Syllabus

CHILD RECRUITMENT & VIOLENCE

Rethinking Prevention, Protection and Reintegration through Collaborative-Dialogic Practices

Welcome!

Every child who is recruited has a story.
Every child who becomes involved in armed groups, organised crime, gangs, trafficking networks, or other forms of violence has a story.

A story shaped by relationships.
By family.
By community.
By belonging, or the gradual loss of it.
By opportunities that were present, and those that were absent.
By people who stood alongside them, and sometimes by those who could not.

Across the world, the recruitment of children and adolescents into violence is receiving increasing attention. Although these realities differ across countries and contexts, they raise many of the same questions for professionals, communities, governments, researchers, and families.

How can recruitment be prevented before it happens?
What helps families continue holding children under enormous pressure?
How can communities become places where children experience safety, dignity, hope, and belonging?
What conversations make different futures imaginable?
And when children return from experiences of recruitment, organised violence, institutional care, or detention, what helps them rebuild trust, relationships, and a sense of belonging over time?

These are the questions at the heart of the **Mutual Learning Program: Child Recruitment & Violence – Rethinking Prevention, Protection and Reintegration through Collaborative-Dialogic Practices**.

Rather than searching for universal answers, this program invites us into a process of shared inquiry. We believe that some of the most meaningful learning does not emerge from experts providing solutions, but from practitioners, researchers, policy makers, community leaders, and people with lived experience thinking together across different contexts, disciplines, and perspectives.

The Mutual Learning Program is therefore not a traditional online course. It is an international learning community built around dialogue, reflection, and mutual learning. Participants from around the world come together to explore one of the most urgent and complex challenges affecting children today while recognising that no single profession, organisation, country, or discipline holds all the answers.

Throughout the program we explore prevention, protection, and reintegration as deeply relational processes. We draw on Collaborative-Dialogic Practices as a way of engaging with complexity, uncertainty, and multiple perspectives. Rather than beginning with predefined solutions or technical interventions, we begin with listening. We remain curious about children's lived experiences, the strengths and struggles of families, the knowledge that already exists within communities, and the conversations that can open new possibilities for action.

This perspective invites a different way of understanding child recruitment. Recruitment rarely begins with the recruiter. It often begins much earlier - in the gradual weakening of relationships, opportunities, trust, belonging, and the protective networks that help children flourish. Likewise, protection is more than removing children from danger. It is also about strengthening the relationships, families, schools, and communities that help children remain connected to safety, dignity, participation, and hope. And reintegration is far more than a child's return to a family or community. It is a relational process of rebuilding trust, restoring belonging, and creating opportunities for children and adolescents to imagine a future beyond violence.

Throughout this program we will explore these ideas together through three interconnected learning modules. Beginning with **Collaborative-Dialogic Practices**, we will examine how dialogue, curiosity, and relational ways of working can enrich professional practice. We will then explore the **prevention of child recruitment through families, schools, communities, and community-led initiatives**, before **reflecting on protection, family- and community-based care, restorative approaches, and reintegration as the rebuilding of relationships and belonging.**

At the heart of this program lies one simple but profound conviction:
Children are best protected when families and communities are strengthened, not replaced.

We warmly invite you to bring your own experiences, questions, uncertainties, and hopes into this international learning community. Your context, your practice, and your reflections are not simply contributions to the program, they are essential to it.

We are delighted that you are joining us and look forward to learning with you throughout this journey.

The Mutual Learning Coordination Team

Our Learning Community

The Mutual Learning Program did not emerge from one organization, one discipline, or one way of thinking. It has grown through conversations among people working in different countries, professions, organizations, and communities who share a curiosity about how we might respond differently to the complex realities affecting children, families, and communities.

Since its launch in 2022, the Mutual Learning Program has grown into a global learning community that has brought together more than **1,510 participants** from **832 organizations** across **99 countries** through **8 Mutual Learning Programs and a range of shorter trainings and thematic sessions**. Each program has been shaped not only by those who helped facilitate it, but also by those who participated in it. Their questions, experiences, reflections, and practices continue to influence the conversations that follow and the direction the program continues to take.

The Mutual Learning Program is currently stewarded by **Wilde Ganzen (The Netherlands)**, **Transform Alliance Africa**, **KidsCare Kenia**, **Instituto Kanankil (Mexico)**, **Hope and Homes for Children (UK)**, and **Danielle Children's Fund Ecuador**. Together, these organizations help create the conditions for an

international learning community where professionals, researchers, community leaders, policy makers, and people with lived experience can think together across different contexts, disciplines, and perspectives.

From a Collaborative-Dialogic perspective, no program is ever truly finished. Each new group of participants brings questions that have not yet been asked, experiences that have not yet been heard, and possibilities that none of us could have anticipated beforehand. In this sense, the Mutual Learning Program is not a fixed curriculum but an evolving conversation. Every new program builds on those that came before it while remaining open to being informed and transformed by the people who participate in it.

We warmly welcome you to become part of this continuing conversation.

Why this Program?

When we begin talking about child recruitment, it is often tempting to begin with definitions, statistics, categories, or legal frameworks. These are important. They help us recognise the scale of the issue, strengthen accountability, and affirm children's rights. Yet from a Collaborative-Dialogic perspective, we might first pause to ask a different question:

What becomes possible when we begin by listening before explaining?

Before we speak about *child recruitment*, there are children and adolescents whose lives have unfolded within particular families, neighbourhoods, schools, friendships, communities, and histories. There are parents trying to hold their families together under enormous pressure. There are communities living with violence, poverty, displacement, exclusion, or fear, while also carrying knowledge, resilience, and everyday acts of care that often remain invisible. There are professionals working across fragmented systems, each seeing different parts of the same reality.

The ways we enter these conversations matter.

The language we choose, the questions we ask, and the assumptions we bring shape what becomes visible - and what may remain unseen.

When conversations begin with categories such as *gang member*, *child soldier*, *offender*, *victim*, or *high-risk youth*, these terms may serve important legal or administrative purposes. At the same time, they can unintentionally narrow our attention. They may draw us toward explaining children through what has happened to them or what they have done, rather than remaining curious about the relationships, experiences, hopes, fears, and circumstances that have shaped their lives.

Collaborative-Dialogic Practices invite us to approach these conversations differently.

Rather than assuming that one explanation is sufficient, they encourage us to remain open to multiple voices and multiple realities. They remind us that no single person, profession, institution, or discipline can fully understand the complexity of children's lives on its own. Meaning is not discovered by one

expert observing from the outside; it is co-created through dialogue among children, families, communities, professionals, and others whose lives are connected to the situation.

This does not mean that "anything goes" or that every perspective is equally accurate. Rather, it recognises that complex human situations rarely yield to simple explanations. Remaining curious about different perspectives often allows us to see possibilities that certainty alone can overlook.

Across the world, increasing numbers of children and adolescents are becoming involved in armed groups, organised crime, gangs, trafficking networks, violent extremist organisations, and other forms of organised violence. These realities differ across countries, cultures, and political contexts, yet they invite remarkably similar questions.

How do children become drawn into these worlds?
What conversations have already stopped by the time recruitment becomes visible?
Who noticed the first signs of vulnerability?
Who remained alongside the child?
Whose voices were present in decisions about protection?
Whose voices were absent?
What relationships became weakened?
Which relationships remained protective?

From a Collaborative-Dialogic perspective, these questions do not seek to replace legal, psychological, criminological, or social explanations. Instead, they invite those different perspectives into dialogue with one another. They encourage us to move beyond fragmented understandings toward a more relational appreciation of children's lives, recognising that recruitment, prevention, protection, and reintegration are never only individual experiences but are always embedded within families, communities, institutions, histories, and wider social contexts.

For this reason, the Mutual Learning Program does not begin by asking *How do we stop recruitment?* Instead, throughout this program we repeatedly return to questions such as:

- **What conversations become possible when we listen differently?**
- **What relationships help children remain connected to dignity, belonging, and hope?**
- **How might families, communities, professionals, and institutions think together rather than separately?**
- **What becomes possible when prevention, protection, and reintegration are understood as relational processes rather than isolated interventions?**

These questions do not offer quick answers. They invite us into a different kind of learning, one grounded in dialogue, shared reflection, and the belief that new possibilities often emerge when people are able to think together across different experiences and perspectives.

Our Philosophy

"I have learned not to try to convince anyone. Efforts to convince embody a lack of respect; an attempt to colonize the other." José Saramago (n/d)

The philosophy behind the Mutual Learning Program is based on Collaborative-Dialogic Practices (Social Constructionism). We would like to emphasize the following premises, inspired by Harlene Anderson (1990).

- Transforming from experts that investigate about and know "how", *towards professionals that do not know and that want to be informed by others, from a position of genuine curiosity towards the other and to what is different.*
- Transforming from professionals that are convinced by what they know or think to know, *towards professionals that are co-constructing knowledge*.
- Transforming from professionals that want to produce changes in other people, *towards professionals that want to be transformed.*
- From having experts that tell us what to do or not to do, *towards an invitation to a collaborative relationship, that allows us to reflect and think together, sharing best practice*.
- *Co-create a space of dialogue and collaboration to inspire and to get inspired*

Objectives

The Mutual Learning Program seeks to create an international learning community where practitioners, researchers, policy makers, community leaders, and people with lived experience come together to explore child recruitment, prevention, protection, and reintegration through dialogue, collaboration, and mutual learning.

Grounded in Collaborative-Dialogic Practices, the program creates opportunities to reflect together on complex realities, engage with multiple perspectives, and explore more relational, family- and community-based responses to child recruitment and violence. Rather than offering predetermined solutions, the program invites participants to think together across different contexts and experiences, recognizing that new understandings and possibilities often emerge through dialogue.

Our invitation for learning

Throughout the program, we invite participants to:

- **Explore the philosophy and key premises** of Collaborative-Dialogic Practices, and consider how they may enrich conversations and professional practice in contexts of child recruitment and violence.
- **Reflect together** on children's pathways into recruitment by listening to lived experiences and exploring the relational, family, community, institutional, and societal contexts that shape children's lives.
- **Remain curious** about prevention as a collaborative process that strengthens relationships, belonging, families, schools, and communities before recruitment becomes a possibility.
- **Explore what becomes possible** when protection is understood not only as removing children from danger, but also as strengthening the relationships, families, and communities that help children remain connected to safety, dignity, participation, and hope.

- **Reflect** on reintegration as a relational process of rebuilding trust, belonging, identity, and participation alongside children, families, and communities following experiences of recruitment, violence, institutional care, or detention.
- **Engage in dialogue** with colleagues from different countries, disciplines, organisations, and lived experiences, recognizing that each perspective may broaden and enrich our collective understanding.
- **Create space** to examine how language, professional practices, institutional responses, and our own assumptions influence what becomes visible - and what may unintentionally remain invisible - in our work with children, families, and communities.
- **Remain open** to being informed, challenged, and transformed through conversations with others, recognizing that meaningful responses to complex situations are often co-created rather than discovered by any one person, profession, or institution.

Content & Schedule

	Introduction session	**Module 1** **Collaborative-Dialogic Practices**	**Module 2** **Prevention of Child Recruitment and Violence**	**Module 3** **Protection and Reintegration**
Unit **1**	**Zoom: September 3 2026**	**Period: Sep 4 – Sep 10** **Zoom: September 10** Philosophy and premises	**Period: Oct 9 – Oct 15** **Zoom: October 15** Drivers and Lived Experience – What Becomes Visible When We Listen?	**Period: Nov 13 – Nov 19** **Zoom: November 19** Protection Beyond Separation: Protecting Children in Contexts of Recruitment, Violence and Organised Crime
Unit **2**		**Period: Sep 11 – Sep 17** **Zoom: September 17** How Do We Generate Dialogue?	**Period: Oct 16–Oct 22** **Zoom: October 22** When the Family Holds – Families as Protective Infrastructure	**Period: Nov 20 – Nov 26** **Zoom: November 26** Protection - Family and Community Care in Contexts of Recruitment and Violence: What Helps Children Remain Connected?
Unit **3**		**Period: Sep 18 – Sep 24** **Zoom: September 24** How Do We Keep the Dialogue Going in Complex Situations such as Child Recruitment and Violence?	**Period: Oct 23–Oct 29** **Zoom: October 29** When Communities Begin to Lead: Community-Led Prevention	**Period: Nov 27 – Dec 3** **Zoom: December 3** Reintegration as Relational Rebuilding - Returning Is Only the Beginning
Unit **4**		**Period: Sep 25 – Oct 1** **Zoom: October 1** Reflecting Processes	**Period Oct 30–Nov 5** **Zoom: November 5** Adolescents at the Edge – The Protective Interview	**Period: Dec 4 – Dec 10** **Zoom: December 10** Restorative Juvenile Justice: Beyond Punishment, Towards Accountability, Healing and Community
Unit **5**		**Period: Oct 2 – Oct 8** **Zoom: October 8** Observatories & Generating Questions	**Period Nov 6–Nov 12** **Zoom: November 12** Recruitment in Digital Times & What Changes on Monday?	**Zoom: December 17** Feedback session – Collaborative Monitoring and Evaluation, what emerged?

The entire program will run from September 3 till December 17 2026. Asynchronous tasks (found on the virtual platform) will be carried out according to the availability of each person. It is estimated that it will be necessary to allocate approximately 5-6 hours per unit (including the Zoom session). All virtual sessions are held at the following time: 13.00-15.00pm **GMT**. (08.00 – 10.00am Colombia, Ecuador and Peru – 07.00-09.00am Mexico) **Please convert to your own time-zone!**

Module 1 – Collaborative-Dialogic Practices

The first module establishes the foundation for the remainder of the program by introducing Collaborative-Dialogic Practices as philosophy to working in situations of complexity and uncertainty. Participants explore key concepts including social constructionism, the position of not-knowing, dialogue, polyphony, reflecting processes, and observatories.

Throughout the module, participants engage with readings, videos, and practical exercises that invite reflection on their own professional conversations and practices. Together, we explore how questions, listening, language, and multiple perspectives can contribute to more collaborative ways of working with children, families, communities, organizations, and multidisciplinary teams. The module combines theoretical exploration with practical application, creating opportunities to experiment with dialogic practices in participants' own professional contexts.

Module 2 – Prevention of Child Recruitment & Violence

Building on the dialogic foundations established in Module 1, the second module focuses on preventing child recruitment before crises escalate. Participants explore children's lived experiences, the relational and contextual drivers of recruitment, and the role of families, schools, communities, and community-led initiatives in strengthening protective environments.

Drawing on experiences and research from different regions of the world, the module examines family strengthening, community mobilization, the protective interview, and emerging challenges such as recruitment through digital environments. Throughout the module, participants are encouraged to connect these international experiences with their own contexts and to reflect on practical implications for prevention within their own organizations and communities.

Module 3 – Protection & Reintegration

The final module explores family- and community-based approaches to protection and reintegration. Participants examine topics including gatekeeping, alternative family care, kinship care, foster care, community-based protection, reintegration, and restorative juvenile justice.

Through international case studies, research, and dialogue, the module explores how children can remain connected to family and community whenever possible and how reintegration can be supported as a long-term process involving children, families, communities, and multiple stakeholders. Particular attention is given to collaborative decision-making, community participation, and restorative approaches that strengthen accountability, healing, and social inclusion.

Methodology

The methodology contains three main elements:

1. Online platform for learning and sharing of materials.
2. Participation in written forums to share our reflections and thoughts
3. Regular and frequent Zoom gatherings in order to discuss and reflect on the online materials.

All participants are asked to review reading materials and videos, available on the online platform **before the Zoom session.**

Also, **before the Zoom Session**, during each unit, the participants are invited to actively participate in a written forum by responding to questions related to the content in order to share reflections. There will be the possibility to share other materials participants regard as useful.

The objective of the Zoom sessions is to facilitate dialogue between the participants about the revised materials and videos. No formal presentations will be held.

Online Platform

This is the link to the online platform: http://platform.mutuallearningprogram.org/
Each participant receives a personal username and password.

Online material and videos

On the Mutual Learning platform, you will find available materials for the online study. The materials include:

- Publications
- Audiovisual material
- Presentations

We warmly invite participants to spend some time with the learning materials before each Zoom session, allowing the ideas, questions, and reflections they evoke to become part of our conversations together.

Forums

The objectives of the forums are the following

- Establish a relationship between all participants and the facilitators
- Share reflections and thoughts between participants
- Create the opportunity to share other useful materials or events that might be interesting.

We warmly invite participants to contribute to the written forum before each Zoom dialogue session.

Zoom sessions

At the end of each unit a zoom session takes place. You can find the link to the Zoom session on the Mutual Learning Platform. The duration of each virtual session will be two hours.

Introduction session

During the introduction session the agenda will be the following:

- Welcome: all organisations related to the Mutual Learning Program and all participants get to know each other and share expectations
- Explanation of the syllabus
- Explanation of the platform
- Questions and Answers

Requirements

Subscription	The subscriptions are open until the maximum number of participants has been reached. Please use the following subscription link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeRG6M3oEVJlrHbwVo96gArv6aIrfsxAHRPo71BS3D8n5nzBA/viewform You will get a username and password.
Participation	Revision of the materials and videos Active and continuous participation in the forums and zoom sessions Punctuality
Certificate	A certificate will be received by those participants that have an 80% attendance rate during the zoom sessions and a minimum participation in the forums of 70%. The certificate will be issued by the consortium members latest January 2027
Costs	A voluntary fee applies to the Mutual Learning Program. Please feel free to support in order to continue this program for more participants in the future.

Contact

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