



CHILDREN and ARMED CONFLICT ANNUAL REPORT of the SECRETARY-GENERAL

SUMMARY · 2024

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Children affected by grave violations TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS 2024

The violence against children in armed conflict reached unprecedented levels in 2024, with children bearing the brunt of relentless hostilities, indiscriminate attacks, disregard for ceasefires and peace agreements, and deepening humanitarian crises.

Warfare and armed conflict strategies included targeted attacks on children, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and the systematic exploitation of children in hostilities and for military and sexual purposes, with a blatant disregard for international law and the rights and special protections of children by parties to conflict.

The full report (A/79/878-S/2025/247) is available at <https://docs.un.org>.

Grave violations¹

41,370 grave violations against children: Of these, 5,149 occurred prior to 2024 but were only verified in 2024.

Situations with the highest number of children affected: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Nigeria and Haiti.

22,495 children affected by recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and abduction. The number of children victims of multiple grave violations (3,137) increased by 17 per cent through the convergence of abduction, recruitment and use, and sexual violence, representing an alarming escalation in brutality.

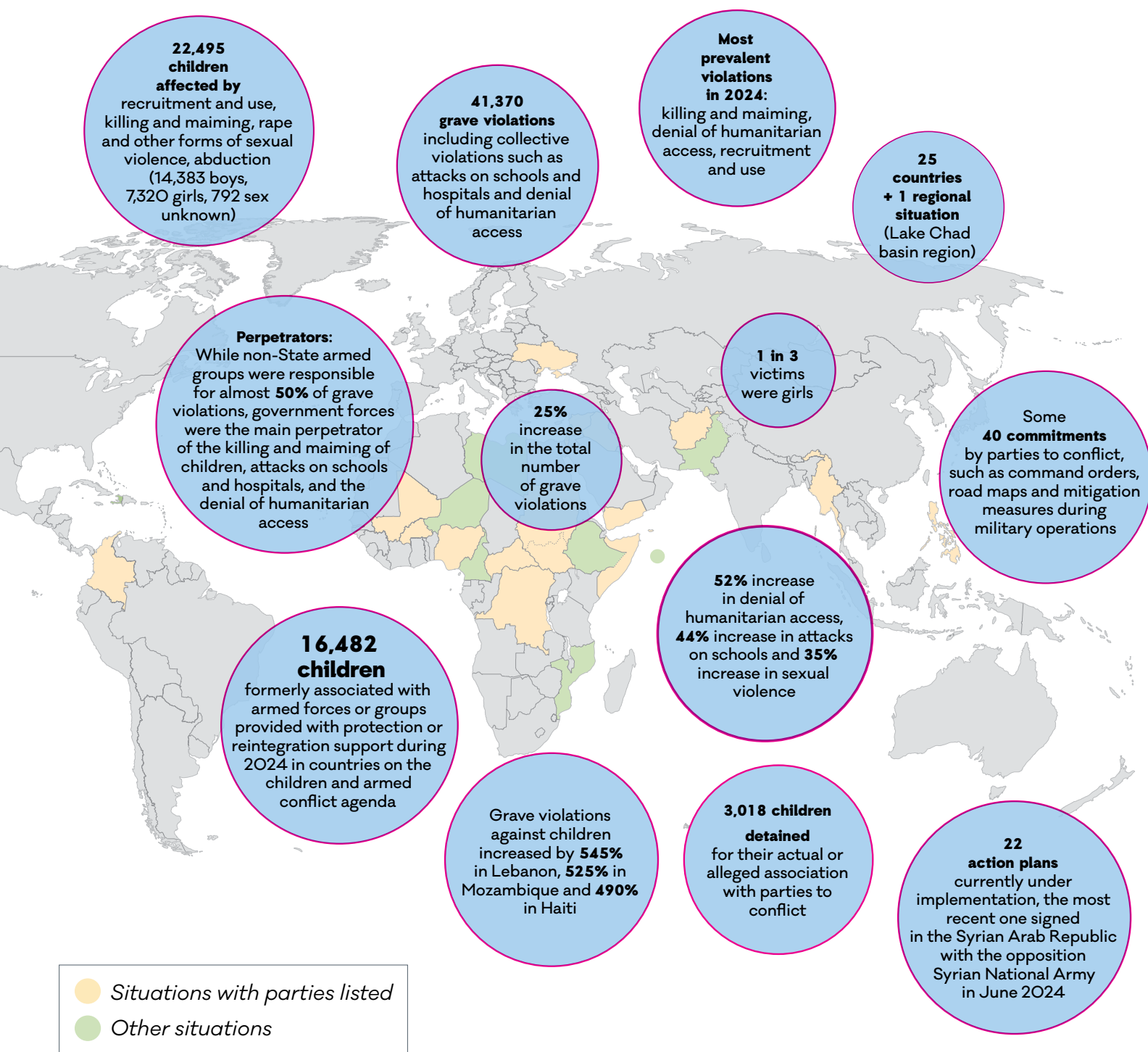
Highest numbers of verified violations: Killing (4,676) and maiming (7,291) affected a staggering 11,967 children, while there were 7,906 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, including attacks on humanitarian personnel and 7,402 cases of recruitment and use of children for, in and by armed conflict.

¹ Numbers include verified violations committed prior to 2024 and verified at a later date in 2024.



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Children and armed conflict: 2024 at a glance



NOTE: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the Parties. The final boundary between the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

⦿ **Recruitment and use: 7,402 children recruited and used**

Situations with the highest numbers of children recruited and used: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Myanmar.



⦿ **Killing and maiming: 11,967 children killed or maimed**

Situations with the highest numbers of children killed and maimed: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Sudan, Myanmar, Burkina Faso and the Syrian Arab Republic.



⦿ **Rape and other forms of sexual violence: 1,982 children victims**

Situations with the highest numbers of children raped and sexually abused: Haiti, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Central African Republic.



⦿ **Abductions: 4,573 children abducted**

Situations with the highest numbers of children abducted: Nigeria, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Burkina Faso.



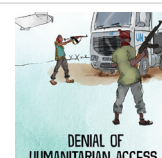
⦿ **Attacks on schools and hospitals: 2,374 incidents (1,265 schools, 1,109 hospitals)**

Most affected situations: Ukraine, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Haiti, Afghanistan and Myanmar.



⦿ **Denial of humanitarian access:² 7,906 incidents**

Most affected situations: the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Afghanistan, Haiti, Ukraine and Ethiopia.



OTHER CONCERNING TRENDS AFFECTING CHILDREN

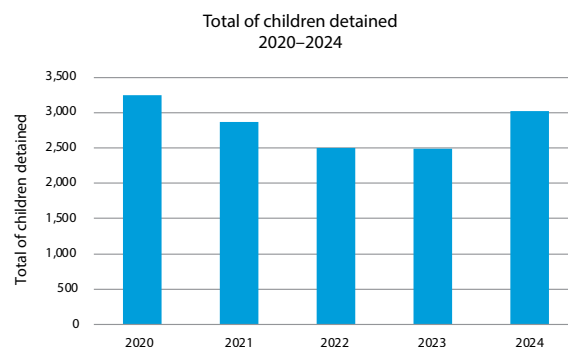
Detention: At least 3,018 children were deprived of liberty for their actual or alleged association with armed parties to conflict, including those that are currently under sanctions enacted by the Security Council. The detention of children for alleged or actual association with parties to conflict makes them particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights, including torture and sexual violence. The detention of children should be used only as a last resort and for the shortest period. Age-appropriate alternatives to detention should be prioritized and reintegration support provided.

Situations with the highest numbers of children in detention: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Nigeria, Iraq, Somalia and Libya.

Military use of schools and hospitals: A 25 per cent decrease in the military use of schools

and hospitals by armed forces and armed groups was verified. Most of the 303 cases were verified in Myanmar, Yemen, Colombia, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Millions of children were out of school in conflict situations because of insecurity, attacks on schools or related personnel, or the military use of schools. In the Sudan, for example, over 17 million children are currently out of school. In Afghanistan, 2.2 million girls are deprived of their right to education three years after the ban on girls' secondary education.



² Not a listable violation.



Measures to better protect children in situations of armed conflict

Sustained engagement between the United Nations and parties to conflict throughout 2024 has led to the adoption of measures aimed at providing better protection for children affected by armed conflict in several country situations. This engagement, facilitated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, her Office and United Nations personnel on the ground, included bilateral dialogues, capacity-building initiatives, advocacy campaigns and public awareness, among others.

"Every child released should be seen as a survivor and as an agent of change, capable of helping build lasting peace in their community and country. We cannot abandon these children; ensuring they have access to meaningful reintegration is essential. Our responsibility to them must not end."

Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Advocacy for increased resources for reintegration, enhanced child protection capacities, and fortified monitoring and reporting mechanisms was done in line with the most recent Security Council resolution 2764 (2024). The fourteenth Security Council resolution on children and armed conflict emphasizes the need for sustainable child protection capacities in conflict and post-conflict settings, sending an important message at a time of increasing transitions to or from United Nations peace operations.

Such engagement produced, among others, the following gains for children in 2024:

- ① **16,482 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups** were provided with protection or reintegration support during 2024 in countries on the children and armed conflict agenda, including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and South Sudan.
- ② The **repatriation of 1,529 Iraqi children** from the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic.

Action plans and other commitments signed with parties to conflict

- ⊙ **Syrian Arab Republic:** Signature of an action plan in June 2024 to end and prevent the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children by the opposition Syrian National Army, including Ahrar al-Sham and Army of Islam
- ⊙ Unilateral declarations to end and prevent grave violations against children by five armed groups commanders in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, leading to the release of 350 children

Prevention and accountability

- ⊙ Signature of handover protocols by the Governments of the **Central African Republic**, **Haiti** and **Yemen** for the transfer of children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors
- ⊙ Establishment of a commission of inquiry in the **Central African Republic** on violations of international law, including grave violations against children, committed in Haut-Mbomou Prefecture
- ⊙ Indictment in **Colombia** by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace of former FARC-EP commanders for war crimes, including recruitment and use and sexual violence against children
- ⊙ Continued prosecution and conviction of perpetrators of grave violations against children, including for recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**
- ⊙ Establishment of the National Directorate of Justice for Children in **Mali**
- ⊙ Establishment of an investigative committee for accountability for grave violations by the Federal Government of **Somalia**
- ⊙ Extension of the joint prevention plan with the Government of **Ukraine** to prevent grave violations against children
- ⊙ Exchange of letters with **Pakistan** and the **Philippines** on prevention measures to better protect children

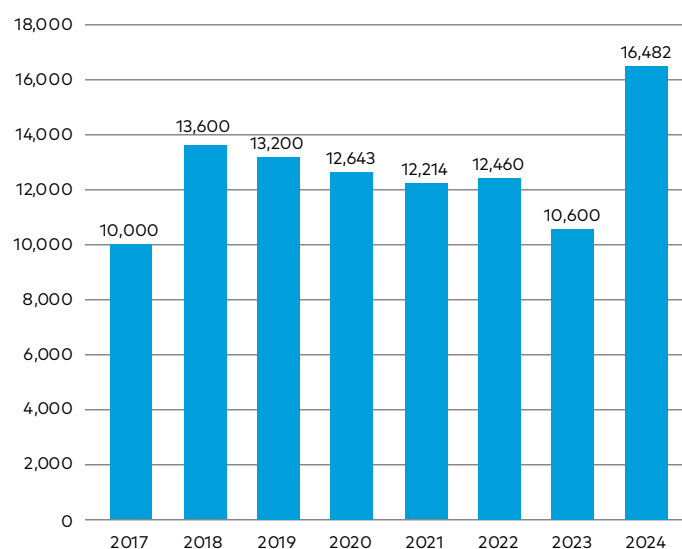
National legislation and policies

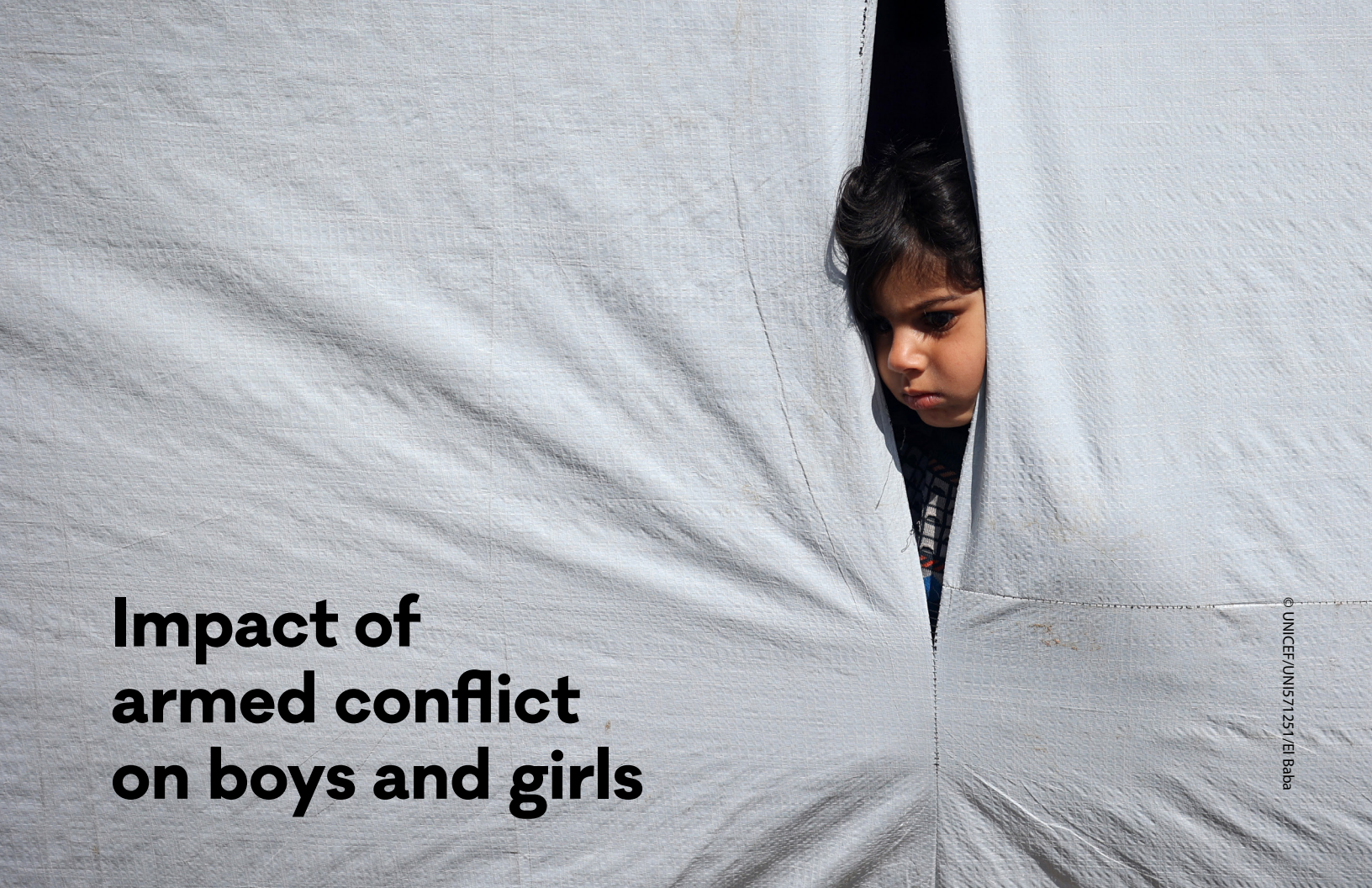
- ⊙ **Chad (as part of the Lake Chad basin region):** Integration of child protection into the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process
- ⊙ **Niger:** Development of a DDR strategy that includes the rights of children
- ⊙ **Somalia:** Amendment to the provisional Constitution of Somalia defining the age of a child as below 18 years

Training and capacity-building

- ⊙ Collaboration with the United Nations for capacity-building of the Haitian National Police and the Multinational Security Support mission on child protection in **Haiti**
- ⊙ Child protection training for **Mozambique** armed forces
- ⊙ Continuous training of Civilian Joint Task Force troops in **Nigeria**
- ⊙ Integration of child protection into military training by the Federal Government of **Somalia**

Number of children formerly associated with armed forces or groups that received protection or reintegration support



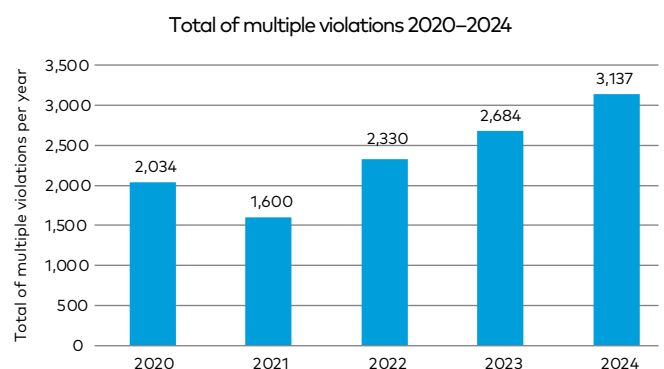


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Impact of armed conflict on boys and girls

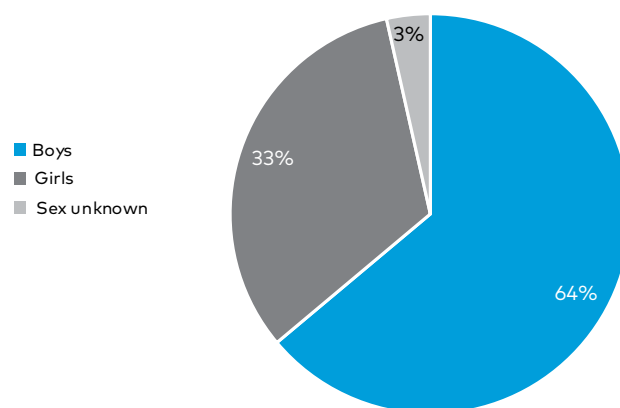
Reliable information on the nature, scope and push factors of grave violations against children in armed conflict is essential. Factors including gender, age, ethnicity, race and disability played crucial roles in adversely shaping the vulnerability of children to grave violations. There is a need to find synergies in better understanding the multifaceted challenges of today. Research studies, papers and guidance notes, notably on the denial of humanitarian access, gender, children with disabilities and climate security, were published in recent years to better inform prevention and response strategies.

Grave violations rarely happen in a silo, and children living in armed conflict can be affected by more than one violation. For example, a child can be abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use or sexual violence, or a child recruited and used can be maimed during association with a party to conflict.



- ⦿ In 2024, at least **7,320 girls** were affected by grave violations, compared with **14,383 boys**.
- ⦿ **Girls** were mostly affected by **killing and maiming**, followed by **recruitment and use, rape and other forms of sexual violence**, and **abduction**.
- ⦿ Grave violations against **girls** showed increases for **all individual violations**, namely recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and abduction.
- ⦿ In 2024, the number of **boys** who were victims of **rape and other forms of sexual violence increased by 125 per cent**. Such violence, both for girls and boys, continued to be vastly underreported owing to stigmatization, fear of reprisals, harmful social norms, the absence or lack of access to services, impunity and safety concerns.
- ⦿ The number of **children victims of multiple grave violations increased by 17 per cent**, through the convergence of abduction, recruitment and sexual violence, representing an alarming escalation in brutality.
- ⦿ In **Nigeria** and **Cameroon**, girls were more affected by all individual violations than boys were.
- ⦿ **Whereby almost 90 per cent of children recruited and used in 2023 were boys, in 2024, just over one third of children recruited were girls**. Sex, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, geopolitical location and economic status are primary determinants of a child's risk of recruitment, how they are exploited and the violations they experience.
- ⦿ **Over 95 per cent of sexual violence was perpetrated against girls**. Sexual violence in conflict is the most

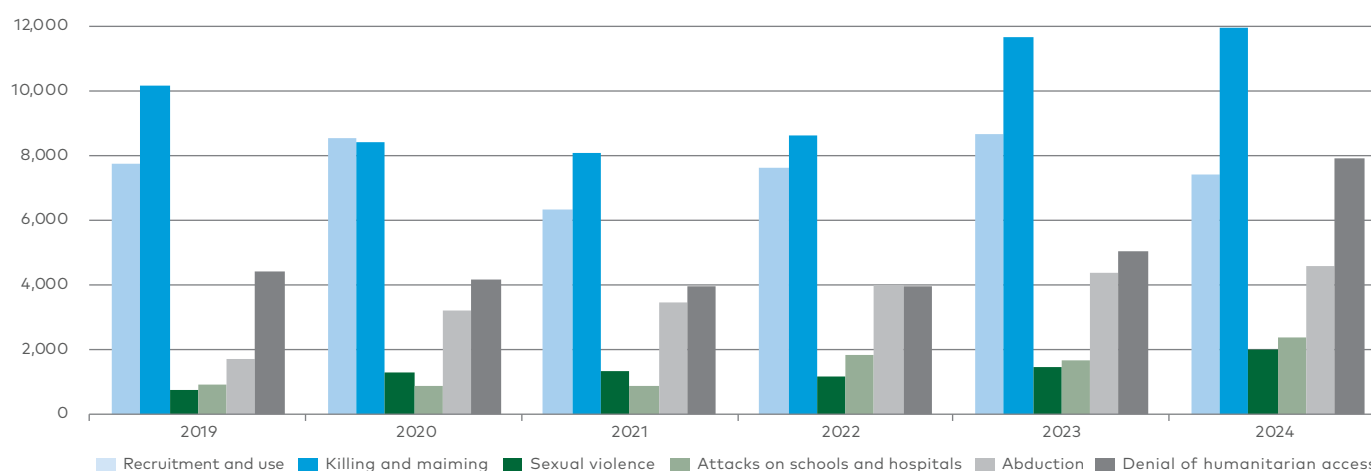
Gender disaggregation for total of grave violations 2024



underreported grave violation for both girls and boys owing to stigma and lack of legal protection among many factors. Girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage. Boys too are victims of sexual violence, although it is underreported.

- ⦿ **Almost 40 per cent of abductions affected girls**. The abduction of children in situations of armed conflict is mostly perpetrated by non-State armed groups and occurs in a variety of settings, including from children's homes, schools and public spaces, often preceding or following other abuses and violations.
- ⦿ **Over 30 per cent of killing and maiming affected girls**. Parties to conflict continue to deploy landmines and other explosive ordnance and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including in dense urban areas. These cause widespread destruction, leaving children maimed, mutilated and scarred by serious, permanent and disabling injuries.

Number of grave violations per year



Behind the numbers



Children affected by armed conflict are the silent casualties of a world torn by violence. They bear the brunt of unimaginable suffering, robbed of the innocence that should define their childhood. Their education is disrupted, their homes destroyed and their futures shattered. They often face displacement, recruitment, abuses, maiming and sometimes death. The scars they carry, both visible and hidden, serve as a haunting reminder of the atrocities they endured.

Children are among the most vulnerable in times of conflict. In recent years, the number of children affected by grave violations has sharply increased, reaching unprecedentedly disturbing numbers. While the increase in the number of conflict situations on the children and armed conflict agenda can partially explain such a tragic trend, persistent and blatant patterns of grave violations and a lack of respect for the special protection afforded to children have harmed children and impaired the protection they deserve in times of peace, as in times of war, and made children everywhere more vulnerable to conflict.

In **Colombia**, Indigenous children and children of African descent continued to be disproportionately impacted by grave violations, constituting almost half of the total of children affected by grave violations.



Recruitment and use

In **Nigeria**, 43 children from Ngala, who escaped from Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad and Islamic State West Africa Province, reported that their captors used them in support roles while they were in captivity.

In **South Sudan**, in Western Equatoria, seven boys aged 15 to 17 were abducted on their way home at gun- and knifepoint by a group of armed men, forcing them to wear uniforms and caps and join the group. One of the boys escaped and returned to his family.

Killing and maiming

In the **Sudan**, Sudanese armed forces airstrikes hit a school in South Kordofan in a densely populated area and an area for many civilian activities, including fetching water and raising livestock. The attack killed 10 children and maimed 44 others.



In **Myanmar**, the Myanmar armed forces launched several rounds of airstrikes by jet fighters on a middle school in Kayah State, killing 4 boys and severely injuring 23 children while the school buildings were destroyed.

In **Ukraine**, a large-scale coordinated attack killed 6 and injured 10 workers of medical institutions and significantly damaged several hospitals in Kyiv city. In addition, five children were killed and seven maimed. The attack is attributed to the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups.

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory

In Jericho governorate, an 8-year-old Palestinian boy playing on his scooter was shot in the neck by the Israeli forces and seriously injured.

One Israeli boy was killed by an individual Palestinian suspect, who killed the child with a knife near an Israeli settlement outpost in Ramallah governorate.

In Ramallah governorate, a group of settlers attacked a Palestinian family in their home and shot the 17-year-old girl with live ammunition in both her legs.

A 7-year-old Bedouin Israeli girl from the unrecognized village of Al-Fura in the Negev region of southern Israel was seriously injured by shrapnel from an unmanned aerial vehicle launched from Iran and shot down by Israeli air defences.



Rape and other forms of sexual violence

In the **Sudan**, one girl was abducted and then raped twice by the same perpetrator. As a result, the girl became pregnant and was diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease and mental health problems. She received

medical and psychosocial support.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, in Ituri, a girl was gang-raped and then killed with a machete by CODECO. The Congolese National Police arrested one of the perpetrators while the others remained at large.

Abduction

In **Haiti**, 16 boys were abducted during the coordinated attacks by the Viv Ansanm coalition on two prisons in February, when over 4,000 detainees managed to escape and the majority of whom enrolled in the Viv Ansanm coalition.

In **Myanmar**, the Myanmar armed forces abducted two 15-year-old boys from their village in Kachin State. When the Myanmar armed forces base was attacked by the Kachin Independence Army, they used the boys as guides. After five days, they were able to escape.



Attacks on schools and hospitals

In **Cameroon**, armed group members abducted three teachers and set examination papers on fire during an attack on a government high school in the northwestern region.

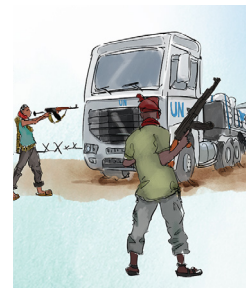
In **Mozambique**, armed groups attacked a village in Quissanga. While one group of members controlled the access road from Pemba, others burned down the health centre after looting medicines.

Denial of humanitarian access

In **Gaza**, a United Nations convoy en route to northern Gaza was delayed at an Israeli forces checkpoint, and threatened with firearms as they attempted to detain United Nations personnel, and United Nations vehicles were damaged by bulldozers, endangering lives.

In the Boucle du Mouhoun region of **Burkina Faso**, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin hijacked a vehicle carrying two local personnel from a non-governmental organization and their office equipment. The staff were both released 24 hours later, along with the vehicle and equipment.

In **Somalia**, an improvised explosive device hit a humanitarian convoy delivering food aid in Banadir, killing two humanitarians and injuring five security guards who were escorting the convoy.



"More and more of the world is being sucked into a desolate moral vacuum. This is a space devoid of the most basic human values; a space in which children are slaughtered, raped and maimed; a space in which children are exploited as soldiers; a space in which children are starved and exposed to extreme brutality. Such unregulated terror and violence speak of deliberate victimization. There are few further depths to which humanity can sink."

Graça Machel,
Impact of Armed Conflict on Children,
26 August 1996



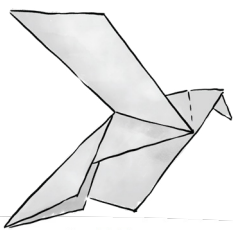
Recommendations

Ending, but also preventing, grave violations against children is at the heart of the children and armed conflict mandate, as the best way to protect children from hostilities is to eliminate the push and pull factors leading to their involvement in armed conflict.

- ① **Respect international law.** All parties should adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, including the rights and special protections afforded to children.
- ① **Reaffirm commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict,** including through the campaign “Prove It Matters”. Member States and parties to conflict should consider every human being below the age of 18 years as a child.
- ① **Reaffirm commitment to the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines:** Explosive remnants of war, anti-personnel mines and improvised explosive devices make up as much as 40 per cent of all children killed and maimed in the children and armed conflict mandate. All parties should further undertake explosive ordnance clearance, risk education and victim assistance.
- ① **Join and implement international instruments and commitments to protect children from hostilities.** Member States should endorse and implement the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.
- ① **Allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access.** Parties to conflict must guarantee children’s access to assistance and protection, irrespective of their age, gender, diversity characteristics, nationality or legal status and ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and assets.
- ① **Protect hospitals and health workers.** All parties should implement Security Council resolution 2286 (2016).
- ① **Refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas.** Member States should endorse the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.



- ③ **Develop and implement action plans and other commitments.** Parties to conflict should strengthen their engagement with the United Nations as a critical way to end and prevent grave violations against children and Member States should facilitate engagement with non-State actors.
- ③ **Support the monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children.** Donors should provide funding for monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children, in particular for child protection capacities on the ground.
- ③ **Pursue accountability.** Member States should adopt and implement legislation that criminalizes violations of international law against children, hold perpetrators accountable and cooperate with international accountability mechanisms.
- ③ **Children should be treated primarily as victims.** Detention should be used only as a last resort and for the shortest period possible. Child protection actors should have access to detained children. Facilitate the safe and voluntary repatriation and reintegration of children allegedly associated with Da'esh in line with international law, including the best interests of the child.
- ③ **Facilitate the reintegration of children.** Assist child victims and survivors, in line with international law and with full respect for the relevant principles.
- ③ **Scale up financial support for survivor-centred assistance, reintegration and an education programme.** The international community should provide long-term financial support for sustainable, timely, gender- and age-sensitive, survivor-centred, and disability-inclusive programmes, including reintegration for victims of grave violations.
- ③ **Ensure that child protection provisions and capacity are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions.** Governments and the United Nations should ensure that during mission transitions, including start-ups, reconfigurations, drawdowns or withdrawals, child protection frameworks are upheld, and data and capacity are preserved and transferred.



Prove it Matters

Prove It Matters, a new global campaign that aims to reinitiate the global consensus on the protection of children to uphold children's rights to life, health, education and a safe future. Through a dual call to action, the campaign engages both Governments and children themselves. While Member States are encouraged to publicly recommit to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children, especially those affected by conflict, are invited to take part in this child-participatory initiative by learning about their rights and then creating messages that they will fold into origami doves addressed to the world's leaders. The origami doves will culminate in a collective art installation at the United Nations in New York.

How do the six grave violations link to the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the children and armed conflict agenda are closely linked through their shared commitment to protecting children from the devastating impacts of conflict, particularly from the six grave violations that were identified by the Security Council as the most egregious and widespread forms of abuse that children endure during armed conflicts.

Recruitment and use of children

Article 1: A child is any person under the age of 18.

Article 38: Children have the right to be protected during war. No child under 15 can join the army or take part in war.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict was adopted by the General Assembly in 2000. It aims to protect children from recruitment and use in hostilities.

Killing and maiming of children

Article 6: Every child has the right to be alive. Governments must make sure that children survive and develop in the best possible way.

Article 37: Children who are accused of breaking the law should not be killed, tortured, treated cruelly, put in prison forever, or put in prison with adults. Prison should always be the last choice and only for the shortest possible time. Children in prison should have legal help and be able to stay in contact with their family.

Prove It Matters campaign

In March 2025, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict launched

Rape and other forms of sexual violence

Article 34: The government should protect children from sexual exploitation (being taken advantage of) and sexual abuse, including by people forcing children to have sex for money, or making sexual pictures or films of them.

Abduction

Article 35: Governments must make sure that children are not kidnapped or sold, or taken to other countries or places to be exploited (taken advantage of).

Attacks on schools and hospitals

Article 24: Children have the right to the best healthcare possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.

Article 28: Every child has the right to an education. Primary education should be free. Secondary and higher education should be available to every child. Children should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools should respect children's rights and never use violence.

Denial of humanitarian access

Article 6 (see before)

Article 27: Children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live so they can develop in the best possible way. The government should help families and children who cannot afford this.

Children have rights.
Children want peace.
Listen and take action.
#ProveItMatters

More information:

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org>

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