

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT: RISKS, PROTECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

5 - 9 October 2026

ORGANISERS

This course is organised by the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict, in cooperation with the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law.

INTRODUCTION

Armed conflicts are increasingly shaped by rapid technological developments, including digital platforms, artificial intelligence, surveillance technologies, cyber operations, and autonomous systems. While these technologies may offer new tools for protection, documentation, and accountability, they also generate unprecedented risks for children affected by armed conflict. Children are exposed to online recruitment, digital surveillance, cyber-enabled trafficking, misinformation, and gender-based digital violence, while the use of emerging military technologies raises serious legal, ethical, and humanitarian concerns.

This course aims to equip participants with a multidisciplinary understanding of how new technologies intersect with international humanitarian law, international human rights law, child protection frameworks, and gender analysis. It combines theoretical foundations, legal analysis, and practical skills, enabling participants to critically assess risks, design child-sensitive responses, and contribute to prevention, protection, and accountability efforts. A gender perspective is mainstreamed throughout the course, recognizing the differentiated impact of technologies on girls, boys, and gender-diverse children in conflict settings.

METHODOLOGY

The course adopts an interactive and multidisciplinary methodology combining theoretical analysis with practical application. Teaching methods include:

- **Lectures and expert presentations** aimed at providing solid legal, policy, and conceptual foundations on children and armed conflict in the context of new technologies;
- **Case studies** drawn from recent and ongoing conflicts, allowing participants to critically assess real-world scenarios and emerging challenges;

- **Workshops and group activities**, designed to foster collaborative learning, peer exchange, and problem-solving skills;
- **Role-playing exercises and simulations**, enabling participants to apply legal and policy frameworks in realistic operational and decision-making contexts;
- **Q&A sessions and panel discussions** with experts, practitioners, and academics, encouraging dialogue, critical reflection, and engagement with diverse perspectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. **To analyse** how new and emerging technologies impact children in armed conflict, including digital platforms, artificial intelligence, surveillance systems, and military technologies.
2. **To examine** the relevant international legal and policy frameworks governing child protection, accountability, and the use of technology in conflict settings.
3. **To identify** key risks and vulnerabilities arising from technological developments, with attention to gendered and intersectional impacts on children.
4. **To develop** child-centred and gender-responsive prevention and protection strategies addressing digital and technological harms.
5. **To strengthen** participants' analytical, policy, and practical capacities, fostering cooperation among professionals working on children and armed conflict.

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

The course is intended for an international and multidisciplinary audience, including:

- Government officials and diplomats;
- Staff of international organisations, UN agencies, and humanitarian actors;
- Legal practitioners and professionals working on accountability and international justice;
- Academics, researchers, and civil society actors;
- Undergraduate and graduate students, PhD candidates, and early-career professionals in law, international relations, human rights, and related fields.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course aims to:

- provide participants with a multidisciplinary understanding of how new and emerging technologies affect children in armed conflict
- strengthen knowledge of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and child protection frameworks through a child-centred and gender-sensitive approach
- identify key risks, protection gaps, and accountability challenges related to digital, surveillance, and military technologies
- develop practical, rights-based, and gender-responsive policy and operational responses
- enhance participants' capacity to contribute to prevention, protection, and accountability efforts at national and international levels

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

The course *New Technologies and Children in Armed Conflict: Risks, Protection and Accountability* will be held in **English** from **5 to 9 October 2026**, in a **hybrid format**, allowing both in-person participation and online attendance through a dedicated platform.

The programme is structured over **five full days**, with **morning sessions from 09:00 to 12:30** and **afternoon sessions from 14:00 to 17:00**, dedicated to applied workshops, simulations, and interactive group work.

Sessions will consist of **lectures and presentations** delivered by leading international experts and practitioners, followed by **Q&A sessions, moderated discussions, case studies, and practical exercises** designed to foster active participation and critical engagement. Guest speakers will include professionals with expertise in international humanitarian law, human rights, child protection, digital governance, accountability mechanisms, and emerging technologies in conflict settings.

The course will admit a **limited number of participants**, both in person and online, in order to ensure a high level of interaction and effective learning dynamics. Detailed logistical information regarding on-site participation will be communicated to selected applicants in due course.

- **Standard participation fee: €300 (in presence) – €250 (online)**

UNETCHAC does not cover travel, accommodation, or subsistence costs, which remain the responsibility of participants.

All applications will be **reviewed by the Scientific Committee** of the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application via email.

To receive the **Certificate of Completion**, participants must attend at least **80% of the course sessions** (either live or, where justified, via recordings) and actively contribute to course activities.

Following the course, **internship opportunities within the Network** and **scholarship possibilities for future programmes** may be offered to selected participants.

For further information, please contact: **unetchacadvancedcourse@gmail.com**

To apply, please complete the application form at the following link:

<https://forms.gle/KPHvYYPkY5ixRuwDA>

PROGRAMME

Day 1 – [October 5th]

Setting the Framework: Children, Armed Conflict, and Technology

09:00 – 09:30 *Registration of Participants*

09:30 – 10:00 **Opening Session and Welcoming Address**

Prof. Nadjma Yassari - Director of the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law

H.E. Amb. Luigi Maria Vignali - Permanent Representative of Italy to the International Organizations

USG Vanessa Fraizer, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

Prof. Sophie Kiladze – Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Prof. Ilaria Pretelli, Scientific Associate at the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law

Prof. Laura Guercio, Secretary General UNETCHAC

10:00 – 10:15 *Course objectives, structure, and expected outcomes – Mr. Antonino Pola – Head of Training Office UNETCHAC*

10:15 – 11:15 **Children in Armed Conflict: Legal and Policy Frameworks**

Prof. Cecile Aptel – Executive Director of the Geneva Academy

11:15 – 11:30 **Break**

11:30 – 12:30 **Introduction to New and Emerging Technologies in Conflict**

Cons. Cristina Perozzi – Consuel at the ICC - Legal advisor to the Italian Armed Forces

12:30 – 14:00

Lunch Break

14:00 – 17:00 Practical Session - Mapping Exercise: Technology and Child Vulnerability

- *Group work identifying how specific technologies affect children in different conflict scenarios*
- *Gender-sensitive analysis of risks faced by girls and boys*
- *Plenary discussion and feedback*

Day 2 – [October 6th]

Digital Spaces, Recruitment, and Gendered Harms

09:00 – 10:00 UN Legal Framework and the new challenges coming from the New Technologies

Prof. Ilaria Pretelli – Scientific Associate at the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, Lausanne

10:15 – 11:15 The role of the Office of the SRSG on CAAC and the new challenges in protecting children and monitoring violations coming from the new technologies

Ms. Katharina Thon – Senior Advisor in the Europe Liaison Office of the SRSG-CAAC

11:15 – 11:30 Break

11:30 – 12:30 Recruitment and Radicalisation of Children in Armed Conflict through New Technologies

Cons. Mikiko Otani – President of Child Rights Connect - Former Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021-2023)

12:30 – 14:00 *Lunch Break*

14:00 – 17:00 Practical Session - Case Study Workshop

- *Analysis of a simulated online recruitment case*
- *Identification of legal violations, protection gaps, and gender-specific impacts*
- *Presentation of group findings*

Day 3 – [October 7th]

Surveillance, Data, and Privacy in Conflict Settings

09:30 – 11:15 Data Protection and Children's Rights in Armed Conflict

Prof. Laura Guercio – Secretary General of UNETCHAC – Associate Professor at Link Campus University, Rome

11:15 – 11:30 Break

11:30 – 12:30 New technologies challenges and Gender Prospective

Prof. Jan Marie Fritz - Professor of Social Work and International Studies at the University of Cincinnati; Research Professor at the University of Johannesburg

12:30 – 14:00 *Lunch Break*

14:00 – 17:00 Practical Session - Risk Assessment Simulation

- *Participants assess a humanitarian technology project involving children's data*
- *Identification of privacy, protection, and gender-related risks*
- *Development of mitigation strategies*

Day 4 – [October 8th]

Accountability, Evidence, and International Criminal Justice

09:00 – 11:00 New Technologies and International Justice

Cons. Paolina Massidda - Principal Counsel and head of the Office of Public Counsel for Victims at the ICC

11:00 – 11:30 Break

11:30 – 12:30 Autonomous Weapons and Child Protection, with a specific focus on the jurisprudence of the European Court of Strasbourg

Jud. Vasilka Sancin - Judge of the European Court of Human Rights in respect of Slovenia

12:30 – 14:00 *Lunch Break*

14:00 – 17:00 Mock Investigation Exercise

- *Use of open-source material to document violations affecting children*
- *Discussion of ethical limits and child-sensitive approaches*
- *Reflection on gender bias in data and evidence*

Day 5 – [October 9th]

Prevention, Policy Responses, and Future Directions

09:00 – 10:00 Engaging Parties to Armed Conflict for the Protection of Children

*Mr. Ezequiel Heffes - Thematic Lead, Policy Research at Geneva
International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)*

10:00 – 10:15 Break

10:15 – 11:15 Round table: Policy Responses and International Cooperation

Cons. Mikiko Otani, Prof. Laura Guercio, Jud. Vasilka Sancin

11:15 – 11:30 Break

11:30 – 12:30 Round table: Looking Ahead: Future Risks and Opportunities

Prof. Ilaria Pretelli, Cons. Paolina Massidda, Mercy Hands Europe

12:40 – 13:15 Closing Remarks and Award Ceremony