Ghana Country Briefing

January 2024

Purpose: The country briefings are designed to provide an initial overview of Dallaire Institute countries of focus – drawing on emerging trends related to peace and security, gender, children's rights, and recruitment and use. Paired with the Policy Alignment Tool and the Capacity Building Assessment Tool, the purpose of the country briefings is to support Dallaire Institute staff in understanding and assessing the situation on the ground, particularly as it relates to children, to inform research, advocacy and programmatic work. This report on Ghana will allow the Dallaire Institute to remain informed when advocating for the implementation of the Vancouver Principles as part of the *Advancing the Vancouver Principles in Africa* project in seven sub-Saharan African countries.

This briefing is divided into the following sections:

1. Country and Operational Context
2. Security Sector Approach
3. Children, Peace and Security Context
4. Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers Context

Country Context

Political/Social context

- Since the country's transition to multi-party democracy in 1992 after decades of post-independence military junta rule, Ghana has been lauded as "Africa's model for democracy". Ghana has enjoyed relative political stability for the past few decades with regular elections and a high degree of political participation.
- President John Mahama, leader of the now ruling social democratic National Democratic Congress (NDC) party, was elected in December of 2024 with 56% of the country's vote. His Vice-President, Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang is the first woman in Ghana to serve in the role.
    - Mahama replaces President Nana Akufo-Addo (2017-2025) of the NPP who stepped down from his role as leader after facing national criticism for his handling of Ghana's worst economic turmoil in years, the decision to receive bailout by the International Monetary Fund, and a debt default.
- Ghana consistently ranks in the top three African countries for freedom of speech and press, however the right to protest and right of freedom of assembly has more recently been infringed upon.
    - In the later summer, civil society and youth groups in the capital of Accra sought to protest the actions of Akufo-Addo on corruption and living conditions, as well his delays in signing an anti-LGBT bill into law (Reuters, 2024).

    - Protesters were denied the right to protest by the High Court and later in September, 50 protesters of the illegal gold mining industry were arrested, actions which Amnesty International has called on President Mahama to right.

Economic context

- The country sought financial assistance from the IMF in 2022, following the economic crisis brought on by COVID-19 shutdowns, the war in Ukraine, depreciating currency, declining international reserves, slowing economic activity and high inflation. (BTI, 2024)
    - The IMF will disperse $1.9 billon to support the country's economic recovery as part of the 3-year bailout program. (FP, 2024)
    - This reversed Akufo-Addo's strong anti-aid stance taken during his election campaign build on creating a "Ghana Beyond Aid".
- The poverty level of Ghana lies at 49%, with a high degree of social inequality. The northern part of the country (which happens to be majority Muslim) is more marginalized economically. (BTI, 2024)
    - Poverty levels have decreased with national efforts, however the Covid-19 economic crisis hindered this progress.
- The discovery of oil in early 2000s brought hope for Ghana's economic situation which primarily relies on exports of cocoa; however, corruption and mismanagement has also hindered this growth.

Conflict

- Ghana is considered one of the most peaceful countries in Africa, however internal conflict in Ghana's neighboring countries, especially to the north, have had some degree of effect on the country as borders are porous. (wilson center, 2021).
- The police lack public trust and have a poor reputation. To the north in rural areas, state security forces are less present, leaving traditional leaders to play a key role in maintaining law and order.
- Electoral violence is common in Ghana, aiming to influence election outcomes. The violence is attributed to youth groups within political parties. (Owusu Kyei & Berckmoes, 2020)
- In Burkina Faso to the north of Ghana, non-state armed groups (mostly Jihadist) control nearly 40% of the territory (acaps, 2024). Because of the conflict in the country 15,000 people from Burkina Faso have fled into northern Ghana to escape the conflict. (BBC, December 2024)
    - In response to the attempts of these armed groups to recruit young people into their ranks, Ghana's National Commission on Civic Education is spearheading a public prevention and education campaign. (BCC, 2024)

    - It is known that children are used as suicide bombers and fighters amongst many armed groups in Burkina Faso.
    - The military leader of Burkina Faso, Captain Ibrahim Traoré attended Mahama's inauguration visibly armed with pistol strapped to his waist (Africa News, 2025)
- There are currently no border disputes with neighboring countries, however prior to its resolve in 2021, a dispute between Togo separatists and Ghana resulted in some violence. (Durham, 2021)
- At Ghana's western border is Cote D'Ivoire, a relatively peaceful country post-civil war. Electoral violence in 2020 led 3,200 Ivorians (mainly women and children) to become refugees, many fled to Ghana.
- *Galamsey*, the term given to the illegal small-scale gold mining trade in Ghana has been known to use child labour. (BBC, 2024)

Security Sector Approach

- BTI writes that "Ghana's government has a monopoly over the use of force, and its authority is not in question". As mentioned previously, Ghana has not experienced large scale terrorist attacks, though its northern region remains vulnerable. Instead, Ghana's security apparatus faces significant internal challenges, including rising chieftaincy conflicts, illegal mining (galamsey), land use disputes, and citizenship issues in some communities. (CSIS podcast, 2024)
- The proliferation of small arms within Ghana has also been a cause of concern, adding more anxiety to the regular electoral violence experienced by the country. (UN, 2024)
    - Number 21 on President Mahama's "First 120 Days Social Contract", which reads: "Commence investigative processes to purge state security agencies of all militia and vigilante elements", attempts to right this.

State Security

- The Ghana Police Service (GPS) is the country's main law enforcement agency; however, it continues to be cited as the most corrupt state entity (BTI, 2024)
    - Instances of police abuse are connected to poor training and challenging work conditions.
- The Ghanaian Armed Forces are allied with the west, regularly training with the United States army.
    - They contribute often to regional peace building missions within Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)., ost notably in Libera during 1990.
    - Ghana is one of the top contributors to the UN peacekeeping service. (https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/ghana)

Private and non-state security

- With levels of distrust to the police high, many in Ghana turn to private security companies.
    - UN Working Group on Mercenaries reports that, there are over 1,900 PSCs operating illegally in Ghana. The government is unable to effectively monitor and regulate, creating an increased probability of human rights abuses and misconduct. (https://www.privatesecurityobservatory.org/regulation-and-oversight/national-regulations-and-overview/ghana.htm)

Table one: Overview of Security Actors in Ghana

Key Questions	Yes/ No	Additional Details
Is there an active peace support mission (i.e., UN or AU)?	No	
Are there other countries presently engaged in the conflict?	No	

Children, Peace and Security Context

- 38.2 per cent of Ghana's population is under 14 years old. The country's population is young and rapidly urbanizing. (Ghana Gov Stats.)
- The participation rate of children in school has increased in recent years. In pre-primary and primary education specifically, participation rate increased from 63.2% in 2007 to 84.8% in 2021. (UN SDG stats, 2023)
    - However, government spending on education services has declined from 15.7% of total government spending in 2001 to 12.0% in 2023.
- Child labour, occurring primarily in the agricultural sector which is considered one of the most dangerous for children, is a problem in Ghana.
    - 1 in 5 children are out of school and working. (Right to Play)

Table Two: Child Protection Mechanisms in Ghana

What is the status of the following child protection mechanisms in-country?	Supported by the state (Y/N/ NA)	Additional Details
UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism		Annual report from June 2022 did not list any groups in Ghana under the annexes.

(MRM) on the six grave violations against children		
Paris Principles	Yes	Ghana endorsed the Paris principles in 2011
OPAC	Yes	Ratified on 9 Dec 2014: "Pursuant to Article 3 (2) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts, the Government of the Republic of Ghana hereby declares that the minimum age at which it permits voluntary recruitment into its National Armed Forces is 18. The age limit is prescribed in the Armed Forces Regulations Volume 1, Article 6.01 (1) (c) and applicants are requested to submit their birth certificate for verification. The recruitment into the Army is not forced or coerced and is voluntary."
Convention on the Rights of the Child	Yes	Signature: 1990, Ratification/Accession: 1990 Further details here
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	Yes	Signature: 2003, Ratification/Accession: 2014 Further details here
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography		Signature: 2003, Ratification/Accession: NA Further details here

Vancouver Principles	Yes	Ghana endorsed the VPs (as of May 2023)
Safe Schools Declaration		Endorsed May 2015 Further details here

Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers Context

- There is no indication that child solders are being used in the Ghanaian armed forces.
- In 2000, Ghana hosted the West African Regional conference on war-affected children which launched several regional initiatives for the protection of children in armed conflict. (Child Soldiers International, 2004)

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