



## COI QUERY

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Child recruitment by non-state armed groups in North and South Kivu</b>
<b>Reference period</b>	January 2008 to 31 December 2013
<b>Topic(s)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Prevalence</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">Recruitment practices</a> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 <a href="#">Mayi-Mayi or Mai-Mai</a></li> <li>2.2 <a href="#">Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)</a></li> <li>2.3 <a href="#">March 23 Movement (M23)</a></li> </ol> </li> <li>3. <a href="#">Consequences for those who refuse to join or desert</a></li> </ol>
<b>Date of completion</b>	16 July 2024
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Cite as: EUAA, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Child recruitment by non-state armed groups in North and South Kivu, 17 July 2024, [url](#)



## COI QUERY RESPONSE – Democratic Republic of the Congo

### Armed Child recruitment by non-state armed groups in North and South Kivu

#### 1. Prevalence

According to War Child, a charity working with children in conflict areas<sup>1</sup>, since 1996 recruitment of children into armed groups has been ‘a significant problem’ in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), especially in North and South Kivu.<sup>2</sup> In 2008, Amnesty International (AI) received reports of ‘systematic forced recruitment of children by armed groups in Rutshuru and Masisi territories’, North Kivu.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009, the UN Security Council reported that the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)<sup>4</sup> documented the recruitment of 554 children, including 26 girls, between September 2007 and December 2008, with 86 % of the cases reported in North Kivu and 12 % in South Kivu.<sup>5</sup> The main armed groups of these cases of children recruitment was the Mai-Mai [also spelled out as Mayi Mayi] factions (32 %), the Coalition of Congolese Patriotic Resistance (PARECO, Coalition des patriotes résistants congolais) (29 %), the National Congress for the Defense of People (CNDP, Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple)<sup>6</sup> (24 %), and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR, Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda) (13 %).<sup>7</sup>

A 2010 report by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers<sup>8</sup> stated that ‘child soldier recruitment and use is an entrenched feature of ongoing armed conflict’ in eastern DRC, where North and South Kivu provinces are located.<sup>9</sup> According to a UN Security Council report published in November 2008, at least 3 500 children were reported to ‘remain in armed

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<sup>1</sup> War Child, Tug-of-War: Children in Armed Groups in DRC, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>2</sup> War Child, Tug-of-War: Children in Armed Groups in DRC, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>3</sup> AI, Democratic Republic of Congo: Crisis in North Kivu, 21 November 2008, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Renamed in 2010 as United Nations Organisation Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONSUCO). MONUC, MONUC Background, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict, 26 March 2009, [url](#), para. 39

<sup>6</sup> The CNDP was established as an armed opposition to the central government in 2006, under the leadership of Laurent Nkunda, a Congolese of Tutsi ethnicity native to southeastern Kivu, previously in command of the rebel group known as the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), supported by Rwanda and based in Goma. CeSI, ‘instabilità del Congo orientale e il ruolo dell’M23 e delle milizie etniche, 7 January 2013, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict, 26 March 2009, [url](#), para. 39

<sup>8</sup> Child Soldiers International, formerly known as the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, is an international organisation dedicated to ending the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and advocating for the reintegration of former child soldiers into society. Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Our Members, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Mai Mai child soldier recruitment and use: entrenched and unending, February 2010, [url](#), p. 1



groups' in DRC, a number estimated to have increased since August 2008.<sup>10</sup> The Mai-Mai groups had the highest numbers of child soldiers, followed by CNDP.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Amnesty International reported in 2010 that between 3 000 and 4 000 children were serving with armed groups in eastern DRC.<sup>12</sup>

Between January 2012 and August 2013, MONUSCO reported 'systemic' child recruitment by armed groups in DRC, documenting 'the recruitment of 996 children, including 79 girls, into more than 25 armed groups.'<sup>13</sup> The same source reported general statistics on child recruitment by armed forces and armed groups, indicating that 5 505 children were recruited between 2009 and August 2013, an average of around 1 800 new underage recruits per year.<sup>14</sup>

Information on armed groups in North and South Kivu can be found in the EUAA Query [Armed rebel groups in North and South Kivu](#), published on 8 July 2024.

## 2. Recruitment practices

Sources indicated that in eastern DRC, while some children were abducted and forced to join armed groups, many others joined voluntarily due to poverty and a lack of alternatives.<sup>15</sup> A 2010 academic study on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes for child soldiers in eastern DRC noted that the experiences of children associated with armed groups varied significantly depending on the roles they played, the conflicts they were involved in, and the duration of their service in the armed forces.<sup>16</sup>

A study conducted by War Child on children who joined armed groups in North and South Kivu, described that life for boys was 'tough'.<sup>17</sup> The study reported the treatment of children by armed groups as follows: 'boys suffer physical hardship, are denied sleep and in some instances, they lack food, shelter and appropriate hygiene. Boys of all ages sleep in the open air, are vulnerable to all elements and have little access to medicine when they are ill. The level of violence towards them is high, as is the violence they commit towards others, including killings and severe beatings.'<sup>18</sup> The same source explained that, in armed groups, boys' roles differed by physical size and strength rather than age.<sup>19</sup> Younger boys, around 13

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<sup>10</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 10 November 2008, [url](#), para. 20

<sup>11</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 10 November 2008, [url](#), para. 20

<sup>12</sup> AI, Annual Report: Congo (Dem. Rep. of) 2010, 19 March 2011, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>14</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>15</sup> IWPR, Many DRC Children Volunteer to Fight, 10 March 2011, [url](#); Pauletto E. and Patel P., Challenging Child Soldier DDR Processes and Policies in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, November 2010, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>16</sup> Pauletto E. and Patel P., Challenging Child Soldier DDR Processes and Policies in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, November 2010, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>17</sup> War Child, Tug-of-War: Children in Armed Groups in DRC, May 2018, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>18</sup> War Child, Tug-of-War: Children in Armed Groups in DRC, May 2018, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>19</sup> War Child, Tug-of-War: Children in Armed Groups in DRC, May 2018, [url](#), p. 43



years old, served as bodyguards, spies, and helpers for transporting ammunition or preparing food, while older boys, around 15 years old, were trained as soldiers.<sup>20</sup> Girls in armed groups were rarely combatants and typically used as wives, performing domestic chores or caring for smaller children, spies, and scouts.<sup>21</sup>

## 2.1 Mai-Mai or Mayi-Mayi

According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, ‘recruitment and use of child soldiers was integral to the Mai-Mai and the way in which they operate.’<sup>22</sup> The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) reported that in certain areas of DRC, communities had established ‘strong links’ with Mai-Mai militias, which promoted recruitment as ‘a means of self-defence.’<sup>23</sup> Sources reported that often children voluntarily joined Mai-Mai armed groups or families encouraged their children to join them.<sup>24</sup>

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers further explained that children performed ‘particular roles within the Mai Mai which give them a particular value to the groups.’<sup>25</sup> These roles included children, both girls and boys, being recruited as ‘féticheurs (healers)’, which involved ‘the preparation and administration of potions believed to confer invulnerability in battle.’<sup>26</sup> They were also used as bodyguards, for collecting unofficial taxes, and for ‘fulfilling a range of functions such as gathering firework, preparing food and carrying water.’<sup>27</sup> The same source described the practice of ‘sending young children first into battle to intimidate the enemy by shouting and screaming, or via the invocation of children’s powers of magical protection.’<sup>28</sup> Girls joining the Mai-Mai armed groups were ‘frequently abducted, raped and used for sexual purposes.’<sup>29</sup>

In 2008, Amnesty International reported that Mai-Mai in North Kivu forcibly recruited and subjected children to violent punishments.<sup>30</sup> In December 2013, the UN Security Council

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<sup>20</sup> War Child, Tug-of-War: Children in Armed Groups in DRC, May 2018, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>21</sup> War Child, Tug-of-War: Children in Armed Groups in DRC, May 2018, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>22</sup> Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Mai Mai child soldier recruitment and use: entrenched and unending, February 2010, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>23</sup> IWPR, Many DRC Children Volunteer to Fight, 10 March 2011, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Mai Mai child soldier recruitment and use: entrenched and unending, February 2010, [url](#), p. 9; IWPR, Many DRC Children Volunteer to Fight, 10 March 2011, [url](#) 4

<sup>25</sup> Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Mai Mai child soldier recruitment and use: entrenched and unending, February 2010, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>26</sup> Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Mai Mai child soldier recruitment and use: entrenched and unending, February 2010, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>27</sup> Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Mai Mai child soldier recruitment and use: entrenched and unending, February 2010, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>28</sup> Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Mai Mai child soldier recruitment and use: entrenched and unending, February 2010, [url](#), p.9

<sup>29</sup> Child Soldiers International (formerly: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Mai Mai child soldier recruitment and use: entrenched and unending, February 2010, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>30</sup> AI, Democratic Republic of Congo: North Kivu: No end to war on women and children, 29 September 2008, [url](#), p. 21



reported that Mai-Mai groups continued to recruit children along Maniema province bordering North and South Kivu.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.2 Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR, Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda)

Sources reported that children recruited by FDLR were kidnapped and forced to join.<sup>32</sup> Some children were abducted during raids and looting or affiliated with FDLR through family members.<sup>33</sup> MONUSCO indicated that, according to children formerly associated with FDLR, living conditions in FDLR camps as 'extreme', lacking food and medicine, where 'forced labour was ordinary practice.'<sup>34</sup> The same source described that children recruited by FDLR were forced to guard the camps, carry 'heavy loads', and engage in combat, while their main activities included 'conducting looting expeditions and collecting taxes by the roadside.'<sup>35</sup> The youngest children mainly served as porters, spies, and cooks.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, children underwent military training that included 'rigorous physical exercise' and weapon handling.<sup>37</sup> According to MONUSCO, ill-treatment was endemic during military training was 'endemic', while '[c]hildren were reportedly beaten frequently with wooden sticks and denied food if they broke the rules.'<sup>38</sup> Although not systematically used in battles, children participated in clashes when camps were attacked or during ambushes.<sup>39</sup>

Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

## 2.3 March 23 Movement (M23)

The Council of the European Union (COEU) reported in a decision on 20 April 2015 that the M23 'has conducted extensive forced recruitment campaigns of children in the DRC.'<sup>40</sup> Data

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<sup>31</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 17 December 2013, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>32</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 12; Pauletto E. and Patel P., Challenging Child Soldier DDR Processes and Policies in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, November 2010, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>33</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>34</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>35</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>36</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>37</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>38</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>39</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>40</sup> EU, Council of the EU, Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/620 of 20 April 2015 amending Decision 2010/788/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20 April 2015, [url](#), p. 6



gathered by MONUSCO between 1 January 2012 to 31 August 2013 indicated that ‘children were either recruited by force (80 %) or through deception (20 %) by elements of the M23 and/or civilian intermediaries both in Rwanda and in the DRC.’<sup>41</sup> In July 2011, Human Rights Watch reported that M23 members intensified recruitment of young men and boys in Rutshuru territory, North Kivu, resorting to forced recruitment when voluntary enlistment was insufficient.<sup>42</sup>

Human Rights Watch also reported that new M23 recruits regularly experienced ‘beatings and cruel or degrading treatment.’<sup>43</sup> According to MONUSCO, the M23 subjected children to ‘harsh’ military training, including nightly runs, ‘rigorous’ physical exercises, parading, and handling guns, for periods ranging from a few days to two months.<sup>44</sup> The main M23 training camps in the DRC were located in the villages of Runyioni, Tchanzu, Nyongera, Bunagana, and Rumangabo, in North Kivu.<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch reported that, between April and August 2011, at least 600 children were recruited in Rwanda and taken to DRC to join M23 forces.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, MONUSCO indicated in 2013 that children were trained by the Rwanda Defence Force in Rwandan camps before ‘being in the DRC’.<sup>47</sup> Recruitment of young people in Rwanda was systematic and well-organized, involving a hierarchical structure of incentivised recruiters who attracted children and young adults with promises of cash, jobs, education, or RDF enlistment, and transported them to DRC training camps via assembly points or transit hotels.<sup>48</sup>

### 3. Consequences for those who refuse to join or desert

MONUSCO reported that children recruited by M23 who tried to escape and were caught were ‘systematically and severely punished and even killed as an example to other recruits contemplating the same.’<sup>49</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, at least 33 members of the M23 who attempted to escape and were captured were executed in 2012.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, 24 October 2013, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>42</sup> HRW, DR Congo: M23 Rebels Committing War Crimes, 11 September 2012, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> HRW, DR Congo: M23 Rebels Committing War Crimes, 11 September 2012, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, October 2013, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>45</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, October 2013, [url](#); p.16

<sup>46</sup> HRW, DR Congo: M23 Rebels Committing War Crimes, 11 September 2012, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, October 2013, [url](#), p.16

<sup>48</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, October 2013, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>49</sup> MONUSCO, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC From January 2012 to August 2013, October 2013, [url](#), pp. 15 – 16

<sup>50</sup> HRW, DR Congo: M23 Rebels Committing War Crimes, 11 September 2012, [url](#)



In a study by Small Arms Survey,<sup>51</sup> former combatants from Rally for RCD Goma — Congolese Democracy Goma (RCD-Goma — Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie),<sup>52</sup> the CNDP, and the Mai-Mai groups indicated that the consequences for desertion varied based on their commanding officers and became more severe with the initiation of DDR programs, implemented between 2004 and 2011.<sup>53</sup> The same source indicated other ex-combatants described ‘extreme’ punishments for desertion, such as public hanging or firing squad executions, along with beatings, whippings, and imprisonment.<sup>54</sup> Armed groups structured themselves with practices similar to those of national armies, to closely monitor lower-level combatants and deter desertion attempts through different tactics, including deployment to distant areas and threats or reprisals against deserters’ relatives.<sup>55</sup>

Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

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<sup>51</sup> The Small Arms Survey is a research project based in Geneva, Switzerland, providing ‘impartial, evidence-based, and policy-relevant knowledge on all aspects of small arms and armed violence to governments, policymakers, researchers, and civil society.’ Small Arms Survey, Homepage, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>52</sup> See EUAA, Country of origin Information Query, Democratic Republic of the Congo: Armed rebel groups in North and South Kivu, 8 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> Small Arms Survey, Demobilization in the DRC, April 2013, [url](#), pp. 1, 9

<sup>54</sup> Small Arms Survey, Demobilization in the DRC, April 2013, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>55</sup> Small Arms Survey, Demobilization in the DRC, April 2013, [url](#), pp. 9 – 10

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## **ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED**

Africa News; Africa Policy Research Institute; Asylum Research Center; Belgium — Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CEDOCA); Crisis24; Congo Research Group; Deutsche Welle (DW); Fédération internationale pour les droits humains



(FIDH); UN — United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United States — Department of Defense, Department of State