

*Child Soldiers, Displacement and Human Security*  
Lisa Alfredson, Disarmament Forum, 2002, p. 17-27.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers defines a child soldier as “any person under 18 years of age who is a member or attached to the armed forces or an armed group, whether or not there is an armed conflict”, the definition of “child” and the age limitation being based on the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Child Soldiers are a critical human security crisis, for these children are placed under serious threats. These include death, disability, drug addiction, serious psychological trauma, social alienation, homelessness, forced pregnancy, sexual exploitation and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS... All this means in turn that using children as soldiers has obvious and devastating impacts on human security and society as a whole.

Displacement also affects a child’s human security, as they can often find themselves separated from their relatives, lose the benefit of education and healthcare, their entire life being disrupted, displaced children all too often also becoming child soldiers. There is a strong correlation between displacement and recruitment of child soldiery and “children often become trapped in a cycle of vulnerability to both recruitment and displacement”. This correlation between displacement and child soldiery has four aspects:

1. “Former child soldiers are vulnerable to displacement.”
2. “Displaced children are vulnerable to military recruitment and re-recruitment.”
3. Children can also be “displaced or relocated to *prevent* recruitment.”
4. “Child soldiers are displaced as soldiers (as a general characteristic of their condition).”

In all these cases children are covered by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which “entitles all children under the age of 18 to the right of personal security”. The Geneva Convention also covers these children and the United Nation’s Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) provide (non-binding) standards on protection against recruitment of children as soldiers. These rights thus need to be “widely acknowledged and properly implemented” by all actors dealing with children and displaced people in armed conflict.

In conclusion “the multitude of connections between displacement and child soldiering, both threats to human security in themselves, demonstrate the tremendous challenges facing us as we try to assist these marginalized populations. The first step toward addressing their needs is simply to be aware of these connections in order to make use of existing mechanisms for rights and protections in the most holistic manner possible—thereby stopping the cycle from continuing.” The integrated approach of human security is thus crucial in tackling this combined problem of displacement and child soldiery, which is detrimental to children as well as to the entire population’s security.