



## JUSTICE RAPID RESPONSE

# Investigating Child Rights Violations



## THE ISSUE

**Investigating crimes affecting children in conflict zones** is challenging and often conducted in complex environments. The scale of the issue is immense. In 2020, the United Nations reported 25,000 gross violations of children's rights. Too often, investigations have overlooked the experience and perspective of children. This happens for a number of reasons.

A displaced girl takes part in an event at a camp in the town of Maarat Masrin in northern Idlib, Syria on 14 April 2020. ©KHALIL ASHAWI - REUTERS / stock.adobe.com

- **CHILDREN ARE OFTEN NOT SEEN AS EQUAL CITIZENS:** as they are not generally key political or economic actors, human rights violations affecting them can be overlooked.
- **CHILD INVISIBILITY:** while adult men and women can self-mobilize and make their voices heard, children often do not have the same agency.

**Child rights must instead be placed front and centre of investigations.** The specific vulnerabilities of children require specialized expertise to ensure that violations affecting them do not go unaddressed. Impunity for crimes affecting children has long-lasting consequences on the well-being of children and their access to justice and remedies.

- **CHILD DEMOGRAPHICS:** children often constitute a large proportion of the population in conflict contexts.
- **CRIMES AFFECTING CHILDREN HAVE LONG-LASTING IMPACT:** child killings, maiming, sexual violence – including forced marriage and pregnancy – displacement, loss of schooling, lack of access to health care and food deprivation are among such crimes and their consequences.
- **CHILDREN ARE OFTEN TARGETS:** they may actually be subjected to specific violations due to their young age, such as in the case of child soldier recruitment or the use of sexual violence against them.
- **INVESTING IN JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION FOR CHILDREN IS INVESTING IN PEACE:** without accountability and viable social and economic support, children affected by conflicts and human rights violations are likely to be drawn into new cycles of conflict, perpetuating recurring violence.

# OUR SOLUTION

**Drawing on dedicated funding**, Justice Rapid Response prioritizes the deployment of child rights expertise in a wide range of engagements. The inclusion of child rights experts can be a game-changer for impunity when investigating crimes affecting children. It affords child rights violations a higher visibility compared to mechanisms that do not benefit from this approach and support.

# OUR APPROACH

**Child rights experts can transfer skills and knowledge**, as well as change attitudes. They do this by developing investigation plans, field missions, interview preparation and collaborative analysis that take into account a child rights perspective. Justice Rapid Response recommends that child rights experts be included from the outset of any mechanism involved in the investigation of international crimes.

# OUR IMPACT

**Justice Rapid Response deploys child rights experts** to investigate crimes against children committed in the world's most violent conflicts, including those in Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, and Syria. Since 2015, Justice Rapid Response has steadily increased deployments of child rights experts specialized in investigating child rights crimes.

## At a Glance

### COLOMBIA

As part of the transitional justice process that began in 2016, Justice Rapid Response child rights experts have been working with national authorities to design consultation processes with victims to systematically include the perspectives of children, or of adults who were children during the conflict. This will contribute to a strengthened collection of evidence, as Justice Rapid Response continues to support the national authorities in building cases of crimes affecting children.

### LIBYA

In the Libyan conflict, more than 40 per cent of internally displaced people were children, yet their specific experiences have remained largely indistinguishable from broader human rights violations. Justice Rapid Response experts have ensured investigators place a higher focus on child rights, and include these in investigative plans.

### IRAQ

Justice Rapid Response has deployed child rights experts for capacity-building projects in Iraq, where they help strengthen the documentation expertise of a national organization cataloguing international crimes against children.



A displaced Afghan girl carries a child at a refugee camp on the outskirts of Kabul, Afghanistan on 20 June 2019.  
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## ABOUT JUSTICE RAPID RESPONSE

**Justice Rapid Response** responds to requests from international organizations, States and civil society organizations to investigate, analyze and document reports of serious human rights violations and international crimes. Justice Rapid Response deploys human rights and criminal justice professionals from a stand-by roster of more than **700 experts** comprising over **110 nationalities, 90 languages, 59% women** and **45% from the Global South**. Since 2009, Justice Rapid Response has deployed experts to over **300 missions** worldwide.

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