EU GLOBAL THREATS PROGRAMME

PROTECTING FUTURES

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN BY ARMED AND CRIMINAL GROUPS

JULY 2026

CONTEXT

The recruitment and exploitation of children represents a critical and escalating threat to national, regional and global security and a violation of fundamental child rights.

Armed and criminal groups operating systematically and transnationally recruit, use and exploit children to shield adult perpetrators from detection, prosecution and punishment; expand illicit operations; and perpetuate cycles of violence that destabilise already fragile contexts and fuel cross-border insecurity.

While children's roles in association with the groups vary, their experiences are consistently characterised by violence and long-lasting harm.

€ 4 000 000

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

3 years
From March 2026 to March 2029

COUNTRIES COVERED
Global, with a focus on Brazil and the Philippines

In the digital sphere, children and youth are increasingly targeted through encrypted messaging, gamified propaganda and manipulative online communities. Traditional enforcement-centric responses are being outpaced by the transnational, adaptive, and tech-driven nature of modern criminal networks. When not paired with broader reform and community support, law enforcement actions can unintentionally increase children's exposure to violence, strengthen criminal influence, and further harm young people that are already vulnerable and marginalised.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

This project aims to **prevent** and **respond to** the recruitment and exploitation of children and youth, in full respect of human rights, gender equality and international law.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To **strengthen** government strategies, policies and mechanisms related to child recruitment and exploitation by armed and criminal groups.
- To **increase** resilience of children in vulnerable situations - and their communities - against recruitment and exploitation by armed and criminal groups.

Legend: This is a cross cutting project spanning across these threat areas: CT/PCVE and Organised Crime

CONCRETE ACTIVITIES

- Conduct and disseminate research on the trajectories of children recruited by armed and criminal groups.
- Organise high level, strategic dialogue between partner countries, UNODC, the EU and other regional and international partners.
- Develop and implement protection measures for children in contact with the law, as victims, witnesses, and/or alleged offenders.
- Facilitate comprehensive training programmes fitting national priorities and context.
- Deliver prevention initiatives in partnership with schools.
- Identify, train and mentor Youth Peace Champions (YPC) in each country and establish a YPC transnational hub.
- Provide support for recovery and reintegration including vocational training and socio-economic interventions.

EXPECTED RESULTS

- Enhanced **global awareness** of the phenomenon of child recruitment, exploitation and reintegration in contexts of insecurity.
- Strengthened **legal and policy frameworks** for preventing and responding to child recruitment, with a focus on effective rehabilitation and reintegration strategies and measures.
- Increased **capacity of multi-sectoral professionals and institutions** to prevent and respond to child recruitment.
- Increased **capacity of children and their communities** to resist recruitment and successfully reintegrate.

EXPECTED ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Research studies** are produced, disseminated and used to inform policy development at national, regional and global levels.
- **Government action plans, policies and comprehensive strategies** addressing child recruitment and exploitation by armed and criminal groups are adopted in Brazil and the Philippines.
- **Children in Brazil and the Philippines benefit** from prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the SCOPE project and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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Funded by
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