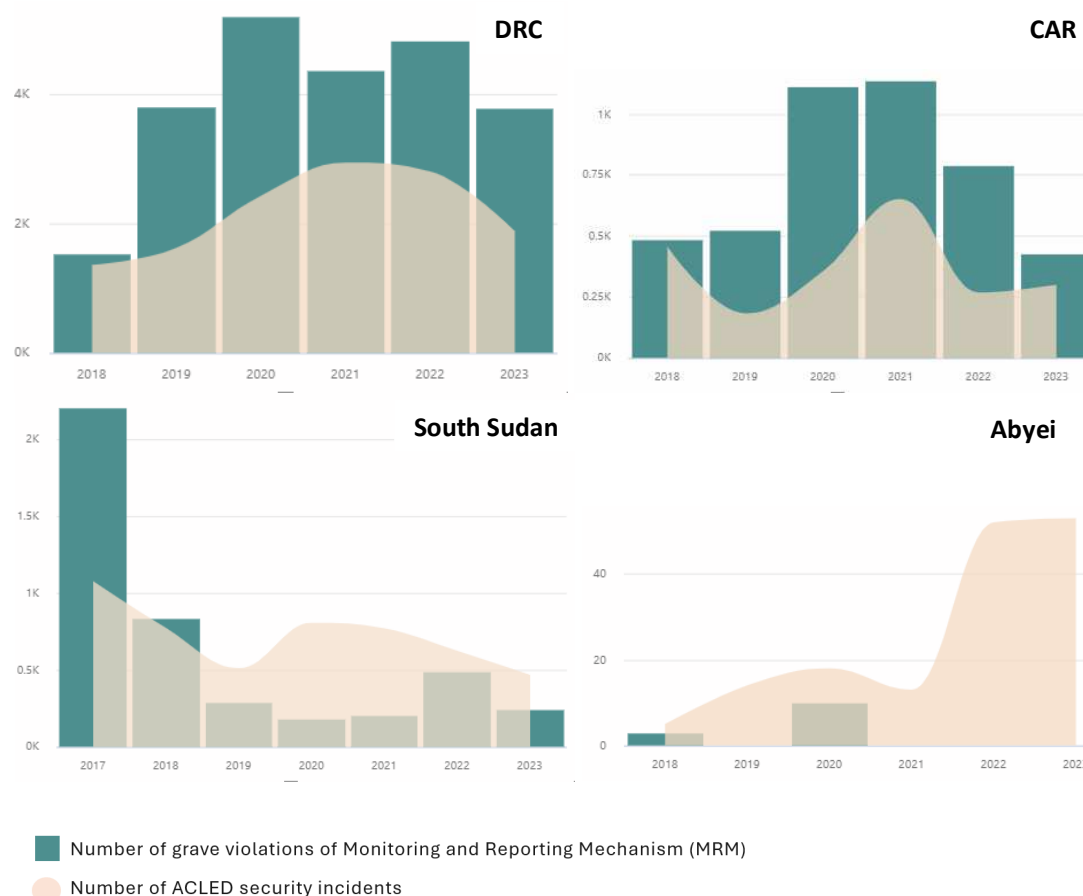
5. The CTFMR serves as the inter-agency mechanism that implements MRM at the country level. It is established in situations of concern under the CAAC agenda when one or more parties to conflict are listed in the Secretary-General's annual reports for committing grave violations. It is composed of relevant United Nations and non-UN entities, and co-chaired by the highest United Nations authority in the country, viz. the SRSG or the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), along with the UNICEF representative. Also, the MRM Technical Reference Group (TRG) provides technical guidance and supports the CTFMR in MRM implementation.
6. United Nations peacekeeping operations have the responsibility, when and where mandated, to ensure effective follow-up to the thematic resolutions on CAAC at the field level. When peacekeeping operations have a mission-specific Security Council mandate on child protection, senior child protection advisers usually support the implementation of the broader child protection mandate, including CAAC. According to the 2017 Policy on Child Protection in United Nations Peace Operations and 2023 Handbook for Child Protection Staff in United Nations Peace Operations, mission priorities in implementing the CAAC mandate include:
 - Monitoring, verifying, and reporting on violations through MRM;
 - Negotiating, mediating, and dialoguing with and supporting the parties to the conflict to develop and implement action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children;
 - Supporting the release of children associated with armed forces and armed groups; and
 - Providing advocacy, technical assistance, capacity building and awareness raising for long-term change for conflict-affected children and their communities.
7. Currently, the following three active peacekeeping operations contribute to the implementation of the CAAC mandate:
 - the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA);
 - the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); and
 - the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).
8. Additionally, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), while not having an explicit CAAC mandate, was requested to incorporate child protection as a cross-cutting issue. The mission also retained general obligations to take appropriate measures to protect children, including as part of its overall Protection of Civilian (POC) mandate. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which closed in 2023, had also been mandated by the Council to contribute to the implementation of the CAAC mandate during its existence.
9. Over time, the CAAC mandate has become integrated into the results-based budgeting and performance frameworks of the peacekeeping missions, with annual reporting on progress toward key indicators related to children affected by armed conflict. For instance, MINUSCA tracked the implementation of action plans by armed groups to prevent and end grave child rights violations, including the number of children released and referred to care services. Similarly, UNMISS and MONUSCO monitored the number of children verified as victims of grave violations such as recruitment by armed forces or groups, sexual violence, killing, maiming, and abduction.

Country contexts

10. **Security context and grave violations:** Continued insecurity in the mission settings amplified the vulnerability of children to grave violations. The scale of grave violations remained significant,

mirroring the changes in the security landscape for most missions in the scope of this evaluation, as shown in Figure 1. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), unresolved political conflicts and the absence of a coherent peace and stabilization process underpinned cycles of violence and violations against children. In the Central African Republic (CAR), despite progress made in the peace process, myriad challenges persisted in addressing violations due to weak chains of command within armed groups and delays in some armed groups rejoining the peace process. These challenges were exacerbated in 2021, when violations, correlated with security incidents, peaked after the withdrawal of some armed groups from the peace agreement. In contrast, South Sudan experienced a sharp decrease in violations after the 2018 peace agreement, though a rising trend emerged of children voluntarily joining organized youth gangs. In Abyei, despite a limited number of violations recorded, there was an increase in intercommunal violence, along with children’s voluntary engagement within the community defense groups and their alleged involvement in cross-border recruitment.⁵

Figure 1. Trends in security incidents and grave violations in the DRC, CAR, South Sudan and Abyei



Note: OIOS analysis of ACLED and MRM data.

⁵ The Sudan Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) cooperates with UNISFA and information on grave violations against children, when available. Stakeholders interviewed raised concerns on potential underreporting of violations in Abyei.

11. The missions also faced widespread insecurity. For example, in the DRC, the government undertook a militaristic response to regional armed groups, thus hindering access to critical conflict hotspots, and in CAR, active or ongoing military operations by the Government and Other Security Personnel (OSP) as well as constraints in road infrastructure also hampered access. Moreover, the offensives conducted by the Central African Armed Forces (the *Forces Armées Centrafricaines* or FACA) and OSP pushed these armed groups into hiding, creating further access constraints.
12. **Socio-cultural context:** Repeated exposure to violence, stigmatization and the social exclusion of children, as well as lack of perpetrator accountability, created environments where grave violations, including sexual violence and child recruitment, went unreported and unaddressed. Girls, in particular, faced disproportionate risks in this regard. Despite estimates suggesting girls comprised between 30 to 40 per cent of children in armed groups, only 8 per cent of demobilized children were girls, indicating underreporting and barriers to reintegration.⁶ Violent reprisals by armed groups were prevalent and recurrent in certain communities. Consequently, the missions' efforts to change behaviors and address violations were hindered, as communities were less inclined to report alerts and less receptive to interventions.
13. **Humanitarian context:** Poverty emerged as the primary driver of child recruitment in all mission contexts, as financial pressures pushed children to voluntarily join armed groups or forces. Economic hardship also fueled systemic risks such as exploitation, abuse, and transactional sex. Furthermore, the ongoing acute humanitarian crisis was one of the leading factors for recidivism. For example, in the DRC, where the median age of the population was 17, a quarter of the population needed humanitarian assistance and half of the displaced persons were children as shown in Table 1. In this context, a recidivism rate of nearly 60 per cent was observed as children returned to armed groups or engaged in criminal activities for subsistence and survival.⁷

Table 1. Humanitarian situation (2024)

Countries/Regions	Population and median age	People in need	Human Development Index	Displacement
CAR	6.1 million and 17.61	2.8 million	0.387	0.8 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), ~60% children
DRC	113.6 million and 16.98	25.4 million	0.493	6.2 million IDPs, ~50% children
South Sudan	12.4 million and 19.04	5.9 million	0.381	2.6 million IDPs, ~65% children

Sources: United Nations Development Group (UNDP), Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) and United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

⁶ Save the Children (2016). "If I Could Go To School...": Education as a tool to prevent the recruitment of girls and assist with their recovery and reintegration in Democratic Republic of Congo. Child Soldiers International.

⁷ The International Peace Support Training Centre (2013). Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Challenges and Prospects. Occasional Paper Series, 4.

14. In addition, host authorities lacked the resources and infrastructure to provide basic services like education, health care, and community-based reintegration, particularly in remote and rural areas, thus deepening children's vulnerabilities. In one instance, inadequate host government support for children maimed by explosive devices left many with lifelong disabilities. The limited presence and capacity of national rule of law institutions (such as infrastructure, transportation, victim protection, and birth registration) also created gaps in accountability. For example, in the DRC, the lack of a functioning juvenile justice system and inadequate legal safeguards resulted in military courts unlawfully detaining children associated with armed groups, with some aging into adulthood during detention. Delayed or insufficient payments to state employees reduced their motivation or willingness to cooperate with the mission as well as fulfill their obligations in supporting investigations and processing cases, thereby creating gaps in accountability.

III. Methodology

15. The evaluation scope included UNMISS, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNISFA and covered the period from 2018 to 2024. For missions with mature and active CAAC mandate implementation (UNMISS, MINUSCA, and MONUSCO), the primary focus of the evaluation was accountability for results. For the missions in transition or post-exit stages of contributing to the implementation of the CAAC mandate (MONUSCO and MINUSMA, respectively), the primary focus of the evaluation was to generate lessons learned, particularly regarding the handover of CAAC mandated tasks as a part of its transition and exit. Additionally, UNISFA was included to generate learning on how peacekeeping operations without an explicit CAAC mandate prevented violations and protected children.
16. The evaluation employed a sequential mixed-method design whereby data was collected, analyzed and triangulated in stages, as shown in Table 2. Quantitative data was collected and analyzed first, followed by the collection of qualitative data that was used to contextualize and explain the quantitative data.

Table 2. Data collection and analysis tools

Stages	Data sources and methods
1. Quantitative data collection and analysis – <i>Secondary data analyses</i>	<p>Descriptive statistics from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal United Nations data, including from: MRM, Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE), Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), and other Child Protection Unit (CPU) data External data, including from: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), Janes Online, World Justice Project Index, United Nations Country Team (UNCT) including Protection Cluster Monitoring, and Save the Children
2. Qualitative data collection and analysis – <i>Interviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content analysis of 153 interviews with United Nations staff and stakeholders. The interviews were both conducted remotely as well as through field visits, comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 87 internal interviews: (155 individuals, 48 per cent female) 66 external interviews: (134 individuals, 28 per cent female)
3. Qualitative data collection and analysis - <i>Observation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Third National Conference on the Protection of Children Against Recruitment and Use in Juba, South Sudan in September 2024.

Stages	Data sources and methods
4. Qualitative data collection and analysis –Document Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured review of up to 400 United Nations documents such as mission concept notes, terms of reference, CTFMR meeting minutes, POC assessments, programmatic activities, and end of assignment and after-action reviews. Artificial Intelligence (AI) assisted with reviewing and extracting data from 60 public documents, including external literature, mission Budget Performance Reports and the Secretary-General’s Reports.

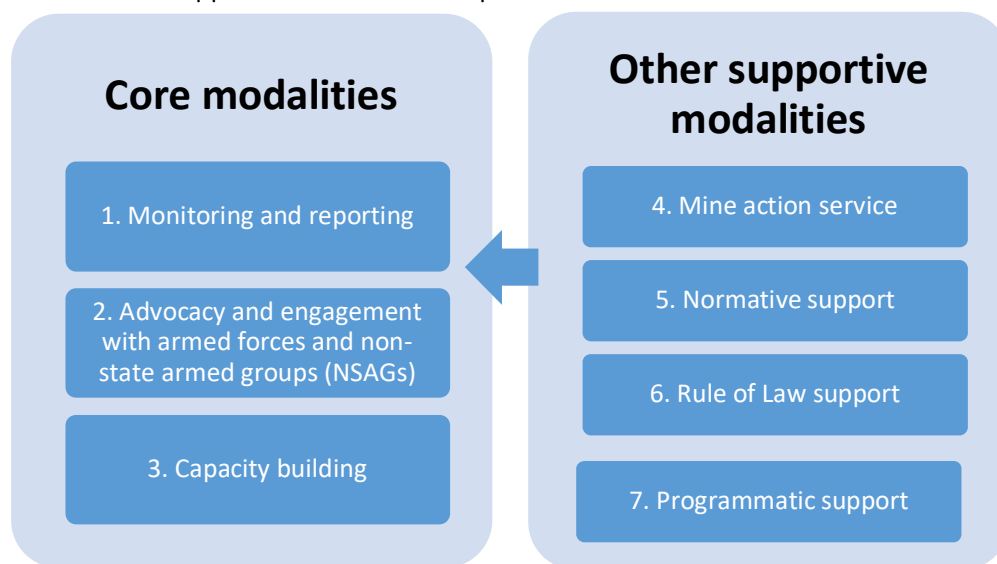
IV. Evaluation Results

- A. The peacekeeping missions made relevant and concrete contributions to protect children from grave violations

The missions implemented their CAAC mandates through three core modalities

17. The missions appropriately implemented three core modalities to prevent grave violations on behalf of their respective CTFMR: 1) monitoring and reporting; 2) advocacy and engagement with the listed parties to armed conflict; and 3) capacity building. Additionally, their efforts through mine action service, normative support, rule of law support and programmatic support reinforced and complemented the core modalities. These are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Core and supportive modalities to implement the CAAC mandate



The missions effectively monitored and reported on grave violations to identify the main perpetrators of these violations

18. Notwithstanding the contributions of other CTFMR members, the missions effectively served as the primary contributors to the systematic monitoring and reporting of violations through the MRM. In many remote and insecure areas in particular, the missions were the only actors to monitor and report such instances. Together with UNICEF, they were the primary actors that collected and verified reported violations due to their comparatively stronger capacities and

resources. Over time, the missions' established relationships with state forces enhanced their access to military barracks for physically verifying child recruitment and use.

19. The MRM was critical in identifying the perpetrators responsible for committing violations and supporting child victims. At the local level, the MRM provided critical information to trigger appropriate mission responses, including engaging with alleged perpetrators to release children and/or vacate schools. This information also enabled other protection actors, such as UNICEF and child-focused non-governmental organizations, to provide timely support to victims through referral systems. At the global level, the missions hosted and co-managed the MRM database⁸ in collaboration with UNICEF, with whom they often alternated in drafting inputs for the Secretary-General's reports on CAAC. The MRM informed decisions on the listing and delisting of parties to armed conflict that committed violations against children. Some listed parties interviewed specifically considered delisting as an incentive to implement child protection measures and change behavior, as stated by one of the listed parties interviewed in Box 1.

Box 1

"We always focus on these violations because there are listed parties in the SG report. We focus on it so we are removed from the list."

A listed party to the conflict

The missions effectively advocated and engaged with the listed parties to armed conflict to have children released

20. The missions' achievements in securing the release of children from armed forces and groups were among their most valued contributions, as recognized by both external and internal stakeholders interviewed. This was achieved through the missions' advocacy and engagement with the listed parties to conflict. In many contexts, the missions were the only entities with access to non-state armed groups (NSAGs). On behalf of their respective CTFMR, they directly dialogued and negotiated with the commanders of these groups and provided logistical assistance for the release and separation of children from their ranks. Over the past six years, these efforts facilitated the release of thousands of children, as seen in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Number of released children from July 2017 to June 2023

Mission	MONUSCO	MINUSCA	UNMISS
Number of children released	6,624	3,668	1,293

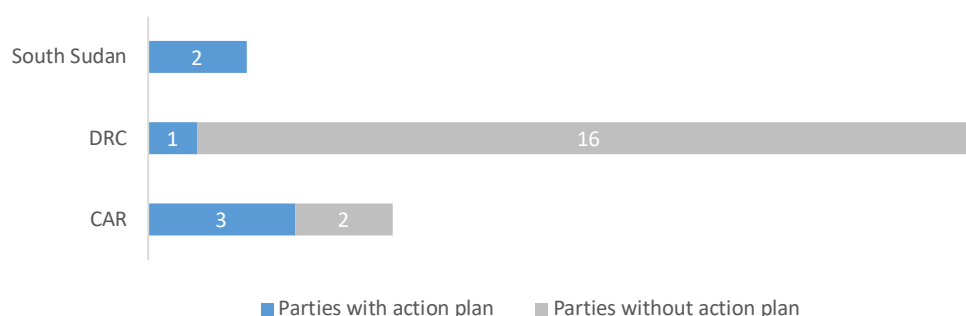
Data source: Budget Performance Reports

21. The missions' advocacy and engagement, on behalf of the CTFMR, also secured formal commitments from listed parties through the signing of action plans —agreements that permitted monitoring by the United Nations and which could lead to the eventual delisting of parties— as shown in Figure 4. While the number of listed parties with an action plan was a positive development, it did not reflect the full scope of the issue. Many armed groups and perpetrators responsible for grave violations against children remained unlisted due to stringent listing criteria, which required verified patterns of systematic violations, as well as the challenges in monitoring

⁸ The current MRM database (called MRM Information Management System or MRM IMS+) was not rolled out in the DRC and South Sudan, and in early rollout stages in CAR. In Mali, the MRM-IMS+ was deployed in February 2023 and used by UNICEF.

and documenting the violations. These challenges included access constraints, and the constantly shifting landscape of armed groups, who often splintered, rebranded, or formed new alliances. For instance, in CAR, six armed groups that withdrew from the peace agreement formed a new alliance. Similarly, in the DRC, over 110 armed groups were estimated to be active out of which only 17 were listed in the Secretary-General reports.

Figure 4. Number of listed parties to conflict in the Secretary-General reports with and without an action plan as of 2024



Data source: Secretary-General reports

22. In contexts where actions plans were not feasible or achieved, alternatives such as roadmaps, command orders and/or unilateral declarations were negotiated and signed by the perpetrators committing violations against children, outlining unconditional releases and/or specific child protection measures.⁹
23. Specific examples of the commitments achieved through the missions' advocacy and engagement included:
 - DRC: MONUSCO negotiated and facilitated the signing of unilateral declarations with over 30 commanders of armed groups to end and prevent child recruitment and use, as well as other violations.
 - CAR: SRSG-CAAC, MINUSCA and UNICEF supported the incorporation of CAAC language into the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR), led the dialogue for the adoption of action plans with some of the listed armed groups, and initiated dialogue with many others.
 - South Sudan: UNMISS advocacy and engagement contributed to the signing and extension of the Comprehensive Action Plans by both two listed parties.
24. These commitments focused on respecting children's rights, and ending all violations, particularly the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Notably, several listed parties that signed action plans implemented targeted measures to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, which contributed to a decline in reported violations.
25. Furthermore, the missions' advocacy at the senior government level led to the release of unlawfully detained children. For example, MINUSCA, as a member of the Juvenile Justice Task Force, advocated for the enforcement of the Child Protection Code, including for children formerly associated with armed groups and forces to be treated primarily as victims; it also coordinated

⁹A roadmap outlines specific steps to accelerate the implementation of action plans or other commitments. A unilateral declaration is a commitment signed by an armed group and is not subject to United Nations monitoring. A command order is a military directive issued at a certain command level within armed forces or groups to prohibit violations or to undertake specific child protection measures.

the release of 22 minors in 2022 who benefited from a presidential pardon for all minors in conflict with the law.

26. While the missions actively advocated and engaged with main perpetrators, certain non-state armed groups that had committed violations were not directly engaged. There was inconsistent interpretation by mission leadership and staff as to whether and how to engage with certain perpetrators.

The missions delivered capacity building that heightened awareness about the six grave violations

27. The missions delivered effective capacity building both within and beyond their own missions. Internally, the missions strengthened their own capacity by mainstreaming child protection concerns into all activities and responsibilities of the uniformed and civilian components. The most common initiatives, which encompassed broader child protection obligations, included the induction and periodic refresher training on CAAC¹⁰, the development of Force Commander's and Police Commissioner's directives on child protection, and the incorporation of child protection risks into broader POC assessments, planning and responses, such as hotspot mapping. Additionally, child protection focal points were established across mission components with terms of reference and specific reporting lines to strengthen internal coordination for data collection on violations. These efforts reportedly enhanced the reach and quality of monitoring and reporting activities while also enhancing the sensitivity of substantive activities towards children's protection needs. For example, UNISFA, while lacking a specific CAAC mandate but nevertheless implementing child protection as a mandated cross-cutting issue, regularly conducted community sensitization on child rights, human trafficking, and sexual abuse against women and girls.
28. Despite mainstreaming efforts, some structural issues continued to limit internal coherence between different mission components with regard to monitoring and reporting. These include the lack of awareness of, or training on grave violations before deployment to the missions among some incoming contingents, high turnover and rotation of force and police child protection focal points, and insufficient data collection capacities. Mission staff and focal points highlighted the need to strengthen pre-deployment and periodic, on-the-job-training for all components.
29. Externally, the missions conducted extensive training workshops and events for national stakeholders to spread awareness about child rights and build capacity in preventing violations. For example, UNMISS CPU allocated an estimated 90 per cent of its programmatic budget (totaling USD 300,000) during 2023-2024 to train national forces and armed groups as well as sensitizing communities on grave violations. These actors deemed UNMISS support crucial in addressing gaps in implementing the Comprehensive Action Plan. Similarly, MONUSCO used Radio Okapi to raise awareness about the violations and engaged with community leaders, leveraging their local influence to engage with certain armed groups for the release of children. National stakeholders interviewed shared the strong demand for continuous capacity-building activities such as those above, emphasizing their contribution to

Box 2

"We are limited with our programme dealing with child protection. The mission has sensitized people which made a good impact on children and population. Some armed groups know that recruiting and using children is really a crime."

A government representative

¹⁰ In addition, there were annual Training of Trainers sessions for child protection focal points in the Force and UNPOL.

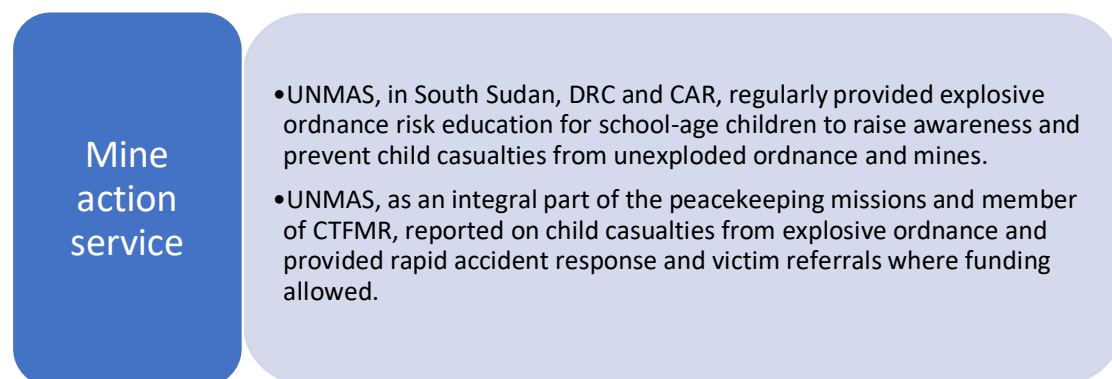
reducing child recruitment and use overtime, as illustrated in Box 2 by the quote of a government representative interviewed.

30. To sustain national capacities, the missions, on behalf of the CTFMR, worked with the listed parties that signed a bilateral commitment or action plan to designate child protection focal points. These child protection focal points would serve as key contacts for further advocacy, coordination and training within their ranks. Additionally, the missions supported national mechanisms involving state actors to implement action plans, such as Joint Technical Working Groups in the DRC and Technical Committees in South Sudan. These mechanisms were seen as enhancing national ownership and facilitating the continuity of child protection efforts.

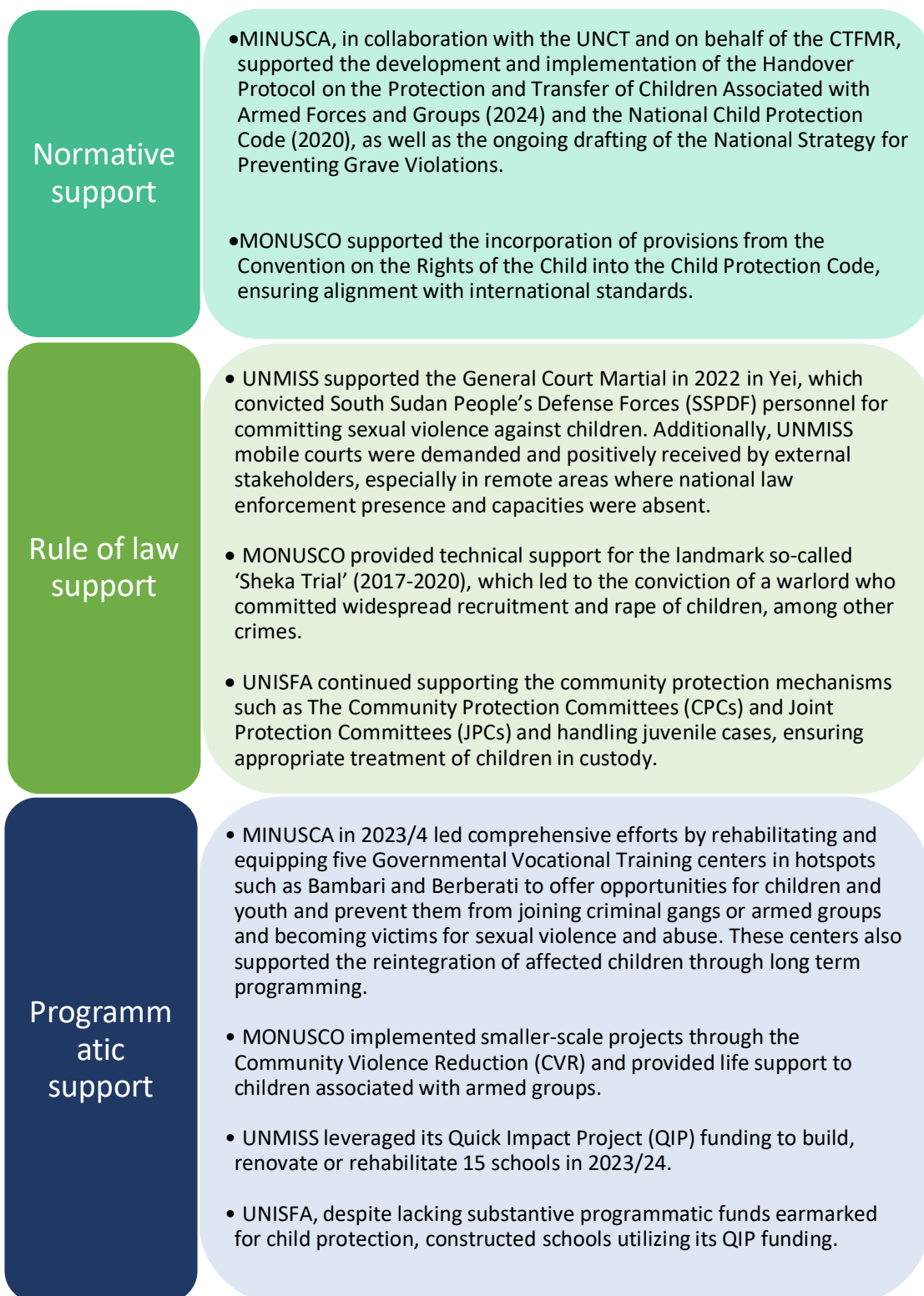
The missions also contributed to the prevention of violations and the reintegration of children through mine action service, normative, rule of law and programmatic support

31. The missions employed four additional modalities to reinforce and complement core child protection modalities (referenced in Figure 2 above), contributing to the prevention of violations. First, the missions' mine action service – UNMAS – specifically targeted the grave violation of the killing and maiming of children by providing explosive ordnance risk education and clearing landmines and explosive remnants of war as these disproportionately impacted children. For example, in CAR, explosive threats have evolved since 2020 with the emergence of landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), adding to the explosive remnants of war contamination due to decades of conflict. In South Sudan, children accounted for up to 80 per cent of casualties for an extended period. Second, the missions provided normative support, often on behalf of the CTFMR, in developing legal and policy instruments to strengthen national child protection frameworks. Third, the rule of law support of the missions facilitated the prosecution of perpetrators of violations and enhanced accountability. By ensuring that responsible state and non-state actors were brought to justice, stakeholders believed these efforts contributed to deterring future violations. Fourth, despite their limited mandate in direct humanitarian support, the missions leveraged their programmatic resources and logistical capacity to foster a safe environment to support the affected children's socio-economic reintegration. This was in line with the frequent suggestions of the stakeholders interviewed across all settings that the missions should expand their roles in child reintegration and address the humanitarian gap due to insufficient United Nations capacity at the country level. Figure 5 provides specific examples of the contributions of all four modalities.

Figure 5. Examples of mine action services, normative, rule of law and programmatic support modalities¹¹



¹¹ Examples without dates represented regular work carried out between 2018 and 2024.



B. The comparative advantages of the missions, such as their logistical capacity and political mandate, enabled them to effectively implement their core and additional supportive modalities

32. Both external and internal stakeholders recognized four main comparative advantages across missions that enabled their effective implementation of the above-mentioned modalities. Even UNISFA, which lacked any specialized child protection staff or a political mandate, benefited from its wide presence, logistical capacities and POC mandate (including the mainstreaming of its child protection mandate) in protecting children and preventing violations. The missions had four specific comparative advantages, which are identified below and illustrated in Table 3:

- **Vast field presence.** In comparison to other United Nations actors, the missions had vast operational reach through their field offices and the deployment of uniformed personnel across their respective territories via main and temporary operating bases. The integration of mission uniformed and civilian components facilitated the monitoring and reporting of violations by leveraging extensive networks, including Human Rights staff, Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) and early warning mechanisms such as the Community Alert Networks (CANs).
- **Logistical capacity.** The missions had superior logistical capabilities compared to the other entities comprising the United Nations presences on the ground, which enabled them to access remote and hard-to-reach areas through their air assets and vehicles. Given the inadequate transportation infrastructure in most areas where the missions operated, the missions' logistical capacity was essential for engaging with the listed parties, transporting released or escaped children, and conducting capacity-building and sensitization activities at the grassroots level.
- **Staff capacity.** The missions had a higher number of staff dedicated to child protection and MRM than UNICEF and other United Nations actors, as well as more specialized expertise in engaging with armed groups and handling the investigation and verification of complex violation cases.
- **Political role.** The missions, in their areas of operations, were the only United Nations actors with a mandate to politically engage with state forces and NSAGs, which they leveraged in conducting sensitive monitoring and reporting and dialoguing with the listed parties. The broader political role and leverage also enabled the missions to include child protection and CAAC provisions in overall peace processes and negotiations.

Table 3. Examples of mission comparative advantages

	MONUSCO	MINUSCA	UNMISS
Vast field presence	MONUSCO leveraged the presence and resources of various mission components, including 98 Human Rights staff, 194 Civil Affairs staff, numerous CLAs and the support of its force presence.	MINUSCA extended its monitoring capacities by leveraging approximately 75 CLAs, 100 Civil Affairs staff, 40 human rights officers and its Joint Operations Centre (JOC) capacities across 11 field offices,	UNMISS had field offices in all 10 states and 32 temporary operating bases, including in remote locations with insecurity.

		supported by over 60 personnel.	
Logistical capacity	MONUSCO operated seven fixed-wing aircraft and 29 helicopters across six air bases in 2023	MINUSCA had 1406 vehicles and 18 aircraft in 2023.	UNMISS operated 24 aircraft, which transported 101,166 personnel in 2022/23.
Staff capacity	MONUSCO had 28 child protection staff, supported by consultants, covering its area of operation in Eastern DRC.	MINUSCA deployed 15 child protection staff in Bangui and six field offices, with additional support from consultants.	UNMISS deployed 33 child protection staff across all 10 states and two administrative areas, achieving an average verification rate of over 90 per cent for the MRM.
Political role	MONUSCO leveraged its good offices during peace negotiations between the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (FRPI) and the host government, where the release and demobilization of children were prioritized as key conditions	The MINUSCA CPU was the first to initiate dialogue with a Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) faction on the release of children, which paved the way for broader actions leading to Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) led by the host authorities and the receiving country.	Through its good offices, UNMISS engaged high-ranking commanders of Sudan People's Liberation Army – In Opposition (SPLA-IO) and followed up on reports of child mobilization, resulting in the release and reunification of children.

C. In Mali and the DRC, the missions' withdrawal and exit jeopardized the sustainability of gains achieved in preventing grave violations

Grave violations reportedly increased in locations from which the missions withdrew

33. Following the departure of MINUSMA from Mali and MONUSCO from South Kivu in the DRC, both regions experienced deteriorated security conditions. Notwithstanding gaps in monitoring, reporting and verifying violations following the missions' departure, available evidence suggested that worsening of the security situation had adverse effects for vulnerable groups like children. This was in line with the finding in Figure 1 in the Background section that the scale of grave violations and other protection risks mirrored the changes in the security landscape.
34. In Mali, security conditions deteriorated during the first half of 2024 following MINUSMA departure in December 2023, according to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Mali.¹² The end of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement led to renewed fighting between the Malian Defence and Security Forces and armed groups in northern Mali.

¹² S/2024/883 covering the period from April 2022 to March 2024.

Violence against civilians by armed groups, including community-based ones, deepened the human rights crisis. As of March 31, 2024, there were 354,739 internally displaced persons in Mali, many of whom were children. Insecurity also led to the closure of 1,788 schools, affecting 536,400 children. The country task force reported 2,091 grave violations against 1,782 children, a slight decrease in violations compared to the previous period but an increase in the number of child victims, noting challenges in verification due to insecurity or access restrictions.

35. In South Kivu, MONUSCO staff and CSOs feared that gains in child protection were at risk with the mission withdrawal. CSOs reported that violence was increasing, with armed groups circulating freely, thereby making children more vulnerable to recruitment and other violations.¹³ While the Mission attempted to hand over early warning systems (e.g., CLAs and CANs) to provincial authorities, technical limitations, such as poor telephone networks and insufficient governmental resources, hindered effective monitoring of violations. Similarly, MONUSCO handed over assets such as helipad and a base to Congolese armed forces (*Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo* [FARDC]) to boost their capacity to protect civilians, including children. However, FARDC faced challenges in being deployed to South Kivu, and MONUSCO military bases were reportedly ransacked after the handover, leaving significant gaps in POC and potentially hindering the prevention of violations against children.

The missions' withdrawal mandated by the Security Council led to significant gaps in the United Nations' engagement with non-State armed actors and human and financial resources, thereby exacerbating protection risks faced by children

36. The departure of MINUSMA from Mali and MONUSCO from South Kivu resulted in three critical gaps in: political engagement, human resources and financial resources. These gaps negatively impacted the outcomes of CAAC modalities and their sustainability, thereby affecting the gains made over the years.
37. First, the missions' political leverage was partially lost after their departure, impacting the implementation of two core CAAC modalities, namely advocacy and engagement with, and capacity building of the listed parties to the conflict. There were gaps regarding United Nations actors undertaking advocacy and engagement with armed groups leading to the halting of follow-up on and implementation of the action plans signed with these groups. The MRM guidelines were clear that the co-chairs of CTFMR, i.e., the RC/HC and UNICEF Representative, would take over from the outgoing Deputy SRSR-Political in MINUSMA. However, the implementation of these guidelines faced setbacks as it was perceived by the stakeholders interviewed that the political engagement with the listed parties would interfere with the discharge of their humanitarian tasks and invalidate the principle of neutrality. As a result, in Mali, MINUSMA CPU had bilaterally advocated with the regional entities such as the United Nations Office of West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS), and the RC Office recruited a former MINUSMA international staff to maintain the mission's political engagement. However, these efforts did not come to fruition due to lack of funds and explicit mandates. In addition, UNICEF in the DRC reported to have struggled with raising funds to be able to take over the task of political engagement with the parties that operated in South Kivu. Furthermore, stakeholders interviewed pointed to sharply reduced capacity building activities for armed elements about child rights and violations.
38. Second, the loss of the missions' logistical capabilities resulted in critical gaps in the implementation of two CAAC modalities- monitoring and reporting of violations and mine action service. In Mali, the United Nations system lost 2,000 civilian personnel with the departure of

¹³ At the time of writing, the regional armed group M23 advanced to South Kivu after occupying Goma in North Kivu.

MINUSMA, severely impacting the capacity to carry out tasks such as security, air transport, information and communications technology. These tasks were essential in monitoring and reporting violations across the country. Similarly, following MINUSMA's drawdown and closure, when UNMAS had to cease its activities in the country, there was a void in the coordination of humanitarian mine action interventions (i.e., Explosive Ordnance Risk Education and Victim Assistance). This resulted in challenges for data collection and coordination of the Mine Action Area of Responsibility, under the humanitarian Global Protection Cluster. Lastly, the departure of MINUSMA also led to the withdrawal of several donors from humanitarian programmes in Mali, which worsened the financial challenges for humanitarian efforts. Similarly, in South Kivu, the departure of MONUSCO resulted in logistical gaps in the transportation of children released from armed groups, thereby delaying their reintegration.

39. This was in line with a general observation by interviewees that children's reintegration was hampered by limitations in UNCT and national actor capacities across all mission contexts. While missions were critical in offsetting these limitations through logistical and programmatic support, mission staff interviewed stated that continued reliance on the missions in carrying out essential child protection tasks risked the sustainability of the achieved outcomes following the missions' departure. For example, while UNICEF had a broad child protection mandate, it relied on often underfunded implementing partners to fulfil the mandate. Furthermore, delays between disarmament and demobilization (DD), supported by the peacekeeping operations, and reintegration (R), implemented by UNICEF, led to children experiencing prolonged stays in overcrowded transit centers, increasing their risk of re-recruitment. Coupled with the loss of missions' logistical capabilities, further delays in children's reintegration in the aftermath of a mission departure were expected.
40. Third, the loss of the missions' human resources further impacted the smooth continuation of monitoring and reporting. More specifically, MINUSMA and MONUSCO had a dedicated team of civilian personnel with specialized expertise in implementing the CAAC mandate, supported by mission uniformed personnel, local protection networks and CLAs. Thus their ability to cover vast areas of Mali and South Kivu, respectively, for reporting and monitoring violations was crucial. According to the stakeholders interviewed, their departure left a significant void in preventing violations against children. Amongst the remaining CTFMR members in Mali tasked with implementing the CAAC mandate, UNICEF, despite being a co-chair, was reported by mission and UNCT staff to have faced significant capacity limitations, having only one MRM specialist.

There were gaps in the planning process to handover the CAAC tasks in Mali and the DRC

41. Both MINUSMA and MONUSCO staff and managers interviewed identified challenges and issues they faced in the process of withdrawal and exit, shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Planning process for the missions' withdrawal in Mali and South Kivu in the DRC

Elements	Mali	DRC (South Kivu)
Timeline	Security Council Resolution 2690 in June 2023 terminated the mandate of MINUSMA and gave the Mission six months to cease all operations in Mali by December 2023. Former MINUSMA staff and managers interviewed considered this "abrupt and insufficient", resulting in leaving protection risks behind.	Security Council Resolution 2615 in 2021 asked MONUSCO to disengage in three distinct and successive phases and gradually hand over responsibilities to the national authorities. MONUSCO completed withdrawal from South Kivu by June 2024, even though staff believed end-state was not fully accomplished.

Elements	Mali	DRC (South Kivu)
Transition/exit strategy and risk assessment	In the absence of a country-specific transition strategy, Secretary-General's Transition Planning Directive was used to guide the process, given the rapid and unanticipated drawdown. ¹⁴ A concept note on transferring the MINUSMA child protection mandate, tasks and capacities was developed. MINUSMA could not assess protection risks related to grave violations due to time constraints.	A disengagement strategy was jointly developed with the host government, and the Mission confirmed to have developed specific guidance on the handover of CAAC tasks to national counterparts as well as UNICEF and other actors, which some MONUSCO staff interviewed still believed was insufficient.
UNHQ Support	The UNDP-DPO-DPPA Joint Project on United Nations Transitions in Mission Settings deployed a transition specialist to assist the mission and UNCT leadership to facilitate the process. The specialist, however, had broader terms of reference, not specifically focusing on CAAC-related areas.	The Joint UNDP-DPO-DPPA Project deployed three transition specialists over the years to facilitate the process. However, local involvement was hindered by the host government dismantling provincial transition committees.
Post-United Nations presence for CAAC	UNICEF was identified as the main successor entity to take over MINUSMA CAAC tasks, with additional support of three MINUSMA national staff transferred to UNICEF offices in Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, but no assessed funds were also transferred.	UNICEF was identified as the main successor entity to take over MONUSCO CAAC tasks in South Kivu. Only one MONUSCO staff member was transferred to UNICEF office in South Kivu to continue these tasks, most especially the MRM database.

42. In Mali, the biggest challenge faced, according to interviewees, was the compressed timeline. Former Mission staff confirmed the mapping of key mandated tasks, but discussions with external stakeholders indicated that this process was rushed and did not account for political uncertainties and funding limitations facing them. The mission was asked to halt ongoing programmatic activities, and local partners were requested to return funds, worsening financial challenges for humanitarian efforts, especially for child protection. The mission concluded that it was not feasible to hand over any CAAC tasks to national counterparts due to lack of political will and resource constraints.

43. In contrast, the mission's withdrawal process initially followed a phased approach in the DRC, with a focus on achieving an end-state¹⁵ before full withdrawal. However, according to MONUSCO staff and managers interviewed, the departure from South Kivu by the end of April 2024 was time-bound in line with the Security Council's decision in its resolution 2717 (2023) and not fully

¹⁴ Policy on United Nations Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal (2013) is being updated at the time of writing. Secretary-General shared a directive in 2018 for the development of consistent and coherent United Nations Transition processes, in line with Executive Committee decision 2018/38.

¹⁵ Reducing the threat posed by national and foreign armed groups to a level that can be managed by national authorities, as well as addressing the root causes of conflict.

contingent on the accomplishment of this end-state, leaving protection concerns, including those affecting children, unresolved.

44. In both contexts, both the mission and UNCT actors interviewed identified UNICEF capacities as a critical factor in ensuring a smooth handover of CAAC tasks. Efforts were made to boost UNICEF staff resources both in Mali and South Kivu as described in the Table 3 above. In Mali, this effort was appreciated by UNICEF, while in South Kivu, UNICEF staff interviewed indicated that they were not involved in the process of selecting or assessing the qualifications of staff that was transferred from the Mission, among other concerns. In both contexts, the transfer of mission-funded posts was considered insufficient given the absence of proportionate amounts of funds to address the protection risks against children.
45. In both contexts, the United Nations headquarters (UNHQ) provided support to the missions in collaboration with UNICEF and the Office of SRSR for CAAC (OSRSR-CAAC). One of the UNHQ's main interventions was through the joint project¹⁶ which was perceived by staff to be influential in the DRC. Both MINUSMA and MONUSCO staff and managers, however, called for stronger and more assertive support and guidance from UNHQ, while planning for known as well as unforeseen political dynamics and setbacks related to the handover of the missions' mandate to engage with the armed groups and forces to successor entities.

V. Conclusion

46. Over the years, peacekeeping missions have accumulated good practices that reinforced the role of CAAC as a cornerstone of their child protection as well as broader peace and security mandates. The missions have effectively operationalized their CAAC mandates through a robust normative framework, comprehensive guidelines and implementation tools such as procedures, work plans and training.
47. The CAAC agenda and peace processes in conflict settings have demonstrated a mutually reinforcing relationship. First, CAAC has shown the potential to serve as a strategic entry point for peace processes, offering a pathway for conflict resolution, dialogue facilitation, and early confidence-building measures as was seen in the cases of the DRC and CAR. Given that children comprise over half the population in many situations of armed conflict, the continuous strengthening of the CAAC mandate implementation enhanced conflict prevention efforts and contributed to more sustainable peacebuilding outcomes. Furthermore, the existence of a comprehensive peace process augmented and sustained the gains made by the CAAC mandate implementation, as was demonstrated in the case of South Sudan. Conversely, failures in peace processes often resulted in negative consequences for children in armed conflict. This was seen with the failure of the Algiers Agreement, for which MINUSMA played the role of guarantor, and which increased the risk of serious rights violations against children in Mali following the mission's departure.
48. Peacekeeping missions have been the essential contributors to the CAAC agenda in complex conflict settings, leveraging their field presence, logistical and staffing capacities, and political mandate. Given the persistent gap between the needs of children and the available resources in conflict settings, there remain opportunities to enhance collaboration and synergies among the United Nations system actors to sustain the gains made towards the protection of children affected by armed conflict and prevention of grave violations. Also, peacekeeping missions are

¹⁶ Launched in 2014, the project was a collaborative between UNDP, DPO and DPPA to support transition processes involving a significant drawdown or withdrawal of a United Nations mission. The project supported 10 transition settings including Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Mali and Sudan.

well-positioned to leverage their comparative advantages to facilitate the work of the UNCT and national authorities well in advance of their withdrawal and exit with a view to ensure the sustainable transfer of CAAC-mandated tasks.

VI. Recommendations

49. OIOS-IED makes two important recommendations to OSRSG-CAAC and to the missions to further reduce the risks associated with mission withdrawals and exits that may undermine the gains made over the years in preventing grave violations.

50. Recommendation 1 (Result D):

Under the leadership of OSRSG-CAAC, the Technical Reference Group at UNHQ (DPO, DPPA, OSRSG-CAAC, UNICEF) should review, with due recognition given to the leadership exercised at the Mission level, the process of handover of the political tasks related to the CAAC mandate during mission drawdown, withdrawal and exit in order to further strengthen that process. The Technical Reference Group may also consider consulting with relevant regional organizations such as the African Union, ECOWAS and the East African Community (EAC) on the handover of political tasks related to CAAC.¹⁷ This recommendation is not intended to undermine delegated authority at the Mission level with regard to the handover of political tasks related to CAAC, but to request the Technical Reference Group to provide strategic, risk-informed guidance in support of Mission-led implementation of the handover.

Indicator of implementation: Completed review identifying the risks and possible mitigation strategies to the implementation of the MRM guidelines during recent mission drawdown, withdrawal and exit including and beyond the ones identified in this evaluation.

Expected change: Relevant and timely guidance is provided to Missions to support their efforts during the handover of political tasks related to CAAC.

51. Recommendation 2 (Result D and C)

MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS should develop a scenario-based contingency plan for the handover of their respective CAAC tasks to national and key United Nations actors in line with the ongoing or early transition planning that might be taking place at the mission. In doing so, the missions may consider undertaking a risk assessment outlining the impact of mission withdrawal and exit on the implementation of CAAC mandate from their areas of operation. This assessment may be accompanied by a capacity mapping exercise of relevant UNCT and national actors in taking over any residual responsibilities from the missions. The plan may also include a description of processes for managing and handing over the MRM database as well.

Indicator of implementation: A contingency plan at mission-level outlining potential scenarios for handover of CAAC tasks, resources, and risks to successor United Nations entities and follow-on presence in case of mission exit.

Expected change: Missions and key United Nations partners have shared understanding of roles and responsibilities for the handover process before the missions approach a drawdown phase.

¹⁷ This recommendation may be considered in conjunction with the implementation of OIOS recommendations issued by OIOS Internal Audit Division Report 2024/103 addressed to the TRG.

VII. Annex 1: Management responses

Comments received from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Message sent on behalf of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your memo dated 30 April 2025 in which you transmitted, for our review and response, the Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations. After reviewing the report, I am pleased to confirm OSRSG CAAC's acceptance of Recommendation 1, and invite you to consider the responses herewith attached. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the OIOS team for its evaluation report.

Best regards,

Comments received from the Under-Secretary General for Peace Operations



TO: Ms. Demetra Arapakos, Director
A: Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 28 May 2025

REFERENCE: DPO-2025-01398
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

THROUGH: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Under-Secretary-General
S/C DE: Office of Internal Oversight Services

FROM: Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General
DE: Department of Peace Operations

SUBJECT: **DPO's Response to the Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations**

1. Thank you for the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED), on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations (IED-25-005).
2. My department reviewed the report and is providing the following as DPO's management response.
3. We appreciate the efforts made by OIOS-IED to address many of the comments formulated by DPO on earlier informal drafts of this evaluation.
4. The OIOS evaluation on this subject is timely and helpful. As peacekeepers continue to operate in increasingly dangerous operational environments and within an even more complex global political context, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of our activities to ensure that missions are maximizing their potential to advance the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.
5. The report highlights the significant and concrete contribution of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations to the protection of children in armed conflict. Missions effectively monitored and reported on grave violations against children; successfully advocated and engaged with parties to conflict, including those listed in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, to obtain the release of children associated with armed forces and armed groups; delivered training and capacity building that raised awareness among internal and external stakeholders; and contributed to the prevention of violations and the reintegration of children through four supportive modalities – mine action service, normative assistance, rule of law support, and programmatic activities.
6. Importantly, the report acknowledges that the protection of children by UN peacekeeping operations goes beyond contributing to the implementation of the children and armed conflict (CAAC) agenda. Missions mainstreamed child protection considerations in all activities and responsibilities of their civilian and uniformed components, including through the adoption of

mission-level child protection guidance for UN military and police personnel, the establishment of child protection focal points systems, and by ensuring that children's specific protection needs were factored in protection-related assessments, planning, and responses.

7. The report also acknowledges the comparative advantages of UN peacekeeping operations, namely their vast field presence, their logistical and staff capacities, and their political mandates as key enablers that allow missions to effectively contribute to the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.
8. The report further notes that, "in locations from which peacekeeping operations withdrew" (Section C), grave violations reportedly increased and significant gaps emerged in UN's engagement with parties to conflict and in terms of human and financial resources available. In this regard, while we appreciate OIOS efforts to analyze the impact of MINUSMA's withdrawal from Mali and of MONUSCO's disengagement from South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo, further to decisions by the Security Council, we maintain that the two missions operated under very different circumstances and that a separate analysis, including as it pertains to political leverage and engagement, logistics, and human resources, would have been appropriate. In the case of MINUSMA in particular, any gaps that might have been observed in the handover of tasks should be measured against a realistic assessment of what could be achieved in the specific circumstances that characterized the mission's withdrawal, starting with the decision by the Security Council in its Resolution 2690 dated 30 June 2023 to terminate the Mission's mandate with immediate cessation of its activities, and to request that its drawdown be completed no later than 31 December 2023. The report also refers to the "absence of a country-specific transition strategy", but, as clarified in earlier comments, no such strategy could be developed as no transition was anticipated by any stakeholder, including the Security Council.
9. Furthermore, we note that the report could have better recognized the efforts deployed by this Headquarters to support the missions in this handover. In close consultation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF, my department deployed extensive efforts to guide and support the DRC and Mali Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR). This support focused primarily on the implementation of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations against children at country level and was provided in line with existing MRM guidance, which comprehensively addresses the MRM architecture in both mission and non-mission settings (including the roles and responsibilities of senior UN officials in-country vis-à-vis the MRM) and in line with DPO's guidance on the transfer of child protection knowledge, data, and capacities.
10. More detailed comments on the draft report are included in Annex 1.
11. Finally, we take note of the recommendation (recommendation #1) addressed to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism Technical Reference Group (TRG). This Department is not in a position to accept a recommendation addressed to the TRG, which is co-chaired by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF and includes DPO and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs as members. Should the TRG accept this recommendation, DPO will contribute to its implementation, noting that the recommendation has resource implications for the department at a time when resources are increasingly scarce.
12. I take this opportunity to thank you for the valuable work of OIOS evaluators and their contributions to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping.

Comments Received from the Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)



Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la
Stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo

United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission
in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

12, Avenue des Aviateurs - Gombe
Kinshasa, RD Congo - BP 8811

Tél. +243 81 890 5000
+243 81 890 6000

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

Date: 19 June 2025

Ref.: SRSG.Prot.MONUSCO-2025-00603

To: Ms. Demetra Arapakos
Director of the Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED)
Office of Internal Oversight Services

From: Bintou Keita 
SRSG MONUSCO

Subject: MONUSCO Management Response to the OIOS Report on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations, IED-25-005

1. MONUSCO would like to thank the Inspection and Evaluation Division (OIOS-IED) for the points raised during the evaluation aimed at improving relevance, effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability of the contribution of peacekeeping operations to ending and preventing grave violations against children affected by armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

2. After a careful review of the report, the Mission would like to request a review of paragraphs 35 to 45 of the findings and of the two recommendations.

Findings

3. The findings notably overlook or understate the comprehensive and sustained preparatory efforts undertaken by the Mission to safeguard the continuity and sustainability of child protection activities in the context of MONUSCO's drawdown and disengagement from South Kivu. The narrative fails to fully recognize the Mission's proactive measures, including the development of strategic partnerships, capacity-building initiatives, and transition planning in close collaboration with national counterparts and civil society actors. Review of these paragraphs should take into consideration the following aspects:

- Child Protection Section (CPS) has developed a comprehensive transition and disengagement package, anchored by a scenario-based contingency plan, to ensure a sustainable and enduring handover of responsibilities under the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate. This forward-looking plan outlined potential risks, identified successor entities, and proposed concrete actions aimed at preserving and consolidating the substantial gains. Far from being an *ad hoc* response, this initiative reflects CPS's proactive and strategic approach to ensuring continuity well beyond MONUSCO's presence.



- A comprehensive risk assessment was undertaken to analyse the anticipated impact of Mission disengagement on core child protection functions – namely monitoring, reporting, advocacy and service delivery. This was strategically complemented by a robust capacity mapping exercise assessing the institutional preparedness of national actors, UN Country Team (UNCT) members and other key partners to take on responsibilities under the CAAC mandate. Notably, UNICEF assumed a leading role in the technical and coordination aspects, with support from national NGOs, the *Programme de Désarmement, Démobilisation, Rélèvement Communautaire et Stabilisation* (P-DDRCS), the Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) established to implement the 2012 Action Plan against grave violations by national defense and security forces, and other UNCT partners including OHCHR and international NGOs. This cohesive and anticipatory approach underscores the Mission's unwavering commitment to a principled and sustainable transition.
- The report suggests that MINUSMA and MONUSCO withdrew under comparable circumstances, whereas their withdrawal followed very different processes. The two missions faced fundamentally different political dynamics, security contexts, and operational mandates, which shaped distinct disengagement approaches. Equating them oversimplifies the complexities involved and risks undermining the context-specific strategies that were meticulously designed and implemented in the case of MONUSCO.
- To enable the effective implementation of the transition, the United Nations Support Plan ('Support Plan') for the transition in South Kivu was developed, directly aligned with the Government's provincial roadmap. This plan, which was developed with UN agencies, funds and programmes in South Kivu, details the practical modalities for the United Nations system to support transition related tasks. It provides the detailed implementation plan of priority activities in the context of MONUSCO's disengagement, as well as the Agencies who will lead on support to the Government in various tasks, based on relevant mandates, presence, capacity and resources. In line with the Government's provincial roadmap, the implementation of the Plan began for a one-year period up to 30 June 2025.
- To solidify the transition framework, MONUSCO concluded two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with UNICEF. Under these agreements, a CPS staff member was seconded to UNICEF to ensure continuity of expertise and institutional memory. In parallel, MONUSCO allocated \$2.2 million to UNICEF directly related to the transition, reinforcing the Mission's commitment to a well-resourced and



collaborative handover process.

- A structured handover plan for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) database was included in the UN Support Plan, ensuring secure data transfer and continuity of reporting. As a result, the regional child protection database for South Kivu has already been successfully transferred to UNICEF.
- Further, the Mission undertook several assessment missions throughout 2024 and emphasized in a joint Government-UN Mid-Term Report for the Transition in South Kivu that the handover of the child protection portfolio was a key success, with extensive support from UNICEF.
- Importantly, one of the areas of success in the transition has been the support for children associated with armed groups, through close collaboration and cooperation between the provincial P-DDRCS and UNICEF, as well as with child protection actors. A total of 1,936 children (1,119 boys and 817 girls) associated with armed groups were released across the territories of Kalehe, Uvira, Fizi and Walungu since July 2024. Of these, 33% received exit certificates and 986 children (607 boys and 379 girls) benefitted from socio-economic and educational support for community reintegration.
- During the joint evaluation mission in December 2024, civil society welcomed the fact that the provincial P-DDRCS had strengthened its partnership with child protection actors following MONUSCO's withdrawal. Moreover, critical coordination mechanisms have continued to operate with the support from UNICEF. The DDRCS-Enfants Working Group continued to meet regularly and is actively supporting dialogue with armed groups, facilitating the release of children and supporting their certification and reintegration into communities and families.
- To support wider stabilisation and conflict resolution efforts, 20 community dialogue structures (ten in Uvira and ten in Fizi) were supported through capacity building. Moreover, two community engagement plans promoting social cohesion and peaceful conflict resolution are being developed. Community engagement also included targeted trainings for 83 community members (15 women and 68 men) on child protection standards, approaches and best practices.

4. It is also worth noting that the Mission had to reprogram transition activities with the Agencies in South Kivu, with a significant focus on child protection by UNICEF, but the capacity building of provincial authorities had to cease, following the capture of Bukavu by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) in early February 2025.



Recommendation 1

5. MONUSCO expresses its strong reservations regarding the applicability of the first recommendation in the case of the DRC. For instance, for South Kivu, MONUSCO, the authorities and relevant partners (such as UNCT, civil society actors and NGOs) engaged in political and operational discussions at the national and provincial levels to ensure a comprehensive, structured and gradual handover of responsibilities in the context of MONUSCO transition and withdrawal. This comprehensive approach has proven effective, with protection-related projects receiving appropriate funding and implementation support from leading UN entities.

6. A late-stage intervention by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict or the Technical Reference Group at UN Headquarters risks undermining the carefully negotiated efforts between MONUSCO, the Congolese authorities, UNCT and other partners. Given the political sensitivity of these processes, it is imperative that leadership and delegation remain at the Mission level.

Recommendation 2

7. As for the second recommendation, MONUSCO believes that CAAC considerations should not be handled in silo but instead be elements of a comprehensive and coherent disengagement and transition approach. Such comprehensive approach would also build upon existing mechanisms. For instance, the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (MRM) was used in South Kivu to map out key protection actors while the management of the provincial MRM database - centralizing data on patterns and incidents of grave violations - was successfully handed over to UNICEF and is functioning effectively.

8. The Mission is grateful to OIOS for the opportunity to respond to the report and remains resolutely committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under the CAAC mandate to protect hard-won gains and support national ownership of child protection efforts.

Best regards,

cc: Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations
Ms. Srilata Rao (OIOS Chief of Section)
MONUSCO DSRSG PO
MONUSCO DSRSG/RC/HC
MONUSCO MCOS
MONUSCO DMS a.i.

Comments Received from the Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

United Nations
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated
Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic



Nations Unies
Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies
Pour la Stabilisation en République centrafricaine


INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

TO: Ms. Demetra Arapakos, Director,
A: Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 16 May 2025

REFERENCE: MINUSCA/OSRSG/095/2025

FROM:  Valentine Rugwabiza
DE: SRSR and Head of MINUSCA

SUBJECT: **MINUSCA's comments on a Draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations**
OBJET: **MINUSCA's comments on a Draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations**

1. With reference to your interoffice memorandum dated 30 April 2025 on the above captioned subject, kindly find attached MINUSCA's comments on a Draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations.
2. I take this opportunity to thank your team for the findings and recommendations issued in this evaluation, recalling that MINUSCA has not been mandated by the United Nations Security Council to undertake transition planning.

Annex: – MINUSCA's comments on a Draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations

cc: Mr. Ebrima Ceesay, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, *a.i.*, MINUSCA
Ms. Hanan Talbi, Direction, Human Rights Division, MINUSCA
Ms. Nathalie Ben Zakour Man, Senior Child Protection Advisor, MINUSCA
Ms. Tiphaine Dickson, Risk Management and Compliance Officer, MINUSCA

Comments Received from the Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan


UNITED NATIONS
United Nations Mission
in South Sudan



NATIONS UNIES
Mission des Nations Unies
en Soudan du Sud

Date: 22 May 2025

To: Ms. Demetra Arapakos, Director
Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

From: Mr. Guang Cong, 
Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-
General (Political) and OIC Head of UNMISS

Subject: **Comments on the Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations**

1. UNMISS acknowledges receipt of the interoffice memorandum dated 30 April 2025, transmitting the Draft Report titled *Evaluation of Children and Armed Conflict in Peacekeeping Operations* and requesting a formal management response by 21 May 2025.
2. UNMISS welcomes the evaluation's comprehensive review of the Mission's contributions to ending and preventing grave violations against children affected by armed conflict, as well as the comparative insights drawn across missions.
3. The Mission notes with appreciation that the report recognizes the relevance and effectiveness of UNMISS's implementation of its CAAC mandate, including efforts related to monitoring and reporting, advocacy with parties to conflict, and capacity building. In particular, the evaluation highlights UNMISS's sustained field presence, political engagement, and logistical capacity as key enablers for CAAC outcomes.
4. UNMISS accepts the two recommendations outlined in the report:
 - Under the leadership of OSRSG-CAAC, the Technical Reference Group at UNHQ (DPO, DPPA, OSRSGCAAC, UNICEF) should review, with the view of strengthening it, the process of handover of the political tasks related to the CAAC mandate during mission drawdown, withdrawal and exit; and
 - MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS should develop a scenario-based contingency plan for the handover of their respective CAAC tasks to national and key United Nations actors in line with the ongoing or early transition planning that might be taking place at the mission.
5. With regard to the second recommendation, the Mission notes that while South Sudan has initiated early transition planning process, UNMISS will explore ways to align contingency planning for the handover of the CAAC tasks.
6. Please find attached the Mission's initial action plan responding to the recommendations and observations outlined in the Draft Report, including proposed actions, timelines, and responsible entities.
7. We thank OIOS for the opportunity to contribute to this evaluation process and reaffirm our commitment to the continuous improvement of child protection programming in peacekeeping contexts.

Comments Received from the United Nations Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA)

Warm greetings from Abyei.

UNISFA acknowledges the findings of the OIOS evaluation. We also appreciate the recognition of the Mission's contributions to child protection within the scope of its Protection of Civilians (POC) mandate, despite the absence of an explicit Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate.

Operating within its current scope and capacity, the Mission has undertaken community sensitization initiatives on children's rights, human trafficking, and the prevention and response to rape and other forms of sexual violence against children. The Mission has also supported community-based mechanisms and activities to prevent and respond to child protection concerns.

The Mission also notes the evaluation's observations regarding the limitations associated with the lack of a formal CAAC mandate, particularly with respect to addressing issues such as cross-border recruitment by armed groups.

We thank the OIOS evaluation team for their efforts and reaffirm our commitment to supporting future guidance from the DPO's Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training to strengthen the Mission's effectiveness in child protection efforts.

Best regards,

VIII. Annex 2: OIOS Response to MONUSCO and MINUSCA management responses

1. OIOS thanks all entities for their considered management responses and further clarifies the intent and scope of the evaluation recommendations.
2. With regard to recommendation 1, OIOS fully acknowledges the position of MONUSCO and recognizes the importance of preserving Mission-level leadership and delegated authority in negotiating the handover of politically sensitive tasks. Therefore, Recommendation 1 has been further modified to reflect this important point. The role of the Technical Reference Group is to ensure appropriate institutional risk oversight and strategic guidance at the United Nations system-wide level in support of missions' efforts to proactively mitigate risks without interfering in country-specific negotiations or dynamics.
3. With regard to recommendation 2, OIOS acknowledges the MINUSCA position that it has not yet been mandated to undertake transition planning. However, the Organization's existing guidance as mentioned in Table 4, footnote 14 of the report, explicitly requires transition planning at the earliest possible stage irrespective of a formal mandate. The Policy on United Nations Transitions (2013) states that:
 - a. Drawdowns and withdrawals may be triggered by other political and security developments that necessitate a change to United Nations presence.
 - b. Planning for United Nations transitions needs to begin early, take into account different potential scenarios, and remain flexible throughout.
4. In addition, the Secretary-General's directive (2018) states that all multidimensional missions, jointly with UNCTs in integrated and other relevant settings, to develop an integrated transition calendar upon completion of the start-up phase. Delays in this regard may hamper the Organization's ability to effectively mitigate risks, particularly in abrupt transitions as evidenced by the experience of MINUSMA in 2023. While OIOS understands that the policy is currently being updated, it notes that a prior OIOS recommendation from the 2021 evaluation of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (A/75/787) to revise this policy on the United Nations transitions in the context of mission drawdown and withdrawal has not yet been implemented, resulting in continuing gaps in this area.
5. Further with regard to recommendation 2, OIOS fully concurs with the point noted by MONUSCO that CAAC considerations during disengagement or transition should not occur in isolation, and that these considerations should be part of a comprehensive and coherent disengagement and transition approach. Implementation of this recommendation does not preclude the necessary consultations with other United Nations actors as part of this consultative approach. Recommendation 2 therefore emphasizes that all planning efforts for the transition of the CAAC mandate should align with either initial or ongoing transition activities at the Mission level, while giving due consideration to the former's continuation beyond the Mission's departure.