

CHILDREN and ARMED CONFLICT ANNUAL REPORT of the SECRETARY-GENERAL

SUMMARY · 2022

Children Affected by Grave Violations

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS 2022¹

Violence and hostilities continued to have a devastating impact on children in 2022. The number of grave violations verified remained high, fueled by conflict escalation, the multiplication of armed actors, and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, among others.

The report [S/2023/363 - A/77/895](#) is available at: undocs.org

Grave Violations

27,180 grave violations against children: Of these 2,880 occurred prior to 2022 but were only verified in 2022.

Situations with the highest numbers of children affected: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Israel and the State of Palestine, Somalia, Ukraine and Syria.

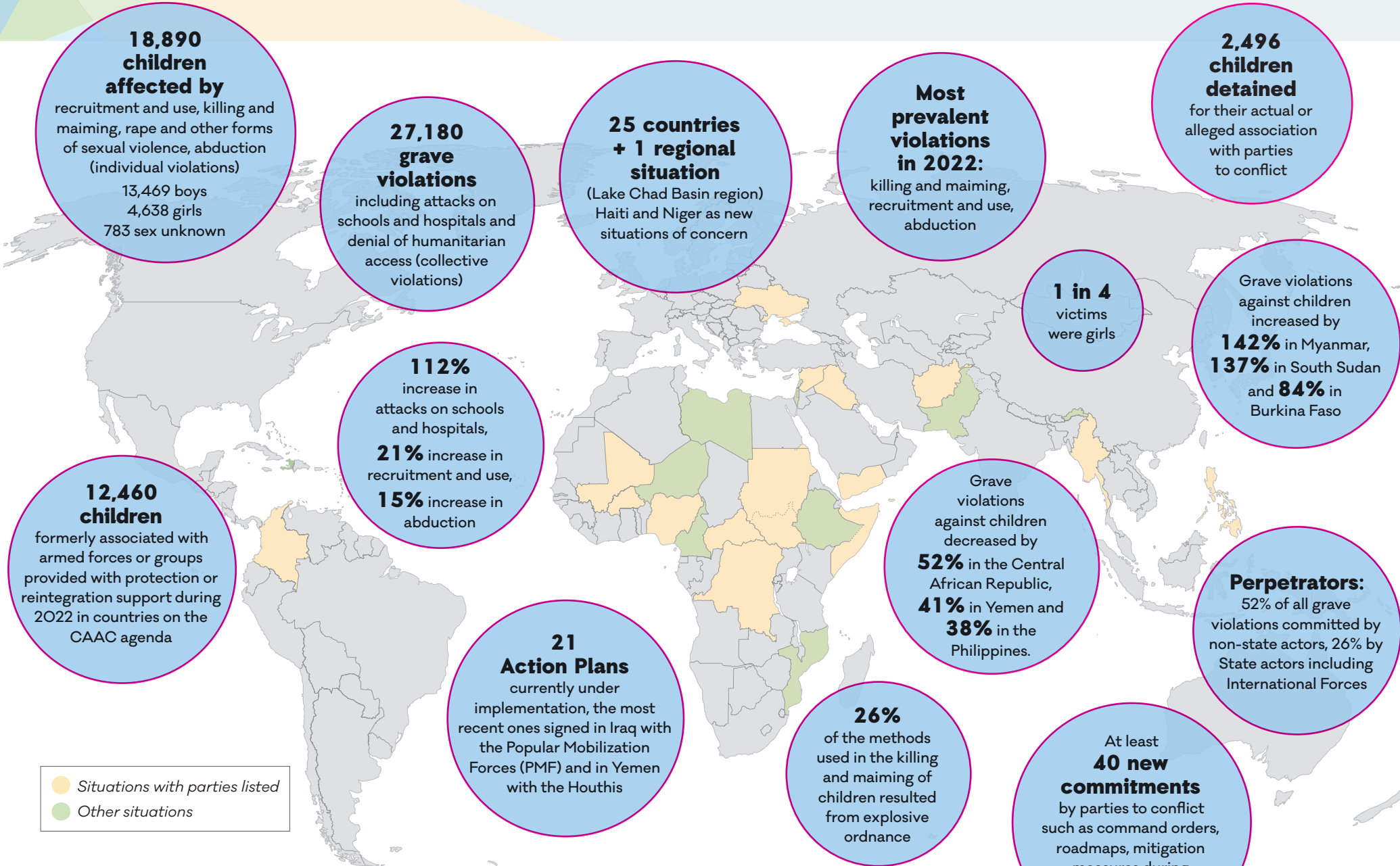
18,890 children affected by at least one of the four individual violations:
(recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction)

At least 2,330 children were victims of multiple violations.

¹ Numbers include some violations committed prior to 2022 and verified at a later date in 2022.



Children and Armed Conflict: 2022 at a Glance



18,890 children affected by recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction (individual violations)
 13,469 boys
 4,638 girls
 783 sex unknown

27,180 grave violations including attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access (collective violations)

25 countries + 1 regional situation (Lake Chad Basin region) Haiti and Niger as new situations of concern

Most prevalent violations in 2022: killing and maiming, recruitment and use, abduction

2,496 children detained for their actual or alleged association with parties to conflict

1 in 4 victims were girls

Grave violations against children increased by **142%** in Myanmar, **137%** in South Sudan and **84%** in Burkina Faso

112% increase in attacks on schools and hospitals, **21%** increase in recruitment and use, **15%** increase in abduction

12,460 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups provided with protection or reintegration support during 2022 in countries on the CAAC agenda

Grave violations against children decreased by **52%** in the Central African Republic, **41%** in Yemen and **38%** in the Philippines.

Perpetrators: 52% of all grave violations committed by non-state actors, 26% by State actors including International Forces

21 Action Plans currently under implementation, the most recent ones signed in Iraq with the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and in Yemen with the Houthis

26% of the methods used in the killing and maiming of children resulted from explosive ordnance

At least **40 new commitments** by parties to conflict such as command orders, roadmaps, mitigation measures during military operations, action plans

● Situations with parties listed
 ● Other situations

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

⊙ **Recruitment and Use: 7,622 children recruited and used**

Situations with the highest numbers of children recruited and used:
Syria, DRC, Somalia, Mali and Afghanistan



⊙ **Killing and Maiming: 8,630 children killed or maimed**

Situations with the highest numbers of children killed and maimed:
Ukraine (477 killed, 909 maimed), Israel and the State of Palestine (55/1087),
Afghanistan (253/656), Syria (309/409) and Somalia (166/546)



⊙ **Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence: 1,166 children victims of sexual violence**

Situations with the highest numbers of children raped and sexually abused:
DRC, Somalia, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria



⊙ **Abductions: 3,985 children abducted**

Situations with the highest numbers of children abducted:
DRC, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Myanmar and Mozambique



⊙ **Attacks on Schools and Hospitals: 1,846 incidents (1,193 schools, 653 hospitals)**

Most affected situations:
Ukraine, Burkina Faso, DRC, Israel and the State of Palestine and Myanmar



⊙ **Denial of Humanitarian Access:² 3,931 incidents**

Most affected situations:
Israel and the State of Palestine, Yemen, Afghanistan, Mali and Burkina Faso



OTHER CONCERNING TRENDS AFFECTING CHILDREN

Detention: At least 2,496 children were deprived of liberty for their actual or alleged association with armed parties to conflict, including groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations. The detention of children for alleged or actual association with parties to conflict makes them particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights including torture, and sexual violence. The detention of children should only be used as a last resort and for the shortest period, age-appropriate alternatives to detention should be prioritized and reintegration support provided.

Situations with the highest numbers of children in detention: Iraq, Israel and the State of Palestine, Somalia, Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Military use of schools and hospitals: A sharp increase (+60%) in the military use of schools and hospitals by both armed forces and armed groups was verified. Most of the 488 cases were verified in Myanmar, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. Overall, millions of children were out of school in conflict situations because of insecurity, attacks on schools or related personnel, or the military use of schools. Schools and hospitals should remain zones of peace to ensure that the right to education of all children is fully protected.

² Not a listable violation

Measures to Better Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict



© UNICEF / UNI91546 / Falvo

In 2022, continued engagement between the United Nations and parties to conflict has resulted in the adoption of measures to better protect boys and girls from hostilities in several contexts.

Such engagement with parties to conflict by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), her Office, and the United Nations on the ground included bilateral engagement; training and capacity building; advocacy and public awareness-raising; development and adoption of commitments and action plans; setting up age assessment mechanisms within armed forces and groups; advocacy to review existing laws to strengthen the criminalization of the six grave violations and to strengthen child rights generally; calling for accountability for perpetrators; issuance of command orders; screenings for the identification of children to be released from armed forces and groups; assistance to parties engaged in peace processes and national dialogues for the inclusion of child protection measures into discussions and peace agreements; development of prevention plans and measures including protocols for handover and release of children; advocacy for reintegration resources, for greater child protection capacity and for reinforcing the monitoring and reporting mechanism as well as strengthening CAAC focal points in country and regional organizations, resulting in the following gains for children in 2022:

- ① **12,460 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups** were provided with protection or reintegration support during 2022 in countries on the CAAC agenda including in CAR, DRC, Nigeria and Syria
- ① The repatriation of **1,448 Iraqi children from North East Syria**

ACTION PLANS AND OTHER COMMITMENTS SIGNED WITH PARTIES TO CONFLICT

IRAQ: Signature of an Action Plan by the Government to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces in March 2023

YEMEN: Action Plan signed with the Houthis in April 2022 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals and other grave violations

DRC: Signature by Mai-Mai Machine commander of unilateral commitments to protect children following United Nations advocacy



© UNICEF / UN0665310 / Bidel

PREVENTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- ⊙ In Burkina Faso, signature of a handover protocol by the transitional authorities in September 2022 for the transfer of children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors
- ⊙ In Nigeria, signature by the authorities of a handover protocol for children encountered in military operations
- ⊙ In CAR, adoption in April 2022 by the Government of a national plan against trafficking of children, focusing on preventing the use of children by FACA
- ⊙ In South Sudan, the Government organized a National Conference on Children and Armed Conflict as part of their commitment to better protect children from hostilities

NATIONAL LEGISLATIONS

- ⊙ In the DRC, adoption of a national strategy for disarmament, demobilization and community recovery and stabilization programme
- ⊙ In Nigeria, signature into law in January 2022 of the Child Rights Act by the Borno State Government
- ⊙ In Mali, adoption by the transitional Government of a decree on compensation for human rights violations providing 529 children with reintegration support

MEASURES TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC VIOLATIONS

- ⊙ In Colombia, endorsement by the Government of the Safe Schools Declaration
- ⊙ In Nigeria, adoption of the Child Rights Acts in Yobe State in June and in Adamawa State in July
- ⊙ In Mozambique, appointment of a child protection focal point for the Mozambican Armed Forces

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- ⊙ In Cameroon, training of law enforcement officers on child protection including in the North-West region in cooperation with the United Nations
- ⊙ In the Philippines, training of military personnel on the AFP Protocol on Handling Children in Situation of Armed Conflict
- ⊙ In Mozambique, training of the Mozambican Armed Forces on the prevention of grave violations

Impacts of armed conflict on boys and girls

Children experience conflict differently based on their gender and boys, girls, and other children all present different vulnerabilities to grave violations perpetrated by armed forces and groups. A paper titled: *The Gender Dimensions of Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict* was published in May 2022, shedding light on the importance of better understanding the gender dimensions of child rights violations during armed conflict to better inform prevention and response strategies.

© UNICEF / UNI121770 / Dornino

- ⊙ In 2022, one in four child victims of grave violations were girls, compared to one in three in 2021
- ⊙ At least 4,638 girls endured one of the four individual grave violations in 2022, compared to 13,469 boys for the same period
- ⊙ Girls were mostly affected by killing and maiming, followed by abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and recruitment and use
- ⊙ The Lake Chad Basin region showed a significant increase of grave violations perpetrated against girls
- ⊙ Grave violations against girls showed increases for recruitment and use and abduction
- ⊙ 85% of children recruited and used were boys
 - » Sex, age, (dis)ability, ethnicity, religion, geopolitical location, and economic status are primary determinants of a child's risk of recruitment, how they are exploited, and the violations they experience.
- ⊙ 99% of sexual violence was perpetrated against girls
 - » *SVC is the most underreported grave violation for both girls and boys due to stigma and lack of legal protection among many factors. Girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage. Boys too are victims of sexual violence, although underreported, or experience secondary trauma from becoming forced witnesses of sexual violence against family members.
- ⊙ 34% of abductions affected girls
 - » The abduction of children in situations of armed conflict is mostly perpetrated by non-State armed groups and occurs in a variety of settings, including from children's homes, schools, and public spaces, often preceding or following other abuses and violations
- ⊙ 25% of killing and maiming affected girls
 - » Parties to conflict continue to deploy landmines, and other explosive ordnances and the use of use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including in dense urban areas, causes widespread destruction leaving children maimed, mutilated and scarred by serious, permanent and disabling injuries

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

The plight of boys and girls affected by conflict is a tragedy beyond words. Each victim of grave violations represents a generation robbed of the right to a childhood in peace and dignity, but also a child with their own individual story. A daughter or a son, a sister, a brother, a student full of hopes. Statistics should never make us overlook the severe individual suffering.



Recruitment and Use

In Somalia, a child was recruited by Al-Shabaab in the Gedo region. He joined because of the drought in search of alternative sources of income. The boy used to look after his parents' goats, all of which died due to the drought.

In Syria, four internally displaced boys aged 15 to 16 were recruited and used at a checkpoint by Jabhah al-Shamiya for a monthly stipend of 26\$US.

Killing and Maiming

In Ukraine, a missile from Russian armed forces hit a maternity ward in Vilniansk, Zaporizhzhia region, killing a new-born boy and injuring his mother and two doctors.

In Cameroon, two boys, aged 10 and 14, were seriously injured by an IED in the North-West Region. The two children, on their way back from school, went into the forest to fetch firewood and picked up a round object that they mistook for a ball. One of the boys tried to cut it open when it exploded. Both boys sustained serious injuries and one had his hand amputated.

In Myanmar, a 14-year-old girl and her father were abducted and killed by the Myanmar Armed Forces in a village, in Magway Region. Both were abducted whilst collecting firewood in the jungle. The body of the girl was found burnt. Allegedly, the girl was raped before being killed.

Rape and other Forms of Sexual Violence

In South Sudan, three girls were raped by SPLA-IO forces in Jonglei. The girls were abducted while travelling from an IDP camp alongside four adult women. They were gang-raped for five days before a humanitarian protection team rescued them and referred them for medical and psychosocial services.

In Syria, three girls were abducted for sexual purposes by Da'esh in 2014 from Ninewa, Iraq, and were rescued by the Syrian Democratic Forces. The girls, aged 2 to 7 at the time of their abduction, remained

in captivity in Hawl camp in northeast Syria until October 2022 when they returned to Iraq.

Abduction

In Mali, a 13-year-old boy was abducted by an unidentified armed group while in the bush near his village in Segou region. He spent one month with the armed group being used as a cook and running errands and was released during a FDSM military operation.

In Colombia, in Cauca department, four boys aged between 12 and 15 years were abducted from a school by a FARC-EP dissident group.

Attacks on Schools and Hospitals

In Afghanistan, an IED exploded inside a religious school in Samangan province. The school was severely affected. Among the casualties, 9 boys were killed, and another 12 boys were injured.

In CAR, in two separate incidents, two educational personnel on mission to Ouham-Fafa and Ouham respectively were intercepted and robbed of money and official documents by 3R/FPRC and anti-Balaka.

In Ukraine, a missile strike hit an apartment building and a recreation centre in a Government-controlled area of Odesa region, killing an 11-year-old boy and injuring 6 children. One of the injured boys, aged 8, sustained a stroke leading to his left-side being paralyzed.

Denial of Humanitarian Access

In Nigeria, a National Security Forces soldier attacked a humanitarian helicopter conveying personnel to and from Damboa town. The staff of an international NGO was killed while a co-pilot was injured in the attack.

In Burkina Faso, in Namentenga Province, Centre Nord region, JNIM looted 2.2 tons of food from a UN implementing partner's food storage intended for Internally Displaced People.

Recommendations

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

- ① **To respect international law.** All parties should comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international refugee law and immediately end and prevent grave violations. All parties to conflict should refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas.
- ② **To strengthen engagement with parties to conflict as a critical way to end and prevent grave violations against children.** Member States should continue to support engagement with the United Nations, including by facilitating engagement with non-State actors
- ③ **To support the monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children.** The Security Council should ensure that child protection provisions and capacity are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions in line with the 2017 policy on child protection in United Nations peace operations and ensure child protection data and capacity are preserved and transferred during mission transitions and reconfigurations.
- ④ **To join and implement International Instruments and Commitments to protect children from hostilities.** Member States should become parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, if they have not yet done so and to endorse and implement the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration, and the Vancouver Principles.
- ⑤ **To ratify and fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, including OPAC.** Member States and parties to conflict should consider every human being below the age of 18 years as a child in line with article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and consider the right to identity and birth registration as a prerequisite for claiming other rights, including in counter-terrorism measures on children.



© UNICEF / UNI122636 / Diftenti

- ⑥ **To end the military use of schools.** All parties should refrain from using schools and healthcare facilities for military purposes. Even in contexts where facilities are closed, non-functioning, or abandoned, they still must be protected from military use and attacks, for targeting these infrastructures is still considered a deliberate attack on education.
- ⑦ **To pursue accountability.** Member States should adopt national accountability measures and cooperate with international accountability mechanisms. The inclusion of accountability provisions should further be included in action plans signed between the United Nations and parties listed.
- ⑧ **To support mine action operations and child-sensitive risk education.** All parties should undertake clearance of explosive ordnance, explosive ordnance risk education and victim assistance and Members States should become parties and implement all conventions on landmines, ERW and cluster munitions.
- ⑨ **To assist child victims and survivors.** The international community should provide long-term financial support for sustainable, timely, gender- and age-sensitive, survivor-centred, and disability inclusive programmes, including reintegration for victims of grave violations.

More information:

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org>