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25 YEARS OF CHILDREN  
AND ARMED CONFLICT:  
TAKING ACTION TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN WAR

# Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by UNICEF's Child Protection Programme Team with the support of the Humanitarian Policy Section of the Office of Emergency Programmes.

The team extends special thanks to the following UNICEF colleagues for their review, guidance and support during the preparation of this report: Andrew Morris, Clementine Cholat, Christopher Tidey, Cornelius Williams, David Andres Vinas, Enyo Awo Gbedemah, Ernesto Granillo, Kaitlin Brush, Manuel Fontaine, Maria Margarita Ardivilla, Martha Mackenzie, Maha Homs, Noriko Izumi, Paloma Escudero, Patrick Kwame Amihere, Patrizia Benvenuti, Pierre Ferry, Phuong Nguyen, Rodeliza Barrientos, Rohannie Baraguir, Samuel Bayo Sesay, Segolene Adam, Senathirajah Ravindran, Sofie Grundin, Souad Al-Hebshi, Tasha Gill, William Kollie.

The team would like to recognize the work of countless UN and NGO colleagues, including frontline workers, over more than two decades implementing the UN Security Council children and armed conflict mandate. These colleagues working in countries affected by armed conflict stay and deliver prevention and protection services for children under the most difficult circumstances. Their daily efforts enable the verification of grave violations against children, which inform emergency and long-term support services that children receive, as well as advocacy to prevent and end violations. Their dedication to protect and support children living in situations of armed conflict is extraordinary, and to them we extend our deepest gratitude.

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UNICEF sincerely appreciates the championship of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict.

This report was made possible thanks to the generous support of Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

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# Foreword

Armed conflicts have direct and devastating impacts on children, families, and communities. They tear the fabric of entire nations, making the task of restoring and maintaining peace and security both long and difficult. When grave violations against children are committed in armed conflict, the quest for justice and reestablishing social cohesion are even more arduous.

Over the past 25 years, the international community has made significant progress in understanding how war affects children, how disruptive, dramatic, and long-lasting the consequences are, and what preventive and mitigating measures can be taken to protect children.

United Nations Member States made a giant step forward when they established the children and armed conflict agenda. This agenda provided the United Nations with a framework within which to act and enabled the development of tools and mechanisms that help us better understand how children are impacted by war. Based on this understanding, measures to protect children have been identified and promoted. This includes the development of tools for dialogue with parties to conflict, adoption of legislative reforms to improve accountability, and implementation of other actions that can prevent children from becoming victims of grave violations.

In addition, international and regional inter-governmental organizations, such as the African Union, have put the protection of children in situations of armed conflict at the center of their political engagement and advocacy. Others, such as the European Union, have developed internal policies and directives as well as the EU Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights, that establish the protection of children as a pivotal element of their political and humanitarian action.

Despite this progress, much remains to be done. This analytical report serves as an important contribution to the collective effort to chart the way forward, by clearly showing the impact of war on children over time and across contexts. It also demonstrates that concrete actions can have a positive impact on children even in the middle of conflict.

As we take stock of the past 25 years of the children and armed conflict agenda and take lessons learned forward collectively, each of us must do our part. UNICEF commits to staying and delivering in every corner of the world where armed conflict is denying children their most basic rights. We will continue working together with our partners and with any and all actors to end and prevent grave violations against children from being perpetrated, while also responding to the needs of affected children. This is no easy or light task, as millions of children continue to live in or be affected by situations of armed conflict. But it is a task that is more urgent than ever.

Thank you for joining in this effort.



**Catherine Russell**  
Executive Director



# List of acronyms

<b>ANP</b>	Afghan National Police
<b>CAAC</b>	Children and Armed Conflict
<b>CAAFAG</b>	Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups
<b>CJTF</b>	Civilian Joint Task Force
<b>CTFMR</b>	Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>ERW</b>	Explosive Remnants of War
<b>FARDC</b>	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GoF CAAC</b>	Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IED</b>	Improvised Explosive Device
<b>OPAC</b>	Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict
<b>MILF</b>	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
<b>MOJ</b>	Ministry of Justice
<b>MRM</b>	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>SCWG CAAC</b>	Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict
<b>SDF</b>	Syrian Democratic Forces
<b>SG</b>	Secretary-General of the United Nations
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedure
<b>SRSR CAAC</b>	Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council



An agenda to protect  
children affected  
by armed conflict

In 1996, twenty-five years ago, Graça Machel presented her seminal report on the impact of armed conflict on children to the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>1</sup> The report exposed what was until then the invisible impact of armed conflict on children's lives, and painted a grim picture of the scale and scope of how children's rights are violated in situations of armed conflict. For the first time, the UN General Assembly heard the full story of how children are recruited and used by armed actors, displaced, exploited, and sexually abused. The story of children deprived of their right to life, to liberty, health and education, their right to be with their family and community, to develop their personalities and to be nurtured and protected.

*"It is unforgivable that children are assaulted, violated, murdered and yet our conscience is not revolted, nor our sense of dignity challenged. This represents a fundamental crisis of our civilization. The impact of armed conflict on children must be everyone's concern and is everyone's responsibility."*

*Graça Machel, The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children A/51/306 (1996), para. 317.*

The Graça Machel report was the result of three years of field research that involved extensive consultations with governments, military authorities, legal experts, human rights organizations, the media, religious organizations, eminent leaders from civil society and women and children. The report highlighted the importance of having information about these violations, as the first necessary step to address them. It also demonstrated the importance of putting the protection and care of children in conflict situations at the centre of the international human rights, peace and security, and development agendas. On that basis the report called on everyone- governments, the United Nations, and civil society- to acknowledge the grave violations children are exposed to in conflict situations and to take action.

The current publication presents key steps that the international community has taken to translate Graça Machel's call into action, with a specific focus on the Security Council-mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to document grave violations against children and to foster accountability by identifying perpetrators.

Based on sixteen years of data from the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, this report illustrates the impact that armed conflicts have had on children, by presenting trends of grave violations across the world and over time. The report examines how information on the documented patterns of grave violations is being used to respond

to children's needs and how engagement with parties to conflict – State and non-State actors alike<sup>2</sup> – enables ending and preventing grave violations. The report also provides country-specific examples showing how direct engagement translated into the adoption of concrete measures, including national legislation and policies.

Finally, the report presents key recommendations aimed at intensifying the actions of the international and the humanitarian communities and strengthening the programmatic response to better target and address the needs and vulnerabilities of all children living in situations of armed conflict.

## 1.1. A unique and robust mechanism that enables action

In 1997, the UN General Assembly established the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict<sup>3</sup> (SRSG CAAC), a key recommendation of the Machel study, and the first step toward the development of a comprehensive agenda to improve the protection and care of children in conflict situations.

The Machel report and the establishment of the Office of the SRSG CAAC set in motion a process that progressively led the UN to establish the unique and robust mechanism that enables it today to have a clear and detailed picture of the impact that armed conflicts have on children.



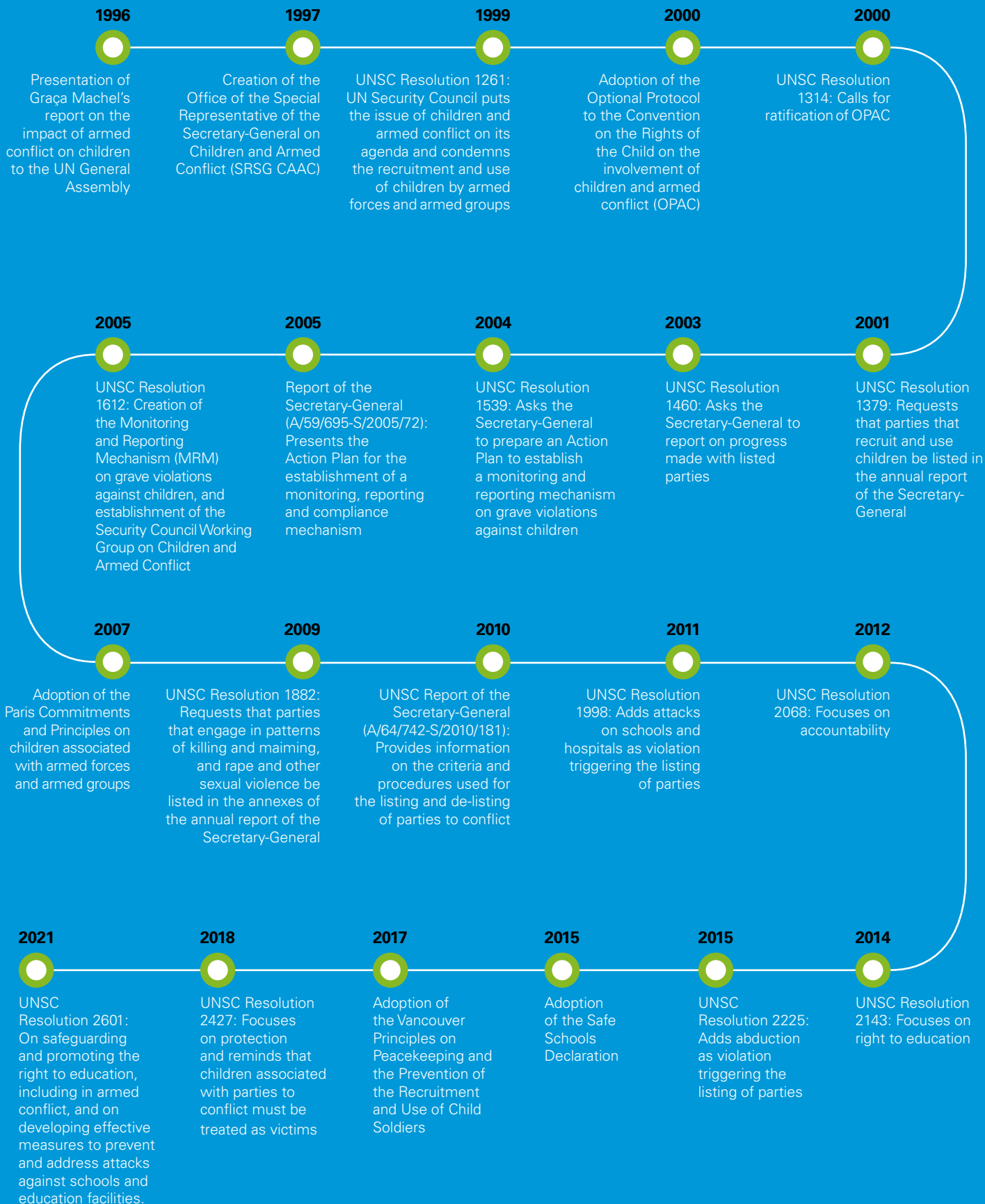
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1 Impact of armed conflict on children, Report of the Expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Machel, 1996 (A/51/306) [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)

2 The terminology used in this report to refer to parties to conflict aligns with the terminology used in the reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Reference to a non-State actor does not affect its legal status.

3 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 51/77, The Rights of the Child, A/RES/51/77, 20 February 1997

## Timeline – Children and Armed Conflict



*This is a non-exhaustive timeline. Selected elements highlighted for each resolution of the UN Security Council do not reflect the entirety of issues addressed in such resolutions.*



After the establishment of the Office of the SRSG CAAC, the Security Council adopted a series of resolutions<sup>4</sup> on children and armed conflict, including:

- Resolution 1216(1999), which squarely placed the protection of children in situations of armed conflict as a fundamental peace and security concern and established it as one of the first thematic human rights issue to be added to the agenda of the Security Council;
- Resolution 1379(2001), which requested the Secretary-General to list in his Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, parties to conflict that recruit and use children; and
- Resolution 1539(2004), which requested the Secretary-General to develop a proposal for the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. In this resolution, the Security Council also called on the United Nations, at country level, to engage in a dialogue with parties to conflict with the aim of developing time-bound Action Plans to halt the recruitment and use of children.

In 2005, as a result of the advocacy of the Office of the SRSG CAAC, UNICEF, and other UN and NGO partners, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1612<sup>5</sup> mandating the UN to establish a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to collect timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on the six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.<sup>6</sup> With Resolution 1612(2005), the Security Council endorsed the establishment of the MRM as proposed by Secretary-General in his 2005 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict,<sup>7</sup> which describes the most grave violations that should be monitored; the standards that constitute the basis for monitoring; the parties whose activities should be monitored; the gathering and compilation of information at the country level; the review and integration of information and the preparation of reports at the Headquarters level; and the bodies that constitute “destinations for action”<sup>8</sup> for monitoring reports.

## The six grave violations against children<sup>9</sup>

### 1. Killing and maiming of children

can be a result of direct targeting or indirect actions, including torture. Killing and maiming can be through crossfire, landmines, cluster munitions, improvised or other indiscriminate explosive devices or even in the context of military operations, house demolitions, search-and-arrest campaigns, or suicide attacks.

### 2. Recruitment or use of children

in armed forces and armed groups refers to compulsory, forced, or voluntary conscription or enlistment of children into any kind of armed force or armed group. The use of children by armed forces or armed groups refers to any capacity, including,

but not limited to, children, boys, and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, and collaborators. Girls are also recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage.

### 3. Attacks on schools or hospitals

include the targeting of schools or medical facilities that cause the total or partial destruction of such facilities. Interferences such as occupation or targeting for propaganda or otherwise causing harm to schools or medical facilities or their personnel are all reported through the MRM.

### 4. Rape or other sexual violence

encompasses acts of rape, other sexual violence, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, enforced prostitution, forced marriage or pregnancy,

enforced sterilization, or sexual exploitation and/or abuse of children.

### 5. Abduction

refers to the unlawful removal, seizure, capture, apprehension, or enforced disappearance of a child either temporarily or permanently. If a child is recruited by force by an armed force or group, this is considered as two violations – abduction and recruitment.

### 6. Denial of humanitarian access for children

includes the intentional deprivation or impediment of humanitarian assistance indispensable to children’s survival by parties to the conflict, including wilfully impeding the ability of humanitarian or other relevant actors to access and assist affected children, in situations of armed conflict.

4 UN Security Council resolutions 1261(1999), 1314(2000), 1379(2001), 1460(2003), 1539(2004), 1612(2005), 1882(2009), 1998(2011), 2068(2012), 2143(2014), 2225(2015), 2427(2018), and 2601 (2021).

5 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612(2005) [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1612\(2005\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1612(2005))

6 Security Council Resolution 1612(2005) notes that: “reference to a State or a situation should not be construed as a legal determination that there exists a situation of armed conflict within the meaning of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols” (A/59/695-S/2005/72 para 7 <https://undocs.org/S/2005/72>), which all Secretary-General’s annual reports on children and armed conflict reference.

7 A/59/695-S/2005/72 <https://undocs.org/S/2005/72>

8 In his 2005 report (A/59/695-S/2005/72), the Secretary-General indicated that reports compiled through the MRM should serve as triggers for action on the part of the appropriate international, regional and national bodies to protect children affected by armed conflicts.

9 The violations are listed in the 2005 Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (A/59/695-S/2005/72) <https://undocs.org/S/2005/72>

Over the next decade, the Security Council increased the number of violations for which parties to conflict could be listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. In 2009, Resolution 1882 requested the inclusion of parties to conflict that engage in patterns of killing and maiming of children and/or rape and other sexual violence against children. In 2011, Resolution

1998 added attacks on schools and hospitals as a trigger for listing and finally in 2015, with Resolution 2225, the Security Council requested the inclusion of parties to conflict that engage in patterns of abduction of children. Denial of humanitarian access remains the only one of the six grave violations that does not trigger listing in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report.

## A Member State agenda

UN Member States led the development of the children and armed conflict agenda and moved it forward consistently over the years. Since 1999, the Security Council adopted 12 Resolutions<sup>10</sup> that have repeatedly called for, among other things, accountability and fight against impunity, protection of the right to education, including by strengthening the monitoring of military use of schools, and for protection of children in situations of conflict, stressing the need to treat children associated with armed forces and armed groups as victims. Furthermore, the Security Council requested that effective community-based programmes be implemented for all children affected by armed conflict. In its latest resolutions,

the Security Council also called on the international community to systematically include mental health and psychosocial services for children as part of the humanitarian response in situations of armed conflict.

The establishment of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (SCWG CAAC) in 2005 was a pivotal moment as it created a forum through which member States agreed to work by consensus to bolster the children and armed conflict agenda. The SCWG CAAC receives quarterly updates on children and armed conflict on many of the situations included in the annual Secretary-General's report on CAAC. It also regularly reviews country specific reports, following which it issues conclusions and recommendations, agreed upon through consensus,

directed to duty bearers, including governmental authorities, parties to conflict, and the United Nations.

Over time, the SCWG CAAC has increased its direct engagement with the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs), by conducting field missions and, more recently, by organising country specific briefings with CTFMR Co-Chairs or their equivalent Working Group for those situations where no parties to conflict are listed. These direct exchanges are unique and provide Council members with real time updates in relation to its child protection component, which inform the rest of the Council's peace and security work, including the establishment and renewal of the mandates of peacekeeping operations and of special political missions.

UNICEF welcomed the adoption of Resolution 1612 in 2005 and has since implemented this Security Council mandate, in partnership with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, as well as UN and NGO partners on the ground.

UNICEF's presence in countries before, during and after armed conflict, has allowed it to be uniquely positioned to support the implementation of monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

UNICEF has worked continuously to integrate monitoring and reporting within its programmes. In countries that are included in the Secretary-General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF co-chairs, alongside the highest UN representative in the country<sup>11</sup>, the

Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs), or their equivalent Working Group for those situations where no parties to conflict are listed.<sup>12</sup> These working groups and task forces are responsible for leading implementation of the MRM, including supporting with dedicated technical capacity to document, verify and report incidents of grave violations, and to respond to the needs of children, survivors, and witnesses, as well as their families, and their communities. In addition to the co-chairs, CTFMRs or their equivalent are comprised of other UN actors on the ground as well as neutral, impartial, and independent international and local NGOs. Although UNICEF plays a specific role in the implementation of the MRM, the mechanism is a broader UN obligation and responsibility of the UN family.

<sup>10</sup> UN Security Council resolutions 1261(1999), 1314(2000), 1379(2001), 1460(2003), 1539(2004), 1612(2005), 1882(2009), 1998(2011), 2068(2012), 2143(2014), 2225(2015) and 2427(2018).

<sup>11</sup> Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) in UN Peacekeeping or Special Political Missions or the Resident Coordinators, depending on the situation.

<sup>12</sup> The formal implementation of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) occurs in situations for which parties to conflict are listed in the Annexes to the annual Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. In formal MRM situations, a Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) is established and is responsible for the implementation of the MRM. In situations included in the annual report of the Secretary-General for which no party is listed in the Annexes, the United Nations establishes a Working Group, which is referred to in this report as equivalent to CTFMRs.



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The analysis of trends and patterns of grave violations produced through the MRM has been used by member States, by the UN, including UNICEF, partners, and the public to better understand the impact of conflict on children and to inform programme responses, both humanitarian and development. Knowing who the affected children are, where they are, and what happened to them, empowers UNICEF and its partners to provide care and protection for these children, to advocate on their behalf, and to engage with all parties to conflict. In addition to providing emergency and longer-term assistance to children, UNICEF and its partners have also trained governmental officials and parties to conflict

on child protection, and raised awareness of governments, communities, and families on the risks that may arise for children in situations of armed conflict.

*“Resolution 1612, and the establishment of the CAAC agenda and the monitoring and reporting mechanism, or MRM, represented a milestone in living up to our commitment to protecting all children.” UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore’s statement at the Security Council Open Debate on children and armed conflict – June 2020*

### The key role of civil society in New York

The United Nations could not have developed the children and armed conflict agenda without the critical support and contribution of civil society.

International NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Plan International, Save the Children, and Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, relentlessly advocate at the UN with member States for a strong protection mandate, playing an essential role in holding the United Nations accountable to their promise to children. Their interventions include

workshops in support of members of the Security Council to increase their knowledge and understanding of the children and armed conflict agenda. They also organise and facilitate briefings and issue regular reports, policy and advocacy briefs, and newsletters focusing everyone’s attention on the plight of children and calling for action.



The impact of armed  
conflict on children:  
grave violations  
committed against  
children since 2005



## Methodology and data limitations

Information, trends, and analyses presented in this report are based exclusively on verified data and information relating to grave violations against children included in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict since 2005. Additional information from country-specific reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict has been used, particularly to support specific analysis and provide examples. Moreover, throughout this section, in-depth analysis focuses on the past five years (2016-2020) to highlight the most recent information and trends concerning grave violations against children.

There are limitations to the data, however. Firstly, information presented in this report focuses on the six grave violations against children and the two related issues of concern as defined by the UN Security Council<sup>13</sup> that are at the core of the MRM mandate. Secondly, information, trends and analyses presented cannot be interpreted as indicative of the prevalence of grave violations committed against children. Challenges relating to the monitoring, verification and reporting of grave violations exist in all conflict situations where the United Nations and its partners operate. Limited access to certain affected areas and places (including bases, barracks or compounds of armed forces and armed groups and places of detention), security concerns for victims and witnesses, and sensitivity associated with some violations, have resulted in numerous alleged violations not being verified, and other violations simply not being reported. Thirdly, although the availability of disaggregated data – including sex-disaggregated data – has gradually improved over the years, it remains insufficient to systematically establish trends and comparisons over the entire 16-year period (2005-2020).

In addition, the time period for which a situation has been included in the annual report of the Secretary-General varies from one situation to another. Moreover, whilst the overall ability of the United Nations to document and verify incidents of grave violations has increased over time, it has fluctuated from one year to another, from one situation to another, and from one violation to another. In this regard, and based on all of the above, direct comparisons between situations, years, or violations should be undertaken with caution.

Since 2005, the United Nations verified over 266,000 grave violations against children committed by parties to conflict in more than 30 conflict situations across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.<sup>14</sup> This figure is a fraction of the violations believed to have occurred, as access and security constraints, among others, and the shame, pain, and fear that child and family survivors suffer often hamper the reporting, documentation and verification of grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

Overall, killing and maiming, and recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups were the two violations with the highest number of cases, accounting for a combined 73% of all verified violations since 2005.

The annual number of verified violations has gradually increased since 2005<sup>15</sup>, surpassing 20,000 in a year for the first time in 2014 and reaching 26,425 in 2020. In the past five years, the daily global average of verified grave violations stood at an alarming 71

violations. The elevated number of violations observed in recent years demonstrates the dramatic impact that armed conflict – and increasingly complex and protracted protection crises<sup>16</sup> – have on children. The ever-growing number of armed non-State actors, the development and employment of new means and methods of warfare, the use of improvised explosive devices and other explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas, are just some of the many factors contributing to the creation of unprecedented challenges for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. The increase in verified violations over time also underscores the increasing strength of the mechanism over the years. The development of guidance on monitoring and reporting, the training and capacity building of UN and its partners' staff on documenting grave violations, and the awareness raising of families and communities on the protection risks for children, have all contributed to strengthen the mechanism and enabled it to collect increased information on grave violations against children.

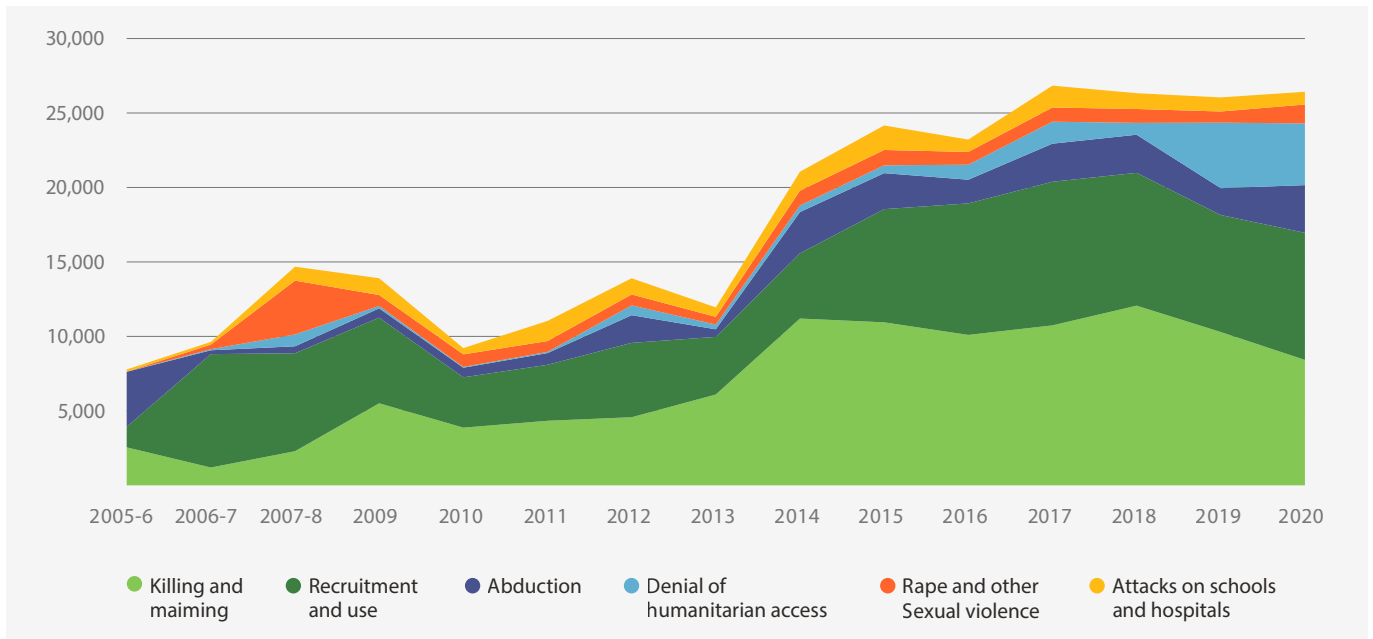
13 The six grave violations against children are: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. The two related issues of concern are: deprivation of children's liberty for their alleged or actual association with parties to conflict or on national security-related charges, and the military use of schools and hospitals.

14 Information pertains exclusively to situations that have been and/or are currently included in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. The number of conflict situations included in the annual reports varied between 18 and 23 in the 16-year period, with an annual average of 20,7 situations included. In the 2021 report, there were 21 country situations, as well as a regional situation (the Lake Chad Basin region).

15 The first three reports of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to resolution 1612(2005) covered different reporting periods: the first report covered the period November 2005 to September 2006, the second report covered October 2006 to August 2007 and the third report covered September 2007 to December 2008. From 2009 onwards, each annual report of the Secretary-General covered a reporting period going from 1 January to 31 December.

16 Of the 21 country situations included in the 2021 annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, 19 (90%) have been included in the Secretary-General reports for a minimum of eight years.

## Number of grave violations against children over time



Information presented in this graph reflects exclusively cases of grave violations verified since 2005. Observations about increases or decreases from one year to another and any comparison between violations should be cautioned because the ability of the United Nations to document and verify violations can vary from one year, situation, or violation to another.

### 2.1 Perpetrators of grave violations

Grave violations against children were committed by all parties to conflict, States and non-State actors alike. In the last five years, State actors – including national and international forces and coalitions – were responsible for at least 26% of all violations (21% in 2020), including 41% of all cases of killing and maiming of children (surpassing 50% in 2018, down to 32% in 2020). In comparison, non-State actors accounted for about 58% of all verified violations (including 64% in 2020). Non-State actors were responsible for approximately 9 out of 10 cases of abduction (91% in 2020) and recruitment and use (86% in 2020), as well as more than half of cases of sexual violence (56% in 2020) and attacks on schools and hospitals (56% in 2020). This underscores the importance of engagement with all parties to conflict, including non-state actors, in order to meaningfully end and prevent violations against children. The remaining violations were mainly incidents perpetrated by unidentified armed elements, resulting from crossfire between State and non-State actors or accidents caused by landmines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war that could not be attributed to any specific party.

### 2.2 Child victims

Available sex-disaggregated data indicates that verified incidents of grave violations have predominantly affected boys.<sup>17</sup> For instance, in 2020, boys accounted for 73% of all child victims, with the vast majority of child victims of recruitment and use (85% boys), abduction (76% boys) and killing and maiming (70% boys) being boys. In comparison, girls accounted for one-fourth (26%) of all child victims, including 98% of child victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence. The inclusion of sex-disaggregated data in the annual reports of the Secretary-General has drastically increased over the years<sup>18</sup>, and has contributed to a better understanding of the different vulnerabilities and experiences of boys and girls. This improvement has concurrently showed an increase in the proportion of girls among child victims of grave violations for which sex-disaggregated data is available, from 11% in 2006 to 17% in 2014 and 26% in 2020. Whilst verified cases only represent a fraction of the actual number of children victims of grave violations, underreporting of some incidents may particularly affect girls, as deep-rooted social norms, stigma and pressure, and safety concerns for girls and/or their families, among other concerns prevent girls and their families from reporting violations. The increased availability of sex-

<sup>17</sup> Sex-disaggregated data is too limited to look at trends over time. Only 2019 and 2020 data provide sufficient information.

<sup>18</sup> In earlier years, only about 10 to 20% of data of child victims of grave violations included in the Secretary-General annual reports was disaggregated by sex of victims. This steadily increased over time, from around 50% in 2017 to full disaggregation in 2020.

disaggregated data is therefore a positive trend that must be sustained, whilst information on children who do not adhere to binary gender identity should be gradually documented and reported so long as it does not place them or their families at security risk.

Moreover, children from poorer backgrounds and children of specific status or characteristics<sup>19</sup> – including refugee, internally displaced and indigenous children, among others – remain at heightened risk of grave violations. For example, in several conflict situations, internally displaced and refugee girls have been particularly affected by sexual violence. In Colombia, indigenous and Venezuelan children have been at high risks of recruitment. The Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict do not currently systematically capture this type of disaggregation.

Cross-border spill-over of armed conflict in several parts of the world have provided a stark reminder that conflicts are not limited by geographical boundaries. In the most recent examples of the Central Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions, the transnational propagation of non-State actors' presence and activities, and military responses by national, regional, and international forces have resulted in heightened

vulnerabilities for civilian populations and increases in violations committed against children. Similarly, in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic (hereinafter 'Syria'), numerous cases of children abducted and forcibly taken across borders for the purposes of recruitment and use, or sexual exploitation were documented. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, dozens of children associated with armed groups were originally abducted and/or recruited in neighbouring or nearby countries, including in Burundi, Central African Republic, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and South Sudan.<sup>20</sup> In 2020, the United Nations verified cases of Syrian boys abducted by armed groups in Syria and sent to fight for different parties to conflict in Libya. Effective coordination and collaboration between UN entities in different countries have been essential not only to document such cases, but also to provide appropriate responses for children. Whilst such cases result in additional complexities, UNICEF and its partners, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) work tirelessly to conduct family tracing, and support the reunification (or appropriate alternative care options that are in the best interests of children) and reintegration of affected children.

The paragraphs below provide insights and analysis of the six grave violations and related issues of concern, based on *verified* cases of violations since 2005.



19 The term "children of specific status or characteristics" includes but is not limited to children with disabilities, refugee and internally displaced children, children from minority religious or ethnic groups, children who do not identify along binary gender identity and children of diverse sexual orientation, among others.

20 See for example the most recent reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2020/1030 and S/2018/502)

## 2.3 Killing and maiming

Since 2005, more than 104,100 children have been verified as killed or maimed in situations of armed conflict. More than two-thirds of these have been verified since 2014, with an average of 10,500 children killed or maimed each year. This is more than double the annual average of child casualties documented between 2005 and 2013.

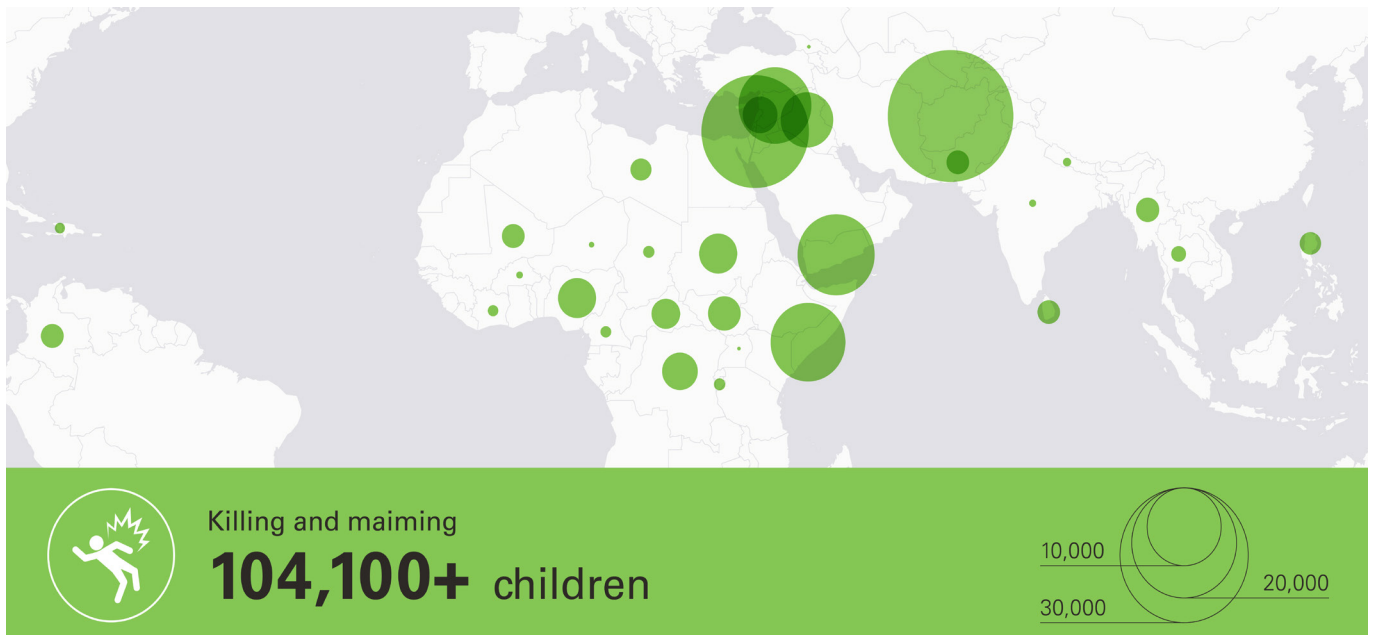
Child casualties, which includes both killing and maiming, have been verified across all conflict situations since 2005. In the last five years, 82% of all verified child casualties – or about 41,900 children – occurred in only five situations: Afghanistan (30%), Israel and the State of Palestine (14%), Syria (13%), Yemen (13%) and Somalia (9%). In 2020, the highest numbers of child casualties were recorded in the same five situations, with all but one – Israel and State

of Palestine – having parties to conflict listed for killing and maiming in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General.

Incidents of killing account for about one-third of all child casualties. Conflicts in Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, have proved to be the five deadliest for children since 2016, resulting in more than 13,000 child fatalities.

Harm to children is often caused by direct attacks or attacks in which there has not been adequate distinction between civilian and military objectives and where parties to conflict failed to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction and proportionality, and the requirement to take all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event minimize, loss of civilian life. Overall, ground engagements and other land-based operations and attacks constituted the main cause of child casualties.

### Children killed and maimed globally since 2005



*Information presented in this graph reflects exclusively cases verified since 2005. Comparison between country situations should be cautioned as each country situation has been included in the annual report of the Secretary-General for a different period of time.*

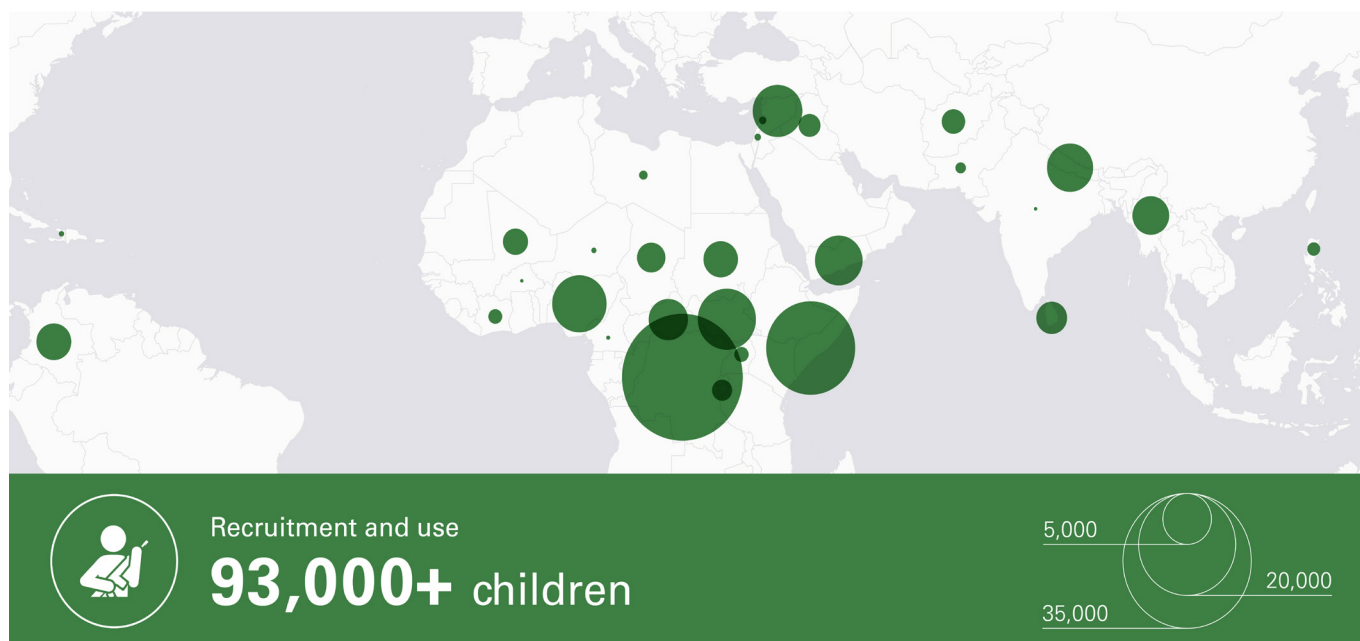


The use of explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas and those with wide area effect, are a persistent threat to children and their families. In 2020 alone, explosive weapons and explosive remnants of war were responsible for at least 47% of all child casualties, resulting in more than 3,900 children killed and maimed. Moreover, since 2016, at least 7,350 children (14% of all child casualties) lost their lives or were seriously injured as a result of missiles and bombs dropped during aerial attacks. In Syria and Yemen, aerial attacks accounted for 61 and 47% of all child casualties respectively, affecting no less than 7,900 children between 2013 and 2018.<sup>21</sup> Risks for children have been further exacerbated by the proliferation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in recent years.<sup>22</sup> In 2019 alone, IED attacks – including instances where children were used to carry the devices – were recorded in 10 countries, killing 279 children, and maiming another 936.<sup>23</sup> Accidents caused by landmines (including improvised ones) and explosive remnants of war (ERW) primarily affected children. For example, between 2015 and 2018 in Afghanistan, 1,922 children were verified as having lost their lives or were seriously injured by ERW, accounting for 84% of all ERW civilian casualties.<sup>24</sup>

In several conflict situations, including most recently South Sudan and Iraq, ERW became one of the main causes of killing and maiming of children.

In the last five years, State actors – including national and international forces and coalitions– were responsible for at least 41% of all verified cases of child casualties. Since 2016, the highest numbers of verified child casualties attributed to State actors were documented in Israel and State of Palestine, followed by Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia, accounting for more than 19,600 children killed or maimed. In several situations, State actors were the main perpetrators of child casualties, including in Israel and State of Palestine (97%), Syria (54%), South Sudan (44%) and Myanmar (43%). In comparison, non-State actors were responsible for 31% of all child casualties, with the highest numbers verified in Afghanistan, followed by Yemen, Somalia, and Nigeria. Non-State actors were the main perpetrators in several situations, including Nigeria (82%), Central African Republic (74%) and Colombia (57%)<sup>25</sup>. The remaining casualties could not be attributed to specific parties to conflict, some of which occurred during incidents of crossfire or involved ERW.

## Children recruited and used globally since 2005



Information presented in this graph reflects exclusively cases verified since 2005. Comparison between country situations should be cautioned as each country situation has been included in the annual report of the Secretary-General for a different period of time.

21 Reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Syria covering the period 16 November 2013 and 30 June 2018 (S/2018/969) and in Yemen covering the period 1 April 2013 to 31 December 2018 (S/2019/453).

22 Reports of the Secretary-General on Countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices (A/71/187 and A/75/175)

23 Report of the Secretary-General on Countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices (A/75/175). Countries are Afghanistan, Cameroon, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, and the State of Palestine.

24 Reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan (S/2019/727) covering the period 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2018.

25 Non-State actors were responsible for at least 60% of child casualties in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and the Lake Chad Basin region. However, since data for those three situations is only available for 2020, they have not been used for comparison for the five-year period.



## 2.4 Recruitment and use of children

Since 2005, more than 93,000 children have been verified as recruited and used by parties to conflict. These represent cases verified by UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting or their equivalent, but actual numbers are believed to be much higher.<sup>26</sup> Since 2005, country Task Forces were able to verify the recruitment and use of a minimum of 1,000 children in at least 15 different countries<sup>27</sup>, with the three most affected countries being the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan.

In 2020, cases of recruitment and use were verified in all but one situation<sup>28</sup> included in the annual report of the Secretary-General. There were 9 conflict situations in which at least 100 children were verified as having been recruited and used, with steep increases noted in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, and Myanmar.

In the past five years, the United Nations verified the recruitment and use of an average of 8,756 children annually (8,521 in 2020). More than 80% of those children were recruited and used by non-State actors, including 86% in 2020. Other cases were attributed to State forces or could not be attributed. In most conflict situations, State forces were responsible for

approximately or less than 5% of cases, except in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen (around 15% each), South Sudan (36%) and Myanmar (84%).

Verified instances of recruitment and use predominantly affected boys, with girls accounting for around 13% of all cases since 2016 (15% in 2020). However, verified cases only represent a fraction of the total number of children, including girls, believed to be associated with armed forces and armed groups globally. Girls in particular are less likely to be formally identified and released, and lessons learnt from demobilization programs have shown that girls tend to exit armed forces and groups quietly and informally, and to conceal their experience from the community due to (fear of) stigmatization.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, research has shown that the likelihood of girls being recruited increases with the length of the conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Children associated with armed forces and armed groups are used in different functions, including as fighters, guards, spies, porters, cooks or for sexual purposes, amongst others. The continuous use of children to participate in hostilities in any role – including children under 15 years of age,<sup>31</sup> which constitutes a war crime under international law – remains of serious concern. In 2020, close to one-third of children were used in fighting roles, thereby increasing their risk of being killed or maimed. Highest incidences were recorded in Afghanistan, followed by Syria, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

26 Since 2005, numerous instances of child recruitment have been reported and/or documented but could not be verified, including due to access and security constraints. In addition, thousands of children have exited armed forces and armed groups over the past 16 years, but not all could be documented and/or verified under the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism.

27 Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen.

28 Pakistan is the only situation where no case of recruitment and use of children was verified in 2020 (A/75/873-S/2021/437).

29 See particularly: "Technical Note on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups: Lessons learnt and good practices on prevention of recruitment and use, release and reintegration," The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2020.

30 See particularly: Haer R, Böhmelt T, "Girls soldiering in rebel groups 1989-2013: introducing a new dataset." *Journal of Peace Research*, 2018.

31 The recruitment and use of children under 15 years of age has been documented in most conflict situations. However, the proportion of children under 15 among all children recruited and use vary drastically between conflict situations, as well as between parties to conflict. For example, children under 15 accounted for more than 35% of all children associated with parties to conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 2014 and 2020 (see S/2018/502 and S/2020/1030 for more details), in comparison with 17% in Yemen between 2013 and 2018 (see S/2019/453 for more details).

## Children detained for their alleged or actual association with parties to conflict or on national security-related charges

Children associated – or allegedly associated – with parties to conflict or suspected of national security charges in relation to armed conflict are often detained following their arrest, capture or apprehension during military operations, surrender or self-demobilisation. Verified cases of deprivation of liberty on these bases have been documented in at least 25 countries since 2005. Of the 10 most affected conflict situations, eight remain included in the 2021 Secretary-General’s annual report, namely: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Israel and State of Palestine, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. Those eight conflict situations accounted for 95% of all 3,243 verified detention cases in 2020.

The total number of children verified as detained has gradually increased over time: between 2016 and 2020, at least 3,000 children were deprived of their liberty each year (including

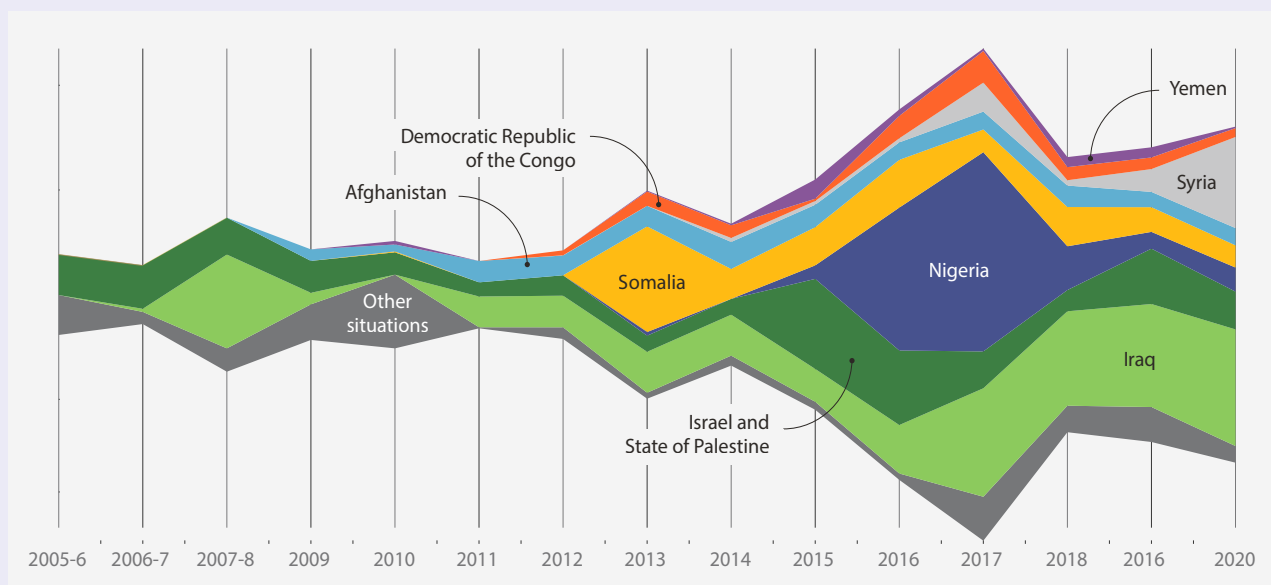
more than 4,700 in 2017, and 3,243 in 2020), 3 times the average observed during the previous 5 years period.

The increasing trend noted in recent years can be partly explained by the expansion of counterterrorism efforts, including to counter armed groups that have been designated as “terrorist groups” by the United Nations and/or regional bodies and national governments. Counterterror efforts and frameworks are increasingly being used in ways that deviate from or suspend the rule of law, including in violation of the rights of children. Although the Paris Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces and armed groups, UN Security Council resolution 2427(2018) and other international instruments clearly stipulate that children associated with armed forces or armed groups, including children who may have committed crimes during their period of association, should be

treated first and foremost as victims of grave violations, children allegedly or actually associated with armed groups, especially those designated as “terrorist” continue to be treated primarily as security threats and/or criminals. Children can spend weeks, months or even years in detention separated from their families, often without charges in violation of their rights and contrary to international juvenile justice standards, and without access to legal counsel. In detention, many children face insufficient access to food, health care, education, and legal aid, while some are exposed to sexual violence, ill-treatment, and torture.

It is also worth noting that United Nations’ access to places where children are deprived of their liberty remains challenging and is not systematically granted by parties to conflict in most conflict situations.<sup>32</sup>

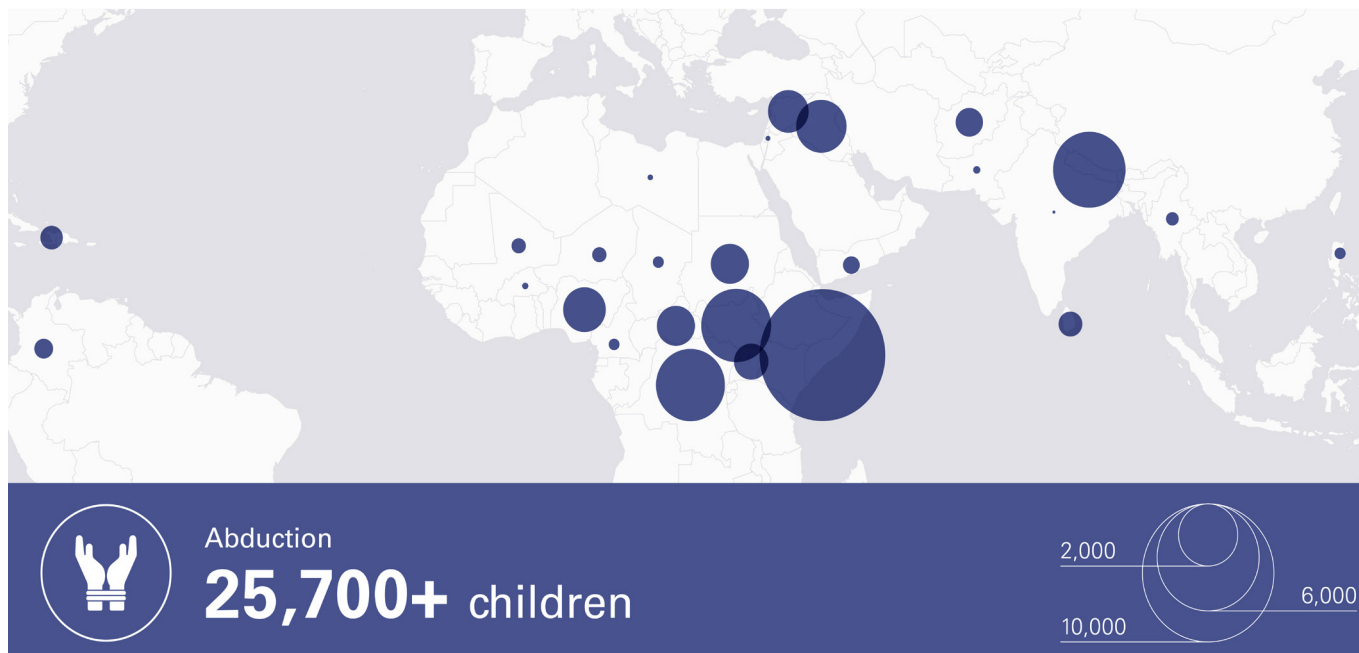
## Detention of children for their alleged or actual association with parties to conflict or for security reasons over time



Variations over time or between countries cannot be interpreted as entirely indicative of detention trends. Increases or decreases may reflect improved or lack of access to places of detention, thereby enabling or constraining the ability of the United Nations to document and verify cases of children deprived of their liberty.

32 See for instance paras. 105, 191, 252 of the Annual Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/75/873- S/2021/437).

## Children abducted globally since 2005



Information presented in this graph reflects exclusively cases verified since 2005. Comparison between country situations should be cautioned as each country situation has been included in the annual report of the Secretary-General for a different period of time

## 2.5 Abduction

Whether it is an intentional act of violence or retaliation, to instil fear among populations, or to forcibly recruit and/or sexually abuse children, abduction is one of the most pervasive violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. Since 2005, at least 25,700 children have been verified as abducted by parties to conflict. Two-third of the verified cases have occurred since 2014, with an annual average of 2,414 abducted children (3,202 in 2020). Similarly, since 2014, abductions were verified in almost all conflict situations, with 89% of all verified cases recorded in six countries – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria.

Verified incidents of abduction were predominantly committed by non-State actors, accounting for 90% of all verified cases. Abduction continued to be used as a tactic to force children into armed forces and groups: in 2020, at least 37% of abductions led to the

recruitment and use of children, with such instances surpassing 50% in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Somalia. Some parties have even resorted to mass abduction campaigns to boost their ranks: for example, in Somalia, Al-Shabaab abducted at least 550 children in Ceel Buur district, Galmudug State, between July and August 2017, and took them to the group's Jim'ale training centre<sup>33</sup>.

Boys account for three quarters of verified instances of abducted children. However, girls remain at risk of being abducted, including for the purpose of sexual violence and exploitation (136 such cases in 2020). This has particularly been the case in the Lake Chad Basin region<sup>34</sup>, where girls accounted for 61% of the 634 children abducted by Boko Haram affiliated or splinter groups between 2017 and 2019<sup>35</sup>. Documented cases and testimonies showed that the majority of girls abducted by the group were sexually abused, used as sex slaves, and often forced to marry the group's commanders and members, including boys who were also forcibly recruited<sup>36</sup>.

33 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia (S/2020/174).

34 This refers to the Lake Chad Basin areas of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria.

35 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria (S/2020/652).

36 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria (S/2020/652).



## Child victims of rape and other sexual violence globally since 2005



Information presented in this graph reflects exclusively cases verified since 2005. Comparison between country situations should be cautioned as each country situation has been included in the annual report of the Secretary-General for a different period of time.

### 2.6 Rape and other forms of sexual violence

Conflict-related sexual violence remains one of the most disturbing violation of children's rights and has often been used as a tactic of war.<sup>37</sup> Since 2005, parties to conflict have raped, forcibly married, sexually exploited, and committed other grave forms of sexual violence against at least 14,200 children. While monitoring and reporting can never capture the full scale of the prevalence of grave violations against children, cases of sexual violence, including sexual violence against boys, are particularly underreported. The annual average of 890 child victims, is not reflective of the true scale of conflict-related sexual violence affecting children. The absence of holistic and/or specialized services for survivors in many locations, constraints for UN entities and partners to reach survivors of sexual violence, victims' trauma, fear of stigmatization and marginalization of survivors and their children, risks of retaliation and widespread impunity

for gender based violence – including, in many cases, perpetrators living in or around communities where survivors live – all contribute to vast underreporting of sexual violence in conflict. In 2020, 1,268 cases were verified. This was the highest total recorded since 2015.

In the last five years, non-State actors were the main perpetrators of sexual violence, including 56% in 2020. State actors were responsible for about 30% of verified cases – with, on average, 295 cases attributed to armed forces and security services annually; the remaining cases could not be attributed to any particular armed actor. Since 2016, sexual violence was predominantly documented in six conflict situations – Somalia, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, and Nigeria – which accounted for 92% of all verified cases. Four of those six countries had some of the highest prevalence of verified cases attributed to State actors, namely: South Sudan (79%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (39%), Sudan (32%), and Somalia (28%).

37 See for example the reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/502) and South Sudan (S/2018/865).



Sexual violence disproportionately affects girls, who were victims in 97% of cases in the last five years (98% in 2020). Rape was the most prevalent form of sexual violence to be verified, but girls were also subjected to forced marriage and used for various other forms of sexual exploitation, including while associated with parties to conflict, after recruitment. Verified cases of sexual violence against boys – including use to inflict humiliation and attack social constructs such as

masculinity – were recorded in about half of all conflict situations, with the highest numbers recorded in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen. Incidents occurred in detention and during association with parties to conflict, whilst in Afghanistan, boys were predominantly exposed to *bacha bazi*, a practice whereby boys are exploited by wealthy or powerful men, including military commanders, for entertainment, in particular for sexual activities.





## One child, multiple violations

Verified incidents of abduction, recruitment and use, sexual violence and killing and maiming have combined for more than 237,000 violations over the past 16 years<sup>38</sup>. But many children suffer from more than one violation, and such cases are increasingly being captured and reflected in the Secretary-General's reports. In 2020, the UN verified that about 10% of the 19,379 affected children were victims of two or more grave violations.

The annual reports of the Secretary-General have emphasised that abduction is often combined with or leads to other violations, particularly recruitment and use and sexual violence. Children – especially girls – who have been abducted and/or associated with parties to conflict are exposed to elevated risks of sexual violence, including rape, sexual exploitation and forced marriage. For example, in Mali, at least 29 of the 60 girls recruited and used by armed groups between July 2017 and March 2020 were sexually abused, including some forcibly married to group members<sup>39</sup>. Latest reports on children and armed conflict in Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have shown that at least 40% of all cases of sexual violence occurred in the course of or after the abduction and/or recruitment and use of children<sup>40</sup>. The coercion of girls into forced marriage, whether as the purpose of recruitment or while they are associated, has been observed in several conflict situations. For example, in Iraq, Syria and Nigeria,

practices of child marriage and sexual exploitation have been widely used by armed groups, particularly ISIL/Da'esh and Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, with girls often being forcibly married to multiple men, either through temporary arrangements or upon the death of their *de facto* husbands<sup>41</sup>. In several countries, risks of abduction and/or recruitment of young girls through or for the purpose of forced marriage and sexual exploitation have also resulted in the emergence of negative coping mechanisms where families have restricted girls' movement outside their homes or used early child marriage to alleviate economic need and deter armed groups from abducting unmarried girls<sup>42</sup>.

Children recruited and used by parties to conflict face heightened risks of injury and death, particularly those fighting and engaged on the frontlines and used to plant or carry explosive devices. Of the 6,411 children recruited and used in Syria and Yemen between 2013 and 2018, at least 10% (635) were killed or maimed owing to or during their association with parties to conflict<sup>43</sup>. The use of children to plant or carry explosive devices has become a trend of concern, with cases verified in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the Lake Chad Basin in recent years. In north-east Nigeria, at least 203 children – of which 146 were girls (72%) – were used by Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups as carriers of person-borne explosive devices between 2017 and 2020<sup>44</sup>, with the group resorting to similar tactics in neighbouring countries<sup>45</sup>.

Owing to their actual or alleged association with opposing parties, children are victims of targeted killings, torture and ill-treatment, abduction, and detention. In Iraq, children have been executed or died as a result of torture following accusations of spying and/or being associated with opposing parties<sup>46</sup>. In Colombia, children have been killed by armed groups in retaliation for their desertion from the groups<sup>47</sup>. In Afghanistan, Mali, and Somalia, among others, armed groups have abducted children allegedly associated or cooperating with defence and security forces, often ill-treating, or even executing them.

Children have also been abducted, killed, injured, or sexually abused by parties to conflict in or on their way to and from schools or hospitals. For example, in Syria, between July 2018 and June 2020, 148 children were killed or injured whilst at school (133) or in a hospital (15).<sup>48</sup> Children seeking medical care have also died as a result of their access being delayed and/or denied by armed groups or armed forces.

Documenting and reporting on these instances is an important endeavour as it helps reinforce our understanding of children's experiences in times of war and subsequently develop and implement tailored response and prevention mechanisms to better protect children. To this end, the MRM should continue to refine its ability to capture this information and systematically include it in the Secretary-General annual reports.

38 This number excludes incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access.

39 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Mali (S/2020/1105).

40 In Central African Republic, out of 291 children victims of sexual violence between January 2016 and June 2019, at least 143 girls (49%) were abused during their association. For more details, see Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Central African Republic (S/2019/852). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, out of 763 children victims of sexual violence between January 2018 and March 2020, 299 and 32 children were abused as a result of recruitment and use and abduction, respectively. For more details, see Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2020/1030).

41 For more details, see Reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2019/984), Nigeria (S/2020/652), and the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2018/969).

42 See for example Reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia (S/2020/174) and the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2018/969).

43 Reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2018/969) and in Yemen (S/2019/453). Note that the report on Syria covers the period November 2013 to June 2018, whilst the report on Yemen covers the period April 2013 to December 2018.

44 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria (S/2020/652), and 2021 Annual Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/75/873-S/2021/437).

45 For example, at least 7 children were used as PBIED in the Far North region of Cameroon in 2020.

46 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2019/984).

47 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Colombia (S/2019/1017).

48 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2021/398).

## 2.7 Attacks on schools and hospitals

Documentation of attacks on schools and hospitals have showcased the catastrophic impact of armed conflict on children's rights, including rights to education and health.

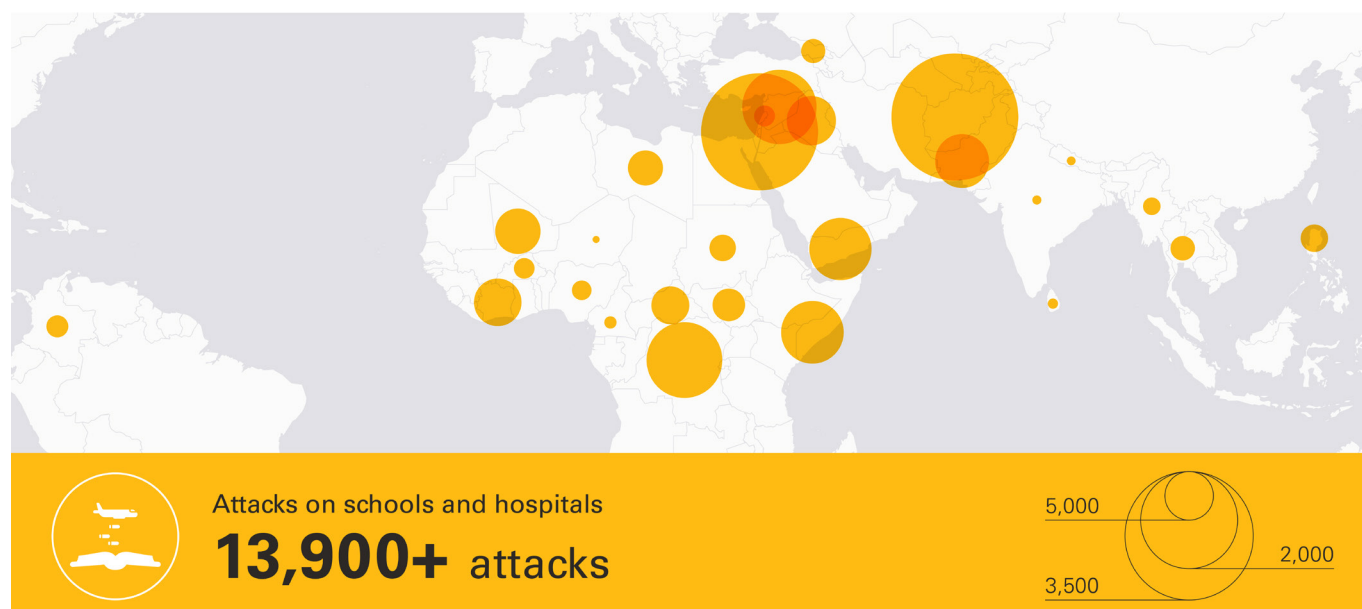
Since 2005, the United Nations verified more than 13,900 incidents of attacks, including direct attacks or attacks where there has not been adequate distinction between civilian and military objectives, on educational and medical facilities and protected persons, including pupils and hospitalised children, and health and school personnel. This indicates an annual average of 873 attacks since 2005, including 1,032 in the last five years. Overall, 74% of attacks concerned educational facilities, personnel, and pupils. However, an increase in verified incidents of attacks against hospitals has been noted since 2014, with an annual average of 347 verified incidents (321 in 2020).

In the last five years, further violations, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Syria were the most affected countries, accounting for 52% of all incidents. Overall, non-State actors were the main perpetrators of such attacks – including in Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – accounting for more than half of incidents. One third were attributed to State actors whilst the rest could not be attributed.

In at least 6 conflict situations – Israel and State of Palestine, Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen – State actors accounted for close to or more than 50% of all verified attacks, including over 80% and 90% respectively in Syria and Israel and State of Palestine. Of those, the Governments of Israel, Myanmar, and Syria had yet to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration at the time of writing.

In 2020, there were 10 different conflict situations each reporting 30 or more incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals, with Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Syria being the most affected. Overall, 856 attacks were verified in 2020, marking a 17% increase in attacks on schools compared to 2019. This increase raises concerns, as children living in conflict situations in 2020 faced additional constraints to access and enjoy their right to education due to full or partial school closures and other disruptions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>49</sup>. School closure stemming from insecurity and attacks on schools, or public health measures, compounds the risks for children who are already amongst the world's most vulnerable. Children living in countries affected by armed conflict are at heightened risk of recruitment and use if they are not in school. The socio-economic insecurity of families increases children's vulnerability, and closing schools eliminates the protection and safeguards that schools provide, leaving girls particularly exposed to domestic and gender-based violence, including child marriage.

### Attacks on schools and hospitals globally since 2005



Information presented in this graph reflects exclusively cases verified since 2005. Comparison between country situations should be cautioned as each country situation has been included in the annual report of the Secretary-General for a different period of time

49 See for example UNICEF's report "Education disrupted: The impact of conflict on children's education in Yemen", July 2021. The report can be accessed at: <https://www.unicef.org/yemen/reports/education-disrupted>



## Use of schools and hospitals for military purposes

In its resolution 1998 of 2011, the Security Council urged parties to refrain from using schools and hospitals for military purposes, including as military barracks, weapons storage facilities, command centres, detention and interrogation sites and firing and observation

positions. The military use of schools and hospitals directly hampers children's right to education and health, but also turns safe havens for children into lawful targets for attacks, and changes community perceptions of schools and hospitals as places of learning and healing into places of violence and insecurity.

Over the past 16 years, the United Nations verified at least 2,100 incidents of military use of schools

and hospitals, yet predominantly affecting schools (96%). More than 1,000 of those incidents were verified between 2016 and 2020, with at least 100 incidents in each of Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. State actors were responsible for half of such incidents, with the highest numbers of military use attributed to defence and security forces verified in Afghanistan, Myanmar, and South Sudan.

## 2.8 Denial of humanitarian access

The United Nations verified no fewer than 14,900 incidents of denial of humanitarian access for children since 2005, including among others, killings of and violence and threats against humanitarian personnel, targeted attacks against humanitarian facilities, looting of life-saving supplies, and onerous physical and administrative barriers. Both children's access

to assistance and humanitarian agencies' ability to access vulnerable populations, including children, have been denied. Efforts are being made to harmonize the types of incidents of denial of humanitarian access captured across all conflict situations by the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Eighty percent of the verified incidents took place in the past five years, demonstrating enhanced efforts to document and verify these incidents, as well as the increasingly difficult and shrinking space in which humanitarian actors have to operate.



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Since 2016, incidents of denial of humanitarian access have been verified in at least 17 conflict situations, i.e. about three-fourths of all situations. The largest numbers of incidents have been verified in Central African Republic, Israel and State of Palestine, Mali, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Overall, most incidents were attributed to non-State actors (47%), closely followed by State actors (42%), whilst the remaining 11% could not be attributed to specific parties, including incidents in which humanitarian actors have been killed or injured, and operations were disrupted and/or hampered by the use of improvised explosive devices. Situations with the highest proportion of verified incidents attributed to State actors in the last five years were Israel and State of Palestine (100%), followed by Sudan (78%), South Sudan (76%) and Syria (53%)<sup>50</sup>.

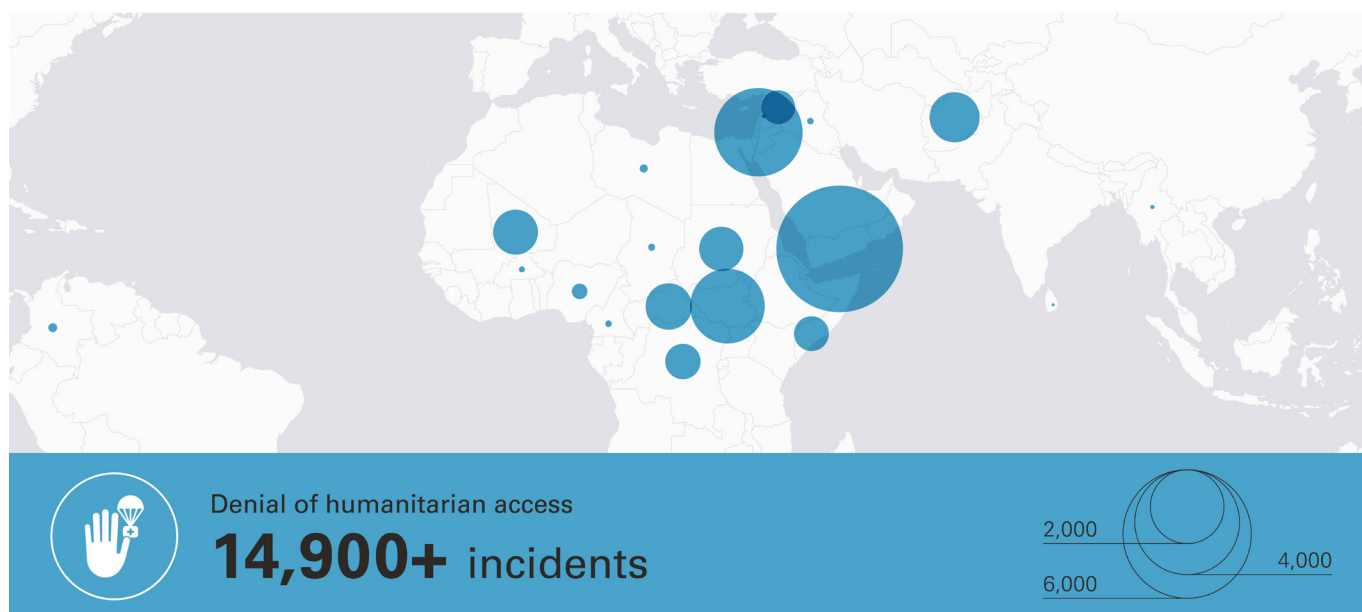
Violence against humanitarian personnel, including killings, abductions, and detention, was recorded in most conflict situations, and remains of serious and in some cases growing concern. For example, in Mali, physical violence and threats against humanitarian

personnel accounted for 28% of 425 verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access for children between July 2017 and March 2020<sup>51</sup>.

Parties to conflict have also hindered essential humanitarian interventions, such as vaccination campaigns in Afghanistan or Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Israel and the State of Palestine, since 2016, at least 9,551 children, including 3,811 girls, have had their permit applications to cross the Erez terminal to access specialized medical treatment outside of Gaza delayed or denied by Israeli authorities.

In 2020, three Palestinian children died whilst waiting for treatment. Moreover, vital services including water<sup>52</sup> have also come under attack. For example, in Syria, in an unprecedented trend, between May and November 2019, 37 water facilities were attacked (including some on multiple occasions) mostly by government and pro-government forces, depriving more than 770,000 people, including children, of access to safe, drinkable water, whilst other facilities were also forcibly closed<sup>53</sup>.

## Incidents of denial of humanitarian access since 2005




Information presented in this graph reflects exclusively cases verified since 2005. Comparison between country situations should be cautioned as each country situation has been included in the annual report of the Secretary-General for different a period of time

50 Yemen has the second highest number of verified instances of denials of humanitarian access attributed to State actors compared to other countries. However, incidents attributed to State actors represent 16% of all incidents recorded in the country, as most incidents were attributed to non-State actors.

51 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Mali (S/2020/1105).

52 See particularly UNICEF's Water Under Fire reports, including Volume 3: "Attacks on water and sanitation services in armed conflict and the impacts on children" released in May 2021. Reports and more information can be found at: <https://www.unicef.org/stories/water-under-fire>

53 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2021/398).



Engaging with parties  
to conflict to end and  
prevent grave violations  
against children

The systematic monitoring, documentation, and verification of incidents of grave violations committed against children has been a true catalyst for the United Nations' engagement with parties to conflict –State and non-State actors alike. This focus on engagement was initially included in Resolution 1539(2004), in which the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to designate focal points to engage parties in dialogue leading to time-bound Action Plans. Resolution 1612(2005) crystalized the importance and necessity of engagement with all parties to conflict, and squarely placed the responsibility for this engagement with the highest UN authority in the country.<sup>54</sup> The Resolution tasked Special Representatives of the Secretary-General of UN Peacekeeping and Special Political Missions, as well as Resident Coordinators, to identify entry points for concrete engagement and to enter into a meaningful dialogue with parties to conflict in order to obtain signed commitments to end and prevent grave violations against children and translate those written commitments, or Action Plans, into action.

### 3.1 Action Plans to end and prevent grave violations

To bolster accountability, in its resolutions 1539(2004) and 1612(2005), the UN Security Council called upon parties to conflict listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict to develop and implement Action Plans to end and prevent grave violations against children. Action Plans are written, signed commitments between the relevant party to the conflict and the United Nations, with specific, concrete, and time-bound actions to establish sustainable measures to protect children from the impact of conflict. In subsequent resolutions, the Security Council welcomed the progress generated through the signing of Action Plans between parties to armed conflict and the United Nations and the subsequent delisting of parties to conflict from the Annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report.



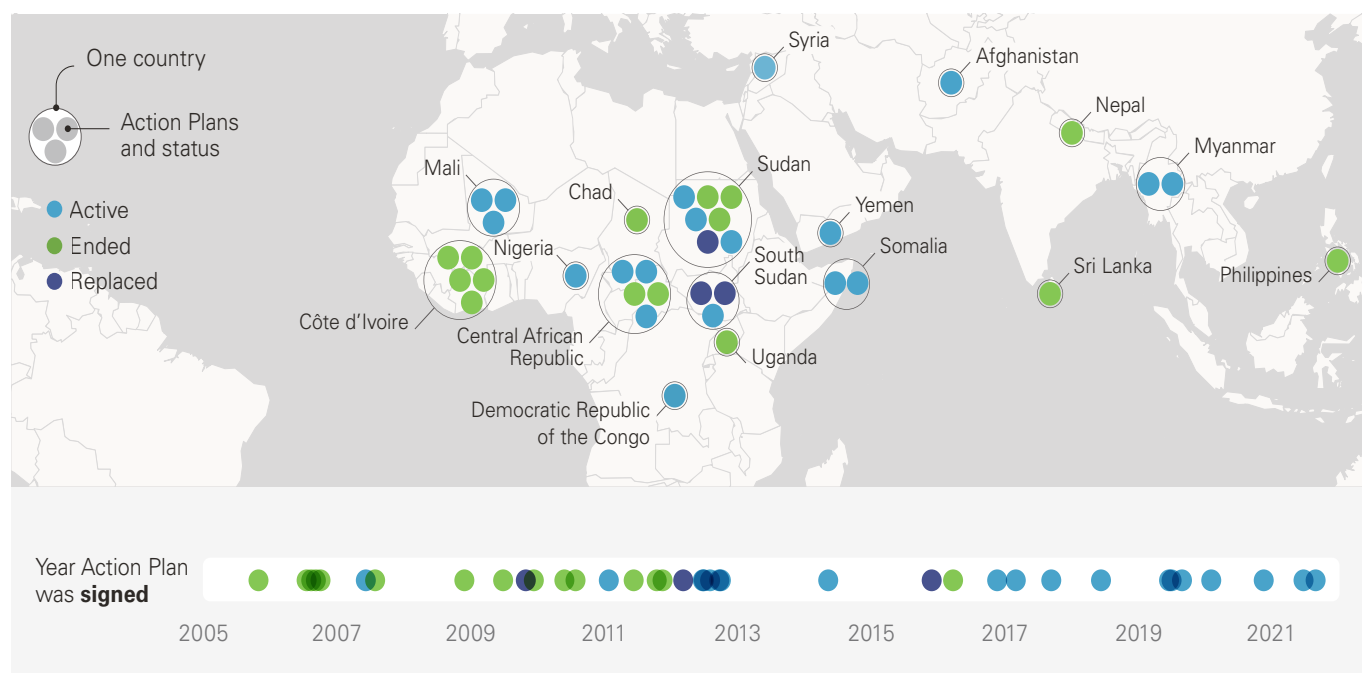
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54 Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (A/59/695- S/2005/72) <https://undocs.org/S/2005/72> para. 82 endorsed by Security Council Resolution 1612(2005)

Action Plans are developed with State and non-State actors alike, enabling the United Nations to engage in an impartial manner with all parties to conflict, in line with its core humanitarian principles. Since 2005, a total of 37 Action Plans have been signed by parties to conflict in 17 conflict situations<sup>55</sup>. Most Action Plans were signed with non-State actors (26, 70%), followed by State actors (11, 30%), showcasing the ability (and necessity) of the United Nations to engage systematically with all parties to conflict. Overall, 13 Action Plans were signed between 2005 and 2010, 12 between 2011 and 2015, and 12 between 2016 and 2021. 80% of State actors' Action Plans were signed between 2011 and 2016, whilst the most recent one signed in South Sudan in February 2020 replaced previous commitments dating from 2012. As of early 2022, 19 Action Plans remained under implementation and 15 had ended, including 11 which resulted from signatory parties' compliance with their commitments, and 4 after the party ceased to exist. Three were replaced by new Action Plans.

Completing an Action Plan is a challenging endeavour that requires significant investment by all actors involved – parties to the conflict, United Nations and other actors concerned– in order to ensure that effective measures to protect children are put in place and can be sustained over time. In 2010, the UN Secretary- General indicated that “A party will be delisted on condition that there is UN-verified information that it has ceased commission of all said grave violations against children for which the party is listed [...] for a period of at least one reporting cycle.”<sup>56</sup> As part of this delisting process, a party is required to “enter into dialogue with the United Nations to prepare and implement a concrete, time-bound action plan to cease and prevent [the] grave violations [...]”<sup>57</sup> for which the party is listed. Delisted parties must ensure continuous and unhindered access for the United Nations to monitor and verify compliance with commitments, and verifiable information on perpetrators' accountability measures adopted.<sup>58</sup>

## 37 Action Plans signed with parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children



This infographic presents all Action Plans signed between 2005 and 2021. Action Plans signed in 2022 are not illustrated in this image.

55 Action Plans have been signed in Afghanistan (1), Central African Republic (5), Chad (1), Côte d'Ivoire (5), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), Mali (3), Myanmar (2), Nepal (1), Nigeria (1), Philippines (1), Somalia (2), South Sudan (3), Sri Lanka (1), Sudan (7), Syrian Arab Republic (1), Uganda (1) and Yemen (1). Action Plans have been signed in 17 of the 20 situations (85%) that have at least one party listed in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General.

56 A/64/742-S/2010/181 (2010) Para. 178

57 A/64/742-S/2010/181 (2010) Para. 179

58 A/64/742-S/2010/181 (2010) Para. 179



Since the beginning of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, 8<sup>59</sup> of the 25 non-State actors and 3<sup>60</sup> of the 11 State actors who had signed an Action Plan completed implementation, leading to their delisting from the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. Out of the 11 State and non-State actors that completed their Action Plans, 10 complied with their commitments

within 1 to 3 years of signature<sup>61</sup>. Of the 17 Action Plans that remain active in 2022, more than half have been under implementation for at least 7 years. Moreover, at the time of writing, only 15 of the 61 (25%)<sup>62</sup> parties listed in the annexes of the 2021 Secretary-General's annual report had developed an Action Plan with the United Nations.



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- 59 Non-State actors that have completed their Action Plans are: Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles, Front de libération du Grand Ouest, Mouvement Ivoirien de Libération de l'Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire, Alliance patriotique de l'ethnie Wè, and Union patriotique de résistance du Grand Ouest in Côte d'Ivoire; Unified Communist Party of Nepal Maoist in Nepal; Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines; and Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal in Sri Lanka. In addition, in 2021, the Civilian Joint Task Force in Nigeria was delisted for recruitment and use. This delisting decision is conditioned on the finalization of pending Action Plans activities, failure of which will lead to their relisting in the next report of the Secretary-General (see A/75/873-S/2021/437 for more details). This Action Plan therefore is considered active.
- 60 State actors that have completed their Action Plans and were eventually delisted are: *Armée Nationale Tchadienne* in Chad; *Sudan Government security forces* in the Sudan; and *Popular Defence Forces* in Uganda. In addition to these Action Plans, the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen was delisted for killing and maiming in 2020 following the signature and implementation of the programme of time-bound activities to support the implementation of the *memorandum of understanding* signed in March 2019 (see A/74/845-S/2020/525, p.32 for reference). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the national armed forces (FARDC) were delisted for the recruitment and use of children in 2017 but remain listed for rape and other sexual violence. Because the Action Plan signed by the Government addresses both recruitment and use and rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, the Action Plan remains considered as active. In addition, in 2021, the Afghan National Police in Afghanistan was delisted for recruitment and use – this delisting is conditioned on the finalization of pending Action Plans activities. Failure of which will lead to their relisting in the next report of the Secretary-General (see A/75/873-S/2021/437 for more details) – as such this Action Plan is considered active.
- 61 The three State actors that completed their Action Plans within one to three years are: *Armée Nationale Tchadienne* in Chad, *Government Security Forces* in the Sudan, and the *People's Defence Force* in Uganda. The seven non-State actors that completed their Action Plans within one to three years are: *Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles*, *Front de libération du Grand Ouest*, *Mouvement Ivoirien de Libération de l'Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire*, *Alliance patriotique de l'ethnie Wè*, and *Union patriotique de résistance du Grand Ouest* in Côte d'Ivoire, *Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal* in Sri Lanka, and the *Unified Communist Party of Nepal Maoist* in Nepal.
- 62 The 15 parties listed in the annexes of the 2021 annual report of the Secretary-General that have developed an Action Plan are: 1) *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique*, *Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique* and *Union pour la paix en Centrafrique* as part of the former *Séléka* coalition in the Central African Republic. The former *Séléka* coalition is listed as one party in the report of the Secretary-General and therefore counted as one party in this report; 2) *Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo* in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; 3) *Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad* in Mali; 4) *Platform including affiliated groups* in Mali. Two different factions of the Platform signed two separate Action Plans. 5) *Tatmadaw Kyi*, including integrated border guard forces, and 6) *Democratic Karen Benevolent Army* in Myanmar; 7) *Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces* in Somalia; 8) *South Sudan People's Defence Forces*, including *Taban Deng-allied South Sudan People's Defence Forces*, and 9) *Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition – pro-Machar* in South Sudan. Both parties in South Sudan are bound by the same Action Plan signed in February 2020; 10) *Justice and Equality Movement*, 11) *Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi*, 12) *Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction* and 13) *Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Malik Agar faction* in the Sudan. In the Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North armed group is now listed as two separate entities, but the Action Plan previously signed is applicable to both factions; 14) *Kurdish People's Protection Units and Women's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ)* in the Syrian Arab Republic; 15) *Government forces*, including the *Yemen Armed Forces* in Yemen.

The number of grave violations covered by Action Plans varies from one to another. Since 2005, all but one Action Plan has addressed the recruitment and use of children, while 7% were specifically dedicated to this one violation and the other 22% addressing recruitment and use and at least one other violation. Killing and maiming and sexual violence have been addressed in seven Action Plans each, attacks on schools and hospitals in four and abduction in one. It is worth noting that recruitment and use was the first violation to be considered as a trigger for the listing parties to conflict, with other violations added later, in 2009 (killing and maiming, and rape and other forms of sexual violence), 2011 (attacks on schools and hospitals) and 2015 (abduction). A higher number of parties have been listed for recruitment and use than for other violations, which partially explain why Action Plans have predominantly focused on this violation. For instance, in 2021, 57 of the 61 parties included in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report were listed for recruitment and use of children (93%), compared with 24 for killing and maiming (39%), 20 for sexual violence (32%), 15 for abduction (24%), and 14 for attacks on schools and hospitals (23%).

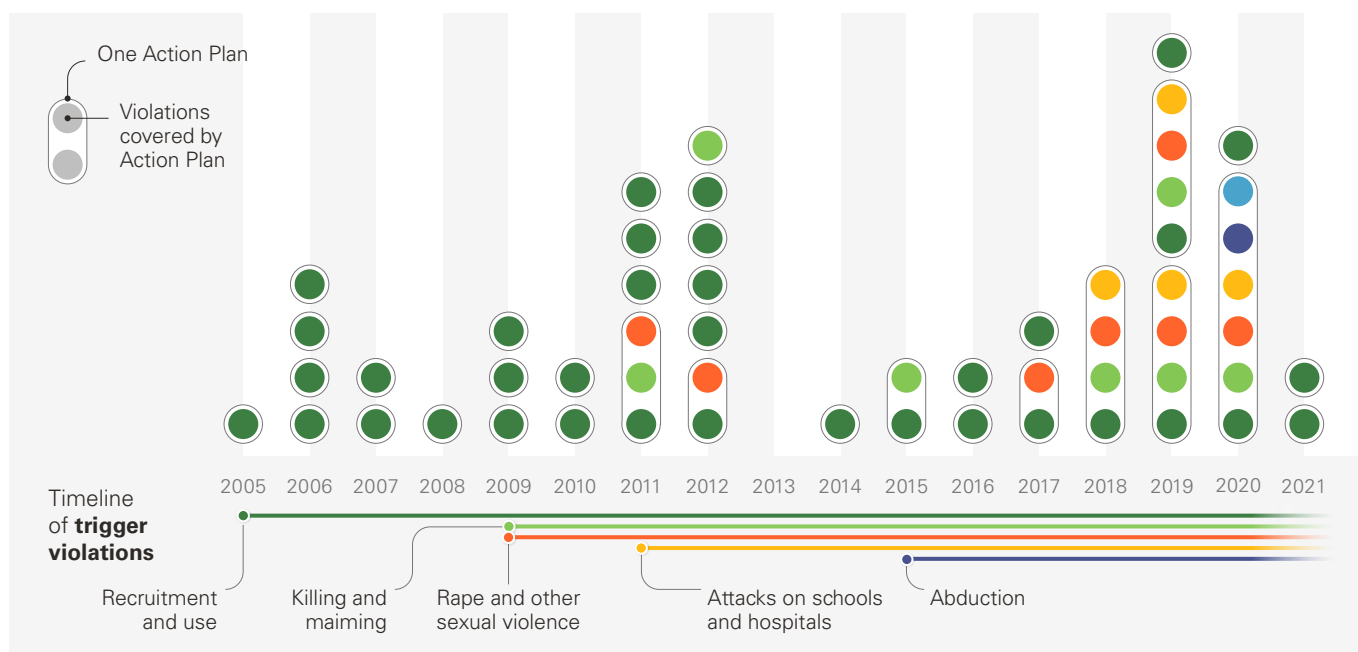
A total of 8 Action Plans (23%), including 7 still under implementation, address 2 or more violations. 5 of those were signed in 2017 or later, indicating a trend by which parties to conflict commit to address a wider range of violations and related child protection issues.

This was particularly echoed in February 2020 with the signing of a new Action Plan by the Government of South Sudan<sup>63</sup> – this is the most comprehensive Action Plan to date, being the first one to address all six grave violations against children. Although the armed forces are listed for the five listable grave violations, denial of humanitarian access was also included in the Action Plan as a prevention measure.

### 3.2 Engaging State and non-State actors through Action Plans: selected examples

Since 2005, undeniable successes and concrete, sustainable protection measures for children have been achieved through the implementation of Action Plans. Some of them are presented below<sup>64</sup>, bearing witness to the UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting's relentless efforts and parties to conflict's commitments to bring about positive changes for children. Selected examples also include references to challenges and obstacles, mirroring practical realities and complexities associated with the implementation of agendas for change.

## Grave violations covered by the Action Plans



This infographic presents all action plans signed between 2005 and 2021. Action Plans signed in 2022 are not included in this image.

63 The Action Plan has also been signed by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) pro-Machar and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA). The comprehensive Action Plan replaces previous Action Plans signed by the Government in 2012 and SPLA-IO in 2015.

64 Information, trends, and analyses presented in this section are based exclusively on verified data and information relating to grave violations against children included in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, as well as country-specific reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict since 2005.

# Afghanistan

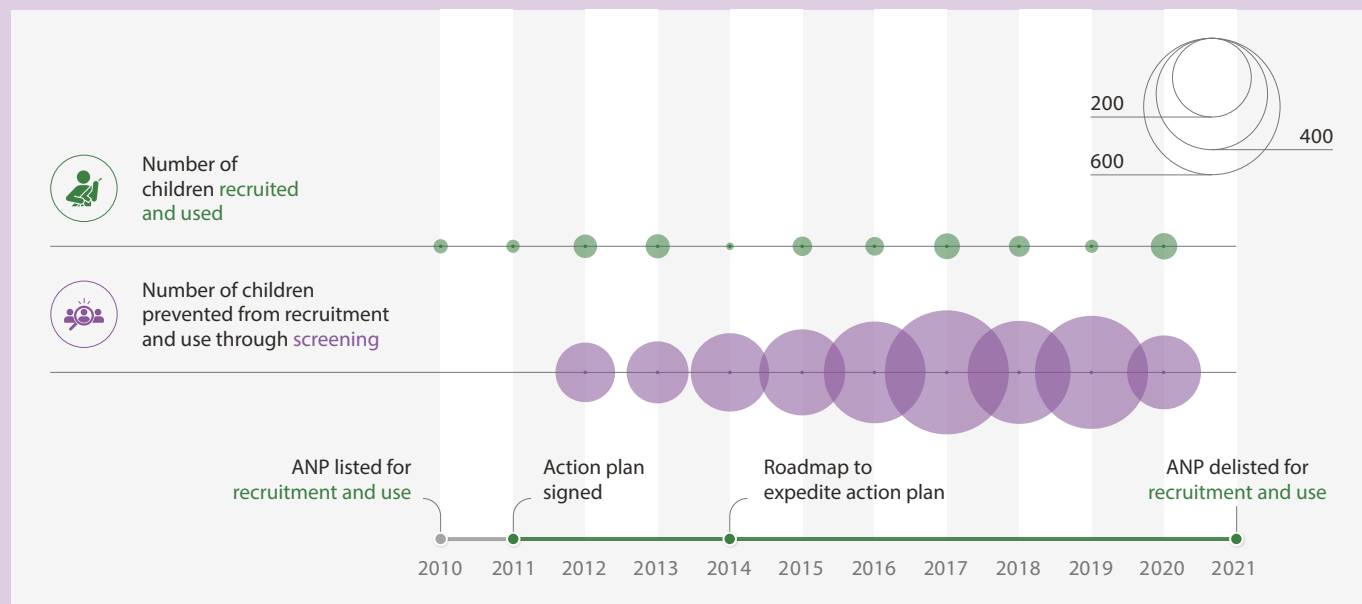
On 15 August 2021, the former government of Afghanistan collapsed and the Taliban assumed control of the entire territory of Afghanistan. The former government of Afghanistan had developed an Action Plan with the United Nations, which produced important advances for the protection of children. Although this Action Plan has ended because the former government of Afghanistan ceased to exist, this example aims to illustrate the important gains made for children under the former government of Afghanistan. It is critical that these gains are maintained by the Taliban, to avoid losing the progress that was achieved.

On 30 January 2011, the former Government of Afghanistan<sup>65</sup> signed an Action Plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the former Afghan National Security Forces<sup>66</sup>; the Action Plan also includes annexes to address sexual violence, and killing and maiming of children. The Action Plan was complemented by a 15-point road map signed in 2014 to expedite its implementation.

The establishment of child protection units in recruitment centres of the Afghan National Police (ANP), a security actor involved in the conflict, and the adoption of national guidelines on age assessment in 2015 resulted in preventing at least 2,592 children from enlisting with security forces. In addition, the dialogue between the UN and the Afghan government within the framework of or in relation to the Action Plan strengthened the national legislative framework. For example, the dialogue directly led to: 1) the adoption of the Child Rights Protection Law in 2019 and the revision of the Penal Code in 2017 – both of which explicitly criminalize and prohibit the recruitment and use of children and the practice of *bacha bazi*<sup>67</sup>; 2) the adoption of a national Policy on Protection of Children and Armed Conflict addressing all six grave violations; and 3) the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration in 2015 and subsequent promulgation of two directives to end the use of schools for military purposes.

## Afghanistan: Action Plan signed with the Government

To end and prevent recruitment and use of children



Whilst the Afghan National Police (ANP) was the party listed for recruitment and use, the Action Plan signed by the Government applies to all Afghan National Security Forces.

65 In this section the “government of Afghanistan” refers to the authorities that governed the country prior to 15 August 2021.

66 It is worth noting that whilst only the Afghan National Police (ANP) has been listed by the Secretary-General for the recruitment and use of children, the Action Plan applies to all Afghan National Security Forces, including the ANP and the local police, the national army (ANA), the National Directorate of Security (NDS), as well as pro-government militia.

67 *Bacha bazi* is a practice whereby boys are exploited by wealthy or powerful men for entertainment, in particular for dancing and sexual activities.



Considerable progress had been achieved over the previous 10 years, which eventually led to the delisting of the ANP by the Secretary-General in 2021. The delisting was conditional to the finalization of all pending activities provided for in the Action Plan and the continued decrease in the recruitment and use of children.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, challenges remained, including to fully implement all measures outlined in the 2014 roadmap. For instance, the CTFMR continued to document and verify instances of child recruitment, primarily attributed to the ANP and local police, as well as limited advancements in bringing perpetrators to justice. Moreover, gaps in the existing

reintegration policy and the absence of a standardized protocol for the handover and reintegration of children separated from parties to conflict, released from detention and rejected from recruitment centres, continued to hamper the sustainable prevention of (re-) recruitment of children. The referral of those children (as well as all other victims of other grave violations) to social welfare services and child protection actors did not occur systematically and remained essential to respond their individual needs and sustainably shield them from being exposed to further violations.



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68 The Secretary-General indicated that failure to meet these conditions would lead to the relisting of the Afghan National Police in the next report (A/75/873 S/2021/437 para. 290)



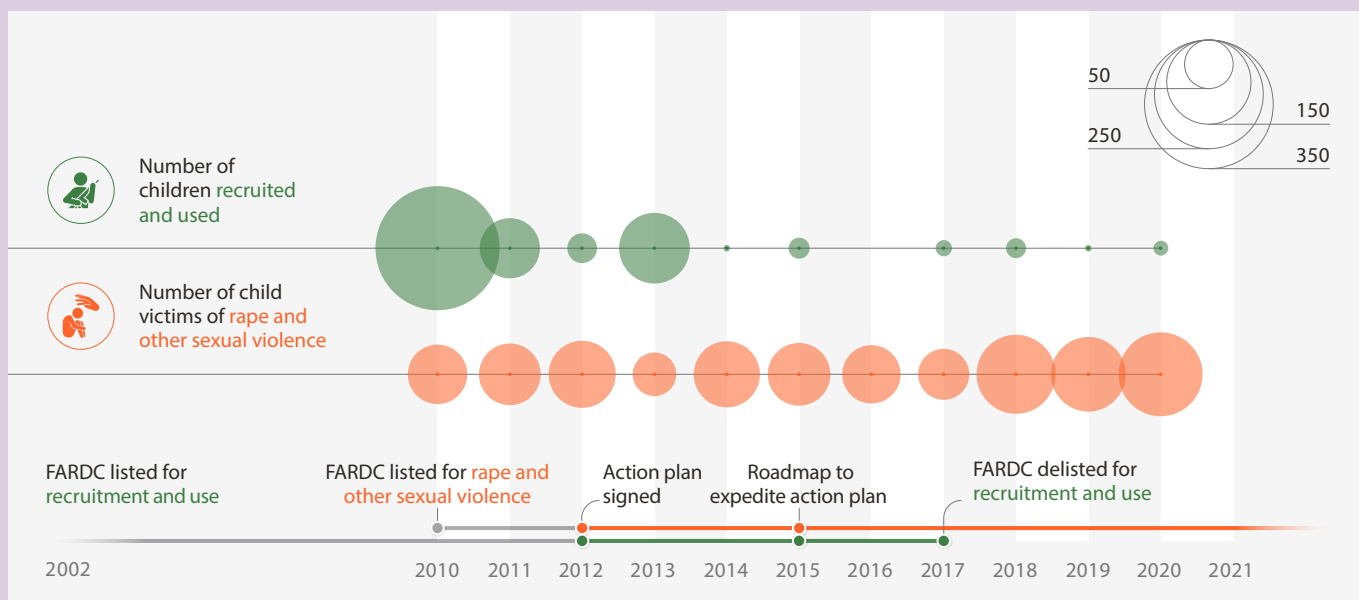
# Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) were listed for the recruitment and use of children in 2002, and for rape and other forms of sexual violence in 2010. On 4 October 2012, after several months of negotiations, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo<sup>69</sup> signed an Action Plan to end and prevent recruitment and use and sexual violence against children, as well as to address other grave child rights violations.

State authorities rapidly showed ownership of the Action Plan, including by establishing joint technical working groups and appointing focal points at national and provincial levels<sup>70</sup>, appointing a presidential special adviser on sexual violence and child recruitment, issuing several directives<sup>71</sup>, and conducting vast public awareness-raising campaigns, among others.

## DRC: Action Plan signed with the Government

To end and prevent recruitment and use and sexual violence



The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) were the listed party, nevertheless the Action Plan signed by the Government applies to all national defence and security forces, including FARDC, the Congolese National Police and the National Intelligence Agency.

69 Whilst only the FARDC were listed in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, the Action Plan applies to all national defence and security forces, including FARDC, the Congolese National Police and the National Intelligence Agency (ANR).

70 Provincial-level joint technical working groups have developed context-specific roadmaps to address local challenges such as mitigating risks of re-recruitment of children or preventing detention of children by security forces.

71 For example, in 2013 the Ministry of Defence issued a directive to prohibit the killing, maiming and recruitment of and sexual violence against children, in addition to the use of schools and hospitals, and the National Intelligence Agency issued another one stating that all children in detention on charges of association with armed groups should be handed over immediately to United Nations child protection actors.



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Significant progress toward ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children was documented, eventually leading to the delisting of FARDC in 2017 for that violation. With UNICEF support, important measures were put in place to screen new recruits and separate children before, during or after their recruitment into security forces. The development and adoption in 2016 of standard operating procedures (SOP) on age assessment and verification were critical in supporting those efforts and have now become a reference document for the training of new FARDC recruits across the country. As a result, more than 1,100 children were effectively screened out and separated from the FARDC between 2012 and 2020. The effective implementation of directives and command orders, the criminalization and prohibition of recruitment and use<sup>72</sup> and increases in arrest, prosecution, and conviction of child recruiters, among others, have been catalysts in ending patterns of recruitment of children into the security forces,

including for combat purposes. Since 2017, the few isolated cases of child recruitment were verified of children being used in support functions.

Advancements to end instances of sexual violence have posed greater challenges, with rates of verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence attributed to security forces remaining extremely high in most recent years (including 159 cases verified in 2020, of which 22 occurred in a previous year). Nevertheless, the CTFMR's advocacy and support provided by the United Nations and international partners resulted in increased numbers of arrests, prosecutions, and convictions of offenders, showcasing a step in the right direction. Efforts to fight impunity, provide services to survivors and invest in prevention, must be sustained to expedite the implementation of the Action Plan, and effectively end to sexual violence against children.

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72. The Secretary-General's 2009 report on children and armed conflict, *Children and Armed Conflict: A Guide to the International Legal Frameworks for Protection and Assisted Return* (A/64/588, 2009), para. 290.

# Myanmar<sup>73</sup>

On 27 June 2012, following six years of negotiations, the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations signed an Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Tatmadaw. Consistent engagement with the Tatmadaw at both senior and technical levels led to important successes including the identification, joint verification, and release of more than 1,000 children from the Tatmadaw ranks since 2012. UNICEF and its partners have worked closely with the Government to ensure the full and effective reintegration of these children. However, the CTFMR continues to document cases in which children have been separated from the Tatmadaw outside of the Action Plan framework, thereby delaying or hindering their identification and reintegration process.

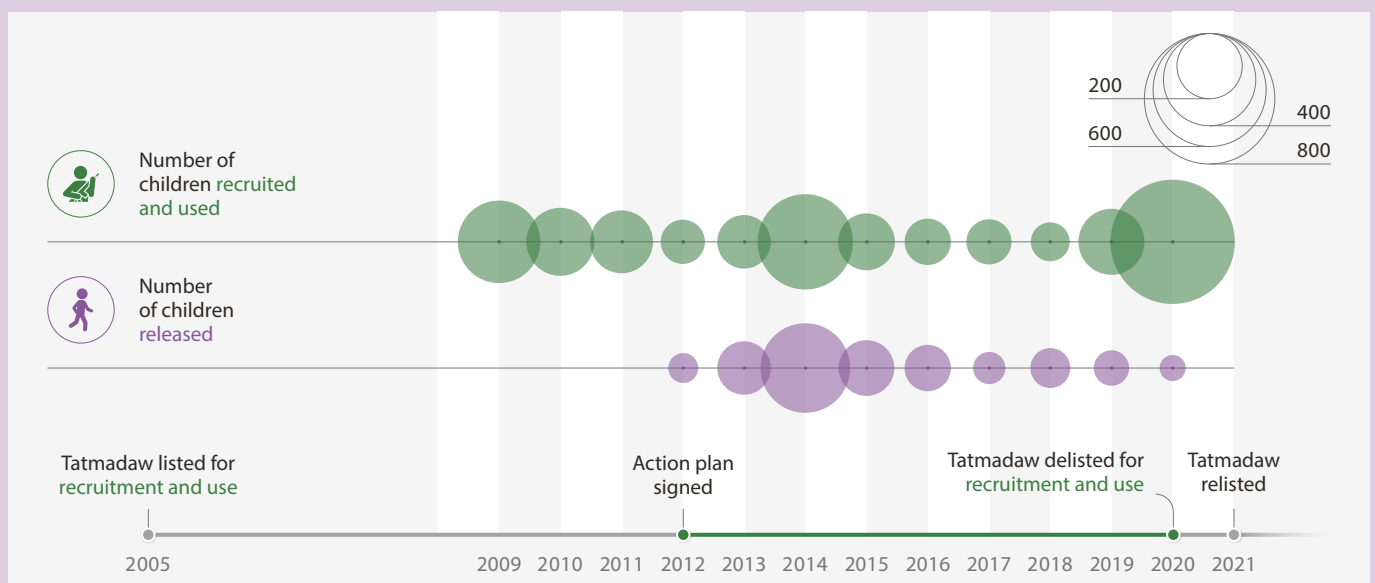
Other important efforts to prevent and criminalize child recruitment and use are worth noting. Building on previous efforts, in 2019 the Government enacted a new Child Rights Law, criminalizing all six grave violations against children, including recruitment and use, and providing for specific protection of children affected by armed conflict, including those associated with armed forces and armed groups, and thereby demonstrating Myanmar's commitment to abide by and align its national legislation with international standards. Prevention efforts included, among others, a nation-wide prevention campaign that started in November 2013 and the centralization of military recruitment and prohibition of recruitment at battalion level in 2014. Thanks to these efforts, the CTFMR noted a steady decrease in new cases of recruitment and use of children into Tatmadaw's ranks.

Notwithstanding important achievements, serious concerns remain around the effectiveness and/or sustainability of certain measures put in place by the Tatmadaw. For instance, the incorporation of both the best interests of the child and the benefit of the doubt principles into Tatmadaw rules and regulations have not yet systematically translated into practice. For example, as of June 2020, age verification confirmation was still ongoing for 145 individuals suspected to be minors who were identified previously as having been recruited by the Tatmadaw. Some cases have been pending for up to five years with suspected minors remaining in their battalions, except for 41 who were absent without leave. In addition, and at odds with the delisting of the Tatmadaw by the Secretary-General in 2020, a dramatic increase in cases of recruitment and use of children was verified in the past two years, affecting respectively 214 children in 2019 and 726 in 2020, mostly in Rakhine State, which demonstrated the irregular implementation of military directives prohibiting child recruitment and use. The Tatmadaw was relisted by the Secretary-General in his report released in 2021.

In terms of accountability, more than 450 army officers had been disciplined in accordance with the military code of conduct, for failure to comply with proper recruitment processes. However, limited transparency has not enabled the United Nations to effectively verify and evaluate the success of accountability measures. Moreover, in many cases, children and families have opted against seeking redress, often citing fear of reprisals and other safety concerns.

## Myanmar: Action Plan signed with the Government

To end and prevent recruitment and use and use of children



The number of children released refers to children released within the framework of the Action Plan.

73 All information included in this section refers to the engagement with the Government of Myanmar prior to the military coup of February 2021.



# Nigeria

In 2013, residents in northeast Nigeria formed the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) to protect local communities against attacks and human rights violations by Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups – an armed group designated as terrorist by the United Nations – and support the Nigerian security forces in their fight against the group. Soon after the creation of the CJTF, the United Nations started to document and verify cases of recruitment and use of children, eventually leading to the listing of the CJTF in April 2016. After months of constructive dialogue, an Action Plan was signed by the CJTF and supported by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) of Borno State.

In line with its commitments, the CJTF granted access to all its bases to both the MoJ and UNICEF to allow children to be identified and separated. As a result, a total of 112 joint verification missions were conducted, leading to the formal disengagement of 2,203 children by the end of 2019. Released children and their families benefitted from an array of services, including psychosocial support, and community-based socio-economic reintegration. Similarly, with UNICEF support, measures were put in place to bolster ownership of the Action Plan and support at all levels, and pave way for the sustainable prevention of child recruitment and use. For instance, child protection units were established across all CJTF sectors, extensive training sessions, including on age assessment, were organized for the group's



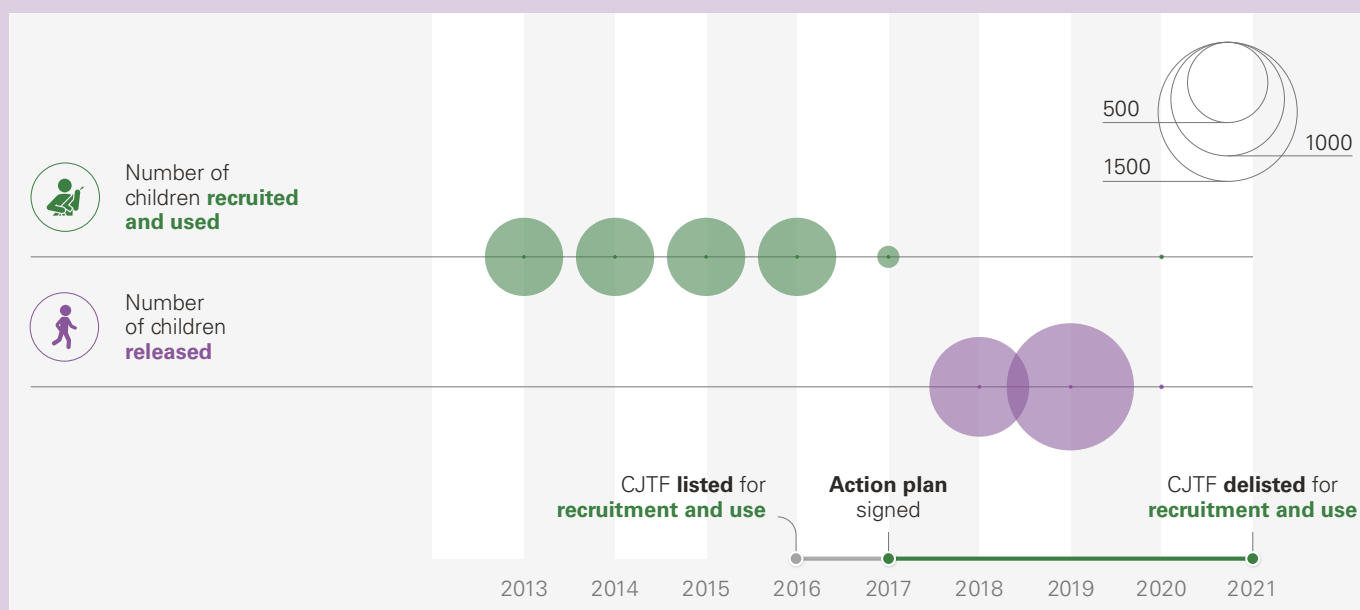
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commanders and members, and targeted sensitization activities were conducted with community leaders and members.

Since the signing of the Action Plan, no child has been verified as having been formally recruited by the group. Two boys were used in support roles at a checkpoint in 2020 but were released in accordance with the CJTF standing orders. The progress achieved eventually led to the delisting of the CJTF by the Secretary-General in the 2021 annual report.

## Nigeria: Action Plan with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)

To end and prevent recruitment and use of children



Exact yearly disaggregation of children recruited and used for the period 2013-2016 is not available; the yearly average for the four-year period has been used instead.



# Philippines

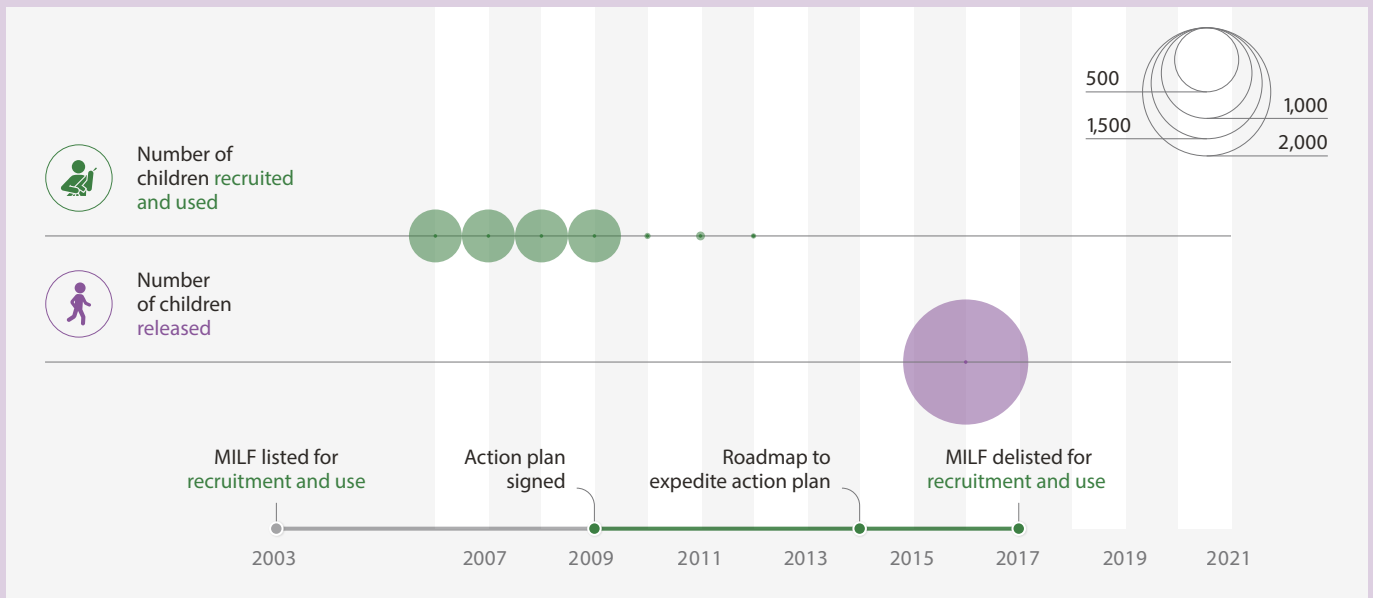
Shortly after its creation in March 2007, the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting in the Philippines started to engage with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which had been listed for the recruitment and use of children since 2003. A joint UNICEF-MILF communiqué in 2007 spearheaded trust-building and dialogue to address child protection issues. Within two years, the MILF had signed an Action Plan to end child recruitment and use and identify and release those within its ranks.

While renewed fighting and other challenges disrupted the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan, opportunities arose with the signing of the peace agreement between MILF and the Government in March 2014. Momentum gained further traction thanks to the involvement of the diplomatic community, particularly a then-recently established Group of Friends of children and armed conflict.

On 14 August 2014, MILF leadership signed a roadmap delineating specific activities to expedite the completion of the Action Plan. Upon endorsement, MILF demonstrated its commitment, obtaining buy-in and building ownership at all levels, including with frontline and base commanders<sup>74</sup>. In less than 3 years, a total of 1,869 children were identified, released, and provided with reintegration services. Since children associated with MILF were living with their families during their association, action plan activities, including reintegration, focused on community outreach and engagement. In addition, the roll-out of the “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign by local partners and religious leaders, and the engagement with women’s organisations and the Bangsamoro Islamic Women’s Auxiliary Brigade proved instrumental in garnering community-wide support. No new cases of child recruitment and use have been documented by the CTFMR, and MILF was delisted by the UN Secretary-General in 2017.

## Philippines: Action Plan signed with MILF

To end and prevent recruitment and use of children



Exact yearly disaggregation of children recruited and used for the period 2006-2009 is not available; the yearly average for the four-year period has been used instead.

74 For further details, please refer to: UNICEF Philippines, UN-MILF Action Plan on the Recruitment and Use of Children: Processes and Lessons Learnt 2009-2017, <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/sites/unicef.org.philippines/files/2019-06/phl-report-unmilfactionplan.pdf> [accessed 30 April 2021].



The selected examples presented above highlight the critical value and impact of Action Plans in bringing about positive change for children, both in the immediate and long terms.

The examples presented in this section showcase the critical importance of joint actions and initiatives. By promoting and ensuring transparency and unhindered access to UN entities, parties to conflict demonstrate their willingness to enabling effective verification of their efforts and evaluation of their sustainability.

These examples also show that the success of such endeavours is highly dependent on the signing parties' commitment, buy-in and ownership at all levels, including the national authorities, who are ultimately responsible for enabling engagement and

implementation of Action Plans. This includes those signed with non-State Actors. The sustainability of the gains achieved through the implementation of Action Plans also depends on the will of national authorities to put the protection of children first, even in situations where a change of government occurs or when military authorities hold power. The country examples also demonstrate that engagement by relevant third parties, including the diplomatic community, national governments and the SRS-CAAC, among others, can be critical to push the agenda forward. Similarly, UNICEF has continuously played an instrumental role in the development, implementation, and monitoring of Action Plans, thanks to its mandate, position, and ability to engage with parties to conflict as well as affected communities, and to deliver effective programmatic interventions for children.

As exemplified above, Action Plans provide a crucial platform for wider engagement with parties to conflict. For example, whilst the Action Plan signed with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in June 2019 primarily focuses on the prevention of child recruitment and the release and reintegration of children associated, additional avenues to protect children were explored. Following sustained dialogue with the group, the SDF shared with the United Nations information about over 800 children whom they believed were formerly associated with ISIL/Da'esh who were detained in several military and civilian-run facilities, and, in coordination with the UN, granted access to child protection actors to some facilities to conduct humanitarian assessments and explore ways to establish non-custodial alternatives measures for children.<sup>75</sup> In addition, the SDF vacated more than a dozen schools used for military purposes and issued, in July 2020, a military directive to all its forces prohibiting the military use of schools<sup>76</sup>, followed by another military directive, in March 2021, on the protection for healthcare facilities.

## Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict

Member States have increasingly created Groups of Friends (GoF) of CAAC in which they can remain engaged and discuss the impact of conflict on children both at the UN Headquarters in New York as well as in the field.

Established shortly after the adoption of Resolution 1612(2005), the first GoF of CAAC was established in New York by the Government of Canada and has reinforced and supported the CAAC agenda the work of the SCWG CAAC over the years. Today, it includes 45 member

States from five regions and holds meetings several times a year focusing on topics of interest. It features briefings from the SRS-CAAC and civil society, among others, and hosts CTFMR co-chairs as well as other relevant CAAC experts visiting the UN headquarters in New York. The GoF of CAAC in New York enabled an enlarged platform for member States to be informed, participate, and promote the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

The establishment of GoF of CAAC has spread over time, and there are now at least twelve such forums, including in Geneva, at the African Union, in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Mali, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. These GoF have been supporting the CTFMRs or their equivalent in their advocacy, and increasingly by mobilizing resources for monitoring, reporting, and responding to grave violations against children. Country-based GoF of CAAC have also played a critical role in relation to the engagement with parties to conflict in some contexts, using its members' bilateral dialogue to advocate with Governments, armed forces, and non-State actors for the protection of children. In some cases, they have succeeded in bringing parties to conflict to the negotiating table to engage in a dialogue on the development of Action Plans.

<sup>75</sup> See Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2021/398).

<sup>76</sup> See Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2021/398).

### 3.3 Additional engagement outcomes

In addition to Action Plans, CTFMRs' relentless dialogue and engagement with parties has led to important legislative reform, improving protection for children, and promoting accountability for grave violations. For example, in 2020, the Government of the Central African Republic adopted the Child Protection Code, which specifically criminalized the recruitment and use of children. In Afghanistan, the Child Rights Protection Law enacted in March 2019 prohibits *bacha bazi* and the recruitment and use of children. In January 2019, the Government of the Philippines adopted the Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Bill, which incorporates Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, and guidelines on the monitoring and reporting mechanism into national law.

CTFMRs' on-going advocacy also contributed to an increasing number of States ratifying key international treaties, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), with most recent examples taking place in the Central African Republic (2017), South Sudan (2018) and Myanmar (2019). Similar trends were observed with the endorsement of the Paris Principles on children associated with armed forces and armed groups, and the Safe Schools Declaration. However, more than one third of countries currently on the CAAC agenda have yet to endorse the Paris Principles<sup>77</sup> and/or the Safe Schools Declaration.<sup>78</sup>

Peace negotiations have also provided key entry points to address child protection issues. For example, the SRSG-CAAC was the first UN high-level representative to be invited to the peace negotiations between the Colombian Government and the FARC held in 2016 in Havana, Cuba, particularly to address the issue of child recruitment and use by FARC-EP. In parallel, the CTFMR supported the organization of

forums on victims and supported the participation of victims' groups in the negotiations in Havana. In a joint communiqué on 15 May 2016, the FARC-EP and the Colombian government committed to the establishment of a protocol for the immediate separation of all children under 15 and an UN-supported roadmap and comprehensive programme for the reintegration of all children under 18. In addition, a ground-breaking statement by the Constitutional Court required that all children associated with armed groups be treated as victims and be granted the right to reparations. This was further reinforced with explicit references to the primacy and prioritization of the best interests of children in the Final Peace Agreement signed in November 2016. As a result of these efforts, 135 children were officially released from FARC-EP, whilst many others informally separated from the group. UNICEF has been actively providing holistic reintegration support to affected children, whilst advocating for the effective implementation of child rights guarantees throughout the transitional justice process.

Moreover, with the detention of children for their alleged or actual association with parties to conflict becoming an issue of growing concern, the United Nations has engaged Governments, and non-State actors where applicable, to develop protocols and/or standard operating procedures to ensure the swift handover of children – usually within 24 to 72 hours – from military custody to child protection actors or social welfare services<sup>79</sup>. These protocols have proved essential in minimizing the detention of children, ensuring that children are treated first and foremost as victims, and promoting their reintegration, in line with key international human rights standards. As such, through UNICEF leadership and/or support, agreements were signed in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Yemen<sup>80</sup>. However, in 2021, handover protocols had been adopted in only one-third of all countries included in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, including in just 2 of the 10 conflict situations with the highest number of conflict-related detention of children.

77 Countries that have not endorsed the Paris Principles: India, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, State of Palestine, Philippines, South Sudan, and Syrian Arab Republic.

78 Countries that have not endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration: Colombia, India, Israel, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, and Syrian Arab Republic.

79 See for reference: Watchlist & Human Rights Watch, Military detention in armed conflict: the role of handover protocols in protecting children's rights, 2019.

80 All handover protocols were signed with government entities, except in Yemen where the protocol was developed with Ansar Allah/the Houthis.







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The monitoring and reporting mechanism continues to provide concrete verified evidence of the impact of war on children. The annual reports of the Secretary-General demonstrate that while children bear no responsibility for war, they are among the first to suffer its consequences. They suffer extreme distress due to armed conflict, including witnessing and enduring violence, including sexual violence, severe injuries, and the threat of recruitment into armed forces or armed groups or being abducted, being forced to flee their homes, losing or being separated from their parents,

caregivers, siblings, and other supports including access to basic services such as education, health and humanitarian assistance. In situations of armed conflict, the MRM provides the humanitarian community with up to date information that helps prioritize interventions – knowing who to assist, where to act and what support is required.

To help keep children safe from bombs, IEDs, landmines and other explosive weapons, UNICEF supports the risk-reduction efforts of governments and humanitarian actors and educates communities

on the dangers of explosive weapons. Based on information gained from the MRM, UNICEF and other humanitarian partners can better target advocacy, service delivery and resource mobilization. In 2020, working with governments, partners and communities, UNICEF reached more than 2.7 million children in 20 countries with life-saving explosive ordnance risk education and provided rehabilitation support to around 733 child victims of landmine and explosive remnants of war in 10 countries. UNICEF has also worked with governments to include explosive ordnance risk education in school curriculum so that children can understand and protect themselves from risk and to know how to report the existence of such devices. Advocacy to protect critical infrastructure and personnel from attack by use of explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas, can also prevent severe deprivation and wide-scale displacement. Where documented, the information can contribute to faster recovery by enabling humanitarian access, and planning for restoration of water, health, education, livelihoods, and other essential services.

Boys and girls suffer extensive forms of exploitation and abuse when associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG). Warring parties use children not only as fighters, but as scouts, cooks, porters, guards, messengers and more. Many, especially girls, are also subjected to gender-based violence while associated with armed forces or groups. The MRM allows UNICEF, governments and humanitarian partners to better understand the scope of the problem, as well as experiences of children who have exited armed forces or groups, the roles that they played while associated, and areas of further inquiry such as methods of recruitment and drivers for child association in particular conflict contexts. Equipped with such information, UNICEF and humanitarian partners can better target prevention and response services. This may include addressing the pull factors for child association, engaging with parties to conflict to conduct verification and release exercises, and providing children with a safe place to live upon release, as well

as community-based case management, economic support, education, mental health and psychosocial support, and family tracing, and reunification services. Understanding the different impact of recruitment and use on girls in a particular context also allow UNICEF to plan for and adapt services for girls who have exited armed forces or armed groups and promotes gender-responsive empowering services to address their specific needs. In 2020, UNICEF and partners provided 12,360 child survivors of recruitment and use with sustained reintegration support worldwide. Nearly 4,900 associated children were reunified with their families and communities.

Millions of children around the globe live with the terrifying threat of sexual violence in conflict every day. In times of war, they are subjected to rape, sexual slavery, or trafficking, forced marriage/pregnancy, or enforced sterilization. UNICEF leads globally to reach child survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual violence in conflict. UNICEF works in close collaboration with other UN agencies and civil society partners to implement GBV programming in emergencies and employs GBV risk mitigation strategies in communities and in displacement sites. In particular, UNICEF supports safe spaces for adolescent girls, survivor centred GBV case management, referral systems for clinical management of rape, mental health and psychosocial support, and other specialized services, among other things. UNICEF also works to prevent harmful practices and change social norms that put girls at greater risk of gender-based violence in situations of conflict such as child marriage. Despite this work, the stigma associated with sexual violence in armed conflict, and the impact on girls and their children, calls for more investment to support survivors and to strengthen protection systems that address gender-based violence – including through health and social services. Increasing access to GBV services and changing social norms may also increase the willingness of survivors to report such violations, which are often significantly underreported.

### Civil society's essential partnership and contribution in the field

National and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are on the frontline and work alongside the United Nations to document grave violations against children and to respond to their needs. By implementing programmes across the humanitarian spectrum,

they provide care and protection, medical assistance, psychosocial support, education, and livelihood opportunities for families and communities, NGOs strengthen the resilience of children and provide them with the support they need to resume their lives shattered by conflict. Civil society organizations also support the release of children from armed forces and armed groups, and through the case management

approach they identify the most appropriate interventions to cater to specific needs of released boys and girls, which supporting community-based reintegration. NGOs also support the engagement with parties to conflict and the development of Action Plans. The work alongside UNICEF to draft standard operating procedures, screening interventions and age assessments policies for adoption and implementation by armed forces and armed groups.





# Conclusions and recommendations



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This analysis shows the dramatic impact that armed conflicts continue to have on children twenty-five years after the Graça Machel report and highlighted some key avenues to effectively end and prevent grave violations against children and to increase the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

Despite global mobilisation, today more than ever, children continue to suffer from the scourge of war. Verified violations against children have continued unabated since 2005, surpassing 20,000 in a year for the first time in 2014 and reaching 26,425 in 2020. In the past five years, the daily global average of verified grave violations stood at an alarming 71 violations. This suffering should not be accepted as inevitable. Effectively and sustainably protecting children from these devastating violations remains our collective responsibility – a responsibility to accelerate action at local, national, regional, and global levels.

The following recommendations, based on the evidence and analysis presented in this report, aim to mobilize all concerned stakeholders, particularly parties to conflict, States, the UN Security Council and its Working Group on children and armed conflict, members of the diplomatic community, United Nations entities including Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs), non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and the donor community, to take action.

## 5.1 Protecting children from grave violations during armed conflict

### 5.1.1. Killing and maiming of children

Since 2016, an average of 10,300 children have been killed or maimed annually. The use of explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas, continues to have a devastating impact on children. For instance, in 2020, at least 47% of the 8,422 child casualties resulted from the use of explosive weapons and explosive remnants of war.

#### **UNICEF calls on parties to conflict to:**

- Abide by their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, including but not limited to, the principles of distinction and proportionality and to take all necessary precautions required to protect the civilian population and civilian objects.
- Avoid using explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas and those with wide area effects and develop military doctrine based on a presumption against such use, as recommended by the Secretary-General.



#### **UNICEF calls on States to:**

- Prioritize explosive ordnance risk education strategies and programmes so that children, families, and communities can learn how to protect themselves.
- Take appropriate measures to avoid the use of explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas and those with wide area effect, including by adopting political declarations that recognize that a failure to limit their use is a failure to protect children living in armed conflicts.

### **5.1.2 Recruitment and use of children**

With over 8,500 verified cases in 2020, children continue to be recruited and used by parties to conflict at alarming rates. In 2021, globally, over 40% of States are yet to endorse the Paris Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces and armed groups.

#### **Parties to conflict are called on to:**

- Take all necessary measures in line with their obligations under international law to prevent and prohibit the recruitment and use of children, including within domestic criminal law.

- Immediately, unconditionally, and safely release all children, including girls, within their ranks, including children recruited and used by armed groups designated as “terrorist” organizations, and ensure that all released children are handed over to child protection actors.

#### **States are called on to:**

- Endorse and fully implement the Paris Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces and armed groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, as well as to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC).
- Take all necessary measures to support community-based reintegration programmes for all children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups ensuring that children are treated first and foremost as victims of grave violations and are provided with age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, non-discriminatory and holistic child-centred services.

#### **The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict is called on to:**

- Continue advocating for the endorsement of the Paris Principles and Vancouver Principles and the ratification of OPAC in its dialogue with Member States and to include recommendations for such endorsement and ratification in their country report conclusions.

### **5.1.3 Detention of children**

The increasing counterterrorism efforts by states in the context of armed conflict is having an alarming impact on children including by undermining their rights and the special protections to which they are entitled under international humanitarian and human rights law. A growing number of children are being arrested and detained for security reasons or for their actual or alleged association with parties to conflict, while concurrently UN entities face mounting constraints to access places where children are deprived of their liberty. Handover protocols – which are essential and effective tools to divert children from detention and other harm – have only been adopted in one third of the countries mentioned in the Secretary-General’s annual report, and in only 2 of the 10 situations with the highest numbers of conflict-related detention of children<sup>81</sup>.

81 Handover protocols have been developed in 2 of the 10 countries with the highest number of verified cases of detention of children for alleged or actual association with parties to conflict or on national security charges since 2005: One protocol was signed with the Government in Somalia, and the other protocol was signed with the Houthis (who call themselves Ansar Allah) in Yemen.



**Parties to conflict are called on to:**

- Provide United Nations entities with full and unimpeded access to all facilities where children are deprived of their liberty, to allow for children to be identified and provided with the appropriate care and services.
- Develop and implement protocols and/or procedures jointly with the United Nations for the systematic and swift handover of children in their custody to child protection actors, so as to ensure children's protection and reintegration.

**States are called on to:**

- Ensure that counterterrorism laws, policies, and practices are human and child rights compliant, and that the best interest of affected children are a primary consideration.
- Refrain from detaining children for their actual or alleged association with an armed group, including groups designated as "terrorists"; or holding children accountable based on the conduct or affiliation of their family members.
- Ensure that children are treated first and foremost as victims of grave violations and that detention is used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time. Administrative detention is never in the best interest of the child. Children should not be deprived of liberty for protective purposes.

### 5.1.4 Rape and other sexual violence against children

The number of verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children is not reflective of the true scale of the violation. The absence or lack of access to holistic and specialized services for survivors, trauma, stigmatization, and marginalization they may experience, and widespread impunity are some of the key factors contributing to the underreporting of conflict-related sexual violence.

**Parties to conflict are urged to:**

- Immediately cease all forms of gender-based violence against children, including sexual violence. Reaffirm the prohibition of this grave violation and integrate it into domestic legislation, military codes and in training manuals, in line with their obligations under international law.

**States are called on to:**

- Take all appropriate measures to support all survivors of gender-based violence with age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, holistic, and specialized child-centred services, including through the allocation of adequate resources.



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### 5.1.5 Abduction of children

The abduction of children, which often leads to or occurs in conjunction with other violations, remains one of the most pervasive violation against children. In the past five years alone, more than 2,300 children were abducted on average annually. In 2020, abductions rose by 70% from the previous year.

#### **Parties to conflict are called on to:**

- Unconditionally release all abducted children in their custody and put in place effective, sustainable measures to prohibit and end this practice.

#### **States are called on to:**

- Urgently address the significant increase in this grave violation by taking appropriate measures to prevent and protect children from abduction and strengthen accountability measures
- Support affected communities in establishing and/or reinforcing community-based prevention and protection mechanisms, with the support of the United Nations and partner organisations.

### 5.1.6 Attacks against schools and hospitals

Schools and hospitals continue to be attacked and used at alarming rates. In 2021, more than one-third of countries included in the Secretary-General's report had yet to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

#### **Parties to conflict must:**

- Cease all attacks on schools, hospitals and respect and protect civilians such as healthcare and education personnel.
- Immediately vacate any schools and hospitals that they currently occupy and use, and refrain from using educational and health facilities for military purposes.

#### **States are called on to:**

- Endorse, and advocate for other States to endorse, the Safe Schools Declaration and put in place the necessary measures to ensure its full and effective implementation, including by using the Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use.



**The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should:**

- Advocate for the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration and continue including this recommendation in their country report conclusions.

### 5.1.7 Denial of humanitarian access for children

The denial of humanitarian access for children, including incidences of violence against humanitarian personnel, is of serious and growing concern. In the past two years alone, the United Nations verified over 8,500 incidents.

**Parties to conflict must:**

- Immediately cease attacks against humanitarian personnel, facilities, and assets, and systematically allow and facilitate safe, rapid, and unimpeded access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

**States are called on to:**

- Use their influence on warring parties to comply with international humanitarian law in order to enable safe, rapid, and unimpeded humanitarian access.

**The Security Council, including its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, is called on to:**

- Ensure that humanitarian safeguards to allow for safe, rapid, and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance are included in all relevant resolutions, agreements, and other documents.

## 5.2 Providing adequate care and response services to children in situations of armed conflict

In 2020 alone, 19,379 children were verified as having been killed, maimed, recruited and use, abducted and/or sexually abused. Today more than ever, United Nations entities and partners need support to provide child victims of grave

violations and other children affected by armed conflict with timely, adequate care and response services, to uphold their rights, and to prevent further violations.

**UNICEF calls on the donor community to:**

- Allocate the necessary long-term, predictable funding to United Nations entities and partners working to protect children in situations of armed conflict to enable robust prevention and protection interventions, including the timely delivery of age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, holistic, and specialized child-centred services.

## 5.3 Improving data disaggregation and analysis for better response and prevention

The increased availability of sex-disaggregated data has reinforced our understanding of how conflicts impact girls and boys differently. Information relating to the specific impact and/or targeting of groups of children of specific status or characteristic<sup>82</sup> is not systematically captured by CTFMRs and thus not reflected in the reports of the Secretary-General.

**CTFMRs, or their equivalent, are encouraged to:**

- Systematically capture and report sex-disaggregated data and information relating to children affected by more than one violation to further inform and support advocacy, and programmatic response.
- Capture information relating to groups of children of specific status and characteristics, provided that specific safeguards are in place so as to not further put children or their families at risk.

**The Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict should:**

- Systematically include sex-disaggregated data and relevant gender-specific issues and/or trends in their reports, further highlight the number of children affected by more than one violation and related trends, and consider including information and/or trends on how grave violations specifically affect groups of children of specific status or characteristics.

82 The term “groups of children of specific status or characteristics” includes but is not limited to children with disabilities, refugee and internally displaced children, children from minority religious or ethnic groups, children who do not identify along binary gender identity and children of diverse sexual orientation, among others.



## 5.4 Supporting Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting to accelerate action

CTFMRs, or their equivalent, and their NGO partners are the backbone of the CAAC agenda implementation on the ground and remain under constant pressure<sup>83</sup> to deliver on their mandate, including due to limited availability of regular, long-term, and predictable funding.

**Member States and the donor community are called on to:**

- Support CTFMRs, or their equivalent, by allocating the necessary long-term, predictable funding to United Nations entities and partners working to protect children in situations of armed conflict. UNICEF, UN Country Teams and Humanitarian Teams, UN Peacekeeping and Special Political missions and other relevant UN entities and partner organizations must be equipped with adequate human and financial resources to fully implement the CAAC mandate.

**The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict should:**

- Continue to use its global advocacy to support CTFMRs by promoting the allocation of adequate resources to UN and NGO field actors, whether in mission or non-mission settings, denouncing egregious violations of children's rights, and advocating for compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law.

**The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should:**

- Continue engaging closely and regularly with CTFMR co-chairs, including through virtual meetings and field visits, as to further support CTFMRs in implementing their mandate.

**Members of the diplomatic community at country level should:**

- Closely and regularly engage with CTFMR co-chairs and consider joining, leading, or establishing Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict to support the work of CTFMRs.

## 5.5 Engaging with all parties to conflict to develop Action Plans and sustainably protect children

Grave violations against children continue to be committed by all parties to conflict, State and non-State actors alike at alarming rates.

**The United Nations should:**

- Continue engaging in dialogue with all parties to conflict, including non-State actors, to end and prevent grave violations against children.

**States are called on to:**

- Enable CTFMRs, or their equivalent, to engage with non-State actors operating in their territories, to prevent and end grave violations against children, irrespective of any designation under sanctions or counter-terrorism measures.

**The Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should:**

- Advocate with Governments to enable the CTFMRs or their equivalent to engage with all parties to conflict



83 The recent inclusion of three new situations of concerns (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and the Lake Chad Basin region) shows the proliferation of armed conflict situations across the world resulting in increased and expanded United Nations needs to deliver on the CAAC mandate.



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**Members of the diplomatic community at country level should:**

- Facilitate CTFMRs, or their equivalent, dialogue with parties to conflict, by creating opportunities for engagement and space for negotiations and using their influence where possible to prevent and end grave violations against children.

Action Plans signed with parties remain one of the most effective ways to sustainably and effectively protect children. In 2021, more than 75% of the 61 parties to conflict listed in in Secretary-General's annual report have yet to sign an Action Plan or even engage with the United Nations.

**Parties to conflict are called on to:**

- Engage in dialogue with the United Nations and develop and implement Action Plans and other joint commitments to effectively end and prevent all grave violations against children. When developing Action Plans, parties to conflict are encouraged to include measures addressing all six grave violations against children, even if they are not listed for all, and related issues of concerns to prevent the occurrence of all grave violations.

**Members of the diplomatic community at country level should:**

- Support the development, signing and implementation of Action Plans and other joint commitments between parties to conflict and the United Nations.

## 5.6 Supporting CTFMRs engagement efforts with Governments

CTFMRs, or their equivalent, dialogue and engagement with Governments has resulted in significant national legislative advances that have improved the protection for children, and bolstered accountability for grave violations.

**CTFMRs, or their equivalent, should:**

- Continue using all opportunities for dialogue with the national authorities to identify and develop legislative measures that will enable accountability for grave violations during and long after the end of armed conflicts, and identify and use all existing entry points to improve legislative, judicial and policy frameworks to do so.

**Members of the diplomatic community at country level should:**

- Complement the CTFMRs, or their equivalents, engagement by sustaining advocacy for the protection of children affected by armed conflict through bilateral and multilateral dialogue with national authorities.

