



2.5.2. Recruitment of minors by armed groups associated with SDF

UNHCR assessed that, after government forces regained control of former SDF-held areas in Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, and Hasaka in January 2026, child recruitment in those areas is expected to have stopped.[432](#) Additionally, the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM), one of the main actors identified as carrying out child recruitment, was expected to leave Syrian territory as part of the January 2026 agreement between the transitional government and SDF.[433](#) However, their presence in Hasaka was still reported as of early May 2026.[434](#)

Despite the Action Plan signed between the SDF and the United Nations in 2019 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18,[435](#) recruitment of children by the SDF and affiliated entities continued to be documented as of December 2025.[436](#) The Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict noted that some progress in implementing the Action Plan with SDF was reportedly achieved, while reiterating that SDF needs to end and prevent their recruitment and use of children, in line with the January 2026 agreement to integrate SDF into the Syrian government forces.[437](#)

The SDF, Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), YPJ, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the RYM continued to recruit children after the fall of the former government.[438](#) Among these groups, the PKK-affiliated RYM was identified as the principal actor responsible for the recruitment of child soldiers for the SDF. [439](#) Recruitment often targeted vulnerable children, including those from poor or displaced families or those experiencing domestic violence,[440](#) and families were frequently not told where their children had been taken.[441](#)

According to SNHR, between 29 September and 5 October 2025, at least 113 individuals, including 12 children and several students, were reportedly detained in Raqqa city and in areas under SDF control in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.[442](#) According to local sources cited by SNHR, many detainees were transferred to recruitment camps,[443](#) while activists described the arrests as arbitrary and based largely on physical appearance rather than identity verification.[444](#) Some detainees were reportedly outside the official recruitment age, including minors and men older than 30 years old.[445](#) The SDF denied allegations of forced recruitment, describing the operations as routine security procedures aimed at maintaining stability.[446](#)

In October 2025, a 14-year-old boy was reportedly abducted by the RYM in Aleppo governorate.[447](#) In testimonies published in January 2026, two Syrian minors stated having been forcibly recruited by YPG/SDF forces after being detained in December 2025 while attempting to cross into Türkiye in search of work. According to their accounts, they were transferred to military camps, underwent military training and participated in armed activities in northern Syria. Human

rights reporting further indicated that families of recruited children were in some cases subjected to intimidation or threats aimed at discouraging them from reporting cases to international organisations. Some families reportedly organised demonstrations and sit-ins demanding the return of their children.⁴⁴⁸ In January 2026, an alleged girl fighter was killed in Aleppo while investigations into the incident were ongoing.⁴⁴⁹

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