

Small Arms and Children

Small arms negatively impact the lives of children because:

- **Children and other civilians are the primary victims of conflict**
- **The presence of small arms interferes with the provision of basic needs**
- **Small arms make child soldiering possible**

Small arms are used to kill and injure children and other civilians in armed conflict. Small arms are used to commit human rights abuses and cause psychosocial trauma to thousands of children. Small arms proliferation often results in massive population displacement, disrupting many elements of children's development process. The presence of small arms may prevent schools from opening or operating, and may leave teachers unable to carry out their responsibilities, limiting children's educational opportunities. The excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms often cause the monitoring of treatable diseases, organization and delivery of health care, and vaccination programs to be episodic. Hospitals may also be flooded with those wounded by small arms, resulting in other health care needs being unmet. Small arms may reduce economic opportunities, resulting in increased poverty and hardship for millions of children and their families.

Beyond their use in conflict, small arms may become instruments for other forms of violence such as crime and banditry, disruption

of economic aid, and interference with efforts to deliver food, medicine, and supplies to people in dire need of relief. In some regions, these surplus weapons may create a culture of violence that traps whole societies in an endless cycle of war. Children are not immune from these negative effects, and it is often they who pay the biggest price, in terms of safety, health, lives, and future opportunities.

Not only are children often the victims of conflict, the weight and size of small arms makes them easy for children to use and encourages the use of children as combatants. A child as young as eight years of age can easily be taught to fire an assault rifle or machine gun. Although the link between arms and conflict is well established, and their negative effects on children clear, countries continue to send billions of dollars in military aid—both arms and training—to countries around the world engaged in or on the brink of armed conflict. Particularly troubling is the arming of countries and groups that use children under 18 in their militaries.