

How are children protected by IHL? Is their protection different in IAC and NIAC? Would a child participating in hostilities constitute a legitimate military target? Does IHL distinguish between children who willingly took up weapons and those who have been forced? Are States and non-State Parties similarly bound by the provisions on the prohibition of recruitment of children?

In times of armed conflicts, girls and boys are particularly at risk of facing abuses, being unlawfully recruited, used in hostilities or otherwise associated with armed forces or armed groups; of being wounded, killed or exposed to sexual violence. They are also often separated from their families and denied access to education and other essential services.

Thus, in the event of armed conflict, international humanitarian law contains specific rules aimed at protecting children from the effects of hostilities. In addition, IHL aims to prevent the recruitment and participation of children in hostilities. These rules can be found in chapters on Civilian population and Conduct of Hostilities.

Related new case studies:

- Somalia, the fate of Children in the conflict
- Philippines, Armed Group Undertakes to Respect Children
- Engaging Non-state Armed Groups on the Protection of Children
- ICC, The Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo

Reference case studies:

- Civil war in Nepal
- Sierra Leone, Special Court Ruling on the Recruitment of Children
- Armed Conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea (1980-2005)

Related documents:

- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
- Colombia/ICC, Situation in Colombia, Interim Report

Related notions:

- Children
- Armed groups
- Child soldiers
- Recruitment

To go further:

- Joint Conference on 'Promoting and protecting education in situations of armed conflict'
- SINGER Sandra, "The Protection of Children During Armed Conflict Situations", in IRRC, No. 252, May 1986, pp. 133-167
- ICRC Statement to the United Nations (2014) on 'Promotion and protection of the rights of children'
- ICRC Guiding Principles on 'Domestic implementation of a comprehensive system of protection for children associated with armed forces or armed groups'
- ICRC Factsheet on 'Legal Protection of Children in Armed Conflict'
- ICRC Brochure on 'Children associated with armed forces or armed groups'