

Beyond Short-Term Intervention: Peacekeeping's Child Protection Legacy in Liberia

By Julie Gregory and Natalie Bramlett

October 2026

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Cover photo: A Nigerian peacekeeper serving with UNMIL embraces a child during an evening patrol in Monrovia in 2018. UN Photo/ Albert Gonzalez Farran.

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Abbreviations

CAAC	Children and Armed Conflict
DDRR.....	Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration
ECOMIL	Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mission in Liberia
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ICC	Interim care center
INCHR	Liberia’s Independent National Commission on Human Rights
MRM	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism
NPFL.....	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
T/PCCs	Troop- and police-contributing countries
TSA	Transitional Safety Net Allowance
UNAMSIL.....	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UN IDDRS.....	United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
UNMIL.....	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire
WCPS	Women and Children Protection Section of the Liberian National Police

Executive Summary

For over two decades, UN peacekeeping has played a vital role in preventing and addressing grave violations against children. As one of the first peacekeeping missions established with a child protection mandate, the former UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) contributed to the protection of children and advancement of their rights throughout its deployment from 2003 to 2018. UNMIL's legacy in Liberia demonstrates that UN peacekeeping can play an essential role in helping build the capacity of the host-government to protect children, as well as in informing civil society discourse about children's rights and challenges to their safety. And while the UN's approach to child protection has evolved significantly since the mission was first deployed, UNMIL's experience nonetheless offers lessons for the UN and its member states to consider when seeking to promote changes that will leave a positive, enduring impact for children well into the future.

Although UNMIL was mandated to support the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDRR) of children associated with fighting forces, the mission did not prioritize assessing the main risk factors that contributed to their original recruitment and use during Liberia's civil wars. Rather, the assumption was made that the end of conflict in country meant the end of child recruitment and use. A greater understanding of risk factors facing boys and girls, however, could have been useful to inform UNMIL's efforts to prevent and halt the subsequent recruitment and use of Liberian children by Ivorian conflict parties during the mid-2000s. UNMIL focused its attention on supporting the immediate disarmament and demobilization of children, and later on conducting troop patrols to prevent adults and children from crossing over the Côte d'Ivoire border once it was clear re-recruitment was taking place. This approach was more reactive than proactive and had limited success. **When UN peacekeeping missions have child protection mandates, all attempts should be made to assess the risk factors that contribute to child recruitment and use and to tailor preventive activities.**

The experience of Liberian children being recruited to participate in the neighboring Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire conflicts also points to the ongoing risk of children being recruited and used across borders. And although former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had called for the peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire to apply a regional lens to their respective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes, more coordination between the missions beyond joint patrols and sharing of technical assets on child protection could have improved information sharing and preventive activities. **Peacekeeping missions should consider how regional instability may impact the cross-border recruitment and use of children and identify opportunities to coordinate on this issue with other peace operations in the region.**

In carrying out its child protection mandate, UNMIL also invested its limited child protection capacity into supporting the creation of relevant government institutions and contributing to emerging civil society awareness about the protection of children and their rights. The mission relied on UNICEF to directly engage with beneficiaries and deliver child-specific programming across the country, deconflicting efforts as much as possible. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that UNMIL and UNICEF could have strengthened their respective efforts by collectively developing and working towards medium- and long-term objectives for child protection in Liberia. **Peacekeeping missions should work with the respective UN Country Team to set joint medium- and long-term outcomes for child protection, clarifying roles and ensuring alignment between political engagement and programmatic activities on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), with the aim of sustaining impact over time.**

When it came to UNMIL's decade-long transition out of the country, the Liberian government did not allocate sufficient funding to child protection institutions and mechanisms that UNMIL and UNICEF helped develop and set up. Following the mission's departure, UNICEF and other UN agencies had to provide the funding or allow child protection mechanisms, such as the local Child Protection Committees, to fall into disuse. To prevent this, the mission could have incorporated child protection into its transition efforts, such as by setting the expectation that the government would be responsible for progressively increasing the national budget line on social development services in the lead-up to the mission's departure and by integrating child protection and relevant budgetary benchmarks into the country's follow-on peacebuilding plan. In reality, however, child protection did not figure into the mission's transition or the country's 2017 peacebuilding plan as UNMIL halted its engagement on the issue in 2014, noting that UNICEF was providing the requisite technical and financial support to Liberian counterparts. With the mission's attention turned elsewhere, the government may have felt less need to prioritize investing in its long-term capacities to protect children. **Early national investment in child protection capacities, particularly within the justice, police, and social welfare systems, should be prioritized to prevent post-mission withdrawal capacity gaps and over-reliance on relevant UN agencies.**



Liberian citizens participate in a workshop on "Women's Security in the Community" in Kakata in 2012. UN Photo/Staton Winter.



Children participate in a dance-off at the launch party for a 2012 singing competition, themed "Promoting Peace through Music," organized by UNMIL and the government of Liberia. UN Photo/Patricia Esteve.

Introduction

Established in September 2003, the former UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was deployed into a country ravaged by war, seeking to reinforce the country's nascent peace process and prevent a relapse in conflict. Following its arrival in October 2003, the mission assessed that more than 15,000 children were associated with the fighting forces¹ and required immediate support to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate into Liberian society. In addition, children not directly recruited and used in the conflict had been targeted in myriad ways. Sexual violence against women and children had become a pervasive phenomenon,² and the civil wars left countless children without guardians or ways to procure food and basic necessities, resulting in economic destitution and high levels of vulnerability.

UNMIL's mandate called for the mission to monitor the ceasefire agreement; oversee the disarmament of combatants and destruction of weapons; protect civilians under imminent threat of violence; support security reform; facilitate humanitarian assistance; promote human rights; and assist the transitional government in preparing for national elections. Furthermore, child protection was mainstreamed into UNMIL's mandate from the start through three distinct elements: 1) developing an action plan to disarm, demobilize, rehabilitate, and reintegrate (DDRR) combatants, with special consideration given to women and child combatants; 2) supporting the protection and advancement of human rights in Liberia, with particular priority given to children and "demobilized child soldiers," among other vulnerable groups; and 3) addressing sexual violence being used as a weapon of war against women and girls.³ In 2014, the Security Council further emphasized the need for UNMIL's human rights activities to address the ongoing scourge of sexual and gender-based violence against children and women.⁴

Since the mission's departure in 2018, both the country and UN mission have been widely regarded as triumphs. Yet, little to no research has taken a comprehensive look at the impact of UNMIL's presence and activities in Liberia or the implementation of its child protection mandate. This report investigates UNMIL's impact on the protection and rights of children in Liberia, examines the longevity of laws, institutions, and mechanisms the mission helped create, and contributes to a growing body of research on the long-term impact of UN peacekeeping on child protection efforts. Furthermore, the report aims to inform the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda, including implementation of the 2017 Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.⁵

The CAAC agenda and approach of UN peace operations to child protection have greatly advanced since UNMIL's deployment in the early 2000s. This report features findings that are most relevant to UN peacekeeping missions today, while still acknowledging the challenges and mistakes that occurred at a time when child protection practice in peacekeeping was nascent. For instance, issues experienced in Liberia around the DDRR process, such as offering monetary incentives to children or the requirement that they had to possess arms to participate in the process, have since been addressed through the development of the UN's Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) in 2006 and member states' commitment to the 2007 Paris Principles.⁶ Furthermore, the UN Department of Peace Operations developed a formal policy on child protection for peacekeeping missions in 2009, which was expanded and updated in 2017, and now also applies to UN special political missions.⁷ UN staff can also seek out operational guidance in the 2023 Handbook for Child Protection Staff in United Nations Peace Operations and the 2025 Handbook on Child Protection for UN Uniformed Personnel. Additionally, member states have strengthened commitments to enhancing their contributions to peacekeeping on child protection through

the Vancouver Principles. This report considers UNMIL's experience in light of this progress, highlighting reflections from UNMIL's time in Liberia that may be of current utility to UN officials, troop- and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs), and peacekeeping missions.

Methodology and Approach

In conducting this research, the authors undertook extensive desktop research and carried out 24 interviews with 71 individuals in Liberia in April and May 2025, as well as two virtual interviews in May and June 2025. Participants included 12 personnel from UN agencies, 20 government officials and politicians, eight former child soldiers, one representative from academia, and 27 child protection or youth experts from national and international non-governmental organizations in Liberia. Only a few former UNMIL personnel were interviewed due to the difficulties in identifying former mission personnel in country, given that almost a decade had passed since the mission was operational. Of the individuals interviewed, one-fourth identified as women, and more than 90% of individuals were of Liberian nationality. Interviewees were selected based on a demonstrated track record of engaging in child protection or youth engagement work in Liberia, including during UNMIL's deployment.

This report is intentionally narrow in scope, focusing on UNMIL's implementation of its child protection mandate and its long-term impact on the country's efforts to protect and promote the rights of children. The legacy of other priority tasks within UNMIL's mandate are not addressed within this report. Furthermore, child protection actors in Liberia remain overwhelmingly centered in and around Monrovia. In-country research was thus conducted in the capital of Monrovia, where UNMIL headquarters was located, and the nearby port town of Buchanan, the location of one of the mission's main field offices. The authors did not travel to other urban or rural areas, limiting their understanding of UNMIL's impact across the country, including where it did not maintain a permanent presence.

The team was unable to interview former girls who were recruited and used in the civil wars, given the harsh stigma and security risks these women continue to face in Liberian society. To address this gap, the authors prioritized desktop records and research papers that documented the impact of Liberia's civil wars and the UNMIL-facilitated DDRR process on girls and young women.

Furthermore, while UNICEF is not a primary focus of this research, the UN agency's contributions to the protection of children are discussed, where relevant, to shed light on UNMIL's approach to its child protection mandate. Additionally, UNICEF's ongoing presence and work in country have helped reinforce UNMIL's enduring impact on child protection, which the former has helped sustain. Interviewees, however, did not always clearly distinguish between the work of UNMIL and UNICEF, with perceptions regarding the division of labor between the two entities likely to have become more blurred over time. As a result, the authors cross-checked claims regarding the mission's and UNICEF's respective contributions through desktop research. These factors are likely to influence the findings and recommendations arising from this research.

RISK FACTORS FOR CHILD RECRUITMENT AND USE DURING LIBERIA'S CIVIL WARS

The widespread recruitment and use of children in Liberia started with the outbreak of the country's first civil war in 1989. Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group forcibly recruited and used both boys and girls to expand its fighting forces, including the creation of "Small Boys Units" with some children as young as 10.⁸ Other rebel groups and government forces thereafter adopted this practice, with fighting forces citing a variety of reasons including the perception that children were more likely to take risks, were easier to control or "program," could stand conditions adults could not, required less resources, and had abundant energy.⁹ Girls were also taken for sexual enslavement or forced marriage to fighters.¹⁰ As a result, forced recruitment, often through abduction, became a common practice.

Nonetheless, many children also "voluntarily" joined the fighting forces. Among those who did, many attributed their engagement to survival (e.g., to the need for food or to provide for family); desire for protection (e.g., loss of family or home); dire economic situations; revenge for attacks on family, home, or community; or a desire for social belonging.¹¹ Children from poorer families were highly vulnerable,¹² as armed groups promised that children who joined would receive food, clothing, and protection, as well as whatever they could steal from civilians.¹³

In addition to the above factors, a primary risk factor for girls joining the fighting forces was the need to protect themselves and other women and girls within their families and communities from the rampant sexual violence that characterized Liberia's civil wars. Some older girls thus became fighters to gain access to a gun, while others, including younger girls, willingly became the "wife" of a male combatant for self-protection. Similarly, others joined for revenge after experiencing abuse at the hands of conflict parties or to combat the gendered power imbalance of war. Some girls also joined to improve their social status, gain access to material goods, or access drugs to numb trauma.¹⁴ Anecdotal evidence suggests that the participation of girls in Liberia's civil wars increased over the years; however, exact numbers remain unknown.¹⁵

Ahead of the UN-facilitated DDRR process in 2004, the UN Secretary-General listed Liberian conflict parties in the annual CAAC reports to the Security Council in 2002 and 2003 for recruitment and use of children. Given that the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations against children was not established until 2005,¹⁶ Liberia had neither an MRM nor UN action plan(s) set up with conflict parties to address and prevent the recruitment and use of children at any point in its history. UNMIL's Human Rights and Protection Section thus worked alongside UNICEF in monitoring grave violations against children.



Aerial view of UNMIL headquarters in Monrovia (now the UN Country Team headquarters) ahead of the mission's closure in 2018. UN Photo/ Albert Gonzalez Farran.

UNMIL's Establishment and Evolution

Throughout the early 2000s, the Security Council monitored the situation in West Africa closely, as Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire were at varying stages of instability or conflict.¹⁷ The Security Council conducted visits to the region in 2000, 2003, and 2004, seeking to show support for peace and gain greater insight into how to help stabilize the region. Following a July 2003 proposal by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to send international troops to Liberia, the Security Council authorized a multinational force to immediately deploy in August 2003, which became the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). The Council also announced its readiness to deploy a UN stabilization force by October 2003.¹⁸

On August 18, 2003, the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement — the final peace agreement in Liberia's civil wars — was signed by the conflict parties, following significant regional and international pressure for the parties to achieve a negotiated settlement to the war.¹⁹ The agreement called for the establishment of a transitional government and mechanisms to monitor the ceasefire, verify implementation of the agreement, and facilitate a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Importantly, it also incorporated the need to address the rehabilitation of war victims, including children, women, and people with disabilities, and to facilitate the demobilization and reintegration of child combatants.²⁰

In conjunction with the end of the peace talks, the Secretary-General sent an assessment mission to Liberia in late August 2003 to prepare for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission. The assessment mission also conducted consultations in the region led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Liberia, Jacques Klein.²¹ On September 19, 2003, the Security Council established the UN Mission in Liberia through an unanimous vote, authorizing a peacekeeping force to take over from ECOMIL on October 1, 2003 and establish an action plan within 30 days for the DDRR of all armed actors, including children²² — an exceptional turn-around time.

UNMIL's deployment, however, was not unique to the region, with UN peacekeeping missions also deployed in Sierra Leone (1999-2006) and Côte d'Ivoire (2004-2017). Given the earlier deployment of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), the peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire took inspiration from UNAMSIL's approach; for instance, UNMIL replicated its approach to the DDRR process and organized for its troops to receive pre-deployment training from UNAMSIL's child protection team,²³ a mission which also had child protection language in its mandate.

To deal with the complex regional situation, the Security Council, at the suggestion of the Secretary-General, authorized the limited use of peacekeeping resources to enable cooperation between these three missions in addressing challenges in all three countries, including through the temporary redeployment

of personnel as needed.²⁴ UNMIL and the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) notably cooperated on security challenges along the border between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire throughout their deployment, such as through joint patrols and asset sharing, as well as in supporting peacebuilding efforts by the Mano River Union and ECOWAS.²⁵ UNMIL's troop strength reached its peak in late 2005, with nearly 15,000 troops from 49 contributing countries. By mid-2007, UNMIL began developing a drawdown plan, gradually reducing its footprint²⁶ until its departure from the country in March 2018.²⁷



Ghanaian peacekeepers participate in a 2012 medal parade in Buchanan as Karin Landgren, then Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIL, looks on. UN Photo/Staton Winter.

Assessment of UNMIL's Impact on Child Protection

Liberian government officials and civil society actors interviewed widely praised UNMIL for its success in helping to stabilize the country, attributing the ongoing peace in Liberia to the mission's past presence. However, when it came to child protection, many provided more critical reflections on the mission's handling of the child-DDRR process, while still noting appreciation for the mission's efforts to institutionalize child protection within the government and elevate child rights across the country.

UNMIL's approach to implementing its child protection mandate focused on the DDRR process, providing technical advice on mainstreaming child protection work within the transitional government, and conducting human rights monitoring and reporting, as well as engaging with the Liberian population on child protection issues. This work was led by the mission's two Child Protection Advisors;²⁸ however, according to several child protection experts in Monrovia, the mission had insufficient capacity to address the complex range of threats facing children in Liberia at the time.²⁹ In the words of a government official, "UNMIL did not have a strong enough focus on children."³⁰ This assessment is consistent with the way the mission's activities were reflected in reporting to the Security Council. Notably, the Secretary-General's reports on Liberia contained limited reference to the implementation of the child protection mandate from 2008 onwards.

Given its limited child protection capacities, UNMIL took on a coordinating role with UN agencies whose activities addressed the protection and promotion of children's rights. This included engaging with UNICEF (focused on children), UN Women (focused on women and older girls), UNHCR (focused on refugees and internally displaced persons, including children), UNDP (focused on building critical civilian infrastructure), and UNFPA (focused on addressing sexual and gender-based violence and delivering emergency maternal care).³¹ According to a former mission personnel, UNMIL regularly arranged meetings between UN agencies to share information, avoid duplication of activities, and identify issues that could benefit from cross-UN collaboration, for example, as relates to cases of incarcerated children. One comparative advantage was the mission's extended reach across the country, which allowed it to engage in rural and far away areas through both UNMIL field offices and the mission's ability to support complex security and logistical needs.³²

UNMIL therefore strategically relied on UN agencies to help advance the protection of children through their respective mandates and specialized expertise, given the wide scope of challenges facing children in Liberia.³³ For instance, by the time UNMIL deployed in 2003, UNICEF had been in country for over a decade³⁴ and had far more personnel devoted to child protection issues, as well as a stronger understanding of the local context. UNICEF thus served as the lead UN actor on child protection throughout the mission's deployment. More specifically, UNICEF oversaw the child-specific DDRR process; championed initiatives to strengthen the capacity of government authorities and civil society to protect children (for example,

serving as the driving force behind the landmark 2011 Children’s Law and supporting the establishment of Liberia’s Children’s Parliament in the early 2000s); and implemented child-specific programming at national and local levels.

Disarming, Demobilizing, Rehabilitating, and Reintegrating Children

Following the mission’s arrival in country in late 2003, UNMIL’s immediate priority was coordinating and facilitating the DDRR process for combatants. Implementation of the child-specific DDRR process was divided between UNMIL and UNICEF. In the first half of the process, UNMIL facilitated the disarmament and demobilization of all combatants, including children, with separation of boys and girls,³⁵ collection of weapons, and delivery of basic provisions occurring at central UNMIL cantonment sites. The second part of the process — the rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with fighting forces — was functionally entrusted to UNICEF to design and implement.³⁶ Within a few days of arrival at the cantonment sites, UNICEF transferred associated children to an interim care center (ICC) in the area to begin rehabilitation.³⁷ Children remained at ICCs anywhere from several days to three months, depending on individual needs and institutional capacity, where they received psychosocial counseling, family tracing, and reunification support.³⁸ UNICEF also implemented longer-term rehabilitation and reintegration programming, which included educational opportunities, skills training and apprenticeships, and support for a range of community programs and structures.³⁹ Near the end of UNMIL’s eight-month disarmament program in October 2004, the UN reported the demobilization of over 10,000 children and the reunification of more than 9,600 children with families — figures that experts have since contested as over-inflated.⁴⁰ However, in practice, Liberia’s child-DDRR process faced many challenges in its implementation.

First, programmatic design was usually not adapted to the differing contextual needs of children recruited and used across the country.⁴¹ The centralization of DDRR programming in high population areas around the country often prevented children in rural areas from accessing key services and resources, with poor road conditions and limited infrastructure serving as a further obstacle.⁴² And while UNMIL eventually established 11 main cantonment sites and staffed multiple small DDRR programs at UNMIL field offices, these sites covered a small amount of Liberia’s territory, with most large counties only hosting a single disarmament site.⁴³

Furthermore, the diverse gendered needs of children associated with the fighting forces were not addressed to the extent necessary for inclusive DDRR. While the design of the child-DDRR process called for targeted resources for girls,⁴⁴ those interviewed described how countless girls associated with the fighting forces were unable to access offered resources, or avoided participation due to fear of stigmatization by peers and communities;⁴⁵ pregnancy and childcare concerns or other family responsibilities;⁴⁶ and interference by unit commanders.⁴⁷ Several interviewees that had worked with children in ICCs highlighted that the process adopted a “one-size-fits-all” approach to case management that did not cater to the unique needs of boys and girls.⁴⁸

Second, child access to DDRR programming and assistance was often predicated upon the delivery of arms, ammunition, or related equipment.⁴⁹ This approach excluded innumerable children, particularly girls, who did not participate in hostilities but remained affiliated with fighting forces.⁵⁰ Exacerbating matters, UNMIL offered financial incentives for children to surrender weaponry — the same \$300 USD

Transitional Safety Net Allowance (TSA) as given to adult ex-combatants — despite concerns voiced by UNICEF and other child protection actors about its potential negative effects.⁵¹ The requirement of possessing arms to access DDRR programming and the reward of a cash incentive for disarming led to the eruption of a black market in Liberia around weapons.⁵² The cash incentive also caused children to be exploited by their former commanders, who, for example, sold children's weapons or DDRR identity cards, or falsely claimed a familial relationship to the child to access the TSA.⁵³ Furthermore, the incentive contributed to popular resentment against those who participated in the war, perpetuating a sense of injustice and hampering child reintegration efforts.⁵⁴ In a parallel pattern, the educational benefit offered as part of the child-DDRR assistance package was monetized: Multiple interviewees who had not been associated with fighting forces reported that they or those that they knew purchased weapons or the identity card issued to demobilized child soldiers in order to benefit from the DDRR education program.⁵⁵

Third, those interviewed described the short-term support provided through the rehabilitation and reintegration process as being inadequate to deal with the long-term physical, emotional, and mental aspects of participating in war as a child.⁵⁶ Much of this can be traced to insufficient multi-year funding underpinning the process. Notably, while resources for child disarmament and demobilization were provided by UNMIL, the child-specific rehabilitation and reintegration phases remained reliant on voluntary contributions from member states, with only 50% of UNICEF's appeal met by August 2004.⁵⁷ This led to the delayed and under-resourced delivery of reintegration assistance across the country,⁵⁸ forcing some children to live on the street while waiting for the support to materialize.

The significant gap for many children between their stays in the ICCs and receiving reintegration support made them more susceptible to exploitation, including to re-recruitment by armed actors for use in neighboring countries or engagement in criminal activities, such as prostitution.⁵⁹ Compounding the funding problem was the large number of children and adults seeking access to the DDRR process, including those who did not participate in the war.⁶⁰ Higher-than-expected child disarmament numbers thus severely over-taxed ICCs and exacerbated the funding shortfall for child rehabilitation and reintegration.⁶¹ All rehabilitation and reintegration programming concluded in July 2009 — five years after the beginning of disarmament.⁶²

Supporting Regional Attempts to Prevent Child Recruitment and Use

Threats to Liberian children also came from outside the country. Political crises in neighboring Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire specifically led to the cross-border recruitment of Liberian children during and after Liberia's civil wars.⁶³ While UNMIL was deployed, recruitment of children from Liberia to Côte d'Ivoire increased in the mid-2000s, as Liberian commanders and Ivorian conflict parties recruited recently demobilized children, as well as those not previously associated with fighting forces, to fight across the border. Children living in the country's southeast, near the border with Côte d'Ivoire, as well as in refugee camps in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, were particularly targeted. Poverty remained a key risk factor, with Ivorian military officers making promises of providing food, cash, and clothing to children. And even though many children had registered for education or skills-based training in Liberia through the child-DDRR program, funding shortfalls and extraordinary unemployment rates compelled numerous children to cross the border to join the fighting forces. Once recruited, children were also encouraged to recruit friends and relatives.⁶⁴

UNMIL recognized the severity of the threat the Ivorian crisis posed to regional security and coordinated with the UN missions in the region to limit its impact. In 2005, UNMIL established a joint task force with the Liberian government focused on monitoring and countering the recruitment of children to Côte d'Ivoire.⁶⁵ The Security Council's assumption that the Liberian DDRR process would curtail the recruitment and use of children in the country shaped UNMIL's posture,⁶⁶ which remained largely responsive to developments on the ground. As a result, the mission focused primarily on deterrence along the Ivorian border through ground and air patrols, including coordinated activities with UNOCI.⁶⁷

Consistent with the approach taken for the DDRR process, programmatic engagement on child protection was led by UNICEF. UNICEF sought to increase child reintegration efforts along the border, support community-based protection mechanisms, and establish child-friendly spaces, though funding constraints presented ongoing challenges.⁶⁸ For its part, UNHCR coordinated the repatriation or return of Liberian children intercepted on their way to or within Côte d'Ivoire.⁶⁹ With the end of the Ivorian conflict in 2011, UNMIL's focus on countering the recruitment and use of children waned as the threat subsided.

Building Up Government's Capacity to Protect Children

Throughout its deployment, UNMIL focused on building up the capacity of the Liberian government to protect children from violence in all its forms. UNMIL's support included providing technical advice and guidance on integrating child protection into the work of national ministries; supporting legislation that protects the rights of children in Liberia; and promoting initiatives to monitor and advance the safety of children.

During and immediately following the civil wars, the government of Liberia did not have any institutions or mechanisms that addressed the protection of children. Those interviewed often attributed the creation of government institutions and mechanisms that focused on child protection to UNMIL's advocacy and technical support. For instance, the Ministry of Gender and Development set up a Children's Protection Division in 2005, which was responsible for ensuring the protection and promotion of children's rights at national and county levels.⁷⁰ Later on, in 2014, the Liberian government merged the Ministry of Gender and Development and the Department of Social Welfare to form the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection to promote more effective coordination between the two departments, following the recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁷¹ Interviewees noted that the strong focus on children within the reconstituted Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection was influenced by the mission's advice to the government.⁷²

Similarly, in collaboration with UNICEF, UNMIL is credited with helping establish the Women and Children Protection Section (WCPS) within the Liberian National Police in 2005. The WCPS was created to ensure that there are police officers at national and county levels with specialized training in sexual and gender-based violence, child protection, and juvenile case management. UNMIL police also supported the training of WCPS officers and maintained a presence within WCPS, progressively building up the capacity of the Liberian National Police.⁷³ By 2012, WCPS had 180 police officers, one-third of whom were women, deployed to 52 locations across country.⁷⁴

Furthermore, UNMIL engaged the Ministry of Justice on the prosecution of cases concerning children and sexual and gender-based violence through its Human Rights Protection Section.⁷⁵ In late 2008,

Criminal Court E — a specialized court for handling cases of sexual and gender-based violence, including for children — was established by the Ministry of Justice.⁷⁶ This court aimed to expedite the backlog of cases involving sexual violence. Additionally, the government created a sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) crimes unit in 2009 to improve the capacity of the Liberian National Police to conduct investigations and collect related evidence, as well as train prosecutors on how to appropriately handle such cases.⁷⁷ According to experts within the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, UNMIL played a significant role in developing these mechanisms. In the words of one government official, “this court is one of the legacies of the UNMIL-supported rule of law reforms.”⁷⁸

UNMIL’s human rights section also prioritized support to transitional justice in the years following the conflict, such as by promoting awareness of the act for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission⁷⁹ (which called for the investigation of the full range of violations against children from 1979 to 2003)⁸⁰ and providing support for the hearings.⁸¹ However, in the years following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report in 2009, there was insufficient national and international pressure to implement the Commission’s recommendations, including the child-specific ones, as evidenced by the fact that only one follow-up report was issued by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s administration.⁸² According to one expert, this meant that, post-2009, there was an absence of effort at the national level to monitor or address the needs of demobilized children, including as relates to education, vocational training, and drug use rehabilitation.⁸³

Invigorating Civil Society’s Efforts to Protect Children

Outside of reinforcing the government’s capacity to protect children, UNMIL also raised awareness among Liberian society about human rights, including the rights of children. For instance, UNMIL Radio hosted programs and public service announcements tailored to educating children across the country about their rights; this was especially important for children in rural areas, who had trouble accessing school or needed to support their parents in farming.⁸⁴ According to child protection experts, UNMIL’s promotion of human rights created a common vocabulary for child protection actors and civil society alike to utilize.⁸⁵ In the words of a former child combatant, “When I was a child, no one knew we had rights. I never heard about child rights. When UNMIL was here, they were training parents to understand child rights and women’s rights.”⁸⁶

Similarly, UNMIL helped to build up the capacity of local civil society organizations, such as by providing trainings and education about international treaties and conventions. In this way, UNMIL set clear standards for the child protection environment in Liberia, informing civil society efforts and empowering local organizations with knowledge to advocate for children’s rights and needs.⁸⁷

Furthermore, UNMIL’s human rights monitoring and reporting activities enhanced understanding among child protection actors as to the range of challenges that children faced coming out of conflict. UNMIL provided the most comprehensive reporting at the time on human rights violations,⁸⁸ with special attention put on sexual and gender-based violence, including against children. International non-governmental organizations reported relying on this data, as the national government lacked the resources to collect or verify such data from across the country.⁸⁹



A child rape victim makes her way to a session with a caregiver at a safe house in Monrovia in 2012. UN Photo/Staton Winter.

Impact of Mission Transition on Child Protection

With UNICEF serving as the lead actor on child protection during and after the mission's time in country, several interviewees described UNMIL's transition as having a minimal impact on child protection efforts.⁹⁰ External events also influenced this transition process. By early 2014, Ebola hit the country, requiring the mission to reorient much of its efforts towards supporting the country in combating this severe threat, with many non-essential activities put on hold. Combined with the mission's anticipated exit, UNMIL was under pressure from the Security Council to reduce or eliminate activities other UN agencies and government institutions could carry forward. As a result, UNMIL did not continue its child protection work outside of its human rights mandate, reporting to the Council in 2014 that "support for the protection needs of children is addressed by UNICEF."⁹¹

While the government of Liberia developed detailed plans for UNMIL's departure from the country⁹² and expanded its budgetary appropriations to cover activities it would take on in the mission's absence,⁹³ the government allocated insufficient funds to national ministries and mechanisms contributing to child protection efforts. This is attributable in part to the low prioritization of social development services within the national budget,⁹⁴ as well as the country's economic contraction following Ebola and long-time foreign donor dependence. For instance, in 2014, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child recommended that Liberia increase the budgets of the Child Protection Division in the Ministry of Gender and Development and of the Women and Child Protection Sections in the Liberian National Police, noting that the former was unable to finance its own initiatives and the latter was inaccessible to the majority of the population.⁹⁵

Experts within the government also shared how confusion and miscommunication persisted around the mission's exit from the country. One of the most significant impacts was that many Liberians reportedly thought both UNMIL and the UN Country Team were leaving the country, leading to reduced public confidence in protection systems, including for children. Furthermore, the closure of UNMIL's field offices reduced civilian access to protection and services, creating a government delivery gap, especially in rural areas. The transition of UNMIL Radio over to the regionally-managed ECOWAS Radio also limited the government's ability to directly engage children and communities in more remote areas.⁹⁶ One interviewee critiqued the mission for not ensuring Liberia had specialized professionals within the government, particularly within the judiciary, who could handle child rights issues when the mission departed.⁹⁷ Another reflected that UNMIL and UNICEF should have coordinated more beyond the immediate term to ensure UNMIL was investing its capital and expertise where it would have the greatest impact.⁹⁸



Traditional Liberian dancers perform during a farewell event for UNMIL in 2018. UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran.

Child Protection in Liberia Following UNMIL's Departure

Nearly 10 years after the mission's departure, UNMIL's impact on child protection in Liberia remains evident through the ongoing work of the government institutions and mechanisms it helped set up, as well as the active network of child protection organizations in Monrovia. Since the mission's departure in 2018, the Liberian government has continued to prioritize the protection of children through the passage of new and amended legislation, such as on domestic violence and human trafficking; the development of new policies, including the Anti-SGBV Roadmap in 2020; and self-reporting on its compliance with child-specific international conventions.⁹⁹ Further discussion of Liberia's child protection mechanisms can be found in the Annex. Civic discourse on human rights, including child rights, also continues to this day, with children speaking out against abuses.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, UNMIL's efforts to strengthen the understanding of civilian communities and capacity of civil society to address these issues have led to an active community of national and international actors working in support of child protection. As one human rights expert stated, "Prior to UNMIL's intervention, people did not talk about female genital mutilation. There was no safe space to talk freely. Now, people can talk; children can speak in parliament. It would be very difficult for any government now to close our space."¹⁰¹

Nonetheless, the country continues to struggle with effective implementation of laws and policies protecting children, as government funding remains inadequate and professionalized human resources within the country are low.¹⁰² As of 2025, out of an approximately \$850 USD million national budget, only about 1% was set aside for social and child protection issues,¹⁰³ with 70% of such funding provided by external sources.¹⁰⁴ National child protection initiatives are thus often limited in scope and duration, with the creation of short-term projects that target a low number of beneficiaries a common phenomenon. For example, President Joseph Boakai launched the National Street Children Project in August 2024, which aims to permanently reduce the number of children living in the streets by 20% over five years (73,317 children); however, government funding for the pilot year amounted to a mere \$379,000 USD, far less than needed.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, local mechanisms like the Child Welfare Committees are expected to operate on a voluntary basis without government funding, meaning that they mostly exist on paper.¹⁰⁶ This reality, compounded with long-standing and structural corruption,¹⁰⁷ perpetuates dependence on the international community and Liberian civil society to maintain hard-won progress and procure related funding and training.¹⁰⁸

Since UNMIL's departure, the government also faces less oversight and pressure from the international community to advance the protection and rights of children, although UNICEF remains an essential aid in country.¹⁰⁹ As a result, related progress remains slow, with the majority of Liberians reporting that the government is doing a poor job of ensuring the welfare of vulnerable children, according to a 2023 Afrobarometer study.¹¹⁰ Rural areas are also highly underserved, due to limited government presence and the concentration of resources in Monrovia.¹¹¹

Furthermore, data collection on children's issues remains disjointed, with assessments often funded by external actors. Without a government-led system in place, government and civil society alike find it challenging to accurately track child protection matters or develop policy informed by robust evidence.¹¹² One example of progress is that UNICEF has helped set up a child protection unit within Liberia's Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), an independent entity mandated to monitor and report on the human rights situation within the country. The INCHR's child protection team is expected to have 3 full-time staff dedicated to children's issues. However, until the government prioritizes greater operational funding to the INCHR, the sustainability of such an initiative will remain uncertain.¹¹³

Compounding matters, the legacy of Liberia's civil wars live on as former children associated with the fighting forces remain without a social safety net. As noted by Liberia's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the 2025 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, "If you look at the issue of drug abuse, the at-risk youth, and all of the social consequences we have today, we can look back at DDRR processes, and look at the fact that we didn't have a longitudinal approach to follow these child soldiers...So today, in 2025, Liberia remains a traumatized society. People are traumatized, and mental health was not addressed."¹¹⁴ Due to the challenges surrounding the DDRR process in Liberia, many former children connected to the fighting forces never received psychosocial support, education, vocational training, drug rehabilitation, or community reintegration support.¹¹⁵ As a result, many former child combatants, now adults, turned to crime and mob violence in the streets, never having learned a different way to survive, while many former girls associated with the fighting forces rely on prostitution to make ends meet. Sexual violence also remains a pervasive concern, including against children, and drug addiction rates among youth are high.¹¹⁶ The children of former child combatants are thus growing up in an atmosphere of insecurity and carry the social stigma placed upon their parents.¹¹⁷ In the words of a former child combatant, "We don't have guns, but mentally, we are still fighting."¹¹⁸



A busy street in Monrovia in 2018. UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran.

Conclusion

Liberia serves as inspiration that, out of the horrors of conflict, it is possible to find peace and stability. And while the country has a way to go in healing from the past, many remain grateful for the role of UN peacekeeping in stabilizing the country and supporting its transition to democracy. Following the devastation caused by Liberia's civil wars, UNMIL helped support the development of national legislation, institutions, and mechanisms that protect children and their rights, some of which remain operational. UNMIL's engagement on human rights, such as through its nationwide radio programs, also helped create an informed and responsive environment to children's issues. Civic exchange on challenges facing children continues today, supported by a community of national and international non-governmental organizations focused on the topic.

Looking towards the future, the UN must continue to assess the effectiveness and durability of child protection activities undertaken by peacekeeping missions, especially as conflict evolves and resources available within the UN decrease. In considering the experience of the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia, the following reflections may serve as ongoing points for discussion in peacekeeping's efforts to protect children.

- UNMIL's efforts to address the recruitment of children were shaped by the Security Council's expectation that conflict would not re-occur in Liberia and that child recruitment and use would stop with the implementation of the DDDR process. The latter, however, did not hold true. When Ivorian conflict parties began recruiting Liberian children to join the fighting across the border, UNMIL adopted a kinetic approach to deterring adults and children alike from crossing over, namely by carrying out patrols. This approach had limited success, with poverty, absence of parents, and the ongoing need for protection, among other factors, driving many Liberian children to join the Ivorian fighting forces. A greater understanding of the main risk factors facing boys and girls could have helped UNMIL develop more effective strategies to pre-empt and stop this phenomenon, in coordination with UNICEF and host authorities. **UN peacekeeping missions with child protection mandates should prioritize the evaluation of the main risk factors that contribute to child recruitment and use within their area of operations (if they do not do so already) and tailor preventive actions.**¹¹⁹
- Although the peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire are widely held up as successful examples of cross-mission collaboration, particularly as relates to asset sharing and joint patrols, greater exchange and coordination on child protection issues could have improved regional efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children. For instance, thanks to the Security Council's authorization of joint mission activities, UNMIL could have served as an observer of Côte

d'Ivoire's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), which UNOCI co-led. This could have helped improve information sharing and activities aimed at stopping the cross-border recruitment of children. **UN peacekeeping missions should consider regional influences in addressing or preventing the recruitment and use of children (if they do not do so already), working with other UN or regional peace operations as appropriate, especially when neighboring countries are experiencing instability or conflict.**

- Throughout its 15 years in country, UNMIL carried out its child protection mandate by disarming children as part of the DDRR process, supporting the creation of relevant government institutions, and educating civilian populations about the importance of protecting children and their rights. In comparison, UNICEF served as the programmatic lead on child protection activities. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that UNMIL and UNICEF could have strengthened their respective efforts by jointly laying out a realistic vision of change across the peacekeeping mission's life cycle and beyond, outlining the medium-and long-term objectives for the UN's engagement in country on child protection. **Peacekeeping missions should collaboratively develop medium- and long-term outcomes for child protection with the respective UN Country Team (if they have not done so already), ensuring alignment between the mission's political engagement and UN agencies' programmatic activities, with the aim of maximizing impact over time.**¹²⁰
- Following UNMIL's departure, the Liberian government did not allocate sufficient funds to child protection within its national budget, leading to a heavy reliance on UNICEF and other UN agencies. Where the UN Country Team did not have the resources or capacity to pick up the slack, child protection mechanisms fell into disuse, such as the local Child Protection Committees. To better prevent this, UNMIL could have developed a plan with the Liberian government over the course of the mission's ten-year transition for how the government could progressively increase national funding and human resources for child and social protection issues, including integrating discussion of child protection and relevant benchmarks into the country's 2017 peacebuilding plan. **Greater emphasis should be placed on host countries meaningfully investing in child protection expertise and capacities well ahead of a peacekeeping mission's departure to avoid gaps in established child protection mechanisms and over-reliance on relevant UN agencies.**

Annex: Liberia's Key Child Protection Mechanisms

Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP)	Child Protection Division was established in the former Ministry of Gender and Development in 2005.¹²¹ The current Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection was created in 2014 by merging the Ministry of Gender and Development with the Ministry of Social Welfare.¹²² The enhanced focus on children, now one-third of the ministry's efforts, was reportedly due in part to UNMIL's influence.¹²³
National Children Representative Forum	Liberia's Children's Parliament was originally established in 2002 with support from UNICEF following a UN Special Session on Children which urged governments around the world to support the creation of children's parliaments, where children could directly inform the work of government.¹²⁴ In 2008, the Children's Parliament was renamed to the National Children Representative Forum. The Forum remains incorporated within the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, with a National Speaker and 30 child representatives from 15 counties (one girl and one boy from each county) meeting monthly to discuss and advocate for the needs and challenges they continue to face.¹²⁵ The government also originally established county-level children's forums; however, lack of sufficient funding over the years means that the county-level forums have been unable to operate effectively.¹²⁶
Child Protection Network	Within the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection sits the Child Protection Network, a coordinating mechanism between the Ministry and non-governmental organizations working on children's issues. The Network was originally created in the mid-2000s and continues to meet on a monthly basis. The Network is used as a mechanism for exchange amongst civil society organizations and for informing the government's approach to child protection.¹²⁷
Child Welfare Committees	UNICEF and supporting partners assisted communities in forming child welfare committees to monitor the situation of demobilized children.¹²⁸ By April 2007, 217 child welfare committees were active across the country.¹²⁹ However, child welfare committees did and do not receive government funding to operate;¹³⁰ interviewees shared that the vast majority of these committees now exist on paper only.¹³¹
Women and Children Protection Section (WCPS) in Liberian National Police (LNP)	The Women and Children Protection Service within the national police was set up by UNICEF, UNMIL police, and the Liberian National Police and became operational in 2006. In September 2005, UNICEF trained the first 25 Liberian police officers in "women and child protection."¹³² By 2012, WCPS had 180 officers (one-third of whom were women) deployed to 52 locations across the country.¹³³ Today, the majority of the population remains unable to easily access the WCPS, with only one to two WCPS officers located within each county's main police station.¹³⁴ WCPS also continues to struggle in retaining top talent, as the government does not provide higher salaries or incentives for undergoing specialized training, with many transferring out to other police divisions where benefits are better.¹³⁵ Furthermore, WCPS is challenged by a low budget, with UNICEF and UNDP providing basic supplies and training support for its continued operation.¹³⁶

Criminal Court E for handling SGBV cases (including for children)	Criminal Court E (known as the “rape court”) was set up in early 2009 to handle the country’s many cases of SGBV, including against children. While this mechanism was intended to fast-track these cases amidst Liberia’s judicial backlog, ¹³⁷ cases are often dismissed due to insufficient evidence (stemming from poor access to law enforcement or medical facilities, or lack of evidence collection training), or victims are pressured by their family or community to settle outside of court. ¹³⁸
Ministry of Justice Child Protection Section	In coordination with UNICEF, the Ministry of Justice launched its Child Protection Section in September 2011. ¹³⁹ The country, however, struggles with handling judicial cases involving children due to the existence of a singular Juvenile Court in country and insufficient judges and lawyers with child protection expertise. Children are sometimes held in the same facilities as adults, due to lack of adequate infrastructure. ¹⁴⁰ In 2022, the government endorsed a five-year National Strategy on Child Justice. And in 2024, the country announced the establishment of its first Child-Friendly Juvenile Court, with support from UNICEF. ¹⁴¹
Children’s Law	The Children’s Law was passed in 2011, constituting the country’s first comprehensive legislation aimed at protecting the rights of children. The law importantly prohibits the use of children in armed or violent conflict and criminalizes the recruitment and use of children in any form of military service. In 2014, the African Committee of Child protection voiced concern about effective implementation of the law, due to the low number of social workers within the country. ¹⁴² Child protection advocates within the country also continue to work on passing an amended version to bring the law into compliance with international standards, such as relates to corporal punishment, as well as ensuring that the Children’s Law supersedes other conflicting statutory and customary laws, including on the minimum age of marriage. ¹⁴³
National Child Welfare and Protection Policy	The National Child Welfare and Protection Policy was approved in 2017. It outlines prevention and response strategies to address violence against children. ¹⁴⁴
Anti-SGBV Roadmap	The Anti-SGBV Roadmap was approved in 2020. It outlines prevention and response strategies to address SGBV, including against children.
Child Protection Unit in Independent Human Rights Commission	Liberia’s Independent Human Rights Commission has set up a Child Protection Unit to support monitoring of children’s issues, with initial funding provided by UNICEF. ¹⁴⁵

Endnotes

- ¹ “Accra Peace Agreement: Children’s Rights,” Peace Accords Matrix, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, accessed January 28, 2026, <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/accord/accra-peace-agreement>.
- ² About 80% of women and girls in Liberia had experienced sexual violence by the time UNMIL deployed in October 2003. [UN Security Council, *Final progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2018/344, 13 April 2018, para. 64.]
- ³ UN Security Council, *Resolution 1509 (2003)*, S/RES/1509(2003), 19 September 2003.
- ⁴ UN Security Council, *Resolution 2190 (2014)*, S/RES/2190 (2014), 15 December 2014.
- ⁵ The Vancouver Principles include a commitment to “share with other Member States and the United Nations best practices and lessons learned on the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the context of peacekeeping” (under *Best Practices*). The findings from this report support implementation of that principle, and other Vancouver Principles, by identifying specific areas where member states and missions can provide ongoing support to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the context of peacekeeping missions. [“The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers,” Government of Canada, last modified August 1, 2019, accessed August 13, 2026, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng.]
- ⁶ For the most up-to-date version of the IDDRS, see United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, *The IDDRS* (2019), accessed January 22, 2026, <https://www.unndr.org/the-iddrs/>. For the Paris Principles, see “The Paris Principles: The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups” (February 2007), https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf.
- ⁷ For the original policy on child protection in peacekeeping, see UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Policy: Mainstreaming the protection, rights and well-being of children affected by armed conflict within UN Peacekeeping Operations* (1 June 2009), https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/peacekeeping/en/dpkodfs_child_protection_policy.pdf. For the latest version, see UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Policy on Child Protection in United Nations Peace Operations* (2017), https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/1._protection_-_3_child_protection_policy_0.pdf.
- ⁸ Human Rights Watch, “How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia,” Tony Tate (2004), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/02/02/how-fight-how-kill/child-soldiers-liberia>.
- ⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia,” Janet Fleischman and Lois Whitman (1994), <https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/c/crd/liberia949.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Amnesty International, “Liberia: The promises of peace for 21,000 child soldiers” (16 May 2004), 11, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/afr340062004en.pdf>; UN Economic and Social Council, *Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Abduction of children in Africa*, E/CN.4/2005/74 (19 February 2005), para. 9, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/540650/files/E_CN.4_2005_74-EN.pdf; and International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia* (2006), https://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2006/106B09_262_engl.pdf.
- ¹¹ Former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025; former child soldier, virtual interview by authors, May 6, 2025; Fleischman and Whitman, “Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia,” 1994; International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 29-44; and Preston M. Varkpeh, “Factors Influencing the Use of Child Soldiers in Armed Conflicts: Perspectives on Liberia and a Way Forward for Future Wars” (Master’s diss., U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2016), 49, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/AD1020404.pdf>.
- ¹² Prior to Liberia’s civil wars, unemployment was estimated to be at 50% across Liberia; however, by the end of the second war, it was up to 80%. [International Labor Organization, *Labour market and training needs assessment: Mapping of Reintegration Opportunities for Children Associated with Fighting Forces - A Report covering Liberia* (1 March 2005), 11, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/labour-market-and-training-needs-assessment-mapping-reintegration>.]

- ¹³ Fleischman and Whitman, “Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia,” 1994.
- ¹⁴ International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 29-44.
- ¹⁵ Tate, “How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia,” 2004, pp. 32; and International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 21.
- ¹⁶ The UN Security Council requested the Secretary-General to implement the proposed MRM in Security Council Resolution 1612 adopted in July 2005. See UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, “About the mandate,” accessed 24 August 2026, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/en/about-the-mandate>. The MRM is stood up in a country once the Secretary-General lists an armed actor for committing grave violations in the annual CAAC report.
- ¹⁷ UN Security Council, *Report of the Security Council mission to West Africa, 26 June-5 July 2003*, S/2003/688, 7 July 2003, para. 3.
- ¹⁸ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Liberia*, S/2003/875, 11 September 2003, para. 11.
- ¹⁹ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Liberia*, S/2003/875, 11 September 2003, para. 9.
- ²⁰ [Accra Peace Agreement, Article XXXI, Vulnerable Groups, August 18, 2003, accessed April 28, 2026, https://pax.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag338_560147822ab3e.pdf.] Prior Liberian peace agreements, such as the 1993 Cotonou Agreement and 1994 Akosombo Agreement, did not address the impact of war on children, including on those recruited and used in conflict.
- ²¹ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Liberia*, S/2003/875, 11 September 2003, paras. 20-21.
- ²² UN Security Council, *Resolution 1509 (2003)*, S/RES/1509 (2003), 19 September 2003, paras. 1 and 3(f).
- ²³ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on inter-mission cooperation and possible cross-border operations between the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, the United Nations Mission in Liberia and the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire*, S/2005/135, 2 March 2005, para. 48.
- ²⁴ UN Security Council, *Resolution 1609 (2005)*, S/RES/1609 (2005), 24 June 2005.
- ²⁵ UN Peacekeeping, “The story of UNMIL: Inter-mission cooperation,” accessed January 22, 2026, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/story-of-unmil-book-inter-mission-cooperation>.
- ²⁶ By June 2014, UNMIL’s troop strength was one-third its original size, with less than 5,000 troops deployed. [UN Mission in Liberia, “UNMIL Military Component,” archived November 3, 2014, at the Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20141103161754/http://unmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3960>.]
- ²⁷ UN Peacekeeping, “UNMIL completes its mandate in a now peaceful Liberia,” March 30, 2018, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/unmil-completes-its-mandate-now-peaceful-liberia>.
- ²⁸ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/426 (2004), 8 October 2004, pp. 9.
- ²⁹ Civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, Liberia, April 29, 2025; Liberian government official and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025.
- ³⁰ Liberian government official and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025.
- ³¹ Prior to UNMIL’s arrival, UN agencies in country had a history of cooperating on children’s rights issues, especially as relates to health and education. [UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict*, A/53/482, 12 October 1998, pp. 10-11.]
- ³² UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.

- ³³ UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.
- ³⁴ UNICEF Liberia, “What we do,” accessed January 22, 2026, <https://www.unicef.org/liberia/what-we-do>; and UNICEF, “George Weah: UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Alumnus,” accessed January 22, 2026, <https://www.unicef.org/goodwill-ambassadors/george-weah>.
- ³⁵ Wolf-Christian Paes, “The Challenges of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in Liberia,” *International Peacekeeping* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 255, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310500066537>; International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 13-14 and 95; and Helen S. A. Basini, “Gender Mainstreaming Unraveled: The Case of DDDR in Liberia,” *International Interactions* 39, no. 4 (2013): 539, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2013.805129>.
- ³⁶ Liberia’s DDDR program was originally envisioned as an integrated framework, pulling together the resources and experience of UN entities, the transitional government, and supporting partners into a single cohesive approach. The basic plan for rehabilitation and reintegration was elaborated in the October 2003 DDDR Strategy and Implementation Framework (co-designed by UNDP, UNMIL, World Bank, USAID, UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA, and World Vision). UNICEF, other protection agencies, and the Joint Implementation Unit (the national body responsible for implementing DDDR) were to develop standard operating guidelines for the interim care centers (ICCs) to ensure a high quality of care and activities. [Draft Interim Secretariat, *Liberian Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Programme: Strategy and Implementation Framework* (Monrovia, 31 October 2003), 19; United Nations Development Programme Independent Evaluation Office, *DDRRP Liberia Lessons Learnt and Summary* (2006), 14, <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/1283>; and United Nations Children’s Fund, “Impact Evaluation of the Reintegration Programme for Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF) in Liberia,” Irma Specht and Hirut Tefferi (2007), 6, <https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?documentID=1133&fileID=33854>.]
- ³⁷ According to official policy, children were supposed to be transferred to ICCs within 72 hours (or in exceptional cases, not more than 5 working days) of their arrival at demobilization sites. [Draft Interim Secretariat, *Liberian DDDR Programme: Strategy and Implementation Framework*, 2003, pp. 68.] ICCs were run by various I/NGOs under UNICEF supervision and standards. For more on ICCs, see Draft Interim Secretariat, *Liberian DDDR Programme: Strategy and Implementation Framework*, 2003, pp. 70; and International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 124-125.
- ³⁸ [Draft Interim Secretariat, *Liberian DDDR Programme: Strategy and Implementation Framework*, 2003, pp. 70; and UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, *DDRRP Liberia Lessons Learnt and Summary*, 2006, pp. 35.] In order to respond to the demand placed on ICCs due to the high number of children seeking assistance, ad-hoc drop-in centers began to pop up across the country by the dozens. Such centers offered children food, clothing, and shelter, as well as counselling, education, and recreational activities when resources allowed, but could only accommodate children for days at a time and did not receive the same level of oversight as ICCs, often leading to mismanagement and poor conditions. [UN agency representative, interviews by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025, second one. For more, see International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 95; and Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, “Child Soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration in West Africa: A survey of programmatic work on child soldiers in Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone,” Guillaume Landry (2006), 10, https://archive.crin.org/en/docs/coalition_west_af.pdf.]
- ³⁹ UN agency representative, interviews by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025, second one; Andrea Tamagnini and Teresa Krafft, “Strategic Approaches to Reintegration: Lessons Learned from Liberia,” *Global Governance* 16, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 2010), 14, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27800786>; Specht and Tefferi, “Impact Evaluation of the Reintegration Programme for Children... in Liberia,” 2007, pp. 13; and UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, *DDRRP Liberia Lessons Learnt and Summary*, 2006, pp. 35.
- ⁴⁰ [UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/695-S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 23; and UN Mission in Liberia, Internal Document, *End of Mission Report, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of the United Nations Operations in Liberia*, Jacques Paul Klein, 1 May 2005, para. 26.] UN statistics on child reunification, which claim that over 9,600 children were reunited with families, are contested – for more, see Human Rights Watch, “Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors,” Corinne Dufka (2005), 53-56, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/westafrica0405text.pdf>.

- ⁴¹ Multiple studies describe UNMIL's DDRR planning process as centralized and non-inclusive of local expertise, largely lacking in baseline data, and not underpinned by needs-based mapping and research. [James Pugel, "Measuring reintegration in Liberia: Assessing the gap between outputs and outcomes," in *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with fighters in the aftermath of war*, ed. Robert Muggah (Routledge, 2009), 73; International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 13; Basini, "Gender Mainstreaming Unraveled: The Case of DDRR in Liberia," 2013, pp. 543; and Liberian government official and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025.]
- ⁴² Former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025; International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 91; and Specht and Tefferi, "Impact Evaluation of the Reintegration Programme for Children... in Liberia," 2007, pp. iv.
- ⁴³ Pugel, "Measuring reintegration in Liberia: Assessing the gap between outputs and outcomes," 2009, pp. 74; "UN brings forward deadline for ending disarmament to 30 October," *The New Humanitarian*, September 1, 2004, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/51221/liberia-un-brings-forward-deadline-ending-disarmament-30-october>; Draft Interim Secretariat, *Liberian DDRR Programme: Strategy and Implementation Framework*, 2003, pp. 20; and United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), "Module 3.30 National Ownership and National Institutions in DDR," IDDRS Framework: Level 3 Structures and Processes (2019), 23, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://www.unddr.org/the-iddrs/level-3/>.
- ⁴⁴ Multiple UN Secretary-General reports, as well as the DDRR Strategic and Implementation Framework, delineated specific DDRR strategies for each target group, including women, children, and disabled persons. [Draft Interim Secretariat, *Liberian DDRR Programme: Strategy and Implementation Framework*, 2003, pp. 7; UN Security Council, *Resolution 1509* (2003), S/RES/1509 (2003), 19 September 2003, para. 3(f); UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Liberia*, S/2003/875, 11 September 2003, paras. 43, 46, and 47; and UN Security Council, *First progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2003/1175, 15 December 2003, paras. 24 and 25.] However, the specific DDRR processes for women and disabled persons were never created, requiring these individuals to go through the same DDRR process as male combatants. [UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, *DDRRP Liberia Lessons Learnt and Summary*, 2006, pp. 9-10 and 48.]
- ⁴⁵ UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025; Tate, "How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia," 2004, pp. 32; UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/695 S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 145; and International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 13.
- ⁴⁶ UN agency representatives, interviews by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025 and April 29, 2025; UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/695 S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 145; and International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 14.
- ⁴⁷ Some "combatants have been reluctant to release girls to transit care facilities, holding them captive as 'wives.'" [UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/695 S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 145.] Commanders also excluded girls from the lists of combatants submitted to UNMIL or confiscated girls' weapons. [International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 14.]
- ⁴⁸ UN agency representatives, interviews by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025 and April 29, 2025.
- ⁴⁹ Although UNMIL's original policy allowed "child combatants, camp followers and abductees who are recognised members of any of the fighting groups" to be disarmed irrespective of their possession of a weapon, access to DDRR programming and assistance was in practice dependent upon the delivery of arms, ammunition, and other munitions. [Draft Interim Secretariat, *Liberian DDRR Programme: Strategy and Implementation Framework*, 2003, pp. 68; UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/695 S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 142; and International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 92.]
- ⁵⁰ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/695 S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 142; International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 80; and former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025.
- ⁵¹ [International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 92 and 96; UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/695 S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 142;

- Dufka, “Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors,” 2005, pp. 53; and UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.] Weapons-for-payment programs for both children and adults have since been discouraged by the UN. Current DDRR guidelines state: “UN supported DDR programmes shall avoid attaching monetary value to weapons as a means of encouraging their surrender by members of armed forces and groups...”. [IDDRS Framework, *Level 4 Operations, Programmes and Support*, “Module 4.10 Disarmament” (2019), 13, https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IDDRS-4.10-Disarmament_16-Jun-2020-1.pdf.]
- ⁵² International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 92-93; former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025; and Liberian government officials, interview with authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025, first one.
- ⁵³ [Dufka, “Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors,” 2005, pp. 53-56; International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 83-95; former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025; Liberian government officials, interview with authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025, first one; and UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.] It is suspected that the TSA payments contributed to the unusually high “speedy family reunification” rates of former child combatants during the DDRR process – see Dufka, “Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors,” 2005, pp. 55.
- ⁵⁴ Specht and Tefferi, “Impact Evaluation of the Reintegration Programme for Children... in Liberia,” 2007, pp. 24; and UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/59/695 S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 144.
- ⁵⁵ UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; Liberian government official and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025; Liberian government officials, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; and former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025.
- ⁵⁶ [UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; Liberian government official and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025; UN fund representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025; Liberian government officials, interview with authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; and former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025.] The complexities and long-term investments required in rehabilitation and reintegration programming have historically been under-considered and are often rushed in favor of other priorities during large-scale multidimensional missions. [Basini, “Gender Mainstreaming Unraveled: The Case of DDRR in Liberia,” 2013, pp. 547.] Among other gaps, many interviewees pointed to an inadequate addressal of child drug abuse — utilized by commanders throughout Liberia’s civil wars as a mechanism of control and a means to encourage children to fight on the front lines — during rehabilitation programming. [Former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, Liberia, May 3, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025; Liberian government official and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025; UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; Fleischman and Whitman, “Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia,” 1994; and International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 101.]
- ⁵⁷ UN Mission in Liberia, Internal Document, *End of Mission Report, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of the United Nations Operations in Liberia*, Jacques Paul Klein, 1 May 2005, para. 27; and “Liberia: Too little money for rehabilitation of former combatants, UNICEF says,” *The New Humanitarian*, August 26, 2004, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://reliefweb.int/report/liberia/liberia-too-little-money-rehabilitation-former-combatants-unicef-says>.
- ⁵⁸ By 2006, a little less than half of children enrolled in the DDRR process had access to reintegration programming. [International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 83-95 and footnote 88; and Kathleen M. Jennings, “The Struggle to Satisfy: DDR Through the Eyes of Ex-combatants in Liberia,” *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 2 (April 2007), 209, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1353331060115080>.]
- ⁵⁹ International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 97; “Accra Peace Agreement: Children’s Rights,” Peace Accords Matrix; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; and UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025.

- ⁶⁰ UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, *DDRRP Liberia Lessons Learnt and Summary*, 2006, pp. 28-29; Tamagnini and Krafft, “Strategic Approaches to Reintegration: Lessons Learned from Liberia,” 2010, pp. 14; and UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.
- ⁶¹ Dufka, “Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors,” 2005, pp. 53; Pugel, “Measuring reintegration in Liberia: Assessing the gap between outputs and outcomes,” 2009, pp. 74; “Liberia: Too little money for rehabilitation of former combatants, UNICEF says,” *The New Humanitarian*, August 26, 2004, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://reliefweb.int/report/liberia/liberia-too-little-money-rehabilitation-former-combatants-unicef-says>; and UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.
- ⁶² Tamagnini and Krafft, “Strategic Approaches to Reintegration: Lessons Learned from Liberia,” 2010, pp. 14.
- ⁶³ Sierra Leone’s civil war spanned from 1991 to early 2002, with the recruitment and use of children a pervasive phenomenon throughout the conflict, including from Liberia. However, with the end of the war in January 2002, the UN Secretary-General did not report any further instances of the recruitment and use of children by conflict parties in Sierra Leone. [UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict*, S/2002/1299, 26 November 2002.] Sierra Leone’s DDR process went through several phases from 1998 through the early 2000s. By February 2004, the government of Sierra Leone declared the process completed, with the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) reporting that a majority of the 6,845 children who had gone through the DDR process had been successfully reunited with their families. [“Disarmament: Lomé Peace Agreement,” Peace Accords Matrix, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, accessed January 28, 2026, <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/provision/disarmament-lome-peace-agreement>; and UN Mission in Sierra Leone, *Fact Sheet 1: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* (December 2005), https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unamsil/factsheet1_DDR.pdf.] With the end of Liberia’s second civil war in August 2003, there were no further reported incidents concerning the recruitment and use of children across the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia by the time UNMIL was established in September 2003. This is in contrast to Côte d’Ivoire’s civil wars (2002-2007; 2010-2011), which resulted in the cross-border recruitment of children from Liberia while UNMIL was deployed.
- ⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Côte d’Ivoire: Government Recruits Child Soldiers in Liberia,” October 28, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/10/28/Côte-divoire-government-recruits-child-soldiers-liberia>; Child Soldiers International, “Child Soldiers Global Report 2008 – Côte d’Ivoire,” May 20, 2008, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/cscoal/2008/en/59339>; and Human Rights Watch, “Côte d’Ivoire: Ex-Child Soldiers Recruited for War,” March 31, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/03/31/Côte-divoire-ex-child-soldiers-recruited-war>.
- ⁶⁵ UN Security Council, *Eighth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2005/560, 1 September 2005, para. 23.
- ⁶⁶ In the 2004 report on the Security Council mission to West Africa, the Security Council noted that “...the end of the conflict in Liberia and the start of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities should end the use of child soldiers in that country...”. [UN Security Council, *Report of the Security Council mission to West Africa, 20-29 June 2004*, S/2004/525, 2 July 2004, para. 52.]
- ⁶⁷ UN Security Council, *Ninth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2005/764, 7 December 2005, para. 27; UN Security Council, *Tenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2006/159, 14 March 2006, para. 9; UN Security Council, *Eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2006/376, 9 June 2006, paras. 15 and 64; UN Security Council, *Twelfth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2006/743, 12 September 2006, paras. 19-20; and UN Security Council, *Thirteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2006/958, 11 December 2006, paras. 12.
- ⁶⁸ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/61/529-S/2006/826, 26 October 2006, para. 55; and UNICEF, “UNICEF Humanitarian Action Update: Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia,” 16 March 2011, 7, https://www.humanitarianlibrary.org/sites/default/files/2013/07/Humanitarian_Action_Update-_16_March_2011.pdf.
- ⁶⁹ UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; and UNICEF, “UNICEF Humanitarian Action Update: Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia,” 16 March 2011, https://www.humanitarianlibrary.org/sites/default/files/2013/07/Humanitarian_Action_Update-_16_March_2011.pdf.

- ⁷⁰ African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), “Liberia Initial Report” (2014), 2, <https://www.acerwc.africa/sites/default/files/2022-06/Liberia-Initial-Report.pdf>.
- ⁷¹ Civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; and OHCHR Treaty Body Database, *Government of Liberia Combined 5th, 6th, and 7th Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Reporting Period 2018-2023*, CRC/C/LBR/5-6, 4 October 2023, pp. 7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FLBR%2F5-6&Lang=en.
- ⁷² UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; and civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025.
- ⁷³ African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), “Liberia Initial Report,” 2014, pp. 7 and 15; Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, “The Protection of Women and Children in Liberia,” Benjamin de Carvalho and Niels Nagelhus Schia (2009), 1, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/117409/PB-01-09-de%20Carvalho-Schia-1.pdf>; Liberian government officials, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; and UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025.
- ⁷⁴ UN Security Council, *Twenty-fourth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2012/641, 25 August 2012, para. 31.
- ⁷⁵ UN Mission in Liberia, “Human Rights Protection,” accessed January 22, 2026, <https://unmil.unmissions.org/human-rights-protection>.
- ⁷⁶ Almudena Toral, “History of Violence: Struggling with the Legacy of Rape in Liberia,” *Time Magazine*, April 30, 2012, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://world.time.com/2012/04/30/history-of-violence-struggling-with-the-legacy-of-rape-in-liberia/>.
- ⁷⁷ Laura Bacon, “Liberia’s Gender-Sensitive Police Reform: Improving Representation and Responsiveness in a Post-Conflict Setting,” *International Peacekeeping* 22, no. 4 (August 2015), accessed January 22, 2026, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13533312.2015.1059285>.
- ⁷⁸ Liberian government officials, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025.
- ⁷⁹ Expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; and UN Mission in Liberia, “Human Rights Protection,” accessed January 22, 2026, <https://unmil.unmissions.org/human-rights-protection>.
- ⁸⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, “Final Report, Volume Three, Appendices Title II: Children, the Conflict and the TRC Children Agenda” (2009), 4, https://www.trcofliberia.org/resources/reports/final/volume-three-2_layout-1.pdf.
- ⁸¹ [Expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.] As concerns the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Children Agenda project, UNICEF served as the main partner providing technical expertise and financial support. [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, “Final Report, Volume Three, Appendices Title II: Children, the Conflict and the TRC Children Agenda” (2009), 9, https://www.trcofliberia.org/resources/reports/final/volume-three-2_layout-1.pdf.]
- ⁸² Expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.
- ⁸³ Liberian government official and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025.
- ⁸⁴ The radio served as an essential way to access rural populations, with the radio transmission reaching 80% of Liberia’s population by the end of its deployment. [Expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025; former child soldiers, interview by authors, Buchanan, May 3, 2025; and UN Mission in Liberia, “UNMIL Radio,” accessed January 22, 2026, <https://unmil.unmissions.org/unmil-radio>.]
- ⁸⁵ Civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; and expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.
- ⁸⁶ Former child soldier, virtual interview by authors, May 6, 2025.
- ⁸⁷ Civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025.

- ⁸⁸ Throughout UNMIL's deployment, the mission remained the only UN entity responsible for comprehensively monitoring, verifying, and reporting on human rights violations in country. It was not until April 2018 that OHCHR established its presence in country following the mission's departure. [UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, "New UN Human Rights office continues work in Liberia," May 17, 2018, accessed January 22, 2026, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2018/05/new-un-human-rights-office-continues-work-liberia>.]
- ⁸⁹ Civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025; and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025.
- ⁹⁰ UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025.
- ⁹¹ [UN Security Council, *Twenty-eighth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2014/598, 15 August 2014, para. 50.] This is despite high sustained rates of SGBV, particularly against children, as noted in the Secretary-General's reports on Liberia in the decade preceding the mission's withdrawal. For instance, in 2013 and 2018 respectively, 70% and 67.3% of SGBV cases involved minors. [UN Security Council, *Twenty-fifth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2013/124, 28 February 2013, para. 11; and UN Security Council, *Final progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2018/344, 13 April 2018, para. 21.]
- ⁹² UNMIL's transition from Liberia had been under active discussion since 2006, with the mission's uniformed strength progressively reduced over time. [UN Security Council, *Final progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2018/344, 13 April 2018, para. 40.] With the outbreak of the Ebola crisis in early 2014, the mission's transition was temporarily suspended; however, once conditions had stabilized, the government approved a comprehensive transition security plan through which it would assume responsibility for all aspects of its security by June 2016. [Karin Landgren, "The Drawdown of the UN Mission in Liberia Resumes," *Huffington Post*, April 29, 2015, accessed January 29, 2026, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-drawdown-of-the-un-mi_b_7126020.] Furthermore, UNMIL's continued transition in 2017 and subsequent departure in 2018 was guided by the Liberian Peacebuilding Plan, which aimed to help the country switch over from peacekeeping to nationally owned peacebuilding. [International Peace Institute, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying: Liberia's Peacekeeping Transition," Daniel Forti and Lesley Connolly (2018), 13 and 14, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/1812_Liberias-Peacekeeping-Transition.pdf.] Through the Peacebuilding Plan, the UN Country Team committed to contributing to the promotion and protection of human rights, with special attention to abuses and violations against children and women. [UN Security Council, *Sustaining peace and securing development: Liberia peacebuilding plan*, S/2017/282, 4 April 2017, para. 39a.]
- ⁹³ Government of Liberia, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, "Annual Fiscal Outturn Report: Fiscal Year 2014/2015," September 2015, accessed April 27, 2026, 11-12, <https://www.mfdp.gov.lr/index.php/economic-management-reports/macroeconomic-and-financial-sector-policy-unit>.
- ⁹⁴ See, by year, Annual Fiscal Outturn reports released by the Government of Liberia, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning at <https://www.mfdp.gov.lr/index.php/economic-management-reports/macroeconomic-and-financial-sector-policy-unit>.
- ⁹⁵ African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), "Concluding Recommendations by the ACERWC on the Liberia Initial Report on the Status of Implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child" (2014), 4, https://www.acerwc.africa/sites/default/files/2022-06/CO_Liberia_Eng.pdf.
- ⁹⁶ Liberian government officials, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; "Liberia UN Mission hands over radio station to ECOWAS," *AfricaNews*, last updated August 13, 2024, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.africanews.com/2018/03/29/liberia-un-mission-hands-over-radio-station-to-ecowas/>.
- ⁹⁷ Civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025.
- ⁹⁸ UN agency representatives, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025.
- ⁹⁹ [OHCHR Treaty Body Database, CRC/C/LBR/5-6, 2023, pp. 5, 15, and 23.] Liberia became a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 during the First Civil War; the country submitted an initial CRC report in 2002 and has since submitted two periodic reports, one in 2009 and one in 2023. In 2004, Liberia signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Optional Protocol to the

Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (though has yet to ratify either) and acceded to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. In 2007, Liberia ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, submitting its initial report in 2014. And although Liberia has since contributed personnel to several UN peacekeeping operations in other countries, it is not yet a signatory to the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. [African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), “Liberia: State Reporting,” accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.acerwc.africa/en/member-state/ratifications/74/liberia>; UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, “Liberia,” Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>; UN Treaty Collection, “12. a Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,” Status of Treaties, accessed January 29, 2026, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtidsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18; UN Treaty Body Database, “Convention on the Rights of the Child: Liberia State Party Reports,” UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=5&TreatyID=10&TreatyID=11&DocTypeID=29&DocTypeCategoryID=4; and “United Nations thanks Liberia for its contribution to peacekeeping” (New York: UN Peacekeeping, 2022), <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/united-nations-thanks-liberia-its-contribution-to-peacekeeping>.

¹⁰⁰ Civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025; and civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025.

¹⁰¹ Expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.

¹⁰² Liberia has a difficult time retaining professional talent in country, as many university graduates and skilled professionals move abroad in pursuit of better economic opportunities. As of April 2025, Liberia only has 93 social workers operating in country, with no pathway to bring on others due to a lack of an accreditation board. [UN agency representatives, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; and civil society expert, interview by author, Monrovia, April 29, 2025.]

¹⁰³ UN agency representatives, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; and civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025.

¹⁰⁴ Andy Brooks, “Investing in Liberia’s Children for a Prosperous Future,” *The Liberian Investigator*, June 18, 2025, accessed April 27, 2026, <https://liberianinvestigator.com/op-ed/investing-in-liberias-children-prosperous-future-andy-brooks/>.

¹⁰⁵ Gerald C. Koinyeneh, “Liberia: President Boakai to Launch Street Child Project on Wednesday,” *Front Page Africa*, August 27, 2024, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/gender-issues/liberia-president-boakai-to-launch-street-child-project-on-wednesday/>.

¹⁰⁶ Civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.

¹⁰⁷ [UN agency representatives, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025.] Since 2014, domestic perception of corruption within the public sector has reportedly increased significantly; as of a 2023 survey, 90% of Liberians believe corruption is high. [Blamo N. Toe, “Liberia gains in anti-corruption index for first time in 7 years,” *The Liberian Investigator*, February 12, 2025, accessed April 27, 2025, <https://liberianinvestigator.com/featured/liberia-gains-in-anti-corruption-index-for-first-time-in-7-years/>.]

¹⁰⁸ For instance, the Women and Child Protection Sections in the Liberian National Police remain dependent on UN agencies for basic supplies and training, particularly UNDP and UNICEF. [UN agency representatives, interviews by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025 and May 2, 2025.]

¹⁰⁹ Liberian government officials, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.

¹¹⁰ Afrobarometer, “Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 614: Liberians fault government performance on promoting child welfare,” Komi Amewunou and Oscar Bloh (2023), <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/AD614-Liberians-fault-government-performance-on-child-welfare-Afrobarometer-5march23.pdf>.

¹¹¹ Civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025.

- ¹¹² Liberian government officials, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 2, 2025; and civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025.
- ¹¹³ Expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.
- ¹¹⁴ UN, “Day 1, High-Level Session 1 – UN Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025 (Berlin, Germany),” May 2025, accessed April 28, 2026, <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k16/k16ai1xbgm>.
- ¹¹⁵ [Civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; Liberian legislative representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025, first one; and former child soldiers, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 3, 2025.] Interviewees reported that many former child soldiers were yet unable to return to their communities for fear of social stigma and potential retaliation. [Ibrahim Bangura, “Liberia’s Quest for Reconciliation After Decades of Waiting,” *Peace News*, March 10, 2025, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://peacenews.com/liberias-quest-for-reconciliation-after-decades-of-waiting/>.]
- ¹¹⁶ “Liberia declares rape a national emergency after spike in cases,” *Al Jazeera*, September 12, 2020, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/12/liberia-declares-rape-a-national-emergency-after-spike-in-cases>; Almudena Toral, “History of Violence: Struggling with the Legacy of Rape in Liberia,” *Time Magazine*, April 30, 2012, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://world.time.com/2012/04/30/history-of-violence-struggling-with-the-legacy-of-rape-in-liberia/>; and OHCHR Treaty Body Database, CRC/C/LBR/5-6, 2023, notes 161 and 212.
- ¹¹⁷ Civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; Liberian legislative representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; civil society experts, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 1, 2025; and former child soldiers, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 3, 2025.
- ¹¹⁸ Former child soldiers, interview by authors, Monrovia, May 3, 2025.
- ¹¹⁹ The Handbook for Child Protection Staff in UN Peace Operations states that, “When developing prevention and risk mitigation strategies for their mission area (or a specific location), child protection staff may find it useful to consider the different types of risks that children face.” [United Nations, Department of Peace Operations and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, *Handbook for Child Protection Staff in UN Peace Operations*, (2023), 74.] The importance of the interlinkage between assessing risk factors facing children and developing effective mitigation or prevention strategies cannot be over-emphasized.
- ¹²⁰ Such objectives could, for instance, be a living supplement to the memorandum of understanding between UNICEF and the UN peacekeeping mission in question, updated every few years or as needed.
- ¹²¹ African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), “Liberia Initial Report,” 2014, pp. 2.
- ¹²² OHCHR Treaty Body Database, CRC/C/LBR/5-6, 2023, pp. 7.
- ¹²³ UN agency representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; and expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.
- ¹²⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Children’s parliament in Liberia grapples with return issues,” Francesca Fontanini, June 8, 2004, accessed 29 January 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/childrens-parliament-liberia-grapples-return-issues>.
- ¹²⁵ Child representative, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; and African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), “Liberia Initial Report,” 2014, pp. 5.
- ¹²⁶ OHCHR Treaty Body Database, CRC/C/LBR/5-6, 2023, pp. 18.
- ¹²⁷ [Expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; civil society experts, interviews by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025 and April 29, 2025; African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), “Liberia Initial Report,” 2014, pp. 2; and Defence for Children International, “Complementary Report to the Initial Report of the Government of Liberia on the Implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child,” Liberian Child Rights NGO Coalition (September 2013), https://www.defenceforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Liberia_

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- ¹²⁸ International Labour Organization, *Red shoes: experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, pp. 126.
- ¹²⁹ OHCHR Treaty Body Database, *Government of Liberia Combined Second, Third, and Fourth Periodic Reports of States Parties Due in 2009*, CRC/C/LBR/2-4, 9 November 2011, pp. 47, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FLBR%2F5-6&Lang=en.
- ¹³⁰ Civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025; and African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), “Concluding Recommendations by the ACERWC on the Liberia Initial Report...,” 2014, pp. 4.
- ¹³¹ Civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 29, 2025; and civil society expert, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 28, 2025.
- ¹³² Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, “The Protection of Women and Children in Liberia,” Benjamin de Carvalho and Niels Nagelhus Schia (2009), 1, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/117409/PB-01-09-de%20Carvalho-Schia-1.pdf>.
- ¹³³ UN Security Council, *Twenty-fourth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, S/2012/641, 15 August 2012, para. 31.
- ¹³⁴ UN agency representatives, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025; and African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), “Concluding Recommendations by the ACERWC on the Liberia Initial Report...,” 2014, pp. 4.
- ¹³⁵ UN agency representatives, interview by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025; and Bacon, “Liberia’s Gender-Sensitive Police Reform...,” 2015.
- ¹³⁶ UN agency representatives, interviews by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025 and May 2, 2025.
- ¹³⁷ Bacon, “Liberia’s Gender-Sensitive Police Reform...,” 2015.
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- ¹⁴⁰ UN agency representatives, interviews by authors, Monrovia, April 30, 2025 and May 2, 2025.
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