

## Call for Papers: 11th European Workshops in International Studies

### Title: Untangling Representations, Definitions, and Meanings of Children's Participation in Armed Conflict

Co-Convenors:

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The term “child soldier” summons a variety of stereotypical images related to media discourses, who we understand to be a child or soldier, and where wars involving children take place. Behind this term is a complicated landscape of overlapping legal and practical categories and terms, varying legal and social understandings of children and childhood, and ambiguities about who counts as a child or as a soldier. The same child might self-identify and be identified as soldier, freedom fighter, terrorist, adult, powerful agent of social change, protector of home and family, victim, or a combination of many identities. The image of the child soldier is emotionally and politically powerful, mobilized to illustrate the barbarity of certain conflicts or armed groups, the threat to a more peaceful world, or support for a political cause. Previous scholarship and practice has explored in depth the range of children's engagement in armed conflict, children's agency in doing so and the constraints on that agency, the harms that children face from being involved in organized violence, the impacts of child soldiering on conflict dynamics, gendered aspects and intersectional experiences of soldiering, and more. However, conflict dynamics and children's involvement continually shift and evolve, new methods of participation are opened by new technologies and evolving strategies, and previous scholarship draws on an unclear range of definitions and meanings of child soldiering.

This fuzzy and fractured representational field contributes to limiting effective action on reducing the recruitment and use of children through: research and data collection that lacks clarity or comparability; missed opportunities for developing improved understanding of children's engagement in organized violence in diverse contexts; providing legal loopholes for the legitimisation of child recruitment and creating potential gaps and problems in practice in preventing children being recruited or involved in armed conflict. Working towards clear, unambiguous and more comprehensive and nuanced understandings of children's participation in armed conflict will improve scholarship in this area and provide better knowledge for practitioners and policymakers to work more proactively and preventatively, moving beyond a narrow focus on children's vulnerability, dependency, and lack of agency. Understanding children not just as victims in need of protection but also as political actors with a stake in present and future social and political systems can contribute to realizing a better world for all.

Drawing on this basis, we invite contributions to the workshop in the following areas:

- Challenges and effects of existing representations of children's participation in armed conflict beyond a negative focus on violence;
- Children's own experiences of and views on their participation in armed conflict;
- Historical and present shifts in children's participation in conflict and how it is represented.

We encourage early career researchers and scholars from the Global South to submit their proposals.