



Research Report

First General Assembly
Tackling the use of child labor in military arms
productions

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Introduction

If you were to ask the general public about child military arms production, you probably would hear something along the lines of “I think it does happen, but I have no idea where”.

This is very weird because if you were to ask the general public about **child soldiers**, you would probably hear a whole lot more about it, maybe even examples of places where it is happening. Why is it then that we barely know anything about this horrible issue?

This research report will take a deep dive into the shocking truth of how little is known about child labour in the use of military arms production, and the harsh situations that we do know of.



UNICEF. (2025, June 11). *Child Labor Statistics - UNICEF DATA*. UNICEF DATA.

Definitions of Key Terms

Child soldier: A person employed for the military who is under 18 years of age

NGO: Non-Governmental officer

ILO: International Labour Organization

Rome Status: An agreement signed declaring it a war crime for children to be employed for military purposes

Minimum age convention: Convention declaring it illegal for any child under 18 to do hazardous work

General overview

Since the end of the Industrial Revolution, we have been trying to tackle child labour, and although we, as humanity, have almost eliminated it, it's still around. Just last year, it is said that 138 million children were affected by child labour (UNICEF, 2025). And although the number of children working in the production of military arms is very much unknown, we do have cases that show it does happen. Concrete evidence was found, proving that Russia had abducted teenagers to help test and produce military drones for their war with Ukraine. (Walker, 2025)

Because governments and armed groups commonly hide forced labor and militarized youth programs from independent monitors, there is very limited verifiable evidence of children being used directly in military arms production. Most conflict zones do not allow journalists and UN investigators access, while most factories-operative weapons plants under tight state secrecy-obstruct photo and video documentation of labor practices on their sites. According to Human Rights Watch (2025) and OHCHR (2024), the best evidence available tends to come from indirect reporting, including leaked footage, survivor testimony, or NGO

investigations, rather than direct inspection (Institute for Science and International Security, 2024; RFE/RL, 2025). The combination of restricted access, government denials, and the risk it would put any potential whistleblower in explains the total lack of comprehensive data on child involvement in arms production worldwide.

Major parties involved

UNICEF

This committee in the UN focusses on the rights of children, and has combatted many situations where children were unlawfully used to produce arms and goods for the military.

International Labour Organization

This organisation focusses on the use of labour in a righteous manner, this also includes the use of child labour in military arms production. This organisation organised the **Minimum age convention**, setting the minimum age to do hazardous work to 18. This means it would be a whole lot more difficult to employ children to produce military arms.

Timeline of Key Events

1800s Industrial revolution- Many children employed to work for factories, working long hours.

1914-1918 World War I - Children employed to help produce military arms for; Great Britain, Russia, and Germany.

1940-1945 World War II- Children employed to help produce military arms for; Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and Soviet Union.

1973 ILO Minimum age convention- Document signed allowing only people above 18 years of age to do hazardous work (The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation, 1973)

1989 UN convention on the rights of children (*Convention on the Rights of the Child Text*, n.d.)

1998 Rome Status- Using children to work for military reasons now illegal (International Criminal Court, 2021)

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

1. **ILO minimum wage convention**, at this convention, it was declared that any work with heavy machinery or dangerous equipment is only allowed for people above 18 years of age. Although this convention doesn't directly try to tackle the issue of child labour in the production of military arms, it does make it a whole lot more difficult for it to occur. As now Governments can be held accountable for having minors do heavy or dangerous work. (The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation, 1973)
2. The UN convention on the rights of children. At this convention, the world decided on the rights of children, this also includes the basic rules that should be followed when employing children. This also does not directly try to tackle the issue of child labour in the production of military arms, however it does make it more easy to hold governments or groups accountable.
3. **Rome status**. This is a document signed which makes the use of child labour in armed conflict a war crime. This again tries to solve a bigger issue, the issue of child soldiers. However, it does stop governments or groups to utilize child labour to rapidly produce weapons in a war time economy. (International Criminal Court, 2021)
4. UN Children and Armed conflict programme, this is a programme made to monitor the use of children in armed conflict. This is a yearly report that is released by the UN. So far it has helped to discover many scenarios where children were used to produce military arms or do other jobs for the military. (Lapar, 2016)

Possible solutions

Strengthen legal frameworks

find a way to hold countries doing any wrongdoing accountable. Think of the ILO or Rome Status, updating old documents. Make it easier to bring violators of child labour to the ICC (International Court of Crime).

Improve monitoring

Try to find more evidence of governments or groups in violation. There are a lot of suspicions of governments that have violated rules for production of military, however, we can't hold anyone accountable for "suspicions". More evidence would mean more places we could crack down on.

Further Readings

<https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/UNICEF-25-years-children-armed-conflict.pdf>

<https://www.unicef.org/media/123091/file/25%20Years%20Children%20in%20Armed%20Conflict%20fact%20sheet%20EN.pdf>

<https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/stolen-childhoods>

<https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/children-and-armed-groups>

<https://ihl-in-action.icrc.org/case-study/central-african-republic-release-child-soldiers>

https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/23-00045_C AAC_AnnualReport_Summary_2023_WEB-23Jul24-1.pdf

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/22/russia-using-children-design-test-military-drones-investigation-finds>

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