Background

The Protection Cluster has recorded numerous incidents of forced recruitment, especially linked to the process of cantonment and training of forces, since the signature of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018. The forced recruitment incidents across the country, including recruitment of children, constitute gross human rights violations against civilians and violates the Article 2.1.8. of the R-ARCSS that establishes that all parties shall cease security forces recruitment. Forced recruitment was also reported in instances of sub-national violence and by non-signatory parties of the R-ARCSS.

Recent incidents demonstrate that forced recruitment continue to be a common practice of armed militias and groups. Over the past months in Tambura, incidents of recruitment and forced recruitment were reported in several areas, linked to the escalation in attacks against civilians. In January 2022, two incidents of forced recruitment were reported in Yei. In Bentiu, protection partners reported forced recruitment of youth in Bentiu IDP sites and in Rubkona town.

Between January and November 2021, the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting and partners had verified the recruitment and/or use of 119 children (114 boys, 5 girls) by parties to conflict in South Sudan compared to 62 children (61 boys and 1 girl) in 2020. The complete year statistics will be published in the annual Secretary General's report on Children and Armed Conflict, in May 2022.

The Protection Cluster is concerned with the protection of civilians due to the ongoing forced recruitment and recruitment of children incidents. It is likely that such incidents will continue to be observed until the Security Arrangements are established. There are multiple protection concerns associated with forced recruitment including elevated levels of sexual violence accompany almost all conflicts and many former combatants both women and men have experienced, witnessed or committed acts of gender-based violence. Changing gender norms and identities, combatants’ socialization to violence and resulting continued patterns of aggression pose a threat to security in post-conflict and peace building settings. Special emphasis should be put on breaking the continuation of violent behaviour through retraining programmes. The protection brief outlines those risks and puts forward a series of mitigation strategies. Nonetheless, tailored specific interventions may be needed for different incidents.

Key Protection Risks

Through continuous protection monitoring by protection partners, a range of human rights violations and protection risks were identified related to forced recruitment incidents, including abductions, restriction of freedom of movement. Where violations have occurred, immediate actions have been pursued, including strengthening awareness raising with the communities, upscaling protection and human rights monitoring and local level advocacy for prevention of recruitment and release thereof of those forcibly recruited.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) may face particular risk of recruitment. This is due to reduced social protection and coping mechanisms, lack of economic, educational or other opportunities caused by displacement. Children separated from their families are particularly at risk and may be targeted for recruitment.

The families of those forced recruitment may face protection risks associated with the recruitment, including reduced income, mental and psychological distress, and reduced social links. Families may not report forced recruitment incidents to the authorities or protection actors, either due to not trusting the officials or because of not being aware of the reporting mechanisms.

---

Children previously recruited and who are released may not be accepted back in their communities. Children who are reintegrated may face stigma and rejection from others. This can create extreme psychological distress and children may resort to negative coping mechanisms.

Those who refuse the recruitment may be asked for large sums of money and may be further persecuted by the groups. Mitigation measures should be location-specific, to ensure risks in each cantonment location are identified through a contextualized and localized protection analysis.

Mitigation Strategies and Recommended Response

Observing the ultimate responsibility for the protection of civilians resting with the government of South Sudan, the Protection Cluster notes and recommends the following points of action for mitigating and responding to forced recruitment:

- **Protection and peacebuilding actors should coordinate activities** in responding to forced recruitment incidents, including on establishing the roles of reporting and follow-up on cases.

- The government need to re-establish/strengthen a National Action Plan for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR).

- The effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms of the Armed Forces Code of Conduct and Discipline is essential to establishing clear accountability mechanisms. CTSAMVM/IGAD must monitor and ensure compliance.

- The government should engage with local communities to update them on progress for the establishment of Security Arrangements provisions of the R-ARCSS and to develop two-way feedback mechanisms using Age, Gender and Disability (AGD) sensitive approaches.

- Humanitarian and peacebuilding actors should reinforce advocacy efforts with the government and relevant groups, highlighting the relevant humanitarian and human rights instruments provisions that outlaw forced recruitment and recruitment of children. This includes also reinforcing ceasefire monitoring, verification and reporting, enabling accountability and ensuring de-escalation.

- Protection partners identifying forced recruitment incidents should refer the reports to the relevant stakeholders, to document and investigate the incidents to enable accountability through legal and human rights mechanisms.

- Protection partners should identify vulnerable families affected by forced recruitment incidents and provide assistance and referral to services, accordingly, upholding confidentiality throughout the process.

- Child protection actors, in coordination with relevant government authorities, to map and support programs for prevention of recruitment as well as for the release, demobilization and reintegration of children.

- Adopting a conflict sensitive approach across the whole implementation phase of protection activities in areas with forced recruitment reports is essential for ensuring the protection of the communities and of the protection partners.

- Strengthening protection monitoring system to produce timely and evidence-based analysis of protection risk and violations faced by population concern with the purpose of informing effective programming and advocacy.

- **END**