



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2023/028

Audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

MINUSCA supported the implementation of action plans with armed groups to prevent violations against children and implemented mechanisms with partners to collect and verify cases of violations of children affected by armed conflict; however, it needed to strengthen mainstreaming of child protection in the activities of all Mission components

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of activities implemented by MINUSCA to monitor and report on the six grave violations of child rights and to engage and advocate with state actors and armed forces/groups for ending, preventing and responding to such violations. The audit covered the period from 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2022 and included an assessment of: (a) strategic planning and mainstreaming child protection into Mission activities; (b) monitoring and reporting of grave violations; and (c) child protection programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

MINUSCA supported the implementation of action plans with armed groups to prevent violations against children and implemented mechanisms with partners to collect and verify cases of violations of children affected by armed conflict. However, MINUSCA needed to strengthen mainstreaming of child protection into all Mission components' activities.

OIOS made five recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, MINUSCA needed to:

- Finalize the mission-wide child protection mainstreaming plan to guide all mission components in their mainstreaming efforts and ensure that substantive components systematically appoint focal points and incorporate child protection concerns in their work plans.
- Ensure that the military component: (a) nominates focal points for all infantry units to be involved in the engagement platoon and provide official e-mails and computer access for all nominated focal points; and (b) effectively implements the engagement platoon action plan by approving the revised patrol report template to include reporting on child protection violation indicators to improve or increase situational awareness and information collection on child protection related concerns.
- Finalize United Nations police child protection-related directive and work plans to ensure mainstreaming of child protection considerations in police operations in all field offices, and designate child protection focal points in all police units.
- Maintain accurate records of child protection training provided to all uniformed personnel to assure that the Mission has made sufficient efforts to make these personnel aware of its child protection mandate.
- Update and disseminate its integrated work plan development guidance and instructions to align the field child protection work plans to the overall child protection work plan.

MINUSCA accepted all recommendations and has initiated action to implement them. Actions required to close the recommendations are indicated in Annex I.

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Audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).
2. The General Assembly Resolution A/RES/51/77 (1996) and its subsequent resolutions on the rights of the child, established the mandate for protecting children affected by armed conflict (CAAC). The Security Council has addressed this issue since 1999 and created mechanisms and tools to implement this mandate in its resolutions. The mandate identifies six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict: (i) recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups; (ii) killing or maiming of children; (iii) sexual violence against children; (iv) attacks on schools and hospitals; (v) abduction of children; and (vi) denial of humanitarian access to children.
3. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for CAAC (SRSG-CAAC) leads the United Nations' advocacy for the protection and well-being of CAAC. The United Nations child protection policy requires Heads of Missions, through the Child Protection Unit (CPU), to ensure that principles and obligations on child protection are mainstreamed and integrated across all operational decisions, activities and processes of United Nations operations. It also includes embedding child protection in core mission planning, mandate implementation and overarching documents guiding the work of the civilian, military and police components.
4. CPU is responsible for implementing the Mission's child protection mandate, which involves monitoring, investigating, verifying and reporting the six grave violations committed against CAAC in the Central African Republic. CPU partnered with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other Humanitarian Country Team actors with child protection mandates to establish the country task force for monitoring and reporting (hereinafter referred to as "*the country task force*") on grave violations against children. The MINUSCA Deputy SRSG and the UNICEF Country Representative in the Central African Republic co-chair the country task force. CPU acts as the secretariat for the country task force.
5. CPU is headed by a Chief at the P-5 level reporting to the Deputy SRSG through the Director of the Human Rights Division. The Chief of the Unit is supported by five international staff, five national staff (one of whom was on loan from another section) and five United Nations Volunteers deployed in Bangui and six field offices. The approved budgets for child protection (including staff costs) activities were \$1.874 million and \$1.903 million for 2020/21 and 2021/22, respectively.
6. Comments provided by MINUSCA are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of activities implemented by MINUSCA to monitor and report on the six grave violations of child rights and to engage and advocate with state actors and armed forces/groups for ending, preventing and responding to such violations.

8. This audit was included in the 2022 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to due to the high operational risk of MINUSCA not being able to implement a vital protection mandate and its resultant reputational risk to the United Nations.

9. OIOS conducted this audit from November 2022 to March 2023. The audit covered the period from 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2022. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks areas related to child protection: (a) strategic planning and mainstreaming child protection into Mission activities; (b) monitoring and reporting of grave violations; and (c) child protection programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

10. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key Mission personnel involved in child protection in civilian and uniformed components; (b) a review of relevant documentation; (c) an analytical review of CPU data on violations against children and activity progress reports; and (d) sample testing of cases of violation against children and child protection training and sensitization using random sampling.

11. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic planning and mainstreaming child protection into Mission activities

Need to strengthen the mainstreaming of child protection into Mission activities

12. The CPU in MINUSCA is responsible for translating child protection strategies enumerated in the CAAC mandate, MINUSCA mandate, strategic planning and other governance documents into actions for implementation across the Mission. MINUSCA civilian, military and police components have a shared responsibility to implement the Mission's child protection mandate. This requires coordinated planning and CPU collaboration with Mission components, underpinned by senior leadership support to ensure child protection considerations are incorporated in strategic and operational processes and activities. A review of the child protection mainstreaming activities showed the following:

- a) Need for enhanced engagement by substantive components to implement the child protection mandate*

13. To facilitate the implementation of the Mission's child protection mandate, CPU participated in weekly senior management meetings attended by the senior leadership team (including advisers), heads of substantive sections and heads of field offices, where ongoing key developments or upcoming events from sections and field offices were discussed. These meetings helped CPU to collaborate with other sections to identify opportunities to monitor child rights violations and implement various protection activities (including capacity-building measures, awareness-raising events, and field missions to remote locations to monitor the overall human rights and security situation, follow up on allegations of child rights abuses and collect and document any serious child rights violations). The CPU 2021/22 work plan incorporated relevant actions, including advocacy, awareness-raising, verification, monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children, and the need to identify and engage with child protection focal points in various substantive sections to coordinate mainstreaming efforts.

14. Various substantive components, such as the Civil Affairs, Justice and Corrections, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) sections and the Human Rights Division play an important role

in integrating child protection activities into their programmatic activities. A review of the work plans of these components for the period between 2021 and 2023 showed that only the work plans of two components, i.e., the Justice and Corrections Section and Human Rights Division, reflected specific child protection activities. For example, their work plans for 2022/23 included a training session for 30 magistrates on juvenile justice to build the capacity of judicial personnel and 100 advocacy dialogues/meetings with leaders of armed groups to review compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law as well as protection of children.

15. The Civil Affairs Section did not document child protection activities in its work plans even though it had 78 community liaison assistants based in field offices and over 40 military bases through which it could frequently report child protection issues to CPU. It had also developed many quick impact projects for children, including schools and youth houses. The Section indicated that it did not clearly mention child protection considerations in its work plan to not be seen as a replacement for the CPU.

16. CPU explained that mainstreaming child protection across mission components was systematically conducted through training of mission personnel and appointment of focal points within the substantive sections, military and police components. CPU also worked closely with concerned Mission components to address child protection concerns. For example, in field office locations where there was no CPU presence (5 of 11 locations outside of Bangui), the Mission relied on human rights officers to verify violations against children during patrols, and CPU worked with the Justice and Corrections Section to advocate for the release of children accused and detained for association with armed groups.

17. However, except for the Justice and Corrections Section and Human Rights Division, focal points had not been systematically appointed in other substantive sections to guide and support child protection mainstreaming efforts. For example, the DDR Section indicated that it did not have a child protection focal point because it had never been requested. The non-inclusion of child protection considerations in the work plans and lack of focal points in substantive sections occurred because MINUSCA had not developed a mission-wide child protection mainstreaming plan (i.e., implementation matrix for child protection) to guide Mission components in ensuring that their individual work plans addressed shared child protection concerns. The mission-wide mainstreaming plan would have also required the appointment of focal points. CPU indicated that the preparation of a mission-wide mainstreaming plan was at the draft stage pending receipt of inputs from relevant components. CPU also stated that even though the plan had not been finalized, it worked with the Mission substantive components to address child protection activities daily. Still, the absence of the finalized plan may result in inadequate consideration of mainstreaming of child protection across all Mission activities, which is vital to ensuring systematic, coordinated and effective implementation of the child protection mandate.

(1) MINUSCA should finalize the mission-wide child protection mainstreaming plan to guide all mission components in their mainstreaming efforts and ensure that substantive components systematically appoint focal points and incorporate child protection concerns in their work plans.

MINUSCA accepted recommendation 1 and stated that the mission-wide child protection mainstreaming plan would be available by October 2023 and the appointment of substantive Child Protection Focal Points would take place during the development of the mainstreaming plan.

b) Need to enhance mainstreaming of child protection in military operations

18. As part of mainstreaming child protection in military operations, MINUSCA developed the following tools: (i) MINUSCA directive¹ on the protection of schools and universities against military use, issued in December 2015 and later updated in December 2022; and (ii) a Force Commander directive on the protection of children issued in December 2018 which established a military child protection focal point system designed to facilitate information-sharing and guidance from MINUSCA military headquarters to sector headquarters and tactical levels. A military gender and protection adviser (MGPA) was responsible for mainstreaming child protection within military components and addressing the protection of civilians, gender, conflict-related sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse and ensuring compliance with this directive by MINUSCA military personnel. The MGPA was also responsible for developing a mechanism to ensure that incidents of violations against children in military areas of responsibility are reported and shared with child protection advisers in a timely, safe and ethical manner.

19. OIOS review noted that the directives were not fully implemented. For example:

- MINUSCA military prioritized appointing female officers as child protection focal points (CPFPs) to allow them to multi-task and deal with gender, women protection and sexual and gender-based violence issues. However, of 60 military units (46 infantry operational bases and 14 detachments), 13 had not appointed CPFPs. Similarly, 10 of 20 military observers' team sites had not appointed CPFPs. In response to audit inquiry, the MGPA indicated that the non-appointment of CPFPs in these locations was partly attributable to the inadequate number of female officers or lack of facilities for accommodation for female staff in some team sites. OIOS, however, noted that male military officers could have been appointed in such circumstances.
- Although the work of the CPFPs involved extensive use of e-mails and computer systems, 14 of 57 (25 per cent) nominated focal points had not been assigned a United Nations e-mail address as their military battalions had already exhausted the quota of e-mails and computers determined in their memorandum of understanding. These memoranda were signed before their deployment and appointment as focal points, and no additional efforts were taken to obtain additional devices from the Mission to ensure that the CPFPs could effectively perform their responsibilities. As a result, these focal points could not share or receive information from other focal points through e-mail, which impeded effective collaboration.
- In compliance with the United Nations Infantry Battalion Manual (UNIBAM) 2020, the MINUSCA military developed an engagement platoon action plan in February 2022 to serve as a tactical-level military capability that supports improved or increased situational awareness and information collection through an increased number of female and mixed engagement teams in troop patrols. These teams were to develop, collect, monitor and report to the military leadership on early warning indicators of international humanitarian law violations, including those related to child protection. The military intelligence at sector headquarters (S2) was required to synthesize the reports and inform the MGPA on violations (including those related to child protection) quarterly to be included in reports to CPU. However, a review of the patrol reports noted that they did not contain the indicators of violations to be transmitted to the MGPA. This was because the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for patrols had not been updated to require patrol reports to specifically include details of violations as envisaged by the engagement platoon action plan. OIOS noted that the

¹ *The directive established general principles to protect and safeguard children's rights, promote safe access to education during armed conflict and prevent the use of schools and educational establishments by MINUSCA personnel, including military, police and civilian.*

MGPA proposed a draft format for patrol reports to address this gap, which was pending approval at the time of the audit.

20. As a result of inadequate CPFs equipped with proper communication tools, lack of an SOP for patrols that requires systematic reporting of child protection violation indicators, and inadequate enforcement of directives issued by the Force Commander and MINUSCA, various child protection mainstreaming activities could not be effectively implemented. For example, implementing the engagement platoons' action plan to identify and report indicators of child protection violations was not effective. Additionally, sharing of information by CPFs was negatively impacted due to the lack of adequate communication tools.

(2) MINUSCA should ensure that the military component: (a) nominates focal points for all infantry units to be involved in the engagement platoon and provide official e-mails and computer access for all nominated focal points; and (b) effectively implements the engagement platoon action plan by approving the revised patrol report template to include reporting on child protection violation indicators to improve or increase situational awareness and information collection on child protection related concerns.

MINUSCA accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the gender focal point list was revised and updated in April 2023, and since then it has been updated monthly. Necessary action to provide official emails and computers for focal points has been initiated. MINUSCA also stated that the engagement patrol report has been updated as part of the guidance on patrol performance and is awaiting approval by the Force Commander.

c) *Need to develop a directive for mainstreaming child protection in MINUSCA police operations*

21. The United Nations Police (UNPOL) component should ensure that child protection is integrated into their work, including in their mentoring and advisory activities and in their capacity-building efforts to support the host state police and juvenile justice system. Accordingly, the Police Commissioner was required to issue appropriate guidance, including mission-specific directives and standard operating procedures to inform the actions of UNPOL officers in relation to the protection of children and to designate a CPF at Mission headquarters and police CPFs in the field offices to facilitate coordination and sharing of alerts among child protection advisers. OIOS was informed that a draft directive had been prepared previously under the former Police Commissioner in 2019 before the pandemic but had not been finalized.

22. UNPOL had designated a CPF in Bangui and appointed CPFs for 12 of the 16 locations where individual police officers were deployed and for 9 of the 13 formed police units (FPU) sites. However, due to the lack of a directive and attendant guidance, UNPOL did not systematically document work plans that adequately incorporated child protection considerations and activities, including specific, measurable, achievable and time-bound targets. The UNPOL CPF in Bangui provided OIOS with a narrative list of child protection-related tasks completed since her assignment in May 2021. However, the list of tasks did not specify time-bound achievements in measurable terms.

23. In the absence of child protection-related directives and guidance, the Mission police component could not demonstrate systematic integration and mainstreaming of child protection considerations in their work plans for all police operations. CPU indicated that a new template for the directive was under development at the time of the audit.

(3) MINUSCA should: (a) finalize United Nations police child protection-related directive and work plans to ensure mainstreaming of child protection considerations in police operations in all field offices; and (b) designate child protection focal points in all police units.

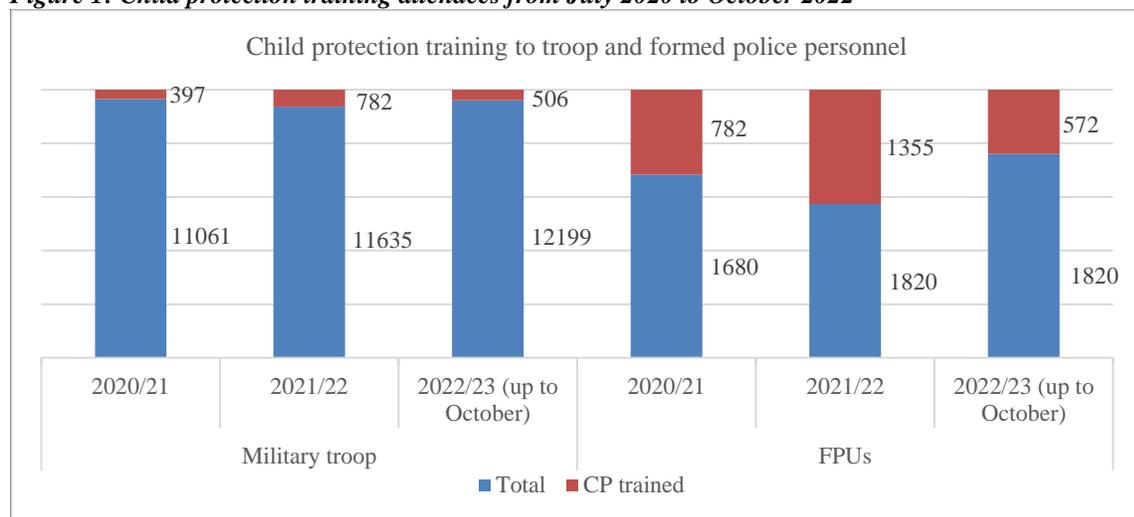
MINUSCA accepted recommendation 3 and stated that it was awaiting the approval of the template for the UNPOL child protection directive which was being developed by the Department of Peace Operations/the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division (DPO/DPET) after which the Mission would finalize its directive and associated work plans. In the meantime, an initial work plan would be proposed by UNPOL for its child protection focal points by August 2023. MINUSCA further stated that UNPOL had a child protection focal point at the headquarters level complemented by a network of focal points in all units, but the list was being updated due to rotation of the personnel.

d) *Need to improve record-keeping for the child protection-related training of military troops and formed police personnel*

24. Training peacekeepers on child rights and protection in armed conflict is a key priority for the United Nations peace operations in its child protection policy. Accordingly, in coordination with the Integrated Mission Training Centre (IMTC), CPU provided a session on the Mission’s child protection mandate, activities and knowledge of six grave violations against children as part of induction training for all incoming civilian staff, military staff officers and observers and individual police officers.

25. Separately, in coordination with military and police CPFs, CPU conducted child protection training for military troops and FPUs. A training record maintained in a spreadsheet by CPU indicated that from July 2020 to October 2022, a total of 609 civilians, military staff officers/observers and individual police officers were provided with child protection training. In addition, 1,685 military troops and 2,709 FPU personnel also benefitted from child protection training over the same period (figure 1).

Figure 1: Child protection training attendees from July 2020 to October 2022



Source: Training record of CPU

26. A review of 50 induction trainings conducted during the period through IMTC showed that all civilians, military staff officers and observers and individual police officers attended the induction training, which included a briefing on child protection. However, as shown in figure 1, on average, child protection training was provided to only 4.8 per cent of military troops and 50.9 per cent of FPU personnel from July 2020 to October 2022. The low recorded participation of military troops and FPUs was attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic, deployment of incoming military troops to locations without CPU field offices, and inadequate record-keeping as noted from OIOS’ review of attendance records. Also, the participation data did not include child protection awareness training provided directly through in-house training conducted by CPFs (not CPU) for military troops and FPUs in the field. Furthermore, in coordination with military

and civilian components, IMTC conducted training for selected trainers on the five hats² for military and police focal points in May 2022 to develop resources at the field level to deliver basic training to other focal points, troops and team sites, but participation records were not updated to include the number of military and FPU personnel that benefited from this training.

27. The MGPA provided data showing 181 child protection trainings with 18,129 attendees from 1 October 2022 to 13 April 2023. A review of this data noted inaccuracies, as the number of attendees was more than the number of military personnel deployed in the Mission. It was noted that the data considered attendees who participated in more than one session of child protection training in some military units, leading to duplication of numbers. The monthly and quarterly reports kept by the military sector/joint task force headquarters still needed to be adjusted to include the details of training activities conducted for child protection along with adequate evidence of attendees, including sign-in sheets for updating the overall training records of MINUSCA.

28. As a result of inadequate record-keeping, OIOS could not determine whether awareness of the child protection mandate by all military personnel deployed in the Mission was adequate.

(4) MINUSCA should maintain accurate records of child protection training provided to all uniformed personnel deployed in the Mission to assure that the Mission has made sufficient efforts to make these personnel aware of its child protection mandate.

MINUSCA accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the UNPOL child protection focal point and the military gender adviser would provide data on UNPOL and force child protection trainings on a weekly basis to the Child Protection Unit, which would centralize the information and share it with the Integrated Mission Training Centre.

Child Protection Unit implemented the reporting requirements on child protection activities

29. Field offices were required to submit daily and weekly field mission reports to provide feedback on the implementation of activities included in their work plans. CPU developed reporting guidelines which specified timelines for the submission of these reports. They also required the confidentiality of victims to be safeguarded by not disclosing the names of victims and those of partners taking care of them in reports other than those shared with the CPU headquarters reporting team.

30. OIOS review of the reports from January to June 2022 indicated that CPU field offices generally submitted daily and weekly reports of their child protection-related activities within the stipulated timelines. The review also noted that these reports adequately covered the prescribed contents under three headings: (i) dialogue; (ii) monitoring and reporting; and (iii) advocacy and mainstreaming. CPU officers at headquarters in Bangui reviewed these reports and used them to prepare the overall CPU reports. OIOS concluded that CPU adequately implemented the reporting requirements on child protection activities.

B. Monitoring and reporting of grave violations

Mechanisms were implemented to record and verify grave child violations

31. MINUSCA was required to implement a process to verify the authenticity of reported cases of grave violations against children by establishing the source of information, evaluating the reliability of the source, establishing the need for additional sources, determining the verification status of the incident, and

² Five hats denotes: protection of civilians (POC); gender; conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA); and child protection (CP).

seeking the endorsement of the country task force (which was responsible for monitoring and reporting of grave violations of CAAC in the country).

32. The Mission had developed procedures to guide its child protection advisers and partners to systematically monitor grave child violations in the country. These procedures outlined information to be collected for each identified incident, standard processes to be followed in verifying these incidents, and how this information was to be reported to the relevant stakeholders. OIOS also noted that the child protection advisers in the field offices, through daily reports, provided information on: (a) dialogue with parties to the conflict; (b) advocacy and mainstreaming of child protection; and (c) detailed information on each grave violation incident that had been identified since the last report in their respective locations. For each incident, the report included the victim's name, the nature of the grave violation, the identity of the perpetrator, and whether the case had been verified or was still an allegation. CPU headquarters in Bangui used the information provided in these reports to populate the monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) database and conducted additional verification of the cases. Due to the sensitivity of the information in the daily reports, access to the email group was restricted to selected CPU staff in Bangui, and child protection advisers of the Mission's three-sector headquarters.

33. These reports included alleged and verified cases of grave violations. A review of randomly selected 108 (80 verified and 28 allegations) of the 2,746 reported cases from 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2022 indicated that the Mission had implemented procedures to verify their occurrence through corroboration with various parties (i.e., triangulation). These parties included partners and primary and secondary sources that had additional information or were witnesses to the reported cases prior to reporting on their final status. For instance, 6 of the 28 cases reviewed that had been previously reported as allegations were verified, and one case was confirmed as not having been a grave violation. The remaining 21 cases remained allegations yet to be fully triangulated at the time of audit.

34. OIOS review indicated that, as required, the Mission used information that was recorded in the MRM database to report on the implementation of its child protection mandate through various reports, including weekly reports distributed to the Mission's senior leadership team, heads of field offices and other sections in the protection cluster. The information was similarly used to prepare reports of the MRM framework in the country, which was presented to the co-chairs of the country task force for review and issuance to the United Nations Secretariat for inclusion in reports by the Secretary-General on the situation in the country in the form of quarterly global horizontal notes (GHNs), annual and bi-annual reports. During the period under review, the country task force oversaw the preparation and issuance of all the expected 10 GHNs, two annual reports and a bi-annual report issued by the Secretary-General as developed by CPU as secretariat for the country task force. OIOS concluded that the Mission and its partners had implemented mechanisms to collect and verify cases of grave violations of CAAC in the country and confirmed that these were used to ensure the timely issuance of reports.

MINUSCA supported operations of the monitoring and reporting mechanism

35. The Security Council, through its resolutions on CAAC, requires the Mission to monitor, verify and report on the six grave violations against children committed by parties to the conflict in the country and report the situation and progress made through the SRSG-CAAC.

36. The country task force carried out its functions in accordance with its terms of reference, which outlined: (i) the mandate of the task force; (ii) parties whose activities are to be monitored and description of six grave violations; (iii) composition, leadership and structure of the task force; (iv) activities and procedures of the MRM working group; and (v) the frequency of meetings (twice a year). However, during the period under review (i.e., July 2020 to December 2022), the country task force held only two of the expected five meetings to review and discuss the operations of the MRM framework. This low number of

meetings was attributed to challenges including the pandemic, presidential elections, the sudden establishment of a coalition of armed groups which carried out operations throughout the country and tried to attack and take over Bangui, and counteroffensive operations against the armed groups by the Government and pro-government forces, thereby limiting movement of personnel. A review of e-mail correspondence confirmed that the country task force secretariat attempted to schedule meetings on various occasions during the period. OIOS noted that the country task force held another meeting in February 2023. In addition, the MRM Technical Working Group, which comprised representatives from MINUSCA, UNICEF (Coordinator) and other entities in the country held only three of the expected ten meetings during the review period to discuss the functioning of the MRM at the operational/field office levels.

37. Despite not being able to conduct all the required meetings to mitigate risks, the co-chairs and the secretariat conducted advocacy activities with parties to the conflict to encourage them to sign and/or implement action plans, as indicated in the next section of this report. In addition, the secretariat implemented other activities, including screening children that had separated from armed groups, recording, monitoring and preparing periodic reports on grave violations shared with the co-chairs prior to submission to the United Nations Headquarters.

38. The country task force also identified various challenges outside its control, including limited access due to insecurity that impacted its ability to monitor and report on grave violations. Furthermore, due to the introduction of other security personnel (OSP)³ and operations in conjunction with the national security forces against armed groups, it was extremely difficult to engage with the armed elements regarding child protection. The task force members faced the threat of arrest if suspected of having contact with armed groups. Nevertheless, the task force members took action to advocate for increased funding for programmatic activities that would make it more sustainable to address the needs of children formerly associated with armed groups. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the surge of insecurity due to ongoing military offensives by all sides, OIOS concluded that the Mission and its partners supported operations of the MRM framework to the extent possible.

C. Child protection programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation

MINUSCA supported the signing and implementation of action plans with the armed groups

39. Out of five parties listed in the annexes of the latest Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC⁴ dated 23 June 2022, MINUSCA and UNICEF as co-chairs of the country task force signed action plans with three ex-Seleka related armed groups on 30 May 2018, 24 June 2019 and 2 September 2019, respectively. These action plans included activities under six broad headings:

- Coordination and collaboration with the United Nations country task force;
- Separation and protection of children;
- Prevention of violations of children's rights;
- Fight against impunity;

³ Other security personnel (OSP) are made up of international private military contractors and personnel under other bilateral arrangements not under the Mission.

⁴ Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (A/76/871-S/2022/493 dated 23 June 2022) has listed two non-state actors: (1) *Local militias known as the anti-balaka*; and (2) *Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)* as the parties that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children and three non-state actors: (1) *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC)*; (2) *Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC)*; and (3) *Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC)* as part of the former Séléka coalition as the parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children in the Central African Republic.

- Care of children; and
- Monitoring the implementation of the action plans.

40. The action plans indicated timelines for each activity with the responsible authority, partner and means of verification of success. These action plans required, for example: (i) developing an operational plan for the implementation of the action plans as a tool for assessing progress (within one month of signature), and for the follow-up of the implementation of the action plan; (ii) assisting the Government and the armed groups in setting up a monitoring committee for the effective implementation of the action plan (monthly meeting); and (iii) submitting quarterly progress reports on the implementation of the action plan and reintegration activities, family reunification, etc.

41. However, the country task force secretariat did not establish a mechanism to track the progress of implementing activities outlined in the action plans. The planned coordination meetings to monitor and evaluate progress towards implementing the action plans could not be held due to counteroffensive operations against the leadership of armed groups by the Government and pro-governmental forces. As a result, the status of the above-mentioned action plan was not available to confirm their achievement within the expected timeline. CPU stated that it had not been possible to establish the mechanism due to the challenges of bringing armed group focal points/leaders together with the Government, and this was also compounded by the pandemic after March 2020. CPU further explained that despite this mechanism not having been established, progress on the implementation of the action plans was reported through the GHNs, weekly reports distributed to the Mission and annual and bi-annual reports.

42. A review of daily reports pertaining to dialogue with the leadership and representatives of armed groups from July 2021 to June 2022, GHNs, Secretary-General's reports on CAAC in the Central African Republic and discussion with child protection advisers indicated that:

- Three armed groups (MPC, FPRC and UPC) had appointed eight, four and one focal points, respectively, to assume the role of interlocutors with CPU. In addition, CPU worked with armed groups' zonal commanders (comzones) in different localities. However, after the creation of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC)⁵ all the previously appointed child protection focal points went into hiding for fear of being arrested or killed due to surge operations against the armed groups by the Government forces supported by OSP. CPU met with CPC representatives on 25 May and 24 June 2022 and stressed the need to re-engage in action plans that were signed with MPC, FPRC and UPC.
- CPU conducted meetings with armed groups, including 8 meetings with FPRC and their factions in the Bria region, 11 meetings with UPC (8 in Bria region, 2 in Bambari and 1 in Kaga Bandoro), 2 meetings with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and 2 meetings with Anti-Balaka factions in Bria. No meeting was held with MPC as this armed group had committed no grave violation during this period. In these meetings, CPU mainly emphasized the need of the armed groups to identify associated children and provide lists of them for verification. Such lists were to be submitted to the CPU and the Execution Unit of National Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation Programme (UEPNDDRR) for inclusion in reintegration programmes which were being implemented by child protection partners.

⁵ *Coalition des Patriotes pour le Changement* (CPC) was created as six major armed groups denounced the political agreements during the general elections (December 2020 to July 2021) and undertook numerous attacks to disrupt the electoral process as well as constitutional order. In late 2022, four members of the coalition announced their withdrawal.

- Following engagement by the country task force, on 30 June 2022, the CPC military coordinator and the group leader issued a command directive for the entire CPC to promote respect for international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians and the protection of children from grave child right violations. In its meeting with the CPC representatives on 15 July 2022, CPU solicited the support of MPC, FPRC and UPC for an after-action review of what worked and the challenges in implementing their respective action plans. They also advocated for command directives, including developing an action plan with the Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (3R) armed group, which was yet to materialize as of the time of the audit.

43. Although the monitoring of signed action plans to properly track the progress had been extremely challenging due to ongoing military offensives by all sides and the increasing use of explosive ordnance, OIOS noted that the Mission, to the extent possible, in its role as a co-chair to the country task force continued with efforts to engage in dialogue with the armed groups and the Central African Armed Force (FACA) to prevent and end grave violations against children. Hence, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

MINUSCA implemented child protection training and an awareness-raising programme for national stakeholders

44. As required by the Results-Based Budgeting (RBB) framework and planned in its annual work plans for the period reviewed, CPU carried out various training and awareness-raising activities on child protection for members of national defence and internal security forces, correction officers, judicial actors, civil society, community leaders, religious leaders, community alert networks, local authorities, members of local and national peace committees including the security technical committees and the prefectural committees for the implementation of the peace agreement. These training and awareness-raising sessions covered the inclusion of children's concerns and their protection in peace initiatives. A review of the 2021/22 RBB quarterly progress reports and relevant daily and weekly reports indicated that CPU conducted, among others, 91 training sessions on child rights and child protection that benefitted 1,785 (including 201 women) members of national defence, internal security forces and correction officers; and 105 awareness-raising sessions that benefitted 1,212 (including 452 women) members of civil society, community leaders, religious leaders, community alert networks and local authorities.

45. To ensure the protection of children during the COVID-19 pandemic, CPU in coordination with UNICEF, developed guidelines for separating children from armed groups. Additionally, MINUSCA assisted the host government in developing the draft national strategy (National Prevention Plan) to prevent children from becoming victims of grave violations as per Security Council resolution 2427(2018). A two-day workshop was held in Bangui in September 2022 for the National Council on Child Protection to review the draft Strategy of the National Prevention Plan. The plan was at the draft stage at the time of the audit. Further, as part of the worldwide "Act to Protect Children" campaign, which was launched in Bangui on 2 May 2019 by the SRSR-CAAC within the framework to prevent grave violations, CPU in collaboration with its partners, including UNICEF, carried out various training and awareness-raising activities which benefitted 5,834 (including 1,454 women) against the targeted number of 6,320 persons in 17 and 18 locations of the country in 2020/21 and 2021/22 respectively. CPU maintained the required documents for these campaigns, including the evidence of attendees, pictures and performance reports in a timely manner.

Need to improve the development of Child Protection Unit work plans

46. For effective programme performance, MINUSCA Joint Mission Planning Unit (JMPU) issued integrated work plan development guidance and instructions which require that CPU should prepare an annual work plan for child protection activities, including indicators of achievement and outputs specified in the Mission's RBB framework. The indicators should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and

time-bound as defined in the Mission’s integrated work plan development guidance for the substantive sections and field offices. These work plans should be communicated to child protection advisers at field offices with clear guidance to streamline the objectives and activities to use in developing their field-level work plans.

47. CPU developed work plans for 2020/21 and 2021/22 in line with activities outlined in the RBB frameworks for the respective years and included expected accomplishments, activities and outputs, which were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. However, the work plan for 2022/23 was not timely prepared and was only finalized in March 2023. CPU indicated that it had not prepared the work plan as the Mission’s child protection mandate was like that of the previous year, and hence it had been using the same work plan whilst awaiting the new electronic version from the JMPU. A review of the work plans developed for CPU and its field offices for 2021/22 and 2022/23 identified the following discrepancies:

- The work plan templates of both financial years used by the CPU field offices differed from those used for the CPU headquarters level work plan. For example, the Bangui office developed its work plan using the e-performance template in Inspira, while the Bria field office drafted a document that only described the activities in narrative form but did not specify activities, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement in quantifiable terms as required by the standard template used by CPU.
- Work plans prepared by the field offices did not incorporate and align with applicable contents of activities relevant to field offices determined by CPU in its headquarters level work plan. For example, the CPU annual work plan required 30 child protection visits to police/ gendarmerie and judicial detention facilities during 2021/22. However, this activity was not expressly included in the field offices’ work plans, although the OIOS review indicated that the field offices carried out the activity.

48. The discrepancies between the CPU headquarters’ and field offices’ work plans occurred because CPU did not instruct the field offices to align their work plans with the CPU headquarters level work plan as required by the JMPU integrated work plan guidance, nor did it disseminate the guidance to the staff at the field offices. As a result, the field offices may not achieve the overall intended results planned by CPU because the activities assigned to them by CPU may not be clearly reflected in their work plans.

(5) MINUSCA should update and disseminate its integrated work plan development guidance and instructions to align the field child protection work plans to the overall child protection work plan.

MINUSCA accepted recommendation 5 and stated that the work plan for 2023/24 has been drafted and instructions for the development of their respective work plans have been sent to Child Protection Officers on 7 June 2023.

Need to plan for the evaluation of the child protection programme

49. The Administrative instruction on evaluation of United Nations Secretariat (ST/AI/2021/3) dated 6 August 2021 required MINUSCA to have an evaluation policy and carry out self-evaluation of all its programmes and sub-programmes on a regular and periodic basis to assess the overall relevance, effectiveness, impact and efficiency of its programmes/sub-programmes at least once every six years.

50. MINUSCA had yet to establish a policy to periodically conduct self-evaluations and had not assessed the overall relevance, effectiveness, impact, and efficiency of its child protection programme since the inception of the Mission in 2014. As a result, there was no sufficient evidence to determine its continued relevance, the extent to which CPU was achieving its programme objectives and to identify areas that required adjustments to ensure effective implementation of its mandate. However, CPU had been regularly updating its indicators and outputs in the comprehensive performance assessment system (CPAS) and the Umoja strategic management application (SMA) used by MINUSCA. The lack of evaluation has been raised as a systemic issue for MINUSCA in previously conducted programme audits. Therefore, OIOS did not make another recommendation.

Need to improve the consolidated quarterly progress of outputs in the results-based budget framework

51. As part of programme performance monitoring and evaluation of the Mission's RBB, each component of MINUSCA, including CPU, was required to update their achievement on planned indicators and outputs of the RBB framework on a quarterly basis.

52. CPU collected relevant data from its field offices and updated the figures of achievement against the planned indicators and outputs of the RBB framework quarterly in the SMA suite of Umoja. To consolidate the achievement figures, CPU designed a quarterly report template for reporting the RBB output elements. However, the template did not match the output elements provisioned in the RBB framework in Umoja. For example, while the RBB framework in Umoja specified 11 output elements relevant to the field office activities, the field office's quarterly report template required reporting on 15 output elements. There were instances where either the RBB output element was not included in the quarterly report template of the field offices, or the elements contained in the quarterly report template of the field offices were not fully aligned with those contained in the RBB framework. For example:

- One of the output elements that required 30 awareness-raising sessions for armed groups on the six grave violations of the rights of children and the protection of children during an armed conflict in the 2021/22 RBB framework was not included in the quarterly report of field offices.
- Similarly, two output elements, i.e., internal training for MINUSCA personnel, and advocacy, sensitization or training sessions for members of the security technical committees and prefectural committees for the implementing and monitoring mechanisms of the political agreement for peace and reconciliation (CTS/CMOP), which were not part of RBB framework, were included in the quarterly reports of the field offices.

53. As a result of the inconsistency in reporting the activities and inclusion of others that were not in line with the RBB framework, the RBB focal point at CPU headquarters had to spare additional effort to analyse data in the progress reports submitted by the field offices to populate in the appropriate headings of RBB outputs with correct figures in the system. This increased the chances of reporting incorrect figures due to errors that could occur in compiling the data. MINUSCA stated that to improve the consolidation of RBB quarterly progress, CPU has designed a template aligned with the output elements defined in the RBB framework for its field offices. OIOS, therefore, did not make a recommendation.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

54. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of MINUSCA for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ⁶ / Important ⁷	C/ O ⁸	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁹
1	MINUSCA should finalize the mission-wide child protection mainstreaming plan to guide all mission components in their mainstreaming efforts and ensure that substantive components systematically appoint focal points and incorporate child protection concerns in their work plans.	Important	O	Receipt of: (a) a finalized copy of the mission-wide child protection mainstreaming plan; and (b) evidence that substantive components have systematically appointed focal points and incorporated child protection concerns in their work plans.	December 2023
2	MINUSCA should ensure that the military component: (a) nominates focal points for all infantry units to be involved in the engagement platoon and provide official e-mails and computer access for all nominated focal points; and (b) effectively implements the engagement platoon action plan by approving the revised patrol report template to include reporting on child protection violation indicators to improve or increase situational awareness and information collection on child protection related concerns.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that: (a) focal points for all infantry units to be involved in the engagement platoon have been nominated and actions have been taken to provide official e-mail and computers to all nominated focal points; and (b) the revised engagement patrol report has been approved as part of the guidance on the patrol performance	December 2023
3	MINUSCA should: (a) finalize United Nations police child protection-related directive and work plans to ensure mainstreaming of child protection considerations in police operations in all field offices; and (b) designate child protection focal points in all police units.	Important	O	Receipt of: (a) evidence that the UNPOL child protection directive has been finalized and the work plans have been developed to ensure the mainstreaming of child protection considerations in police operations in all field offices; and (b) a copy of the updated list of child protection focal points in all police units.	September 2023
4	MINUSCA should maintain accurate records of child protection training provided to all uniformed	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that accurate records of child protection training provided to all	December 2023

⁶ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

⁷ Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

⁸ Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

⁹ Date provided by MINUSCA in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ⁶ / Important ⁷	C/ O ⁸	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁹
	personnel deployed in the Mission to assure that the Mission has made sufficient efforts to make these personnel aware of its child protection mandate.			uniformed personnel deployed in the Mission have been maintained.	
5	MINUSCA should update and disseminate its integrated work plan development guidance and instructions to align the field child protection work plans to the overall child protection work plan.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that the field child protection work plans have been updated in accordance with the integrated work plan development guidance and instructions.	December 2023

APPENDIX I

Management Response



INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

TO: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye
A: Under-Secretary-General for OIOS

DATE: 28 July 2023

FROM: Valentine Rugwabiza
DE: SRSG and Head of MINUSCA

REFERENCE: MINUSCA/OSRSG/129/2023

SUBJECT: **MINUSCA's comments on the Draft report on an audit of the child protection programme in MINUSCA (Assignment No. AP2022-637-05)**

OBJET: **MINUSCA's comments on the Draft report on an audit of the child protection programme in MINUSCA (Assignment No. AP2022-637-05)**

1. With reference to your interoffice memorandum dated 4 July 2023 on the above captioned subject, kindly find attached MINUSCA's comments on the Draft report of an audit of child protection programme in MINUSCA.

2. I take this opportunity to thank your team for the findings and recommendations issued in this audit.

Annex (2): – MINUSCA's comments on the Draft report on an audit of child protection programme in MINUSCA
- Draft report on an audit of the child protection programme in MINUSCA (Assignment No. AP2022-637-05)

cc: Mr. Kemal Karaseki, Acting Chief, Peacekeeping Audit Service, Internal Audit Division, OIOS
Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy SRSG, MINUSCA
Lt. Gen. Humphrey Nyone, Force Commander, MINUSCA
Mr. Christophe Bizimungu, Police Commissioner, MINUSCA
Mr. Sory Sangaré, Director of Mission Support, MINUSCA
Mr. Souleymane Thioune, Chief of Staff, *a.i.*, MINUSCA
Ms. Nathalie Ben Zekour Man, Senior Child Protection Advisor
Ms. Hanan Talbi, Director, Human Rights Division, MINUSCA
Mr. Charles Fomunyam, Child Protection Officer, MINUSCA
Mr. Jeffrey Lin, Professional Practices Section, Internal Audit Division, OIOS
Mr. Laud Botchwey, Chief Resident Auditor for MINUSCA, Internal Audit Division, OIOS
Ms. Tiphaine Dickson, Risk Management and Compliance Officer, MINUSCA

Management Response

Audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	MINUSCA should finalize the mission-wide child protection mainstreaming plan to guide all mission components in their mainstreaming efforts and ensure that substantive components systematically appoint focal points and incorporate child protection concerns in their work plans.	Important	YES	Senior Child Protection Advisor	December 2023	<p>Mission-wide child protection mainstreaming plan to be available by October 2023 (CPU). Appointment of substantive Child Protection Focal Points to take place during development of mainstreaming plan.</p> <p>Force Directive on the Establishment of Gender/Child Protection/POC Focal Points was already issued. Force/Sector Gender and Protection Advisers are working to strengthen child protection consideration among all GFP network.</p> <p>UNPOL has an HQ level Child Protection focal point to coordinate activities related to child protection and other focal points in the sectors.</p>
2	MINUSCA should ensure that the military component: (a) nominates focal points for all infantry units to be involved in the engagement	Important	YES	Force Military Gender Advisor	a) December 2023 b) September 2023	a) The Gender Focal Point List was revised and updated in April 2023, and since, it has been updated on a monthly basis. Necessary action to

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

Management Response

Audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
	platoon and provide official e-mails and computer access for all nominated focal points; and (b) effectively implements the engagement platoon action plan by approving the revised patrol report template to include reporting on child protection violation indicators to improve or increase situational awareness and information collection on child protection related concerns.					provide official e-mails and computers has been initiated. (b) The Engagement Patrol Report is part of the Guidance on Patrol Performance which is to be approved by the FC.
3	MINUSCA should: (a) finalize United Nations police child protection-related directive and work plans to ensure mainstreaming of child protection considerations in police operations in all field offices; and (b) designate child protection focal points in all police units.	Important	YES	UNPOL Child Protection Focal Point	a) September 2023 b) Completed	(a) The UNPOL Child Protection Directive remains to be finalized. However, a template for the Directive is being developed by DPO/DPET and is expected to be available towards the end of August/early September 2023. UNPOL proposes that it awaits the approved template to develop the UNPOL directive otherwise the exercise will need to be repeated. A MINUSCA UNPOL Child Protection Directive is expected to be available and approved by November 2023. The Workplans will be developed following the development of the Directive. In the meantime, an initial workplan will be proposed by UNPOL for its Child

Management Response

Audit of the child protection programme in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						Protection Focal Points by August 2023 based on the 2019 UNPOL child protection directive. (b) UNPOL has a Child Protection Focal Point at HQ level and is complemented by a network of focal points in all units. This is being updated due to the rotation of personnel.
4	MINUSCA should maintain accurate records of child protection training provided to all uniformed personnel deployed in the Mission to assure that the Mission has made sufficient efforts to make these personnel aware of its child protection mandate.	Important	YES	Senior Child Protection Advisor	December 2023	UNPOL Child Protection Focal Point and Force Military Gender Advisor to provide data on UNPOL and Force Child Protection trainings on a weekly basis to CPU. CPU will centralize the information and share with IMTC.
5	MINUSCA should update and disseminate its integrated work plan development guidance and instructions to align the field child protection work plans to the overall child protection work plan.	Important	YES	Senior Child Protection Advisor	December 2023	2023-2024 Workplan drafted. Instructions sent to Child Protection Officers for development of their respective Workplans on 7 June 2023.