STOP
THE WAR
ON CHILDREN

A CRISIS OF RECRUITMENT

Save the Children

Save the Children exists to help every child reach their potential. In more than 100 countries, we help children stay safe, healthy and keep learning. We lead the way on tackling big problems like pneumonia, hunger and protecting children in war, while making sure each child's unique needs are cared for. We know we can't do this alone. Together with children, partners and supporters, we work to help every child become whoever they want to be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Previous reports on the war on children

Weapon of War: Sexual violence against children in conflict, 2021

Stop the war on children – killed and maimed, 2020

Stop the war on children – gender matters, 2020

Stop the war on children – protecting children in 21st century conflict, 2019

The war on children – time to end grave violations against children in conflict, 2018

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Violations against children in armed conflict do not stop during a pandemic. If anything, they get worse. Worldwide, the countless children left without caregivers, out of school and in danger face a higher risk of violations.

One in six children – 452 million children globally – lived in a conflict zone in 2020. That is a 5% increase from 429 million children in 2019. At the same time, the number of conflicts in 2020 remained the same as the year before. These are painful and dramatic statistics about our children during a pandemic that is the biggest upheaval in our time.

The number of children reported to have been recruited or used by armed actors in conflict increased from 2019 to 2020 (from approximately 7,800 to 8,600 children). This is verified by the UN's monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children. The most recent annual report of the UN SecretaryGeneral on children and armed conflict communicates how gendered these violations against children are. The majority of the recruited children are boys. Girls are also recruited but less so in combative functions, rendering girls' recruitment less reported and less known.

This report shows that between 2019 and 2020 the number of non-state actors that recruit and use children increased by 25, from 85 to 110. For the very first time, we are also able to quantify how many children are at risk of recruitment and use by armed forces and groups. We estimate that a staggering 337 million children live in or near conflicts where armed groups or forces recruited and used children in conflict in 2020. Children in 39 countries are at risk of recruitment. The number of states where children are recruited is in fact at its highest point in 30 years.

As a result, more children are now living and growing up in extremely insecure and challenging environments, potentially harming them for life.

Yet, despite the challenges of the pandemic and conflict trends, we recognise the efforts of our child protection specialists globally. Amid the pandemic's devastating effects on children, child protection workers continued to identify child victims and assist vulnerable children. As we have seen again in 2021, children displaced or living in areas of conflict are among the most vulnerable children in the world. The pandemic has dramatically affected humanitarian access, education, economies, protection, health and nutrition. Consequently, more children are at risk of indirect consequences of conflict such as malnutrition.

Children's rights are non-derogable in conflict and peace. They cannot be paused or cancelled. Over recent decades, our knowledge about children's rights has increased along with our knowledge of how to prevent harm and support children to recover from conflict. The international community now needs to transform this raised awareness into collective action.

I look forward to engaging with government counterparts, civil society representatives and individuals to continue the work to advance the protection of children globally. Through collaboration, learning and embracing innovation, I am convinced that our awareness of children's rights in conflict can translate into noticeable changes in the lives of children in conflict. Together, we can stop this war on children.

Inger Ashing
CEO, Save the Children International

Save the Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Covid-19 pandemic did not bring a lull in the war on children. In 2020, the number of children living in conflict actually rose.

There has been progress in some areas – most notably, verified incidents of children killed and maimed in conflict fell in 2020 for the second successive year. However, in other areas the situation for children became worse. Of the UN's six grave violations against children in conflict, across four of them – recruitment of children, child abductions, sexual violence against children, and attacks on schools and hospitals – the numbers of verified incidents in 2020 increased. Equally important, the number of verified incidents of recruitment grew in 2020 for the second successive year.

This latest report in our Stop the War on Children series looks in detail at one of the grave violations: children at risk of recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups. There has been a rise in the number of verified incidents of children recruited and used by armed forces and groups, and the number of groups recruiting children has also increased. In three countries – Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen – the vast majority of children in conflict zones are deemed at risk of recruitment.

This report and its key findings illustrate the war on children:

- The share of children living in conflict zones who are at risk of being recruited and used by armed forces or armed groups has tripled from less than 5% in 1990 (99 million children) to more than 14% in 2020 (337 million children).
- The number of children living in conflict zones at risk of recruitment increased by more than 2 percentage points from 2019 to 2020.
- One in eight children – 337 million children – live in a conflict zone with at least one battle-related death and where at least one actor who recruited and used children was active.
- The number of non-state actors who recruited children increased from 85 in 2019 to 110 in 2020, while the number of government actors who recruited fell from 25 in 2019 to 22 in 2020.
- Approximately 1.265 billion children (54% of all children globally) were living in one of 39 countries where one or more conflict actors were reported to have recruited children.
- In 2020, in three countries with the highest share of children living in conflict zones with reports of child recruitment perpetrated by conflict actors – Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen – almost all children were at risk of recruitment by armed groups. In Afghanistan, 98% of children were at risk of recruitment, in Syria 97% of children and in Yemen 89% of children.
- In 2020, according to the UN, boys made up 85% of verified recruits, girls 15%.
- In 2020, the number of children who lived in high-intensity conflicts increased by 19% to around 193 million, from 162 million children in 2019.
- One in six children – approximately 452 million children – lived in a conflict zone in 2020, a 5% increase from 429 million children in 2019.
- In 2020, more children were living in a conflict zone than at any time in the previous 20 years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a global community, we must stop this war on children. States must protect the most marginalised children from recruitment and use by armed actors. And the UN Security Council members must use their power to hold perpetrators of grave violations to account.

Save the Children calls on governments to:

1 Uphold standards of conduct in conflict

- Ratify and implement in full the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which calls for the principle of 'straight 18' for recruitment into armed forces.
- Endorse and implement the Paris Principles and the Paris Commitments and support other states to follow suit.[1]
- Endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and UN Security Council Resolution 2601, and encourage and support other states to follow suit.
- Review approaches to counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism to ensure they are respectful of children's rights and that, irrespective of any actual or perceived association with armed groups, children are treated first and foremost as children and victims of children's rights abuses.
- Facilitate dialogue between states, the UN, NGOs and non-state armed groups to protect children. Support efforts to engage non-state armed groups to develop and implement action plans, policies and codes of conduct to end the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations. And ensure that humanitarian and human rights work is not impeded by restrictions on organisations' interaction with armed groups.
- Strengthen doctrine, training and other measures to ensure armed forces and allies understand and consider the reverberating effects from military actions in collateral-damage assessments, take measures to reduce them, and record casualties according to internationally agreed standards.

- Regulate and improve transparency on international arms transfers and delivery, and the supply of other military services, making these explicitly conditional on respect for international legal and normative standards. As a matter of policy, no state should authorise the sale of arms, military equipment or services to actors that are listed by the UN Secretary-General for committing the six grave violations or where there is credible evidence that the weapons may be used to perpetrate rights violations against children. Further, all states should sign and ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, with parties to the Treaty adhering to its obligations in full.
- Deploy child protection experts into the UN, African Union, European Union, NATO, and other regional organisations' forces.
- Develop and use national systems – such as sequestering property, freezing bank accounts and imposing travel bans – to act against individual perpetrators of violations of children's rights in conflict and resource national crime agencies to investigate grave violations of children's rights in third countries and to prosecute through national courts.
- Develop codes of conduct and negotiate their implementation by parties to the conflict, communities and children in order to ensure a safe environment for the reopening of schools.
- Encourage the UN General Assembly to establish a standing impartial, independent and international mechanism that can be activated to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses, notably children's rights.
- Develop and implement gender-sensitive risk assessments and school safety plans to prevent and mitigate the impact of attacks on education before, during and after schools reopen.

Save the Children

Nzitonda*, 14, was recruited by an armed group in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. He later managed to escape.
PHOTO: HUGH KINSELLA CUNNINGHAM/SAVE THE CHILDREN

2 Hold perpetrators of violations to account

- Commit to ending impunity for those responsible for unlawful recruitment and use of children and other grave violations and financially and diplomatically support the UN's systematic monitoring and reporting of violations of children's rights in conflict, including the tracking of age- and gender-disaggregated data on grave violations, and the complete, accurate and impartial naming of perpetrators.

3 Take practical action to protect children and support their recovery

- Address structural, social and individual factors that contribute to vulnerability to recruitment and undermine safe and long-term reintegration, recognising that failure to address recruitment and use of children by armed groups and to support children who are affected has immediate and long-term influences on stability and security.
- Support international mechanisms to prosecute cases of violations of children's rights in conflict, including through resourcing dedicated gender-sensitive, child-specific expertise in international investigations and through support for the International Criminal Court and ad hoc judicial mechanisms.
- Scale up urgently needed flexible funding for gender-transformative child protection programming and gender-based violence prevention, mitigation and response in humanitarian and refugee response plans.
- Provide adequate funding for education programmes in emergencies to strengthen education systems in conflict-affected areas, and also mitigate and respond to attacks on education.
- Establish a holistic response that addresses the needs of children, including child protection reporting and referral, and monitoring systems to identify children at risk of dropping out of school, particularly girls.

"I HAD TO LEAVE MY HOME BECAUSE OF THE CONFLICT. I DON'T HAVE ANY SISTERS OR ANY PARENTS."

Emerson's* parents were brutally killed by armed men who attacked their village in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. His sister is still missing.

Emerson, aged eight, and his older brother managed to escape. They ended up in a transit camp for families who have been displaced by the conflict.

Through our reunification programme, they've been reunited with their grandmother.

"I felt good when I saw my grandmother again," says Emerson. "I felt at peace when I saw her again."

PHOTO: SACHA MYERS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children

METHODOLOGY

This report draws on four main sources. First, bespoke data was produced by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) that maps children and armed conflict trends from 1990 to 2020.[2] The core dataset used is the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Georeferenced Event Dataset (UCDP GED) and the United Nations (UN) 2019 World Population Prospects.[3] Living in or close to a conflict zone is defined by the UCDP GED dataset as living 50 kilometres or less from one or more conflict events in a given year. A conflict event or incident is defined as a lethal incident, either a violent clash between two armed groups or an attack on civilians by a group or groups, at a given time and place. Conflicts usually consist of multiple conflict events. Further, PRIO classified countries by conflict intensity, with countries experiencing more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in a calendar year considered high intensity.

Second, PRIO researched new subnational data, estimating the number of children living in conflict zones who were at risk of being recruited into armed groups during the period 1990–2020.[4] Children are defined as at risk of recruitment if they live within 50km of one or more lethal conflict events where at least one conflict actor who was reported to have recruited children in a given year was active. PRIO linked data from the UCDP GED with UN population estimates. Additionally, data on conflict actors reported to have recruited boys and girls in a given year were updated with data collected by the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security in Canada and new data collected by the University of Leiden in the Netherlands and PRIO.[5]

Third, Save the Children analysed all the annual reports of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict spanning the 1998–2020 period, reports from 2005 to 2020 from the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations committed against children in times of armed conflict, and other relevant sources of secondary data and research, including recent Save the Children reports, such as on sexual violence.[6] The annual UN reports on children and armed conflict collect data on the six grave violations affecting children in armed conflict, based on field reports. The UN Security Council established the MRM reporting mechanism in 2005 with the adoption of resolution 1612 related to recruitment of children in armed conflict.[7] Country Task Forces for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) collect and monitor data on grave violations against children in specific country situations that have been listed in the annexes of the annual reports from the UN Secretary-General.

Fourth, our report draws on structured interviews with Save the Children colleagues working in countries experiencing armed conflict. We conducted interviews with 40 staff from 14 country offices and regional offices.

Underreporting and other data gaps

The data from PRIO and our analysis of the UN reports provide us with a comprehensive insight into how children are affected by armed conflict. However, Save the Children, alongside other humanitarian actors, noted a likely high level of underreporting of violations against children in armed conflict.

NGOs and CTFMR are often challenged in monitoring, reporting and verifying grave violations for several reasons.[8] The small number of humanitarian actors across all sectors involved in monitoring, reporting and verification contributes to underreporting. Additionally, these actors may have a lack of access to areas where violations occur, which is a key barrier to reporting and verification. This lack of access for humanitarian actors can be for security reasons. Also, NGO staff and local communities face the risk and threat of retaliation by armed actors committing violations, which is a significant barrier to reporting and verification. In addition, communities may have limited awareness of children's rights and how to report such abuses. Social attitudes and norms around violence against children and children's

involvement in conflict may also reduce communities' willingness to report violations, particularly sexual violence and recruitment and use by armed forces and groups. As an illustration, we noted in a recent report that sexual violence against children in conflict is underreported due to multiple factors, such as stigmatisation, gendered notions of girls' honour and purity, distorted ideas of masculinity for boys, and the flawed assumption of guilt by association.[9]

Finally, the rate of abuses against children increases during emergencies. But increased insecurity, reduced access, and a lack of child protection infrastructure and of a reporting mechanism result in a lower reported rate than the actual rate.[10]

This report shows a list of the states where verified violations against children in armed conflict are the highest (see page 23). However, it should not be assumed that that states not on the list are doing enough to prevent children from suffering in armed conflict or to enforce the law on violations against children.

"My whole life has been shelling, displacement and tents since birth," says nine-year-old Aysar*. He and his family are living in a camp in Syria.
PHOTO: SYRIA RELIEF/ SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children

THE WAR ON CHILDREN TODAY – A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

The aftermath of airstrikes in Gaza, May 2021
PHOTO: MOHAMMAD LIBED/OCHA PHOTO ARCHIVE

1

NEW DATA AND A NEW ANGLE: THE RISK OF RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

Children and armed conflicts: the risk of recruitment

In 1996, the landmark study by Graça Machel for the UN, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, helped put the issue of the recruitment of children on the international agenda.[11] The report and its key findings looked at demographic characteristics, factors enabling recruitment, and the effects of participation in armed conflict on children.

Child recruitment (forced or coerced) is one of the six grave violations against children in armed conflicts that the UN monitors on an ongoing basis and reports on. Some parties to conflict, particularly some armed groups, forcibly recruit children through, for example, abduction or forced conscription. Since 2006, around 81,500 incidents of recruitment were verified by the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations against children.[12] The most recent annual report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict identified 8,595 verified cases of recruitment of children in 2020, acknowledging that this violation continues to be vastly underreported. A significant number of boys and girls become associated with armed forces or armed groups due to a range of factors, such as lack of educational opportunities leading to coerced recruitment.[13] Other factors, such as the desire to defend family and community, can be drivers of recruitment.[14] Child protection agencies have consistently seen that no enlistment of children is voluntary: this is supported by research.[15] Older children may choose to join armed forces or armed groups, but they often have few or no alternatives. In addition, the impact of Covid-19 on families and communities has strengthened drivers of recruitment.[16]

This report presents new data and a new angle on children living in conflict zones who are at risk of recruitment by conflict actors. We have collaborated with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) to calculate how many children live 50km or closer to armed conflicts where at least one conflict actor has been reported to perpetrate recruitment against children in a given year.[17] Now, for the first time, we can look at recruitment from a global angle by estimating the number of children *at risk* of recruitment in all armed conflicts in the world.[18]

How many children in conflict zones are at risk of recruitment?

In the space of three decades, the number of children living in conflict zones at risk of being recruited and used in conflict has tripled – from 99 million children in 1990 (under 5% of children) to 337 million children in 2020 (more than 14%).[19] In 2020, approximately 1.265 billion children (54% of all children globally) were living in 39 countries where one or more conflict actors were reported to have recruited children. Around 140 million children lived in areas with reported recruitment by both state and non-state actors. In the dataset used, the term child recruitment is defined as any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes.[20]

One in eight children globally – around 337 million children – live in a conflict zone where there were one or more battle-related deaths in 2020 and where one or more actors who recruited and used children were active. Among parties to conflict who recruited

Save the Children

Conflict events associated
with child recruitment
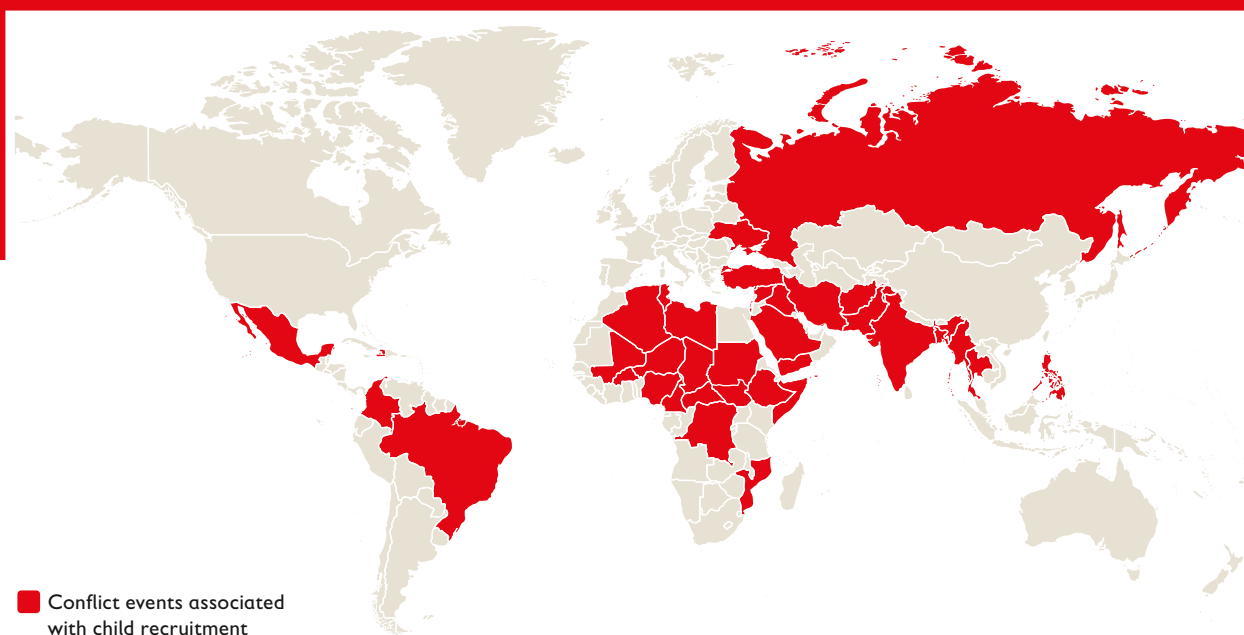
FIGURE 1: WHERE ARE CHILDREN AT RISK OF RECRUITMENT INTO CONFLICT?
All conflict zones and countries where children are recruited and used by armed forces or armed groups, 2020

SOURCES: UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM GEOREFERENCED EVENTS DATASET AND UN POPULATION PROSPECTS

and used children in 2020, there are 22 governments and 110 non-state actors. The number of government actors has dropped by three from the previous year (25 state actors in 2019). But in that same year the number of non-state actors who recruit minors has risen markedly, by 25 actors – an increase of 29%. These figures are part of a longer trend. While the number of state actors recruiting children to armed conflict over the last decade is relatively stable at around 20, the number of non-state actors has almost tripled, from 38 in 2010 to 110 in 2020.

Child recruitment by region

On a regional level, the Middle East has the highest share – 33% – of children living in conflict zones at risk of recruitment and use; though this share in 2020 is lower than in 2019 (36%). Most children (95%) in conflict zones in the Middle East are at risk of recruitment.

Africa has the second highest share of the child population living in conflict zones at risk of recruitment, with an all-time high in 2020 of 19% of all the children on the continent – up from 14% in 2019. This means one child in six in Africa is at risk of recruitment; in other words, they live in conflict zones with reports of child recruitment perpetrated by conflict actors. In African conflict zones, 65% of the children are at risk of recruitment.

On the Asian continent, 13% of the total child population is, by the same measure, at risk of

recruitment – a one percentage point increase from 2019. Around 90% of all children living in conflict zones in Asia are at risk of recruitment.

Both in Europe and the Americas, child recruitment is less a feature of conflicts. In Europe in 2020, 2% of children were living in conflict zones where at least one conflict actor is reported to recruit children – the same as in 2019. And in the Americas the corresponding number is 8% – a one percentage point rise from 2019.

The recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups in armed conflict has been common throughout history.[21] However, the number of children at risk of recruitment by armed forces and groups has increased from 99 million in 1990 to 337 million in 2020, which corresponds to the general increase of children living in proximity to violent conflict. Both the numbers of children affected by conflict and the number of children at risk of recruitment have increased steadily over the years 1990–2020. However, all-time trends should be interpreted with caution as they could be influenced by data quality and reliability.

The risk to children of recruitment has increased as the nature of wars has changed – from predominantly war between states to intrastate wars. Alongside this, qualitative changes to the nature of war – such as low technology wars, local conflicts, higher proportions of civilian casualties, normalisation of violence and mass displacement – have made the impact of war even harsher for children.[22]

NSII'S* STORY

Nsii was 16 when he was recruited to a local armed group in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

"My friends convinced me to go and join the rebels. They registered our names then we were taken to fight.

"They started showing us how to open and close a gun.

"We were told to open our shirts and they cut our bodies and smeared us with juju – some kind of pounded shrubs – after which we were told that we were immune to bullets.

"The juju wasn't helpful because there were many among us who got killed. I got scared every time.

"I had my own gun. I used to be afraid, especially two places where we fought and many people died. If one [fellow fighter] didn't die immediately, our comrades would stab him to death with a machete.

"It was at night [when I ran away]. I had not put on a uniform and I ran through till the next morning.

"When I reached Kitchanga I met someone who took me to my cousin, who was so happy to see me. I stayed there for three months.

"I'm happy to have escaped from there. In my life, I'd like to be a businessman."

PHOTO: HUGH KINSELLA CUNNINGHAM/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children

Child recruitment hot spots

The ten countries with the highest share of children living in conflict zones with reports of child recruitment perpetrated by conflict actors are listed in Table 1. By this measure, in the three countries at the top – Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen – the vast majority of children living in conflict zones are at risk of recruitment.

It should be noted that PRIO's data used in Table 1 looks at the percentage of all children in countries, although it is recognised that boys are more vulnerable to recruitment than girls and girls are not recruited by armed forces or groups in some contexts.

In the Philippines, Table 1 shows, the share of children living in conflict zones with reports of child recruitment perpetrated by conflict actors has increased from 56% in 2018 to 81% in 2020.

Tunisia is on this list of the worst ten states due to two attacks by the Islamic State (IS) group in two major cities during 2020 where large numbers of children were affected. PRIO's data highlights the role of insecurity contributing to risk of recruitment, noting that a series of attacks in Tunisia has contributed to a marked increase in the risk of recruitment.

Country	2018	2019	2020
Afghanistan	98%	98%	98%
Syria	95%	96%	97%
Yemen	92%	91%	89%
Philippines	56%	70%	81%
Iraq	62%	54%	68%
Somalia	66%	62%	65%
Cameroon	49%	47%	49%
Libya	34%	48%	48%
Nigeria	6%	38%	47%
Tunisia	0%	30%	45%

SOURCES: UCDP GED AND UN
NOTE: FIGURES IN THIS TABLE DO NOT MAKE DISTINCTIONS ACCORDING TO GENDER.
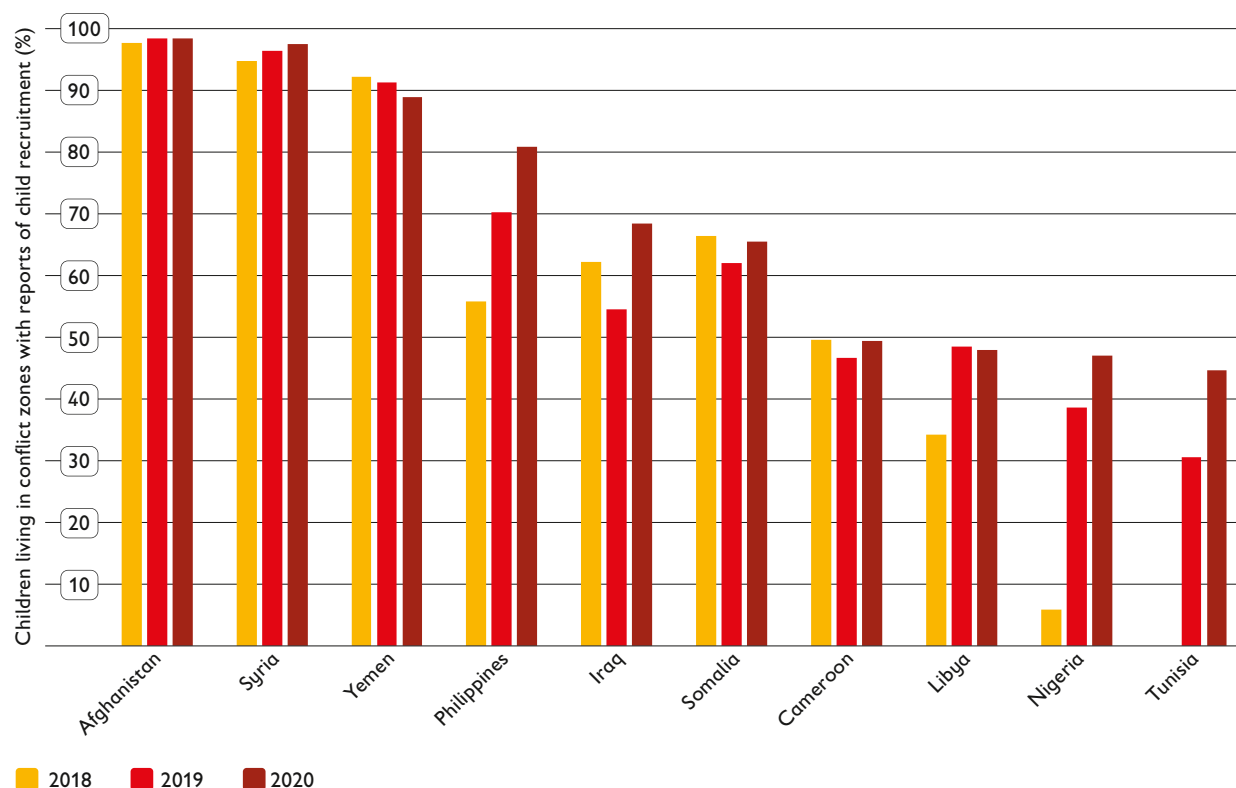
FIGURE 2: THE TEN COUNTRIES WHERE CHILDREN ARE AT GREATEST RISK OF RECRUITMENT

Countries with the highest share of children living in areas with reports of child recruitment perpetrated by conflict actors

SOURCES: UCDP AND UN

Three countries with the highest share of children living in conflict zones with reports of child recruitment by conflict actors in 2020

Country	Share of total child population at risk of recruitment	Number of children at risk
Afghanistan	98%	18 million
Syria	97%	6 million
Yemen	89%	12 million

SOURCES: UCDP GED AND UN ,

In 2020, 140 million children – or 40% of all children in conflict zones – were living in areas with reports of child recruitment perpetrated by conflict actors; that is to say, they were exposed to the threat of recruitment by state or non-state actors. Though shocking, it represents a fall from 53% in 2019.

Figure 3 shows where where children living in conflict zones are at risk of recruitment by both state and non-state actors – namely in Afghanistan, Syria, southern Somalia, Yemen, and North-eastern Nigeria.[23]

What are the trends in child recruitment over the last 30 years?

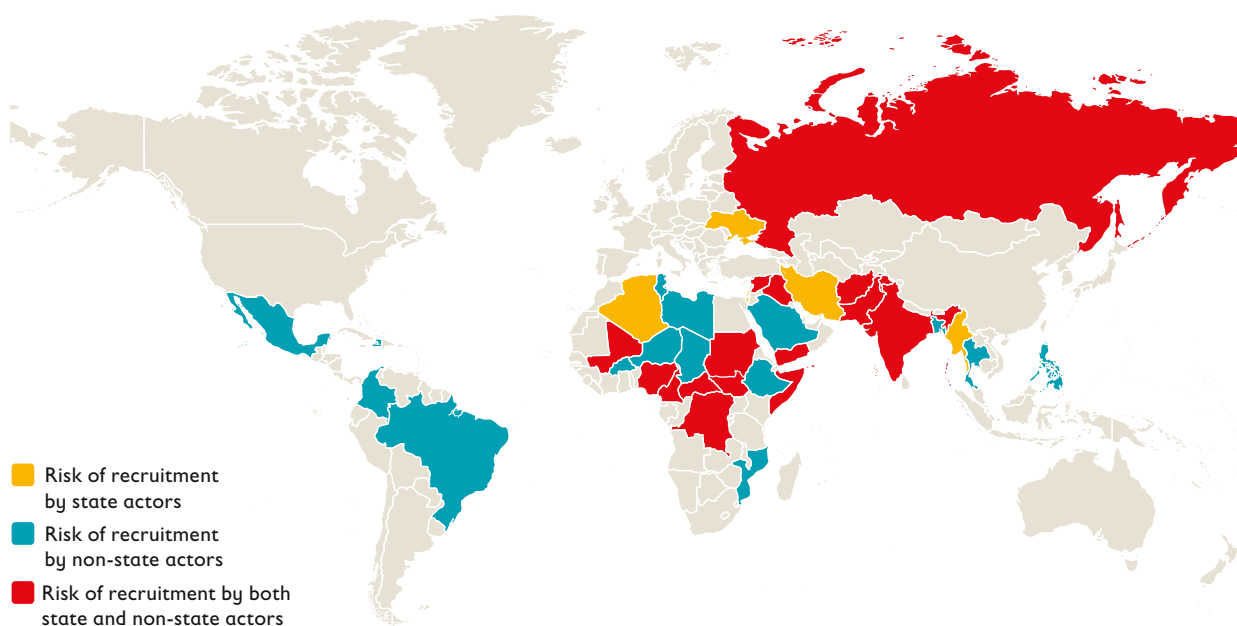The share of children living in conflict zones with reports of child recruitment perpetrated by conflict actors, as a proportion of the total child population, has been relatively stable over the last three decades in most regions (see Figure 4). The stand-out exception is the Middle East, which has seen a marked increase in children at risk of recruitment over the last decade – rising from 5% of children in the region in 2009 to 33% in 2020. It reached an all-time high in 2017, with 41% of children living in conflict zones at risk of recruitment. The wars in Syria and Yemen and the increase in IS influence are key factors in this.

The recent trend in Africa is also alarming. Figure 4 shows that in Africa as a whole, the share of children living in conflict zones at risk of child recruitment has grown sharply since 2013, reaching its highest-ever figure of 19% in 2020.

Recruitment data limitations
The quality of data and availability over time changed during the period 1990–2020, which means time trends should be interpreted with caution. We have stronger data and reporting on child recruitment for the most recent years.

Risk of recruitment by state actors

Risk of recruitment by non-state actors
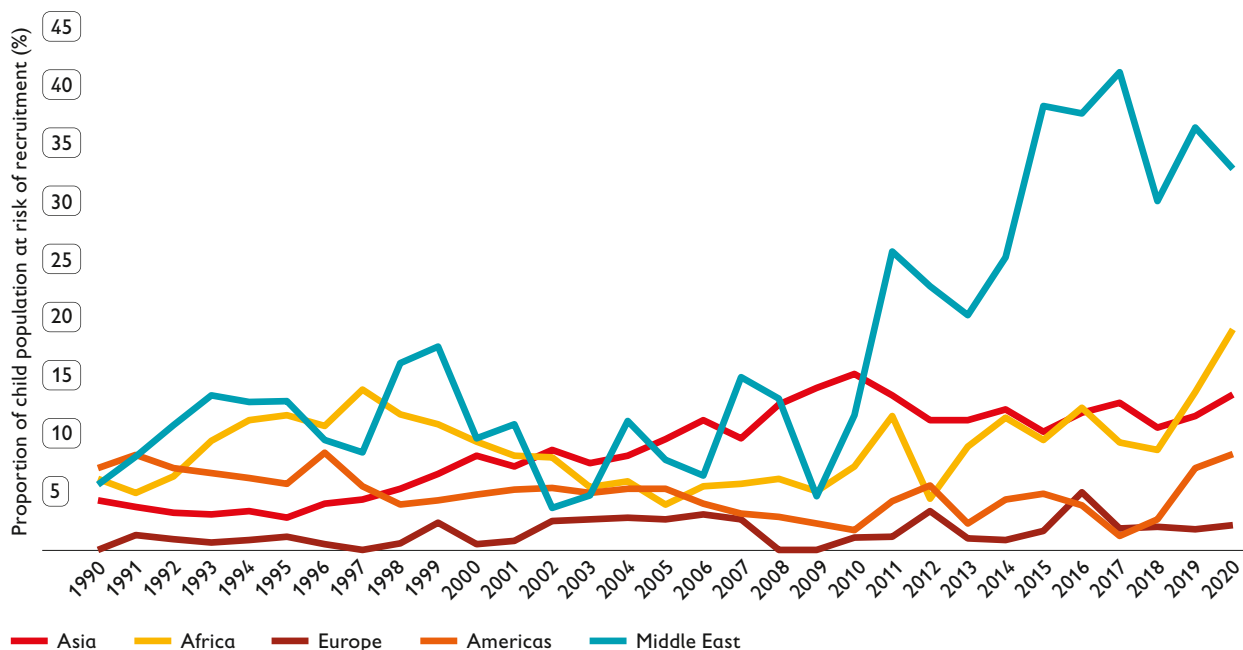
Risk of recruitment by both state and non-state actors

FIGURE 3: WHERE ARE CHILDREN AT RISK OF RECRUITMENT?
Map of conflict zones broken down by type of actor, 2020
SOURCES: UCDP GED AND UN

Save the Children

FIGURE 4: RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN HAS RISEN IN MOST REGIONS OVER TEN YEARS – MOST DRAMATICALLY IN THE MIDDLE EAST
Children at risk of recruitment as a share of total child population, by region, 1990–2020
SOURCES: UCDP AND UN

Why are children vulnerable to recruitment and use by armed actors?

The association of boys and girls with actors in armed conflict is rooted in often systemic vulnerabilities (see Table 3). This is substantiated by research that demonstrates children do not need to agree with the views and aims of an armed group to join.[24]

Poverty, displacement,[25] reduced access to schools and education, insecurity, the presence of armed actors, and their control over a population are significant drivers of child recruitment in several current conflicts. Armed groups may manipulate these factors for their advantage and, as part of their process of recruitment, groom children, in person or through social media.

TABLE 3: WHAT MAKES CHILDREN VULNERABLE TO RECRUITMENT AND USE BY ARMED FORCES?

- Strengths or weaknesses of the 'legal, policy and practical barriers' to prevent recruitment (for example good birth registration or a security sector that acts in line with international legal obligations regarding the recruitment and use of children)
- Presence or control by an armed group in a particular geographic area
- Poverty and/or ability to meet basic needs
- Lack of educational opportunities
- Lack of safe or decent employment or livelihood opportunities
- Need for protection from abuse, neglect or domestic violence
- Violence, abuse, discrimination or marginalisation by communities or authorities
- Harassment or attacks by an armed force or group
- Radical *madrasas* where indoctrination might take place
- Being targeted for oppression, exclusion and marginalisation due to religious, social or ethnic differences
- Desire for revenge
- Wish to defend family and community
- Desire for power, status, respect and adventure
- Craving for belonging or purpose
- Impact of other compounding humanitarian crises

SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN, PROGRAMME GUIDELINES ON ADDRESSING RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN, 2017

The media often portrays stereotypical images of children in armed groups, particularly boys – such as combatants with guns almost as large as they are.[26] In reality, boys and girls perform a wide range of roles in armed conflicts (see Table 4), and some change roles during their association.

What role or roles a child has may be determined by a range of factors, including age, size, skills and gender.[27] For example, small children and girls are often used as spies or to lay mines or improvised explosive devices, or as suicide bombers, as they are less likely to arouse suspicion. Girls and boys may be recruited for sexual purposes.[28]

Armed groups or armed forces may recruit and use children because they perceive children to be easier to manipulate than adults[29] and less likely to question adults in authority. Consequently, children are particularly useful for carrying out hazardous missions, such as acting as suicide bombers.[30] Children may also be considered as more expendable.[31] And research indicates that some armed actors recruit children to the battlefield to create a moral shock.[32] Armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been known to use children to spearhead their attacks in order to take advantage of their opponents' hesitancy to harm child soldiers.[33]

In recruiting children and forcing them to commit extreme acts of violence against their own

TABLE 4: WHAT ROLES DO CHILDREN TAKE ON IN ARMED GROUPS?

- Fighting on frontlines
- Manning checkpoints
- Conducting armed patrols
- Gathering intelligence
- Guarding prisoners
- Laying or clearing mines or improvised explosive devices
- Carrying equipment, supplies, looted goods, etc.
- Carrying out domestic and support duties
- Acting as human shields, suicide bombers or in execution squads
- Serving for sexual purposes, as bodyguards, as medical assistants, or as recruiters

SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN, PROGRAMME GUIDELINES ON ADDRESSING RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN, 2017

communities, armed groups forcibly break important bonds between children and their families and communities. Public displays of children committing or witnessing such acts instils in communities a sense of fear and mistrust of children.

In research with children recruited to armed groups in Burkina Faso, girls explained that they cook, find firewood, wash clothes and gather information for the group. Some girls are forced to marry men who belong to the group.
PHOTO: JACQUES BOUDA, BURKINA FASO

Save the Children

Gender differences in child recruitment

Most children who are recruited into armed forces and groups are boys. In 2020, according to UN verified numbers on grave violations, boys make up 85% of recruits and girls 15%.[34] Figures for 2019 are similar: 84% boys, 11% girls and 5% classified as unknown gender.

Research on child recruitment and gender often assumes that all recruited children are under-age males.[35] However, some research asserts that girls make up 30–40% of all children associated with armed forces or armed groups in recent conflicts,[36] which is in line with some reports from our country offices.

Social norms and community expectations may pressure boys to join or participate in the activities of armed groups when they reach puberty. During their association, boys' vulnerability to and experience of sexual violence are often overlooked. Consequently, boys may suffer stigma and rejection and may find that support services are unavailable once they have left an armed force or armed group.

Some boys may be perceived as associated with an armed group due to their gender even when they are not. Adolescent boys in Somalia and Northern Nigeria have reported fears of being rejected or even killed by people in their communities because of an assumption that they are associated with armed groups.[37]

Girls can have a number of roles within armed forces or armed groups during their association. Some may have combat roles and, in some contexts, there are specific female-only units within some armed groups. Some groups have used girls as suicide bombers because they appear less of a threat. However, girls' vulnerability, low status and gender also put them at even greater risk of abuse.[38] They are in danger of being recruited for sexual purposes and of its consequences, including forced marriage, pregnancy and motherhood.[39]

The lasting impact of recruitment on boys, girls and communities

Many factors affect a child's ability to cope with and recover from their experiences during association with armed forces or armed groups. These include their age, maturity, gender, whether they have a disability, the length and location of their association, their status during their association, experiences of violence against others or themselves, their resilience, and the services and support available to them after association.

During their association with an armed group, recruited children may face death, disability, chronic mental or physical illness or injury (due to combat, violent training, their treatment, punishment or being assigned tasks beyond their physical capacity). They may also suffer sexual violence, poor living conditions, lack of nutritious food, and forced substance abuse. If children become sick or are injured, an armed force or group may not have access to or provide appropriate medical care. In some cases, children are abandoned, punished or even killed.

Research shows that being forced to witness or participate in acts of violence may cut bonds with families and communities.[40] Children who live in an environment of enforced normalisation of violence also have a higher risk of mental health and psychological problems.[41] This includes but is not limited to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and difficulties with stigma and social exclusion.[42] Consequently, these children may struggle to develop and maintain relationships and secure livelihoods later in life.[43]

Girls who have been associated with armed groups have reported they experience greater autonomy during their association than they would at home.[44] Girls' acceptance by their families and reintegration into their communities is often affected by whether or not they have borne children during their association. Some families accept their daughters back but not their daughters' children.[45] Research into the mental health of girls recruited is limited and there have been scant investigations into treatments.[46] In sum, there is a knowledge gap on girls associated with armed forces and groups and how their experience differs from their male counterparts.

Boys who have been – or are perceived to have been – associated with armed groups may be at risk of being detained.[47] Some children who have been associated with armed groups experience arbitrary arrest, torture and detention without due process, being held with adults and without access to their families or education.[48] Research that Save the Children conducted into the experiences of Palestinian children held in the Israeli military detention system – who are detained for reasons not related to armed groups – reveals the psychological and longer term mental health consequences for children when their rights are not protected. In some instances, these children were made to believe that their families had abandoned them.[49] Yet international norms are clear: children who have contact with the judicial system must be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth.[50] The Paris Principles and Commitments to end the use of children in conflict state that children who have been recruited should be treated primarily as victims of child rights abuses.[51]

Children who have been recruited and used by armed forces and groups often miss out on formal and informal education. They may also miss learning social and cultural norms and acquiring positive life skills. Continuing or returning to learning opportunities following association may be difficult due to:

- stigmatisation by other students and teachers
- reluctance of other students and teachers to let them back into the classroom
- difficulty with concentration, motivation and maintaining appropriate behaviour
- the need to earn a living or care for children.

Olha, age six, from Ukraine, suffered life-changing injuries from a mine explosion.
PHOTO: OKSANA PARAFENIUK/ SAVE THE CHILDREN

The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict are known to have a destabilising effect on communities. They increase social divisions and insecurity, and fuel fear and stigmatisation of vulnerable children and their families. This can create a vicious circle where marginalisation and lack of access to protection services and to safe and inclusive education and livelihoods opportunities act as a driver of coerced recruitment.

Viewing children who are vulnerable to or who have experienced recruitment with fear and treating them as threats rather than as victims of child rights abuses is destabilising and morally wrong. Failure to prevent recruitment and correctly support the recovery and reintegration of children with the appropriate and timely social and economic support for them and their families and communities leads to continuing insecurity and an environment in which conflict can occur.

Although there may be elements within communities that support and facilitate the recruitment of children,

overall, communities have an important role to protect children and many take a lead in protecting children. All efforts and actions to address recruitment and use of children by armed groups must involve communities and their capacity to protect children must be supported. Strong community-led structures, which are linked to well-resourced and functioning child protection, education and social protection systems, are key to protecting children vulnerable to recruitment and use. So are humanitarian actors' systematic monitoring and reporting of recruitment and use of children (and other grave violations), and the development of early warning mechanisms that work with local communities.

Practical interventions to address recruitment and use of children by armed groups

Child protection agencies work holistically across child protection, education and livelihoods to address children's, families' and communities' vulnerability to recruitment and to support safe and meaningful reintegration. For example, trained case workers work with children, parents and caregivers to address challenges within families that contribute to children's vulnerability to recruitment or jeopardise their reintegration following recruitment. Case workers refer children and families to specialised services – such as appropriate health and mental health support and, for older children and their parents or carers, livelihood opportunities. Such services should take children's age and gender into account and recognise their own agency.

Child protection agencies work with partners, children, parents and communities to ensure that children can continue their education. New ways of working, including distance-learning programmes, keep children in education and help prepare for their safe return to school. Nevertheless, to protect children, there is no substitute for safe schools and being in the classroom.

In contexts where education is under attack, in order to protect children's right to learn and be safe, Save the Children has have pioneered an integrated programme to support children, communities and governments. For example, our Safe Schools programming engages children and communities to make sure schools are able to stay safely open for children throughout times of insecurity and all children affected by conflict are accepted in schools, including children who have been associated with armed forces or armed groups.

With the right support, communities can protect children against recruitment. Child protection agencies, including Save the Children, are working with communities to develop community-led approaches to child protection. This approach strengthens communities' capacity to protect children from grave violations, such as recruitment

RECRUITMENT AND EDUCATION

Save the Children identifies a strong connection between efforts to enable children to continue their education in times of crisis and a reduction in grave violations. If children are out of school, they are more vulnerable to recruitment. New research we carried out with children recruited by armed groups in the Sahel found, before they were recruited, most children had already either dropped out of school or had not had access to the school system.[52] The link between education and recruitment is particularly worrying in this region, given that from April 2017 to July 2021 the number of schools closed due to violence across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger increased sevenfold.

Girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence when out of school. One 14-year-old girl told us:

"I am worried about my learning. I have a fear of teenage pregnancy and child marriage; schoolgirls are the most targeted ones in marriage due to school closure."

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Save the Children has seen the impact of school closures on children. And we know well that once children are out of school, it is often hard for them to find their way back.

and use, within conflict; to support acceptance and integration of children after recruitment; and to develop community-led peacebuilding and social cohesion initiatives, which contribute to stability, and which in turn reduces children's vulnerability to recruitment.

As well as these practical and holistic interventions, humanitarian actors can help protect children by monitoring and reporting the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, and by developing early warning mechanisms with local communities.

Following the escalation in conflict in Afghanistan in 2021, Damsa* is back attending community-based classes.

PHOTO: ZUBAIR MOHAMMAD SHAIRZAY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children

2

HOW MANY CHILDREN WERE LIVING IN CONFLICT IN 2020?

One in six children was living in a conflict zone (within 50km of one or more conflict events) in 2020. That amounts to approximately 452 million children – a 5% increase from 429 million children in 2019 and the highest amount in 20 years. Two out of three children (68%) – approximately 1.6 billion children – lived in a conflict-affected country in 2020, a one percentage point increase from 2019.

Half of children exposed to conflict in 2020 lived in countries with medium-intensity conflicts (25–999 children killed a year), similar to 2019.

In 2020, there was a drop in the number of children living in low-intensity conflict countries (fewer than 25 children killed a year), accounting for only 7% of children living in conflict zones. In previous years, more children were exposed to low- and medium-intensity conflict events, as suggested by Figure 5, which compares the number of conflicts with the numbers of children at risk.

The number of children who lived in high-intensity conflicts (more than 1,000 battle-related deaths a year) increased by 19%, from 162 million children in
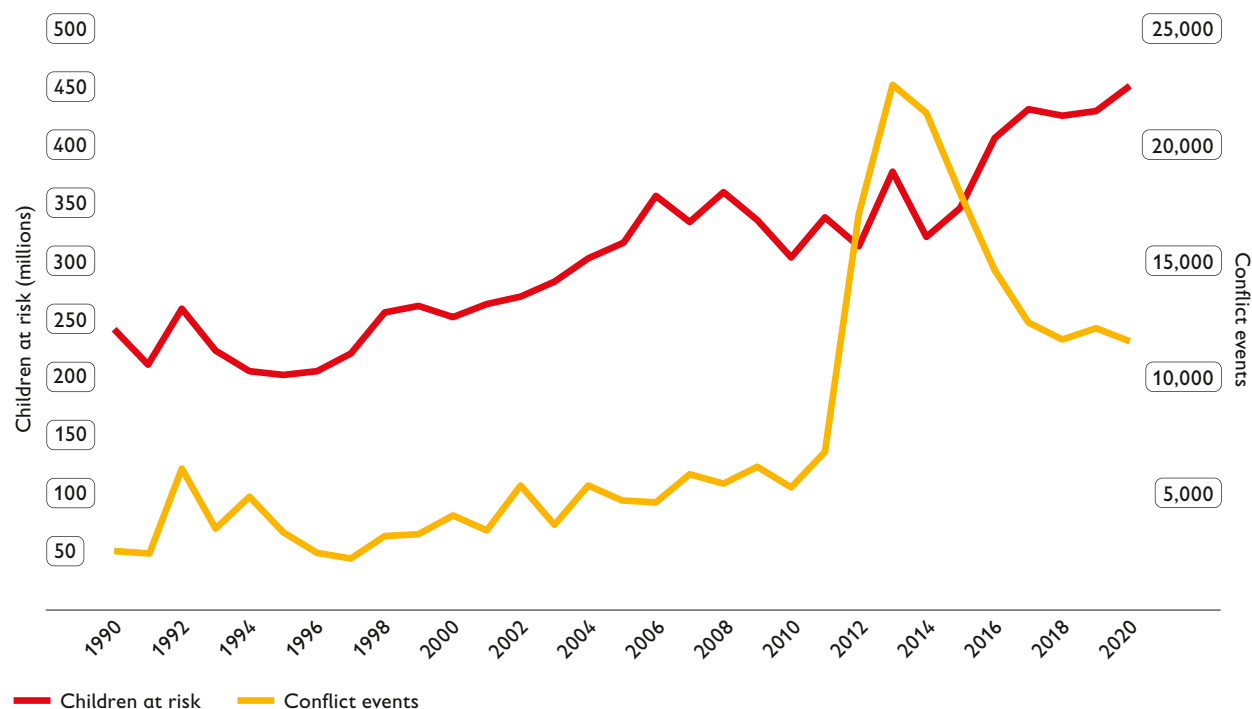
FIGURE 5: HIGH-INTENSITY CONFLICTS ARE PUTTING MORE CHILDREN ARE AT RISK

The number of children at risk from conflict and number of conflict events, 1990–2020
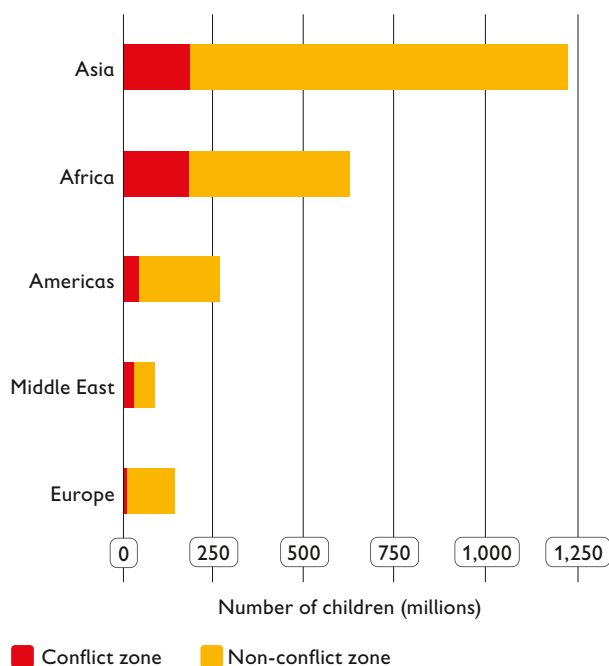
SOURCES: UCDP GED DATASET V.21.1 AND UN WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS, 2019

Save the Children

2019 to around 193 million in 2020.[53] The number of children living in high-intensity conflicts is the highest ever recorded. The steepness of the rise in 2020 – at a time that communities worldwide were grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic – is especially concerning. Part of this was driven by the onset of violence that affected children in Azerbaijan, Ethiopia and Mozambique, along with sustained high numbers of children living in conflict in Afghanistan, DRC, Nigeria and Yemen.

Children and regional conflicts

Asia is the region with the highest total number of children – 184 million – living in conflict zones (see Figure 6), an increase from 163 million in 2019, but fewer than in 2017 (around 200 million children) and 2013 (around 226 million children).

In terms of the share of children living in conflict, the Middle East stands out (Figure 7). One in three children (34%) here lived in a conflict zone in 2020, the highest proportion of any global region, though

Conflict zone **Non-conflict zone**

FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES IN 2020, BY WORLD REGION

Conflict zone **Non-conflict zone**

FIGURE 7: SHARE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES IN 2020, BY WORLD REGION

SOURCE: UCDP GED DATASET V.21.1 AND UN WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS, 2019
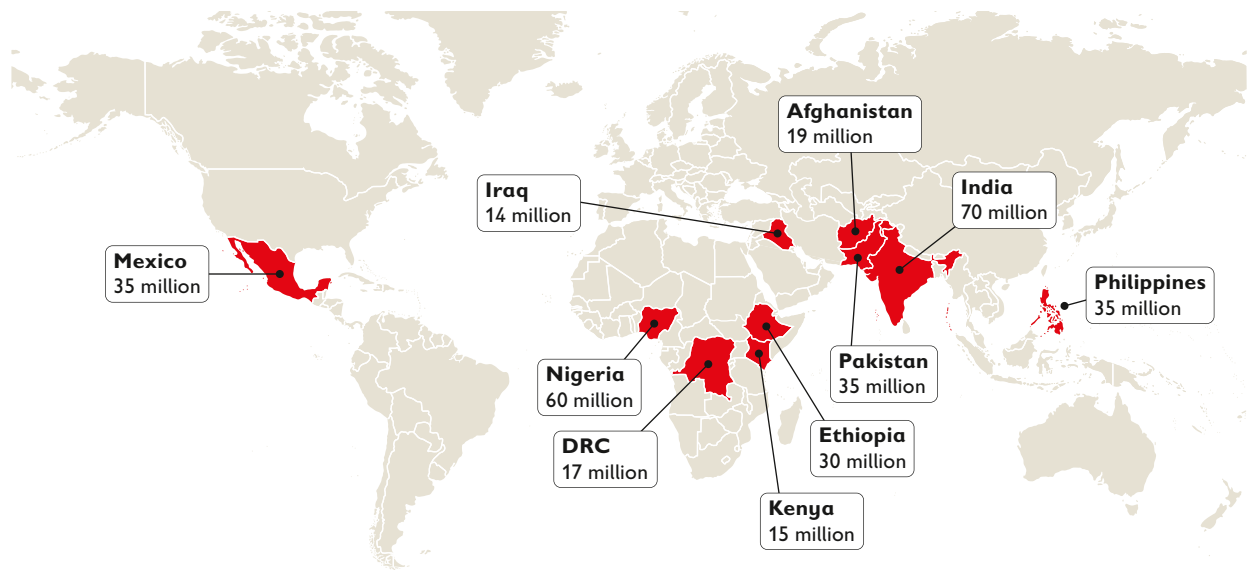
FIGURE 8: THE TEN COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT ZONES

Estimated number of children living in conflict zones in ten worst-affected countries in 2020

SOURCES: UCDP GED DATASET V.20.1 AND UN WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS, 2019

a decrease from 39% (around 340 million children) in 2019. From 2013, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, parts of the Middle East and North Africa experienced a sharp increase in conflict,[54] with the number of non-state conflicts increasing to 50 in 2014 before falling to 17 in 2019.

More widely, the Arab world – with 22 Arab League member states – has increasingly become a focus of high-intensity conflicts, in Iraq, Libya, the occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

The African region has the second-highest number of children in conflict – 182 million children – a dramatic rise from 54 million in 2010 caused by an increase in low-level conflicts.

Children in Africa also have the second-highest risk of living in a conflict zone – approximately 29%, the same as in 2019, but the number of African children at risk of conflict has steadily increased since 2011. In the Americas, children had a risk of 17% (around 45 million children) of living in a conflict in 2020 (down from 46 million children in 2019).

In Europe, 9 million children are at risk of living in a conflict in 2020 (6% of the child population) compared with 5.7 million children (4%) in 2019. This rise is attributable to the war in Azerbaijan in 2020 – the world's second most violent war in 2020 – and the conflict in Ukraine.[55]

Improved reporting on children in conflict

Some of the increase in the number of children in conflict zones over the long term can be attributed to better reporting of battle-related deaths. However, more recent trends show that improved reporting does not on its own fully explain the upward trajectory of the number of children living in conflict zones.

Since 2014, after a spike in battle deaths from the conflict in Syria, the total number of both battle deaths and conflict events have reduced steadily. However, the number of children living in conflict has increased. So has the proportion of children: in 2014, approximately 14% of the total global child population lived in conflict zones, but this number rose to 19% in 2020. In other words, even though conflict events have slightly reduced, children's exposure to conflict is increasing Why? We suggest that as conflict events have slightly gone down, fewer children are leaving conflict zones. As a result children are now more exposed to conflict.

Save the Children

3

THE 10 WORST CONFLICT COUNTRIES TO BE A CHILD IN 2020

We have ranked countries according to the number of children who the UN verified suffered the six grave violations in 2020, the number of children exposed to conflict, and the number of battle deaths nationally. Afghanistan comes out as the most dangerous – alarmingly, even before the events of 2021.

The ten most dangerous countries for children living in conflict in 2020 were:

1 Afghanistan
2 Democratic Republic of Congo
3 Syria
4 Yemen
5 Somalia
6 Mali
7 Nigeria
8 Cameroon
9 Sudan
10 Central African Republic

FIGURE 9: THE TEN WORST CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES IN WHICH TO BE A CHILD IN 2020

Based on the number of children suffering from the six grave violations, the number of children exposed to conflict and the number of battle deaths nationally

SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN ANALYSIS

Syria · Afghanistan · Central African Republic · Sudan · Mali · Nigeria · Yemen · Somalia · Cameroon · Democratic Republic of Congo
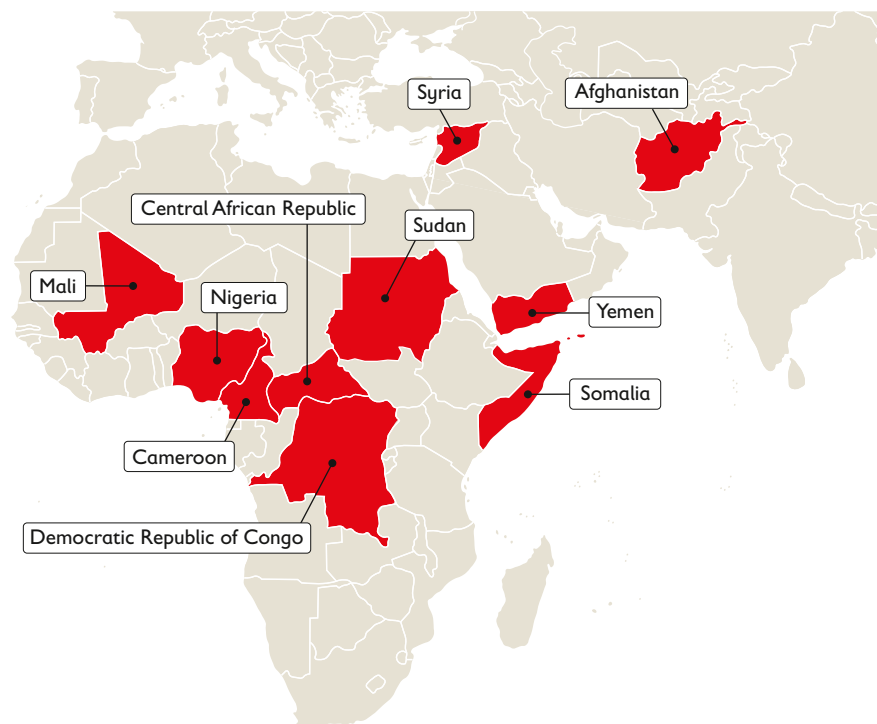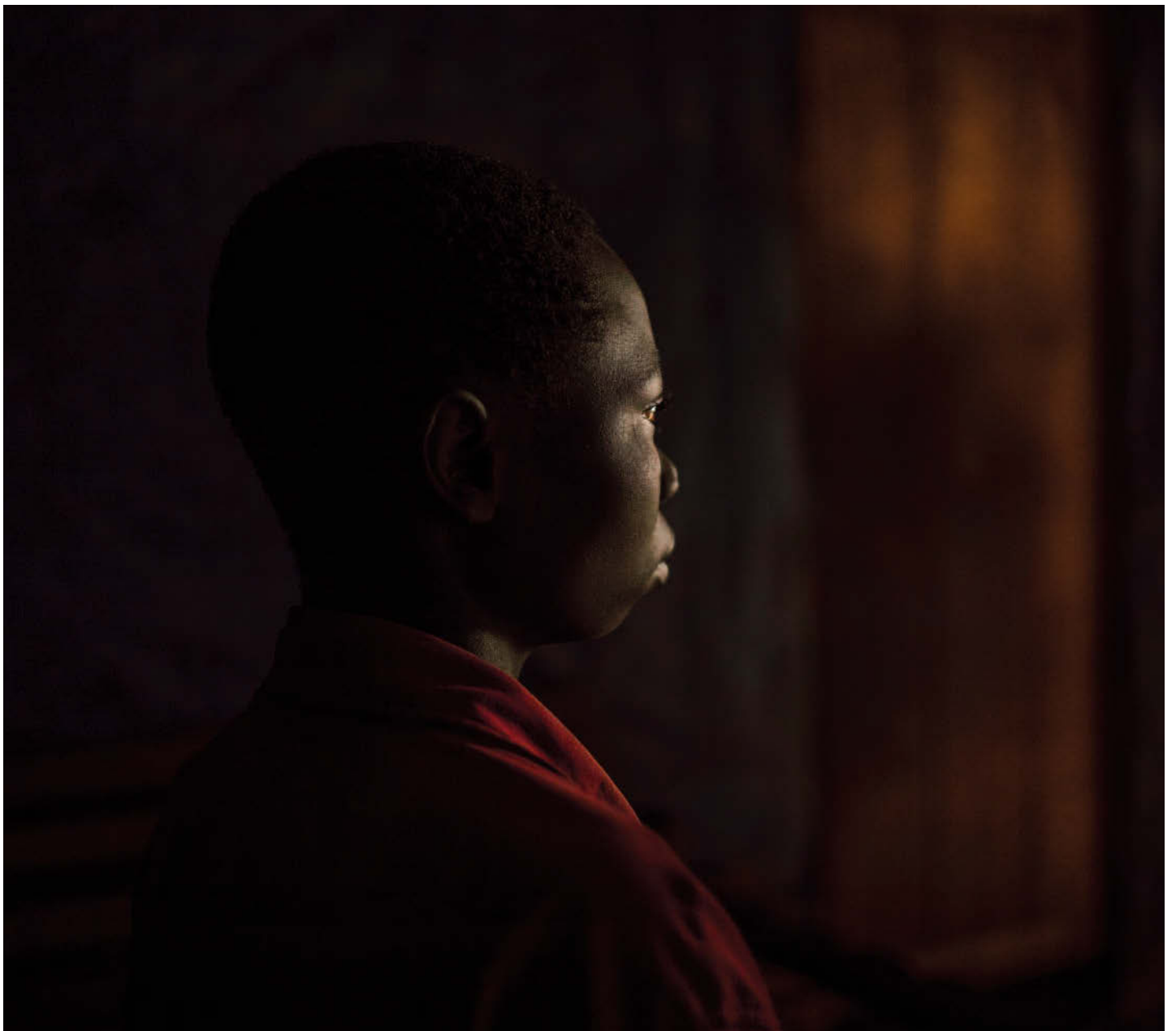
"WHAT I LOST THERE WAS MY MIND"

Rukara* was just 13 when he left home to join an armed group. He was initiated into the militia through a ritualistic 'juju' ceremony and taught how to load and fire a gun.

"In the beginning I felt good when I joined the group, but later on I started feeling bad because I saw many people die, including my friends," he says.

Together with his young comrades, Rukara was routinely drugged to remove inhibitions about conflict. He describes how older fighters would also often accuse him of wrongdoing and torture him with punishments.

One day, equipped with just one gun for every three fighters, Rukara and his friends were sent into battle. They believed the magic juju potion smeared over their skin would protect them from harm.

But vastly outnumbered, the militia suffered a bloody defeat. Rukara saw many of his friends killed before his eyes. As he hid in the vegetation witnessing the carnage, Rukara knew he had to escape this life of warfare.

He fled during the night, running for hours in the dark until he reached safety. He knows that if he'd been caught, the militia would have killed him.

"What I lost there was my mind," says Rukara. "It's like dipping yourself into a muddy swamp – it's easy to join but so hard to get out."

Now, Rukara wants to become a humanitarian worker and help other child soldiers demobilise and rebuild their lives.

Rukara lives in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

PHOTO: HUGH KINSELLA CUNNINGHAM/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children

4

GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT IN 2020

During the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020, children continued to suffer heavily from the six grave violations that the UN reports and monitors on an on-going basis. According to the UN's annual report on children and armed conflict, in 21 armed conflict situations, children experienced a record total of 26,803 grave violations in 2020.

In 2020, a total of 8,432 children were killed and maimed, 8,595 children were recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups, 1,268 children suffered from sexual violence, 3,198 children were abducted, 1,166 schools or hospitals were attacked and 4,144 children suffered from denial of humanitarian access.

These alarming numbers indicate how children continue to be risk in conflict areas. Some of the grave violations against children in conflict are significantly gendered. Boys heavily outnumber girls in terms of recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, making up 85% of child victims in 2020. Girls constitute 98% of sexual violence harms.

From 2016 to 2020, children experienced a global increase in five of the six grave violations. Worldwide, based on the annual UN reports on children and

Children living in conflict zones ▬▬ Grave violations
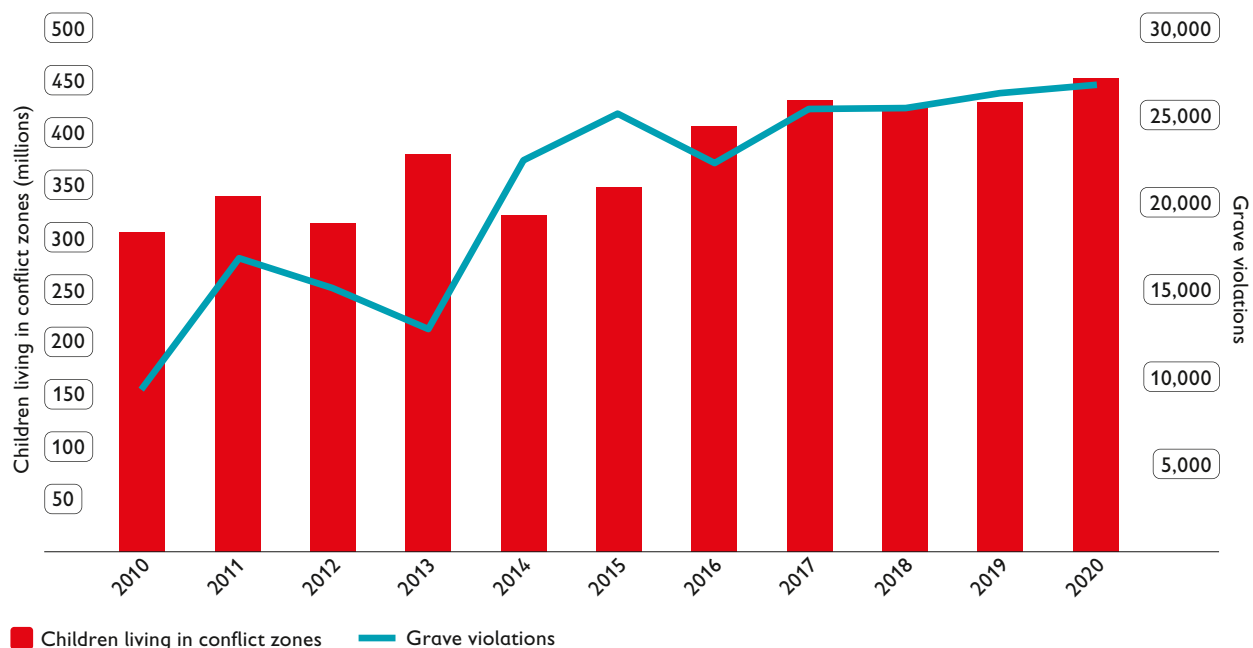
FIGURE 10: GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES HAVE INCREASED

SOURCES: SAVE THE CHILDREN'S ANALYSIS OF THE UN CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT REPORTS AND PRIOS CALCULATIONS BASED ON UCDP GED DATASET V.20.1 AND UN WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS, 2019

armed conflict, the denial of humanitarian access increased by 308% in these five years.

The number of children who are sexually violated in armed conflicts has increased by 48% in the last five years. Sexual violence in conflict zones is a weapon of war. Children's age makes them vulnerable, with girls at high risk.

Over this period, attacks on schools and health providers grew by 17%.

Between 2016 and 2020 the number of children who were killed or maimed in conflict fell by 16%. Nevertheless, 2020 saw an appalling total of 8,432 children killed or maimed in conflict – of whom 2,674 were killed.

Globally, the number of children recruited to or assisting parties to armed conflict increased by 11% from 2016 to 2020.

The number of children who were abducted from their school or home in 2020 increased from 1,804 in 2019 to 3,198 in 2020; this represents a 101% rise from five years earlier. The high numbers of children abducted in Somalia and DRC shows how this is a prevalent feature of conflict for children.

As reported repeatedly since the first UN report in 2006, children continue to suffer grave violations in armed conflict, both physically and emotionally. Yet the international community fails to enforce children's right to be protected according to international law. Research suggests that, in order for fundamental social development to happen, such as establishing the rule of law, peace and security are needed.[56]
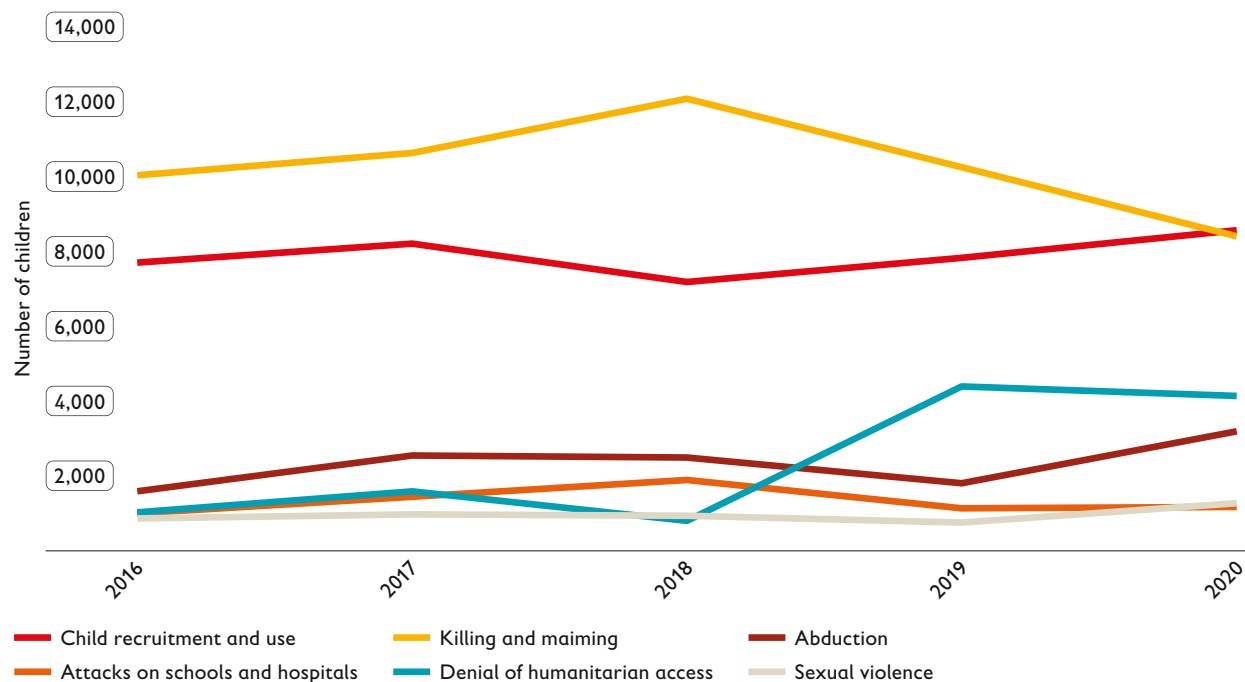
FIGURE 11: THE SIX GRAVE VIOLATIONS OVER FIVE YEARS (2016–20)

SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN'S ANALYSIS OF UN REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT, 2016–20

Save the Children

1 KILLING AND MAIMING OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT
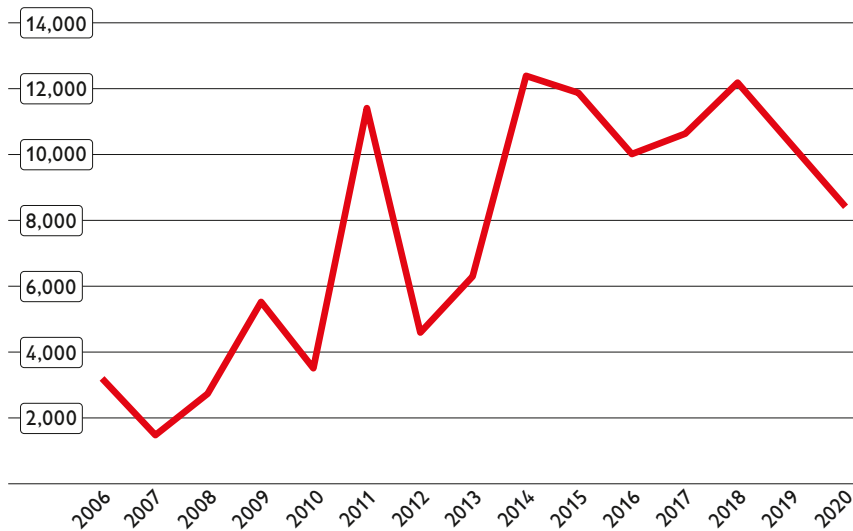
FIGURE 12: THE VERIFIED NUMBER OF CHILDREN KILLED AND MAIMED IN CONFLICT IS DECREASING

BOYS AND GIRLS
(total 8,432 in 2020)

Girls	Boys	Unknown
2,267	**5,862**	**303**
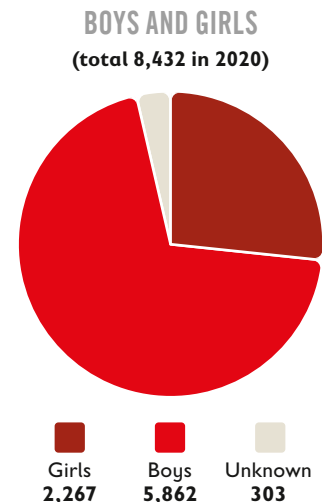
FIGURE 13: 70% OF CHILDREN KILLED AND MAIMED IN CONFLICT IN 2020 WERE BOYS

■ 70% of children who are killed and maimed in conflict in 2020 were boys (5,862 boys), verified as victims of indiscriminate and excessive use of force, deliberate targeting, landmines, cluster munitions and other weapons or used as human shields. 2,267 girls were killed or maimed, constituting 27% of the total, with the gender of the remaining 3% (303 children) unknown. The significant number of victims of unknown gender indicates the challenge of finding and identifying young victims of this violation. In 2020, the total number of children who were killed or maimed – 8,432 children – came down from the previous year's total of 10,294. The five-year trend for killing and maiming of children, from 2016 to 2020, is a decrease of 16% – from 10,068 to 8,432 children.

The two countries with the highest numbers of children verified as killed or maimed in conflict in 2020 were Afghanistan (2,619 children) and Syria (1,229 children). In Afghanistan, the Taliban is attributed by the UN as responsible for the highest numbers killed and maimed, followed by other actors, such as the Afghan National Army. Children are killed and maimed mainly as a result of ground engagement, non-suicide improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and air strikes.

In Syria, according to the most recent UN report on children and armed conflict, the highest number of violations are attributed to Syrian government and pro-government forces. Children are killed and maimed by air strikes, explosive remnants of war, improvised explosive device attacks and shelling. Most violations are reported in Idlib and Aleppo.

Yemen (1,165 violations) and Somalia (1,087) also have high verified numbers of children killed and maimed. In Yemen, the largest numbers of these violations against children are attributed to

the Houthis, the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen and the Yemen Armed Forces. Children are mainly victims of mortar and artillery shelling, gunshots and crossfire, explosive remnants of war and air strikes. The city of Hudaydah, the town of Ta'izz and the Ma'rib and Jawf Governorates have the highest numbers of verified violations of killing and maiming of children.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the occupied Palestinian territory also verify high numbers of children killed and maimed in 2020. In DRC, 413 children were killed or maimed (251 boys, 162 girls). Most children are harmed by armed groups raiding villages of a different ethnic group. Other causes are being caught in crossfire and from combat between armed groups. In Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory 422 children were verified as killed or maimed in 2020 according to the UN (420 children in the occupied Palestinian territory, 2 children in Israel); of these, 405 were boys, 17 girls. Israeli forces are attributed as the main perpetrator, with tear gas inhalation one of the main ways children were maimed during demonstrations at the Israel–Gaza perimeter fence. Ten children suffered from landmines and explosive remnants of war. Children were also maimed during air strikes and rocket fire; two Israeli children were maimed by stone-throwing.

In conflict, some children sustain high-energy tissue damage and massive burns.[57] Blasts from landmines leave some children without limbs, blind or deaf. Families suffer the agony of children killed or maimed. Communities are broken. Parties to armed conflict who violate international law through killing and maiming children destroy individual lives and futures – and the prospects of sustainable development for all. ●

RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT BY ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS
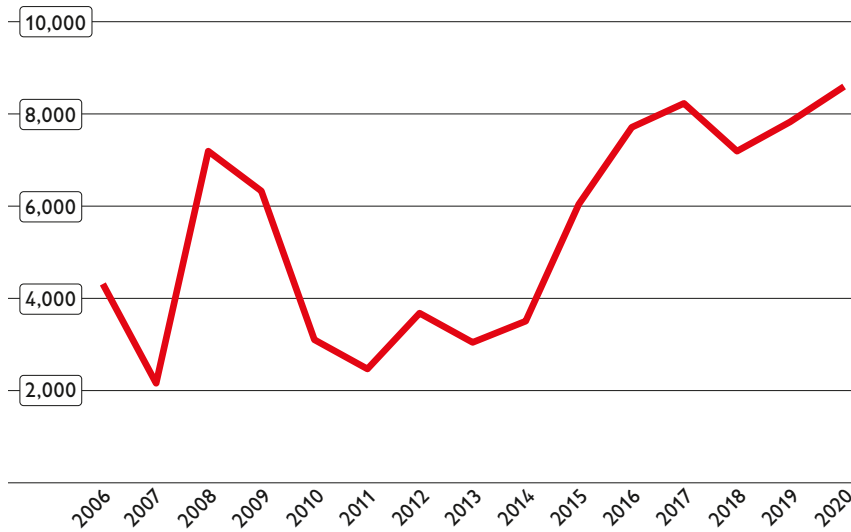
FIGURE 14: THE VERIFIED NUMBER OF CHILDREN RECRUITED BY ARMED GROUPS IS INCREASING

BOYS AND GIRLS
(total 8,595 in 2020)

Girls
1,254
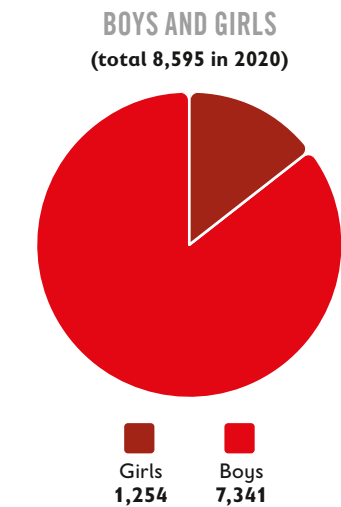
Boys
7,341

FIGURE 15: AMONG CHILDREN RECRUITED BY ARMED GROUPS IN 2020, 85% WERE BOYS

■ 2020 saw the highest-ever total recorded by the UN for verified cases of the recruitment and use of children, 8,595 children were recorded as having been recruited and used by armed groups – a rise of nearly 11% from 2019. The five highest totals all occurred during the five years from 2016 to 2020 (see Figure 14).

More than five times more boys (7,341) were recruited by parties to armed conflict than girls (1,254) in 2020. Boys made up 85% of recruits.

The countries where the highest numbers of children were recorded as having been recruited and used in 2020 were DRC (3,265 children) and Somalia (1,716 children). Much of the recruitment of children in these two countries took place in cross-border operations and attacks on settlements of refugees or internally displaced people, and through child abduction and child trafficking – highlighting how interrelated grave and other serious violations against children are.

In DRC, 2,569 boys and 696 girls were recorded as having been recruited and used in 2020. Among the many conflict actors who are active in the DRC, armed parties such as Mai-Mai Mazembe (239 children), Nyatura (109 children) and Alliance des forces de résistance congolaises (101) were attributed with the highest numbers of child recruits. 456 children were reported to have been used in support roles. While the drivers of recruitment and use of children are complex and fluid, the illicit trade in precious minerals could be a factor in why DRC has a high number of children recruited and used, with research finding armed actors in natural-resource-rich states able to afford to fight longer as they can pay their recruits.[58]

The issue of the recruitment and use of children in the protracted conflict in DRC made international headlines in 2012, when the International Criminal Court (ICC) found Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, former President of the Union des Patriotes Congolais/ Forces Patriotiques pour la Libération du Congo, guilty of the war crimes of enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15 years and using them to participate actively in hostilities.[59] It was the first time the ICC had found someone guilty of child recruitment. Lubanga's sentence of 14 years in prison was upheld by the ICC Appeals Chamber in 2014.

In Somalia, of the 1,716 children recruited, 1,655 were boys (96%), The main perpetrators recorded by the UN were armed groups such as Al-Shabab, who reportedly made use of schools for recruitment. The majority of children who were recruited were used in support roles. However, nearly 10% (165 chidren) were used in combat.

In the Central African Republic, 774 children were verified as recruited and used by armed forces and groups. Of these children, 524 were boys (68%). Children were used in combat and support roles. The main recruiters were ex-Séléka factions (412 children).

Children who have been recruited by armed forces or armed groups are likely to struggle mentally with post-traumatic stress disorder, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders and somatic disturbances.[60] They may struggle with mistrust and rejection from family, community, peers and wider society.[61] In terms of wider costs to social, regional and global stability, research suggests that, when children are recruited by armed groups, armed conflicts are likely to last longer.[62] ●

3 SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN IN CONFLICT
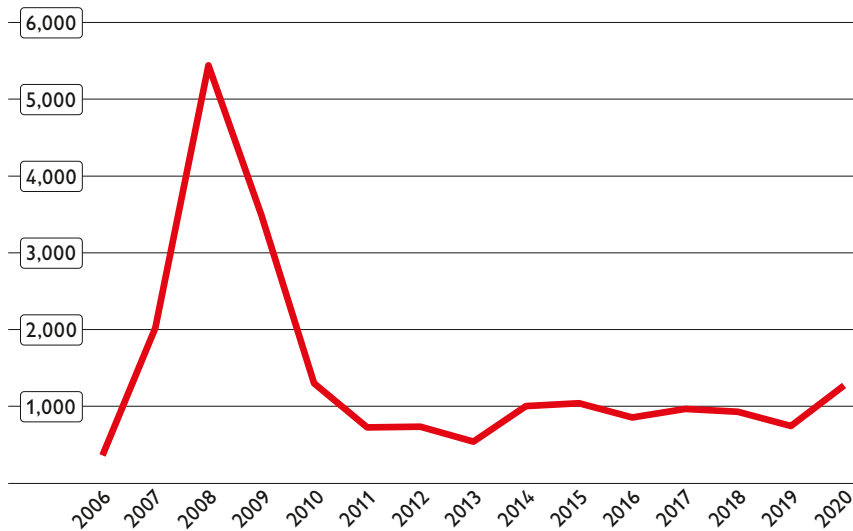
FIGURE 16: THE VERIFIED NUMBER OF CHILDREN SUFFERING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN ARMED CONFLICTS IS INCREASING

BOYS AND GIRLS
(total 1,268 in 2020)

Girls 1,238   Boys 30
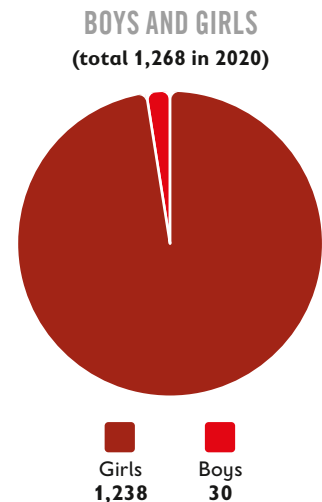
FIGURE 17: GIRLS MADE UP 98% OF VERIFIED CASES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN ARMED CONFLICTS IN 2020

■ Girls made up 98% of the 1,268 verified cases of children who experienced sexual violence in armed conflicts globally in 2020 (1,238 girls, 30 boys). It is the highest verified total for more than 10 years (see Figure 16), and up 48% from 2016. Sexual violence includes rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, forced abortion, sexual mutilation, sexual abuse and sexual torture. Sexual violence is a weapon used in armed conflict to destabilise, to dominate and to destroy communities, whether it is used with those intentions or not. Both state and non-state actors are perpetrators. The disproportionate impact of this violation on girls underscores how girls are vulnerable in armed conflicts due to age and gender.

In 2020, two African states had the highest numbers of verified sexually violated children. In the DRC, where sexual violence appears a defining feature of the conflict, 564 girls and 4 boys were confirmed as sexually violated. The main perpetrators were government forces. Among the governmental perpetrators, 45 suspects were arrested and 4 convicted. Rape (245 cases) was the most common violation, and there were 77 cases of gang rape and 46 cases of forced marriage. Over five years, verified cases of sexual violations against children more than tripled – from 171 children in 2016 to 568 children in 2020. Most reported cases of children who are sexually harmed are reported in North Kivu, the greater Kasai region and Ituri.

In Somalia, the UN verified 400 girls as suffering sexual violence and 6 boys – a 33% increase from five years earlier in cases of children being sexually violated by armed forces and groups. Research suggests that armed groups in Somalia use sexual exploitation of girls as a form of ethnic cleansing.[63]

Globally, the majority of victims of sexual violence against children are girls. However, though they have tended to be overlooked, boys are also among the victims. Afghanistan verifies the highest number of boys who were violated sexually in 2020, with nine boys out of a total of 13 children. In the case of Afghanistan, five of the boys were used as *bacha bazi* or 'playful boy', a practice where boys are dressed up in female clothes and made to dance at parties and are subjected to physically and emotionally degrading treatment, including sexual violence.[64] While numbers of verified cases in Afghanistan are low, they increased over five years from 2016 to 2020.

Sexually violated girls may become pregnant at a young age, and may face risks associated with unsafe abortions, infertility problems and genital trauma.[65] Violated children face post-traumatic stress disorder and potential exposure to sexually transmitted diseases. Entire communities may be stigmatised by sexual violence.[66] And at national, regional and international levels, research indicates that sexual violence can trigger conflicts or diminish sustainable peace after conflict.[67]

In 2019, the ICC issued its first conviction for sexual slavery of children under 15 with the case against Bosco Ntaganda from the DRC, former Deputy Chief of Staff and commander of operations of the Forces Patriotiques pour la Libération du Congo. Its decision was upheld by the ICC Appeal Chamber in 2021.[68] ●

4 ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS
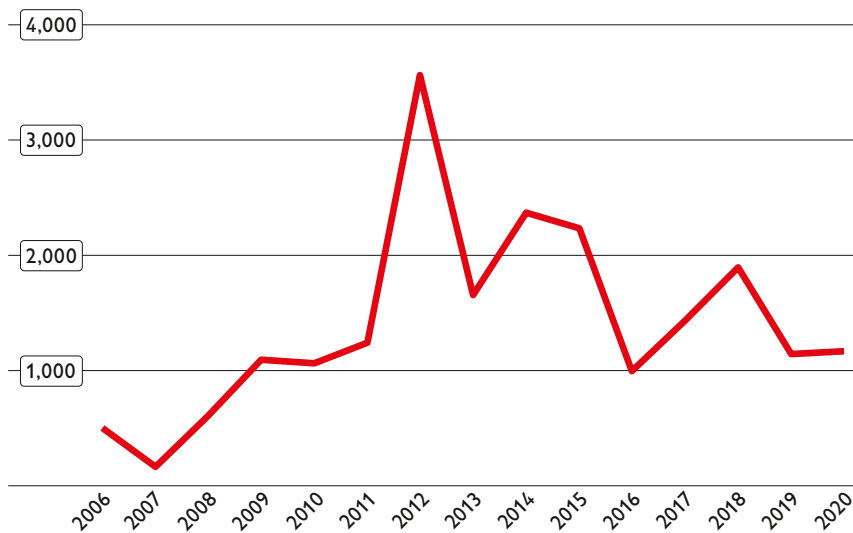
FIGURE 18: SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS CONTINUE TO COME UNDER ATTACK IN CONFLICT AND TO BE USED BY ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS

■ The number of attacks on schools and hospitals increased slightly in 2020 – up from **1,139** in 2019 to **1,166**. While this 2020 figure is lower than the five-year high of **1,892** in 2018, it was 17% higher than the total in 2016.

In 2020, of **1,166** attacks on civilian places where children gather, such as schools or health providers, or incidents of the use such spaces by armed forces or groups, one-third occurred in the DRC and Afghanistan. There were 173 reported cases in DRC in 2020, and 171 in Afghanistan. Armed groups bombed, shot, looted, intimidated and obstructed access to facilities, and blocked and took over vital supplies to educational or medical facilities, depriving children of their right to education and health.

In the DRC, schools were the most commonly attacked civilian places used by children in 2020. These attacks took place mainly in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu in eastern DRC. The main perpetrator was armed groups. Armed forces used five schools in DRC for military operations. During the previous five years, attacks in DRC reached a peak in 2017 with more than 500. 2020 saw a fivefold increase in attacks from the previous year – from 31 attacks in 2019 to 173 in 2020.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban is the main perpetrator of attacks on or use of schools and hospitals. Some attacks are related to vaccination campaigns and voter registration or polling centres. The number of attacks in Afghanistan have decreased since 2016 (from 260 to 171) but the high number of attacks on facilities used by children is a concern.

In the occupied Palestinian territory, children experienced 135 attacks on or incidents of the use of schools and hospitals. Israeli forces interfered with health or education 94 times in 2020, mainly through denial of access through checkpoints (39) or by firing tear gas or other weapons in or around schools (22). The education of more than 6,900 Palestinian children was affected.

In Syria there were 125 attacks on or incidents of the misuse of educational or medical facilities in 2020. The 2020 UN report on children and armed conflict attributes most attacks to Syrian government and pro-government forces and categorises most attacks as air strikes and shelling. The military used schools (30) and medical facilities (4). The number of attacks on educational and health facilities in Syria has decreased since 2016 (from 170 to 125). Research indicates the number of reported attacks on facilities is higher than in previous conflicts such as in Bosnia,[69] suggesting that such attacks have become more commonplace in armed conflicts and illustrating that the risks to children from conflict continuously change.

Children who live through attacks on schools may suffer psychological and social problems afterwards and many need assistance to return to their normal life.[70] Their cognitive functioning may also suffer for several years, affecting their performance in school.[71] Attacks on healthcare in conflict zones affect healthcare access and delivery, with direct consequences for the health of local children.[72] ●

Save the Children
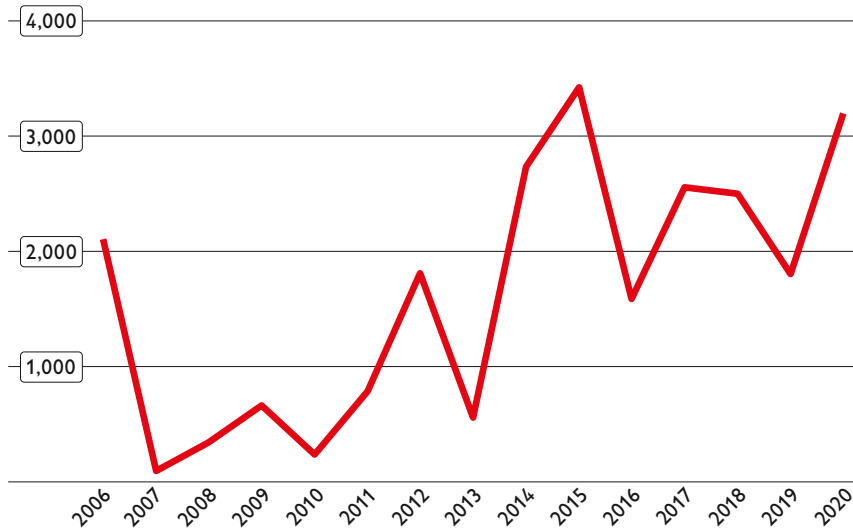
5 ABDUCTION

FIGURE 19: THE VERIFIED NUMBER OF ABDUCTIONS OF CHILDREN BY ARMED GROUPS IS INCREASING

BOYS AND GIRLS
(total 3,198 in 2020)

Girls	Boys	Unknown
738	**2,442**	**18**
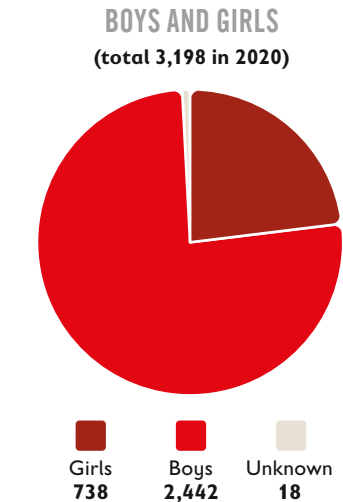
FIGURE 20: AMONG CHILDREN ABDUCTED BY ARMED GROUPS, 76% WERE BOYS IN 2020

■ The second highest total of abductions of children by armed groups or parties to conflict was verified by the UN in 2020, with 3,198 cases – only lower than the all-time high recorded in 2015 and up dramatically, by 77%, from 1,804 cases in 2019. Of the children abducted, 76% were boys (2,442 boys), 23% girls (738 girls) and 1% unknown gender (18).

As in the previous three years, in 2020 Somalia had the highest verified number children abducted (1,430 children). The vast majority of these children were boys, with relatively few girls abducted (82 girls). The UN attributed most cases of abduction to Al-Shabaab (1,413 abductions), with children reportedly abducted for association with armed forces and lack of compliance with Al-Shabaab-imposed codes. Six children were killed following their abduction.

In the DRC, 834 children – 603 boys, 231 girls – were verified as having been abducted. The main reason for abduction was recruitment. Most abductions happened in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, bordering Uganda. In Kasai province, close to the border with Angola, 52 children returned to their families in 2020 after three years of captivity.

Several states where children were verified as having been abducted by armed groups in 2020 reported fewer than five child abductions. Colombia, for example, verified two children (a boy and a girl) as abducted by an armed group.

Children who are abducted are often forced to become child soldiers and experience or participate in violent events.[73] And consequently suffer mental and social problems. Research shows that formerly abducted young mothers generally face rejection from their community and struggle to reintegrate.[74]

The long-term consequences of child abductions – for children who are recruited, their communities and for wider society – are illustrated by the case of Dominic Ongwen.[75] In 2021 the ICC sentenced Ongwen to 25 years of prison for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Northern Uganda between July 2002 and December 2005. However, Ongwen had been abducted and integrated into the Lord Resistance Army as a child and endured extreme suffering physically and emotionally at the hands of the group. Following his abduction, suffering and exposure to extreme brutality, Ongwen became a member of the group and later a leader. ●

6 DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS
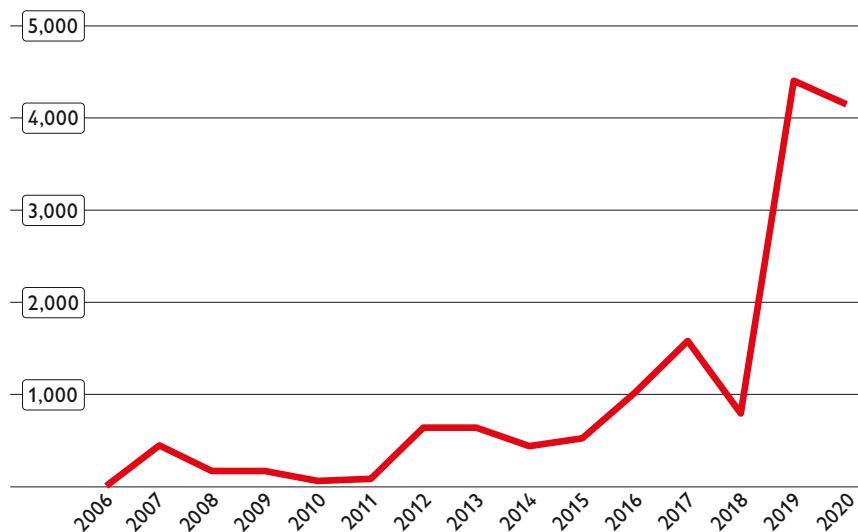
FIGURE 21: VERIFIED INCIDENTS OF THE DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS ARE AT HISTORICALLY HIGH LEVELS

■ Of the six grave violations, the denial of humanitarian access has seen some of the biggest rises in incidence in recent years. In 2020, there was a slight reduction from 2019 – down from 4,402 incidents to 4,144 in 2020. Nevertheless, this is an increase of more than 300% from 2016 (see Figure 21).

Almost two-thirds of children affected by the denial of humanitarian access in 2020 were in Yemen. There were verified reports of 3,033 incidents here – a rise of 64% in a year, from 1,848 incidents in 2019 to 3,033 in 2020, and a massive rise over five years from a total of 220 in 2016. Many cases in 2020 can be attributed to the Houthis, with children denied access through attacks on infrastructure and movement restrictions in and out of Yemen. Children in the governorates of Amanat al-Asimah (1,048 incidents), Sa'dah (597 incidents), Aden (378 incidents) and Hudaydah (371 incidents) were particularly affected.

In the occupied Palestinian territory there were 661 incidents in 2020 of Israeli forces denying children humanitarian access in the occupied West Bank, including Jerusalem, and in Gaza. Two fatally injured children were prevented from or delayed in receiving medical care by Israeli forces. The political situation, with suspension of coordination between the authorities of the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel due to plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, had grave implications for children in need of medical care.

As an illustration, children who must exit through the Erez land crossing to access specialised medical care outside Gaza have to apply for a permit. In 2020, 28% of children's permit applications to Israeli authorities were delayed and 3% were rejected, affecting 659 children. Three Palestinian children died before receiving permission to exit to access medical care outside Gaza.

In Myanmar, while there are no verified numbers available for the children denied humanitarian access, access was noted to have deteriorated in Rakhine and Shan states due to armed confrontations, insecurity, landmines and explosive remnants of war, inconsistent and strict governmental travel authorisations, and poor road infrastructure.[76] For example, children in seven townships with a total population of more than 100,000 people were prevented from accessing humanitarian assistance. The pandemic exacerbated children's lack of access to humanitarian support, for example, through disrupted business supply chains and the closure of local markets.

In Mali, there were 199 incidents of children having been denied humanitarian access in 2020. The perpetrators were largely unidentified. Most children denied humanitarian access are in the regions of Mopti, Gao or Ménaka. Children were prevented from accessing humanitarian aid due to issues such as attacks on humanitarian personnel.[77]

Children who are denied access to food face the danger of malnutrition. Chronic hunger or undernourishment threaten children's development and even their survival.

Malnutrition also has wider consequences for society. Violence often breaks out in regions where hunger and food insecurity are prevalent. Ensuring humanitarian access to these areas is therefore critical in creating the necessary conditions for social stability.[78] ●

Save the Children

PART 2
EIGHT COUNTRY PROFILES

ETHIOPIA

In Ethiopia's Tigray, Afar and Amhara regions, 14 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021[79] – 9 million more than the year before. Of them, some 2.3 million children in Tigray remain cut off from humanitarian assistance as a result of continuing violence.[80] The intensity of conflict rose sharply in 2020, with nearly ten times more battle deaths in 2020 (3,815) than 2019 (395). The conflict in Tigray has displaced more than 1.7 million people into Afar and Amhara.[81]

The conflict in Tigray is not the only one affecting Ethiopia's children, with violent conflict in other parts of the country affecting large numbers of children. As a result, the number of battle deaths and the number of children living in conflict have remained high in Ethiopia since 2015. In that time the number of children living in conflict has never fallen below 9 million.

Although there is no UN monitoring and reporting mechanism in Ethiopia to verify and record violations, as there is in some other countries, such violations are known to have taken place. The UN and other organisations have raised their concerns over killing of children and sexual violence against women and children in Tigray and Afar regions, as well as attacks on schools and damage to vital infrastructure.[82] Humanitarian access has also been a significant challenge, with organisations totally unable to access communities for months. This has contributed to the catastrophic levels of food insecurity currently affecting populations in Tigray, Afar and Amhara.

A range of parties are responsible for the perpetration of grave violations against children in Ethiopia, and the internationalised dimension of the conflict further complicates the situation. This complexity contributes to a lack of accountability, which in turn has been cited as a key factor in the continued violations taking place[83] – a recurring theme across countries affected by conflict.

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on children also needs to be taken into account. The violations against children, the displacement of people, and the denial of access to life-saving services are taking place in a context where 27 million children were out of school because of the pandemic. A further 3 million children have lost access to education due to the conflict in Tigray. In many areas, Ethiopia's children have returned to school, but this has not been possible in conflict-affected areas of Tigray, Afar and Amhara.

Yakob* and his father Tamrat* at a child-friendly space we run in Tigray, Ethiopia
PHOTO: SACHA MYERS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children

NIGERIA

Children in conflict zones in Nigeria have – for more than a decade – been accumulating serious and grave violations, with an enormous toll. With their rights denied or compromised, children are experiencing a cycle of trauma, distrust, poverty and sexual violence.

In the north of the country, conflict continues to cost children their lives. Many more are being robbed of their futures. In the north-east, and increasingly in the north-west, children cannot go to school safely. Displaced families are led to adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as child marriage and child labour. Attacks and assaults on children are common, and the conflict and humanitarian crisis has created huge child protection caseloads, which stakeholders and duty-bearers struggle to respond to.

In Nigeria's conflict zones, a generation is growing up knowing nothing but conflict and instability. An estimated 60 million children were living in conflict zones in Nigeria in 2020 – the second highest total in the last 10 years, though a fall of around 2 million from 2019 (Figure 22). Nigeria has one of the highest overall numbers of children in conflict zones for any country. The lack of education and opportunities for children is only likely to perpetuate the conflict.

Of course, the situation for children in conflict zones is very different from other parts of the country. The proportion of children living in conflict in Nigeria, at 28.5%, is significantly lower than in other countries with intense conflicts – Afghanistan (98%), Burkina Faso (60%), Somalia (65%), Syria (99%) and Yemen (89%).
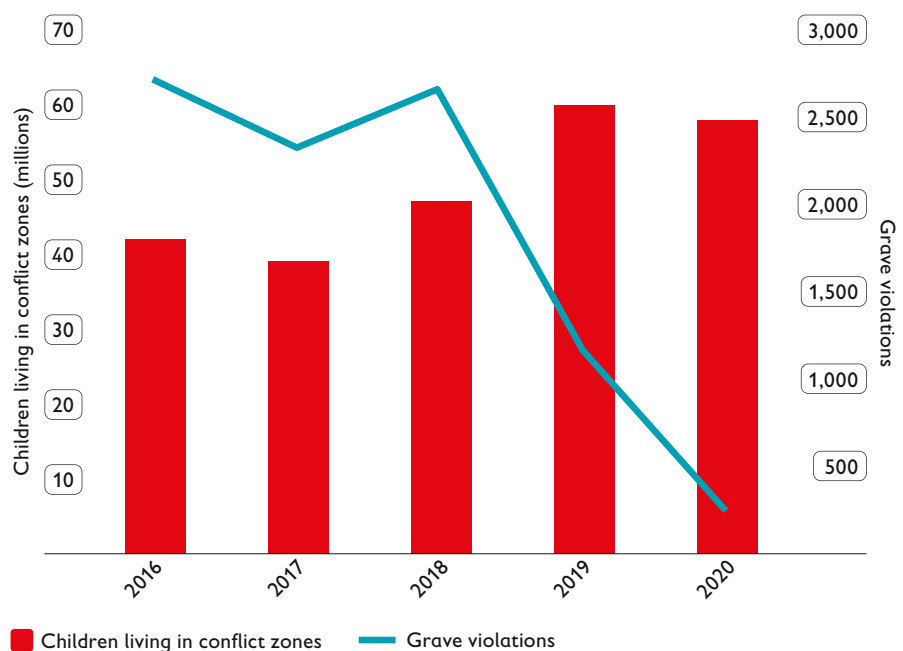
FIGURE 22: THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT IN NIGERIA AND OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST THEM

Children living in conflict zones ▬ Grave violations

Save the Children

The situation for children in 2020

As a result of ongoing violence, economic crisis, and the impact of the climate crisis, humanitarian needs in Nigeria are growing. Attacks on schools and kidnapping of girls and boys increased in 2020. Armed groups are using children and teachers as hostages to claim ransoms, incentivising other actors to abduct children and enabling investment in weaponry and the wider war economy.

Attacks on local communities have also seen more farmers relocating, affecting food availability and market prices. In some parts of the north, flooding, which can be attributed to climate change, has led to more people being displaced and crops destroyed. These challenges became even greater in 2020, while Covid-19 limited the ability of communities and organisations to respond.

Grave violations against children in armed conflict
As shown in Figure 22, the number of verified grave violations against children in armed conflict fell sharply in 2019 and 2020. Clearly, for children in Nigeria, this overall trajectory is welcome.

The biggest fall was in the verified cases of recruitment and use – falling from 1,947 to 667 in 2019, and then to just 7 in 2020. While these figures should be treated with caution – given difficulties in verifying incidents during the pandemic and that recruitment incidents are often reported long after they occur – they offer promise. However, it is important to note that, despite these falls, recruitment and use of children by armed groups still accounts for 64% of all grave violations reported in Nigeria from 2016 to 2020.

The next two most prevalent violations over five years up to 2020 were killing and maiming (124 cases in 2020), and abductions (76 cases). In interviews another grave violation that stood out in 2020 was attacks on schools and hospitals.[84]

Abducted children
The abduction of children has increased over the past years, with abductions now also happening in the western part of the country. Between January and August 2021, around 1,000 children were abducted in Northern Nigeria.[85] Kidnapping continues in conflict areas, and is particularly common in the north-west of the country.

Key drivers of the abduction and kidnapping of children by armed groups are the ransom they receive, enabling them to buy weapons and train combatants, and the opportunity to recruit and use children. Abductions also increase the visibility of non-state armed groups, including through media attention.

Attacks on schools and hospitals
While attacks on hospitals are rare, attacks on schools are common. Attacks on schools and the threat of abduction in the north-east and north-west of Nigeria discourage children from going to secular schools, push teachers out and keep communities

illiterate. By reducing children's opportunities and increasing the hardship children face, armed groups enhance their own chances of recruiting supporters.

In January 2020, a suicide bomb attack carried out during open air classes in eastern Nigeria killed three boys. In the same month, a communal militia reportedly attacked a government secondary school in Benue. In February, non-state armed groups reportedly abducted three secondary school students in Borno state, who were later rescued by the military and returned to their families.[86] Out of fear of abduction, most teachers left north-eastern Nigeria at the beginning of or during the conflict, leaving a huge gap in trained teachers. Additionally, with military groups using education facilities in Nigeria for their own activities, parents have refrained from sending their children, especially girls, back to school.[87]

Communities put huge efforts into rebuilding schools. However, many schools remain inaccessible due to limited resources or staff to rebuild schools, or are overcrowded and desperately short of qualified teachers.

Sexual and gender-based violence against children
Children, particularly girls, in conflict areas face the threat of sexual violence. They may be sexually abused and exploited by members of an armed group. Or faced with poverty, children, particularly girls, may sell sex as a means of survival.

In Nigeria as a whole, according to 2018 figures, a staggering 44% of girls are married before age 18, 18% before age 15.[88] Child marriage is both a cause and result of poor education of girls in Nigeria. Of more than 10 million out-of-school children in the country, 60% are girls.[89] The socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has seen a further increase in the rate of child marriages.

Hunger, food insecurity and the climate crisis
Nigeria is one of the countries that is most affected by the climate crisis. Floods, drought, desertification and deadly heatwaves threaten children across the country.[90] According to Action Against Hunger, 7.9 million people needed humanitarian assistance in 2020, and 1 million people had less than 15 litres of water per day.[91] Hunger and food insecurity are a clear consequence of the ongoing conflict. Farmers regularly experience attacks on themselves or their crops. As a result, the food supply in affected areas is reduced, and this is exacerbated by increasing numbers of displaced farmers. In addition, climate change means seasons are changing and being delayed, significantly affecting agricultural production and household livelihoods.

Many families live in locations that are occupied by non-state armed groups and to which humanitarian actors have only limited or no access. In those areas where humanitarian access is provided, need is often greater than supply. As a result, children are often malnourished, and many lactating mothers are unable to provide quality breastmilk to their babies during their first critical six months. Children's

Save the Children

growth, mental ability, well-being and productivity are affected.

The Nigerian government has shown a strong commitment to resuming school feeding programmes, which had been put on hold due to Covid-19, and to reaching children across the country. The school feeding programme provides one meal per day to approximately 9 million children enrolled in grade 1–3 of government-owned primary schools.[92] As a result, a significant number of children have been able to access food. However, the financial costs of school feeding programmes and shortages in food supplies are big challenges.

Save the Children's response

Education is a central focus of Save the Children's response.

For the first time in ten years, Borno state now has a children's government. Save the Children supported the training and capacity building of the children's parliament. And we continue to support it through advocacy meetings with key lawmakers and other branches of the government of the state.

In this way, we are supporting the children's parliament to push the government to set up child protection frameworks. This is a vital foundation to protect children from attack and abuse and to keep children safe.

We have also set up children's rights advocacy clubs in schools. Here, children speak about issues they face in trying to realise their rights and how they can defend their rights when they are being abused. We provide platforms for children in these clubs to speak up and link them up with media.

In the north-east, we support girl champions and a youth ambassador to speak out for the rights of children in the conflict areas. We support local communities to organise to push for schools to be rebuilt. Working with UNICEF, other INGOs and governments, we led to the government's adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration in 2019. In October 2021, the Nigerian government hosted the 4th International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration. We continue to advocate for the development of a costed multisectoral plan of action for the full implementation and adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration at state and local government area level.

Recommendations

Children in Nigeria's conflict zones are living amid violence, displacement and lack of resources. It's vital to change their realities – and let them see a better future is possible.

The government must ensure measures are in place to protect children, deliver access to education, and make sure every child's basic needs are met. We have set out a set of urgent measures that the government should adopt.

1. **Increase investment in education access, safety and quality**: The Nigerian government must fulfil the commitment of President Buhari to the 2021 Global Partnership for Education Conference to increase education funding to 22.5% by 2025, with staggered annual increases to 14% in 2022, 16.7% in 2023, 20% in 2024 and 22.5% by 2025. In addition to the domestic budgetary increase, the government has committed to ensure that states and their local government areas progress towards or maintain spending levels at 20% of total budget; increase equity and efficiency in the use of State Universal Basic Education Board funds to cater for proactive teacher training programmes; and update national minimum standards for education outcomes. Commitments have also been made to invest in digital learning and to implement monitoring mechanisms for education commitments, among others.

2. **The Child Rights Act (CRA) must be domesticated, costed and fully implemented by all states and local government areas**: The CRA is a comprehensive legal instrument for the protection of the rights of a child. On domestication by states, it will give full assurance and hope for a better life for Nigerian children. While the domestication of CRA is a critical first step to stopping the war on children, it must be backed by appropriate financial and human resources for its full implementation, such that it provides a favourable environment for children to realise their full potential.

3. **The government should protect education from attack** (including students, teachers and schools) and hold perpetrators to account.

4. **The government should ensure the Safe Schools Declaration is fully implemented** – especially in the north-east of the country – through developing a costed national and state-level plan of action.

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

Background

Since the beginning of the Israel–Palestine conflict, children have experienced rights violations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The situation remains complex due to the protracted nature of the conflict, the different realities of children in the different areas in the occupied Palestinian territory, and the resulting protection crisis. The bottom line is that for the 2.3 million children living across the occupied Palestinian territory, they have only known the occupation and with it, the violence and pressure it creates. In just five years, from 2016 to 2020, the UN has verified a total of 11,350 grave violations against children – the 7th highest total globally over that period.

Children's mental health, well-being and development are affected by the persistent rights violations and violence they experience, whether from cycles of violence or as a by-product of the occupation and blockade. These violations include killing and maiming, demolition and displacement, excessive and inappropriate use of force by security or military personnel, detention of children, denial of humanitarian access, and settler violence. The UN verified that in 2020, 422 Palestinian children and two Israeli children were killed and maimed, with 11 Palestinian children and one Israeli child killed.[93]
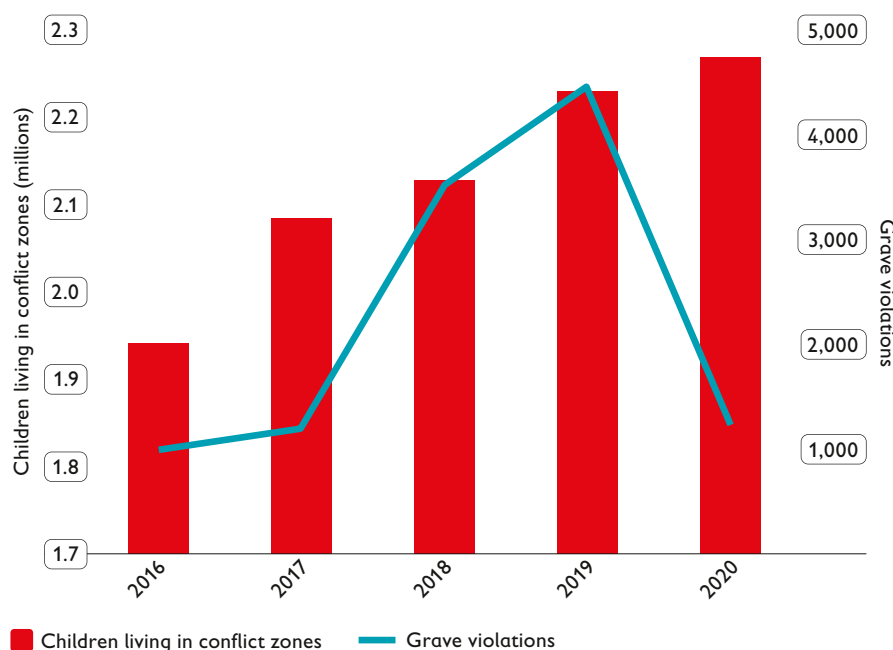
FIGURE 23: THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY AND OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST THEM

Save the Children

The impact of conflict on children in 2020

Beyond the grave violations mentioned above, the ongoing conflict and regular flare-ups of violence restricted access to education and limited or destroyed infrastructure. Demolitions and displacement are additional violations of children's rights. In 2020, the situation was exacerbated by Covid-19, as healthcare for children in Gaza was further restricted when both the de facto authorities in Gaza and the Israeli authorities tightened restrictions on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza, effectively preventing most people – including humanitarian workers – from entry and exit and causing an immediate reduction in the number of referrals for medical assistance. Referrals decreased even further when, in May, the Palestinian Ministry of Health ceased the coordination of permit applications from the Gaza Strip. For many of the referrals that are made, the Israeli authorities continue to inhibit access to medical care, including for one 16-year-old child with hematologic disease who was denied an exit permit in January and 52 children who received no definitive response by the date of their hospital appointment.

The socio-economic impact of Covid-19 led to increased needs of communities, but because of movement restrictions, children often experienced difficulties accessing basic services and receiving humanitarian support. Additionally, at least nine hospitals were damaged or destroyed by Israeli airstrikes in 2021.[94] Israel did not comply with its legal obligations under international humanitarian law to provide Palestinians with access to the Covid-19 vaccine, and as a result, Palestinians did not access Covid-19 vaccines in a timely manner. As the occupying power, Israel has primary responsibility for ensuring access to healthcare for the Palestinian population under occupation.

During the pandemic, the number of demolitions in the West Bank reached a four-year high, leading to many families being forcibly transferred, left with inadequate shelter and forced to share small living spaces. This exacerbated the spread of the virus throughout the West Bank.

Palestinian children imprisoned by Israeli authorities were forced to share confined spaces with other children and with adult prisoners, often in compromised sanitary conditions, with limited access to resources needed to maintain minimum hygiene routines. The added requirement of an isolation period at the beginning of detention, which means that children are totally alone and denied access to a lawyer or family member, created an even more difficult experience than usual for children detained during the pandemic. In many cases, this resulted in a prolonged period in detention, which is contradictory to the fundamental principle under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, which stipulates the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child must be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest time possible.

According to Assiwar, a feminist Palestinian organisation that supports women, there was a surge in recorded cases of both sexual violence and domestic abuse against children following the implementation of lockdown measures.[95] The United Nations Population Fund reported an increase in physical violence, family violence and verbal violence against children during the Covid-19 pandemic, finding "the likelihood of verbal and physical abuse against children and spouses increased among those living in Hebron, Tulkarem and Ramallah; those living with extended family; those with a large number of children; and those with low education levels."[96]

However, despite the unsanitary and often difficult conditions at home, some children reported feeling safer staying at home due to high levels of harassment, abuse and violence on their way to or at schools. Much of the harassment, abuse and violence has been inflicted on children by settlers, as organisations such as B'tselem have documented a spike in Israeli state-backed settler violence during the pandemic.[97] While attacks on education and schools

decreased in 2020 as a result of the pandemic and children learning from home, grave violations and violence in children's lives remained common. In the long term, the UN has deemed it likely that human rights violations will intensify, with unequal legal rights – and unequal protection of those rights – for Palestinian and Israeli children living in the same space. The key driver of grave violations remained the occupation, and in the specific case of Gaza the ongoing land, air and sea blockade imposed by Israel.

Grave violations against children in armed conflict

Killing and maiming

As mentioned above, children are affected differently in different geographic areas. Country staff interviewed for this report described how in the occupied West Bank, children are experiencing harassment and violence from the Israeli military forces constantly. This happens on their way to school, or as part of the demolitions and forcible transfers that take place particularly in East Jerusalem and Area C of the occupied West Bank, where children walk long distances to reach schools, crossing checkpoints and electronic gates. Additionally, military forces forcefully raid houses of Palestinians and use inappropriate and excessive force that results in physical injuries.[98] All these incidents leave children hurt, experiencing severe emotional distress through recurring violence and fear of attacks. The most extreme incidents resulted in children being killed both during house raids or on their way to and from school.

In 2020, 12 children (11 Palestinian boys and 1 Israeli boy) were killed in the occupied West Bank, of which at least eight were killed by the Israeli forces, one by Palestinian security forces, and one by Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades. The UN reports "Of the eight Palestinian children killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, seven were killed by Israeli forces by live ammunition (6) and physical assault during arrest (1), during law enforcement operations (3), demonstrations and confrontations involving stone throwing (2) and Molotov cocktails (1), and a shooting attack against Israeli forces (1). The child killed by Palestinian security forces was shot with live ammunition in a law enforcement operation. One Israeli boy was killed in the occupied West Bank while being pursued by Israeli police after allegedly throwing stones at Palestinians."[99]

The UN verified that 422 children (420 Palestinian children, 2 Israeli children; 405 boys, 17 girls) were killed and maimed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (304), and in Gaza (118) by Israeli forces (380), Israeli settlers (20), Palestinian armed groups (2) and unidentified Palestinian perpetrators (2) and explosive remnants of war (8).[100] The main causes of maiming of children by Israeli forces were tear gas inhalation (170), rubber-coated metal bullets and sponge-tipped bullets (70) and live ammunition (34). Eight children were maimed by Israeli forces during demonstrations at the Israel–

Gaza perimeter fence.

In Gaza, six Palestinian children were maimed during air strikes by Israeli forces on Gaza, and two Palestinian boys were maimed by a rocket fired by a Palestinian armed group landing near their home.

Apart from violence perpetrated by the Israeli army, daily frictions with Israeli settlers result in children being hurt on their way to schools or while playing outside. There are recorded incidents of Israeli settlers physically assaulting Palestinians, including farmers and students, and burning their houses or trees, with violence increasing during events such as the annual olive harvest.[101] In Gaza, as part of the recurring violent cycles, as witnessed during airstrikes, many children lost their lives, families, and homes, and were injured or disabled because of injuries inflicted by Israeli forces.[102]

Abduction of children/Detention

Detention of children remains a serious and widespread risk for children growing up amid military occupation and conflict in the occupied West Bank. Being detained has an impact on every aspect of children's lives, from their safety and development to their psychosocial well-being and mental health. Palestinian children are the only children in the world who are systematically prosecuted in military courts, which consistently lack fair trial rights and fail to meet juvenile justice standards. In the last 20 years, an estimated 10,000 Palestinian children have been held in the Israeli military detention system.

Almost half of the former child detainees consulted in a report for Save the Children, stated that they have not felt able to fully return to their normal life, and 85% said that they have changed due to their experience. In a country that has the highest rate of mental health needs in the Eastern Mediterranean, the needs of former detainees are often neglected, with devastating consequences for those who are children.[103]

Detention stops children from accessing and continuing education and leads to severe emotional distress and family separation, in addition to feelings of isolation. More than half of the children consulted for our report on child detainees were denied access to support and comfort from their families, and in some cases, they were led to believe that their families had abandoned them.

Boys are disproportionately affected by detention. It affects their access to education as they miss out on classes and struggle with reintegrating due to the psychosocial and economic consequences of detention. There is also a lack of adequate measures taken by the Palestinian Authority to ensure children can continue their studies with their peers even after detention.

Attacks on schools or hospitals

As a result of escalations in violence in 2020, schools and hospitals, particularly in Gaza, were destroyed, severely affecting children's ability to access education and healthcare. According to the UN, 11 attacks on schools and 19 on hospitals were verified, of which 26 were attributed to Israeli forces, four to Israeli

Lee*, 6, looks at the remains of his home in Hebron, West Bank. He and his family are from a Bedouin community. Their home has been demolished five times.
PHOTO: FARAH ABU SAHLIYA/SAVE THE CHILDREN

settlers. Four of the attacks took place in Gaza, while 26 took place in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.[104] Israeli forces were responsible for 90 verified attacks on education in the occupied West Bank, which included "closure or denial of teachers' and students' access through checkpoints, firing tear gas or other weapons in and around schools, or threats of demolitions and stop working orders."[105]

With the pandemic, the lack of adequate infrastructure also further prevented children from accessing education, often due to a lack of internet or access to computers. In Gaza, over 50% of school-aged children and teenagers lack access to computer equipment, a reliable power supply and the internet. It is estimated that only 30% of households in the Gaza Strip have internet, and these internet connections are often unreliable.[106]

Beyond the incidents reported in the UN Secretary-General's 2020 report on children and armed conflict, in interviews with Save the Children staff across the occupied Palestinian territory, children's safety and security on the way to and within schools was a recurring theme. According to the education cluster, there are currently 53 schools under threat of demolition, mainly located in marginalised areas in Area C of the occupied West Bank. In many areas in the occupied West Bank children are forced to walk long distances to and from school, crossing checkpoints and being repeatedly targeted by Israeli forces. In Save the Children's report *Danger is our Reality*, children stated that the key barriers to their education include "military operations, settler-related incidents and movement restrictions, which put them at risk of injury, detention or disruption to their learning".[107] Additionally, chronic shortages in education infrastructure due to lack of funding, building restrictions and school demolitions further compromise children's education.

Denial of humanitarian access for children
For Palestinian children, life under occupation means denial of humanitarian access is an everyday occurrence. The closure of borders and the blockade of Gaza – direct results of the occupation – create obstacles to children's access to humanitarian support. This has been exacerbated by Covid-19, which led not only to a reduction of international protective presence in the occupied West Bank because of severe movement and access restrictions,[108] but also to increased needs of communities on the ground due to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. Additionally, international organisations struggled to support children logistically, as their ability to move goods and staff decreased because of Covid-19. Before the pandemic, Palestinian and Israeli civil society organisations, as well as INGOs, operating in the occupied Palestinian territory were already facing a civic and humanitarian space that had rapidly shrunk over a number of years. The increasing number of false accusations of aid diversion, supplemented by attacks by Israeli authorities and their allies against national NGOs, international NGOs and Palestinian civil society organisations, raise serious concerns about the continued ability of these organisations to speak out for Palestinian rights and provide humanitarian assistance. The misinterpretation or misapplication of counter-terrorism legislation has further contributed to the shrinking of humanitarian space, compromising the basic rights of Palestinians, and hindering the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the Gaza Strip. The full impact this has varies from area to area, but in Gaza, 80% of the population depend on humanitarian aid, with around 45% being unemployed due to limited economic activity. The needs of children for support have risen dramatically, with 96% of the water now contaminated and unfit for human consumption,[109] hospitals having been hit by rockets, and access to food having decreased. Two infant boys died at the beginning of the pandemic, as Palestinian and Israeli authorities halted coordination and as a result did not provide travel permits, while more than 50 children with cancer needed travel permits to receive medical treatment outside the Gaza strip.[110]

Hunger, food insecurity and the climate crisis

Increased food insecurity is a direct result of the occupation and the resulting blockade and recurring violence. Since the occupation in 1967, Israel has confiscated thousands of acres of farm land and then separated it with the occupied West Bank wall. Farmers are struggling to grow their crops due to vandalism and destruction from settlers and the military. In Gaza, 25% of fertile land has been destroyed by the buffer zone that borders Israel. Patrol boats in the area only allow fishermen access to 15% of their territorial waters, further reducing access to food sources.[111] With the limitations on trade, environmental issues as a result of climate change and the pollution of sea water and drinking water, and the confiscation and destruction of land, food sovereignty is unachievable. This has hindered economic growth and social conditions, resulting in increased levels of food insecurity.[112]

The World Food Programme estimates that nearly a third of the Palestinian population – about 1.7 million people – are affected by food insecurity.[113] In Gaza, 68.5% of the population are affected by food insecurity, following the collapse of all productive sectors, basic social services and infrastructure.[114]

The impact of Covid-19 has also hit the already weak Palestinian economy hard, resulting in an expected 11.5% contraction of gross domestic product in 2020, one of the most severe declines on record.[115] 1.4 million people are now living in poverty across the occupied Palestinian territory, but the Gaza Strip has been hit particularly hard. In the fourth quarter of 2020, 43% of the labour force in Gaza was unemployed, and 77% of households reported worrying about not having enough to eat.[116]

Save the Children's response

Child protection, child rights governance and education remain the cornerstone of our response. We are the co-lead agency of the education cluster and play a leadership role in ensuring a protective environment for schools under the Safe Schools Declaration. While the Israeli government has not yet signed the Declaration, the Palestinian Authority did so in 2015. Recognising that education can have a protective effect against early marriage, child labour and recruitment to armed forces and groups, we work with duty-bearers to ensure that they adhere to the principles of the Declaration and that schools are a safe environment.

Child protection remains a large component of our work, particularly as we see the increasing violence that children are experiencing both in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. As a result of rising socio-economic pressure, and with more and more family members living within one house (whether because of economic reasons, demolitions or lockdown), sexual and gender-based violence against children have increased.[117] Addressing the key drivers and protecting children from sexual and gender-based violence will remain central to our future programming.

Additionally, we are trying to ensure children have access to essential and basic services, such as healthcare, addressing the root causes of malnutrition and improving food security for the most vulnerable households in Gaza. We are highlight the impact on children of movement restrictions and of the denial of access to medical treatment outside Gaza. As one of the leading organisations working in the occupied Palestinian territory we put pressure on duty-bearers and try to help people access care services inside and outside the country.

Possible solutions, existing best practices

Staff interviewed for this report all pointed to the root cause of occupation as the most important driver of children's needs and the biggest barrier to responding to those needs. Only through ending the occupation will it be possible to meaningfully change children's realities.

Political change is fundamentally important. In addition, **governments, the UN, donors, NGOs and civil society** must take the following steps to respond to the needs of Palestinian children:

1. **Urge the government of Israel to end the use of sniper fire, live ammunition and tear gas against children in all areas of the occupied Palestinian territory.** The killing and maiming of children are never acceptable and all parties must ensure that children are not targets.

2. **Urge the government of Israel to immediately stop all attacks on schools and take steps to ensure that children can go to school and learn safely**, in line with its international obligations, and apply accountability measures when obligations are violated.

3. **Urge the government of Israel to take steps to immediately lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip** – since this is a requirement of any sustainable solution that establishes a durable peace, reconstruction, recovery and longer-term development. The blockade has been the root cause of the persistent denial of the rights of children in the Gaza Strip and the impoverishment of their families.

4. **Speak out when grave violations happen** and ask for compensation when donor-funded infrastructure is demolished or damaged.

5. **The international community should work with all parties to seek to create conditions for renewed talks between the parties for a just solution** that addresses the underlying causes of this escalation, that upholds equal rights for both Palestinian and Israeli children, and that will end the decades-long occupation as the only sustainable resolution to the conflict.

SYRIA

Over 10 years of conflict, children in Syria have experienced every type of grave and serious violation codified by international laws, rules and standards. As with many of the protracted situations of armed conflict discussed in this report, year after year Syrian children face a complex – often deepening – set of challenges to their safety, wellbeing and fundamental human rights. Just as the conflict itself has evolved, so too has the impact on children. However, this change does not constitute an improvement – although the experience of a child in Syria today is different than at the start of the conflict, it is still of great concern, both for those still in Syria and for the 13.5 million Syrians who have been displaced internally and across international borders.[118]

While frontlines remained relatively stable at the time of writing, hostilities continue, particularly in the north-west and across areas of northern Syria more broadly. And the possibility of escalation remains. While the threat of active conflict has waned in other parts of the country, the humanitarian needs of children continue to increase, including because of the economic consequences of protracted conflict. But access to education and life-saving services remains extremely limited.

The long-term effects on children of trauma from the hostilities are only starting to become fully apparent. Children are living with the double burden of their past experiences and an extremely challenging present.

Conflict has reduced much of the city of Al Raqqa to ruins
PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

The impact of conflict on children

The number of children affected by conflict in Syria has remained relatively constant over six years, with 38% of the population living in conflict zones in 2015, coming down slightly to 36% in 2020. As shown in Figure 24, a similar pattern can be seen with grave violations which, excluding a small rise in 2018, have also persisted at around 2,500 verified grave violations each year. However, this relative stability in the numbers is in stark contrast to the number of battle-related deaths and conflict events (see Table 5). Worryingly, although fighting has reduced in geographic scope over time, those affected by active conflict are more likely to experience a grave violation.

Grave violations against children in armed conflict

From 2016 to 2020, killing and maiming of children, recruitment and use of children by armed groups, and attacks on schools and hospitals have accounted for more than 93% of all grave violations verified by the UN, with killing and maiming the largest single violation over that time (53%). One violation was higher in 2020 than in 2016: abduction. This highlights the links between abduction and the multi-dimensional risks facing adolescent boys, in particular, related to perceived or real affiliation with armed groups.

FIGURE 24: THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT IN SYRIA AND OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST THEM
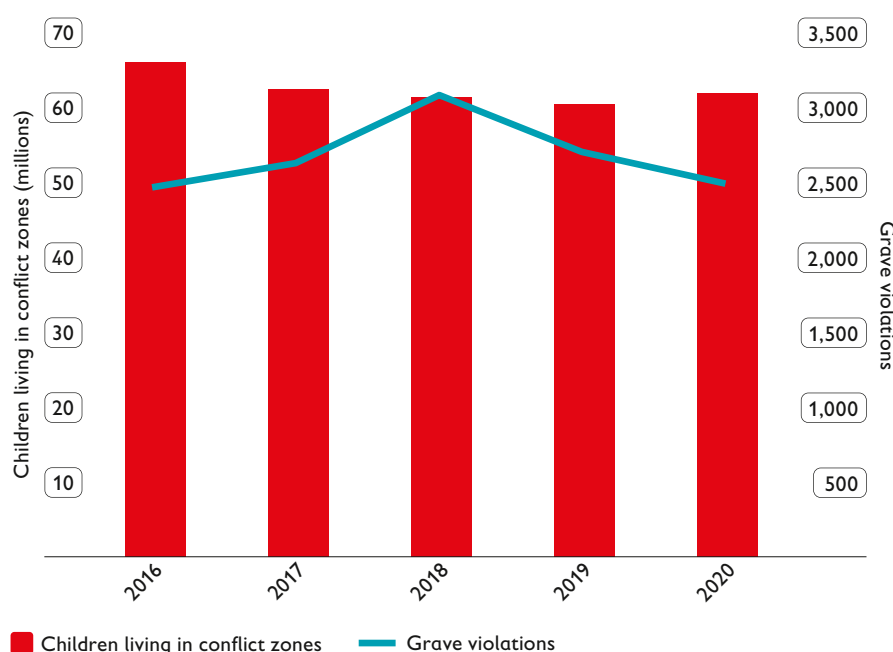
TABLE 5: THE WAR ON SYRIA'S CHILDREN: GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN AND THE PROPORTION OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT AREAS, 2016–2020

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Killing and maiming	1,299	1,271	1,854	1,454	1,229
Recruitment and use	851	961	806	820	837
Attacks on schools and hospitals	170	197	252	296	125
Abduction	43	57	69	17	227
Denial of humanitarian access	90	105	59	84	48
Sexual violence	8	24	38	11	8

SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN ANALYSIS OF UN SECRETARY-GENERAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Save the Children

Killing and maiming

The contrast between the overall reduction in battle deaths in Syria and the persistent levels of killing and maiming of children demonstrate the continued impact of conflict on children. While not directly comparable sets of data, in 2020 for every five battle deaths there was one case of a child being killed or maimed – a dramatic rise from 2016 when there was one case of a child killed or maimed for every 38 battle deaths. As with many of the countries included in the annual UN report on children and armed conflict, most of these cases were boys. In interviews for this report, staff also described slight differences related to the killing and maiming of children in conflict, over time, location and between actors. For instance, killing and maiming were more prominent in north-west Syria, linked to the presence of IS. Equally, a shift away from the extensive use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas during the peak of the conflict towards lighter weaponry and ground offensives was mentioned as occurring within the violations reported over time.

Recruitment and use

The number of children recruited and used by armed forces and groups has remained constant from 2016 to 2020, with a peak of 961 verified cases in 2017. As with children killed and maimed, the majority of these cases were described as affecting boys. However, fully understanding the risk of recruitment – as well its true scale – is complicated by the interconnectedness of abduction, displacement and the MRM's ability to verify incidents. While this is true across the armed conflicts monitored by the UN, it is particularly pronounced in the case of Syria, given the level of displacement. It can be extremely difficult to track the disappearance of children from displacement camps; some of these cases may well be linked to recruitment.

Overall, given the breadth of actors reported to have recruited and used children in Syria in 2020, PRIO analysis estimates that almost all of Syria's children living in conflict zones are at risk of recruitment. Nearly 6 million children live with double exposure to the risk of recruitment by both state and non-state actors.

Underneath this large number, however, are important differences. Many of the children recruited into non-state armed groups such as the YPG and YPJ were recruited at a very different moment in the conflict. In relation to this, while the primary barrier for Save the Children's and our partners' responses to child recruitment is often access or physical safety, the push factors for recruitment have been more nuanced. For many communities there are economic pressures that drive a risk of recruitment, while for other families or individuals, there remain ideological drivers. While no recruitment is acceptable, perceptions and attitudes of the population towards recruitment in some cases present additional challenges to both prevention of and response to recruitment of children in Syria.

Attacks on schools and hospitals

While attacks on schools and hospitals do not show the highest relative incidence of the grave violations, in interviews they were cited as particularly prominent – not only as they are indicative of the disregard for international law shown by parties to conflict or the inability of the wider international community to hold perpetrators to account, but because of the impact such attacks have had on children and their access to services.

Equally, attacks on schools – as well as violence and attacks on students and teachers on their way to and from school, were reported in interviews to have persisted despite the overall reduction in conflict events over time. Pilot activities to enhance the reporting and monitoring of attacks on schools, complementary to the MRM, were cited as commencing – offering an opportunity to identify and respond to such attacks.

Detention

While not one of the six grave violations, detention was cited in interviews – and has been widely reported – as a critical issue in the Syrian conflict. Approximately 12,000 children are estimated to be detained, many for as long as three years, often without contact with family members or their community, though some children are detained with their caregivers.

In some instances, children are housed in adult facilities that are unsafe and unsanitary. Those detained are held due to their perceived affiliation with armed groups. This may mean that a single family member was or is – or was or is perceived to be – affiliated with an armed group, and their children are also detained.

While most children detained are boys, the impact of detention can be quite different for girls who are detained. For example, after detention, boys may return straight to their families and communities. However, in interviews staff described how girls would in many cases immediately be sent to board at school elsewhere, suggesting that girls leave detention with a stigma that doesn't affect boys. While anecdotal evidence suggests some girls may experience sexual violence and harassment during detention, the common perception at community level is that every girl in detention experiences violence routinely; this informs community attitudes towards girls returning from detention.

Conflict and hunger

As with many of the elements of the conflict in Syria, the food security and nutrition situation has deteriorated over time. Not only are the effects of prolonged undernutrition – including for pregnant and breastfeeding women – now becoming apparent in the presentation of stunting and developmental issues for many Syrian children, but food insecurity is becoming more severe, shifting from chronic to more acute forms.

The factors driving hunger, food insecurity and

malnutrition are manifold, and include severe economic deterioration because of the impacts of prolonged conflict and a collapse in the value of the Syrian pound, exacerbated from 2020 onwards by the impact of Covid-19 and in 2021 by a water crisis affecting particularly north-east Syria and government-controlled areas. In August 2021, the national average food basket price was 107% higher than in August 2020. The informal exchange rate reached 3,358 Syrian pounds to $1, compared with a pre-war exchange rate of 47 Syrian pounds to $1.

Prices of basic goods, including bread and vegetables, have continued to increase. Subsidies on bread and fuel in government-controlled areas have been reduced.

Humanitarian access has posed repeated challenges to ensuring food security for populations, with siege tactics employed, cutting off all supplies to huge numbers of children, including most recently in 2021 in Dara'a Balad. In the north-west, humanitarian supplies and services are provided cross-border, but neutral and de-politicised cross-border assistance is virtually non-existent. The UN's cross-border operation relies on the UN Security Council renewing its authorisation on an annual basis. This process has become increasingly fraught, jeopardising children's future access to those services and this assistance.

Beyond the physical impact of food insecurity, undernutrition and the emerging threat of acute malnutrition, after more than a decade of conflict, the ongoing uncertainty and stress of hunger can have a significant negative effect on households – including children. This was cited in interviews as compounding mental health and psychosocial issues among children.

Recommendations

1. **Parties to the conflict should:**
   - Adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians, cease all attacks on schools and other civilian infrastructure, and refrain from using explosive weapons with wide area effects.
   - End grave violations against children and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.
   - Allow unfettered humanitarian access wherever there is need to conduct impartial needs assessments and deliver medical aid and other vital services including child protection case management, mental health and psychosocial support and education services.
   - Agree to a ceasefire and enter into internationally supported negotiations to find a peaceful and inclusive resolution to the crisis in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

2. **The international community should:**
   - Recognise the further deteriorating situation, commit to fund Syria's humanitarian response plan for 2022, including critical areas of food security; water, sanitation and hygiene; child protection; and mental health and psychosocial support and services.
   - Ensure funding for multi-year, sustainable programming for mental health and psychosocial support of children in the long term, recognising that the full extent of the impact of the conflict on children may not be known for several years after the conflict eventually ends.
   - Commit to durable solutions for Syrian children, including integration and resettlement. Recognise that Syria is not conducive to large-scale population returns and ensure that the return of all refugee and internally displaced children and their families is safe, voluntary, dignified and informed, and in the best interest of the child.
   - Support humanitarian actors to engage with non-state armed groups to address grave violations against children, in line with international humanitarian law obligations.
   - Urge all parties to the conflict to ensure unfettered humanitarian access so that children can access the assistance they need, including child protection case management and mental health and psychosocial support.

Save the Children

LONGING TO LEARN

Issa* is seven years old and has just started going to school in Raqqa, Syria.

"I was very happy when I first went to school," he says. "I used to look at the other children going to school and cry to my mother and tell her I want to go to school like them. She would say where should I get the money from to send you to school?"

Our partner organisation Ashti helped Issa start at school. He has quickly learned to read and write his name.

His mum, Farah*, remembers life before the conflict, when they lived peacefully in their own house. Then, with the shelling all around them, they had to flee to Raqqa. Now they live in a bombed-out building without electricity or clean water.

PHOTO: MUHANNAD KHALED/SAVE THE CHILDREN

YEMEN

The brutal seven-year conflict in Yemen is characterised by the decimation of infrastructure; huge numbers of casualties among civilians, including children; a context of complete impunity for perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights; and unprecedented economic decline. While humanitarian needs continue to soar, with more than 20 million people in need of assistance, humanitarian funding is at a deficit.

Recognised as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, Yemen continues to be one of the most challenging operational environments. Access constraints and endless bureaucratic impediments hinder service delivery, resulting in millions of children not receiving life-saving services or having to endure long delays. With no signs of the conflict abating and the failure of peace processes, the protracted nature of the conflict will deepen the impact of the harm children have already experienced, as well as present new threats to children's lives and futures.

The impact of conflict on children

The protracted nature of the conflict has led to the incidence of child marriage at levels not previously seen in Yemen. This has been raised as an issue of emerging and significant concern. There are anecdotal reports of girls as young as four being married because of economic hardship and prolonged fragility. There have been similar reports of the worst forms of child labour and of children being recruited.

In four out of the five years from 2016 to 2020, the number of grave violations against children increased. In 2020, the number of battle-related deaths and battle events were significantly higher than the year before. This suggests that, although the number of children living in conflict zones decreased in 2020, the conditions of children in conflict zones have worsened.

Grave violations against children in conflict

The three grave violations against children with the highest incidence over five years from 2016 to 2020 were killing and maiming (44%), denial of humanitarian access (36%) and recruitment and use (17%). In total, Yemen had the third highest total number of violations in 2020 (4,580), with higher numbers in only Somalia and DRC. For all years the UN have MRM data available on grave violations, Yemen ranks sixth – with more than 22,000 incidents in total. Of these, 10,638 incidents were where children were killed or maimed.

It is important to note that the current reporting on children and armed conflict in Yemen excludes the Saudi- and Emirati-led Coalition as a result of influence by parties to the conflict on the listing and de-listing process.

As Table 6 shows, in 2020 by far the biggest verified grave violation against children was the denial of humanitarian access, which continues to be affected by the overzealous implementation of the arms embargo and the subsequent blocking[119] of the Hodeida port. Beyond this, increasing and intense processes, procedures and requirements from all sides were cited as making it extremely difficult to reach communities and provide children with the support and services they need. For example, it is proving more difficult to secure the required permissions to provide child rights governance and child protection activities.

In addition, and beyond 2020, the conduct of hostilities continues to affect children enormously – differing by actor and location. For example, Coalition Forces aligned with the government have caused massive destruction to civilian infrastructure, including objects indispensable for survival, through airstrikes and the use of heavy weapons. The report by the Group of Eminent Experts released in September 2021 outlined that since March 2015, there had been 23,000 airstrikes by the Saudi-led Coalition, which resulted in the killing or injuring of 18,000 civilians.

Save the Children

A displacement camp in southern Yemen
PHOTO: ANNA PANTELIA/SAVE THE CHILDREN

This works out at approximately ten airstrikes per day.[120] Further, a joint report from key human rights NGOs have determined that such airstrikes on civilian infrastructure – including water facilities, fishing boats and farms – and impeding humanitarian access by all parties to the conflict have likely violated prohibitions under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including through the use of starvation as a weapon of war.[121] Other forces – who do not have access to airpower or heavy weapons – have at times failed to show the restraint required to minimise civilian casualties.

TABLE 6: THE WAR ON YEMEN'S CHILDREN: GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN, 2016–20

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Recruitment and use	517	842	370	686	236
Killing and maiming	1,340	1,316	1,689	1,447	1,165
Abductions	4	1	–	22	64
Attacks on schools and hospitals	64	28	79	75	72
Denial of humanitarian access	220	248	275	1,848	3,033
Sexual violence	–	–	9	4	10

SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN ANALYSIS OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

"A PANDEMIC OF IMPUNITY"

Yemen's plight has been described as "a pandemic of impunity in a tortured land".[122] Now, the failure of the Human Rights Council to renew the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts (GEE) – the only international, independent and impartial accountability mechanism reporting on the situation in Yemen – will contribute to a further deterioration in the human rights situation in the country.

Parties to the conflict, some of whom have been heavily involved in influencing the rejection of the GEE, have been using their international influence to ensure that violations of international law in Yemen go unreported and unrecognised, leading to a more worrying environment where parties belligerent to each other can violate civilian rights, kill and maim children, and destroy schools, homes and hospitals without accountability.

A combination of push factors – including poverty, food insecurity and physical safety – as well as community beliefs and ideologies have contributed to children being recruited and used. The specific policy of actors was also cited as a factor. While the number of children verified to have been recruited and used in 2020 was 236 – just over a third of the number in 2019 (686) –

virtually all children in Yemen were living in proximity to an armed actor known to have recruited children in 2020. Some girls had been recruited, generally into different roles from those of boys; for instance, girls were used as spies, cooks or porters.

In addition to grave violations, children in Yemen continue to face catastrophic levels of hunger. An assessment in 2021 highlighted that more than 400,000 children need urgent food and nutrition support to survive.[123] A combination of blocking ports and airports, the climate crisis, damage to productive assets, the prevention of activities such as fishing, and restrictions on humanitarian assistance has led to a crisis of food insecurity afflicting more than 16 million people., Many people are living in famine-like conditions: when food is available, it is unaffordable, with markets collapsing under the economic pressure of the conflict. The currency is at an unprecedented low, and while the ad hoc top-ups to the humanitarian response plan have managed to keep the man-made famine at bay, constant deficits and the fact that the humanitarian response plan is only about 50% funded put millions of people at risk of falling into fully fledged famine.

Recommendations

The international community should:
- Establish, at the Human Rights Council, an international, independent and impartial mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Yemen and to prepare files in order to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings, in accordance with international law standards, in national, regional or international courts or tribunals that have or may in the future have jurisdiction over these crimes.
- Establish, at the Human Rights Council, a mechanism that investigates alleged violations of international human rights law in Yemen and

identifies those responsible, with a view to ensuring that perpetrators of violations, including those that may constitute crimes against humanity, are held accountable, with a clear mandate on public reporting.

Save the Children calls on parties to the conflict to:
- Ensure the protection of civilians, including children, is prioritised at all costs. This includes ensuring military operations are undertaken in line with international humanitarian law, including taking precautionary measures to minimise harm, to prevent children being recruited or used by armed forces or groups, and so that parties to conflict ensure landmines are not planted in residential areas, especially in and around schools.

Save the Children

UKRAINE

Despite different attempts to negotiate a successful ceasefire since 2014, the situation in eastern Ukraine remains largely unchanged when it comes to numbers of children affected by the conflict – with incidents rising particularly in recent years. The 'contact line', which is 427 kilometres long and separates government-controlled areas from non-government-controlled areas, has become one of the most landmine-contaminated areas in the world.[124] According to the Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, the situation in the conflict-affected Donetska and Luhanska oblasts in eastern Ukraine continues to exact a significant toll on the lives of more than 5 million people, 3.4 million of whom require humanitarian assistance and protection services. More than 3,300 civilians have been killed in the conflict and more than 7,000 injured. A generation of more than half a million children is growing up surrounded by violence and fear, which threatens to have a long-lasting effect on their future.[125]

While the number of children living in conflict is relatively constant (Figure 25), they represent a very large number of children who require better protection and safety and expanded support. Equally, since 2014 it has been mostly the *same* children affected. This is especially concerning given the lack of

Children living in conflict zones   **Battle deaths**
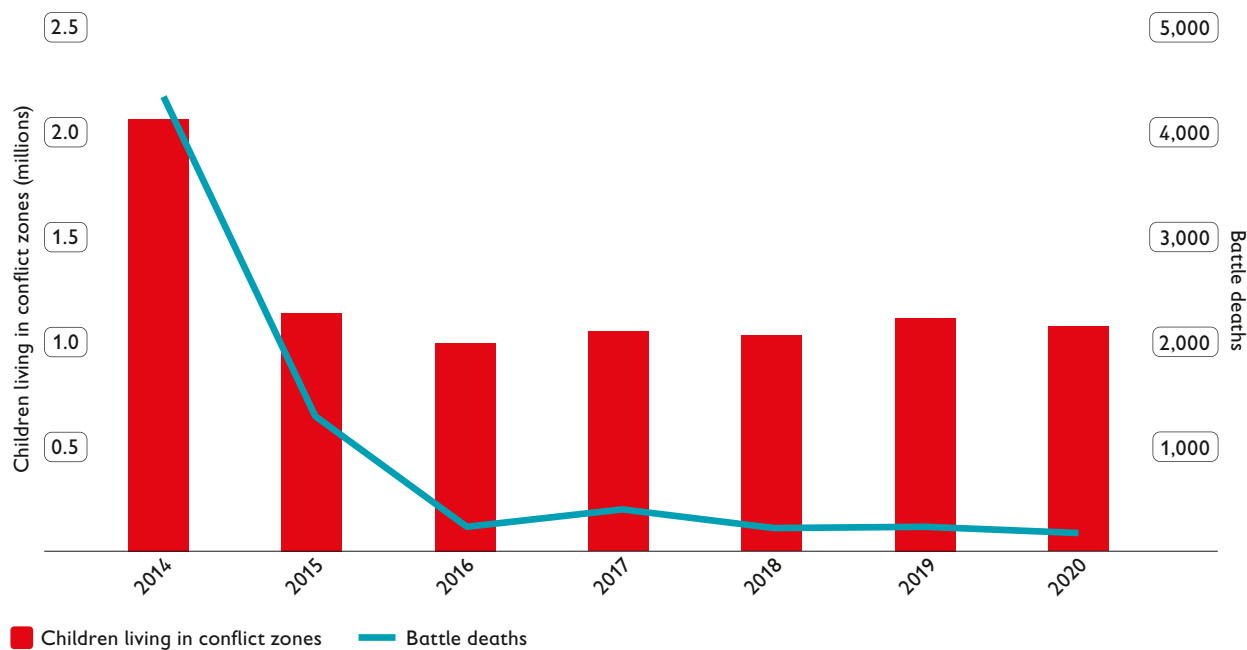
FIGURE 25: THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT IN UKRAINE AND THE NUMBER OF BATTLE DEATHS

SOURCE: PRIO

Save the Children

access to services – and documentation for – children in non-governmental controlled areas. The situation is both detrimental for children as well as protracted, with Covid-19 adding an additional level of pressure. Children have reported feeling less safe as a result of Covid-19 – with it becoming a core safety concern for many children who may not be accessing services such as education in the same way as their peers in the areas not affected by the conflict.

The situation for children

In terms of key concerns raised in interviews related to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, attacks on schools were cited as a priority issue for children and education practitioners. Over the last three years, the Ukraine Education Cluster reports that at least 118 attacks on schools have taken place. The lack of an MRM in Ukraine was identified as a factor related to attacks on education – with no means of verification or monitoring contributing to a lack of accountability. It can be difficult to attribute attacks, and therefore to engage parties with a focus on preventing and mitigating harm. In the absence of an MRM, Save the Children, in consultation with partners, developed the Ukraine Education Cluster which aims to build a common understanding and commitment among partners, ensuring not only global minimum standards as our joint foundation but also that context-specific standards are set, shared and adhered to.[126]

Related, while the government of Ukraine endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in November 2019, and as the government approved the national implementation action plan in August 2021, various stakeholders including government ministries, local and international NGOs and UN agencies should support the implementation within the inter-ministerial working group of the Safe Schools Declaration.

In terms of gender, while there was no major difference reported between girls and boys related to killing and maiming or the effects of attacks on schools, girls were described as experiencing greater harassment, abuse and sexual violence – especially around military barracks. In some cases, sexual exploitation and abuse were linked to the economic effects of the conflict.[127] Children with disabilities face increased marginalisation and are subject to stigmatisation, prejudice and discrimination. They are very often left behind due to both the negative impact of the conflict on access to services and weak systems being unable to meet their needs. The economic effect of protracted insecurity, marginalisation from the wider economy, and limited humanitarian access was also noted to have had an effect on food security.

Recommendations

1. **The government of Ukraine and international partners** should financially commit to the domestication and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration guidelines for safety and conducive learning environment for children.
2. **The government of Ukraine** should take steps to mainstream the Safe Schools Declaration guidelines into military training manuals and rules of engagement to prohibit military use of schools during armed conflict.
3. **The government of Ukraine**, which has the primary responsibility for providing effective protection and relief to all affected children, should put in place remedial measures aimed at improving the protection of children in conflict in eastern Ukraine.
4. **The government of Ukraine** should ensure that the interministerial task force/committee/working group consisting of key ministries in charge of implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration is set up and takes concrete steps to ensure better protection for education, including monitoring and reporting of attacks on education and the military use of schools, assisting victims of attacks, prosecuting perpetrators, and promoting measures that enable safe education to continue during war, as well as using the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
5. **Parties to armed conflict** should immediately cease unlawful attacks and protect children by preventing grave violations, in particular, the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools, use and recruitment of children and rape and sexual violence, with an emphasis on the different risks and impacts for women and girls. Parties to armed conflict should immediately cease unlawful attacks and grave violations of children's rights, in particular killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools, use and recruitment of children, rape and sexual violence, with an emphasis on the different risks and impacts for women and girls. They should immediately cease military use of schools in line with UN Security Council Resolutions 1998 (2011), 2143 (2014) and 2225 (2015).

Save the Children

MYANMAR

Children in Myanmar have experienced rights violations – often linked to armed conflicts between Myanmar's military (Tatmadaw) and ethnic armed organisations – for decades. In Rakhine, Kachin, Kayin and Northern Shan states, for instance, there is a long history of armed conflict along political and ethnic lines – often with scant regard for the protections afforded civilians by international norms, rules and standards, and different levels of rights and protections are afforded to different ethnic groups. Grave violations have been verified by the UN in Myanmar in consecutive years since 2013, and according to data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), there have been more than 500 battle-related deaths in Myanmar in five out of ten years up to 2020, peaking at nearly 2,400 in 2017. According to research commissioned by Save the Children, there were nearly 1.7 million children living in conflict across Myanmar in 2020. While lower than the record number in 2019 (2.4 million children), it represents a huge proportion of the country's population.

In addition to the conflict, across the country limited infrastructure and weak child protection, education and health systems – especially for marginalised and excluded groups – have presented further child rights issues. Further, extensive physical and bureaucratic impediments greatly limit the access of communities to services and the ability of humanitarian organisations to operate. These have been particularly pronounced since 2020, which not only saw the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbate children's vulnerability, but a *coup d'état* and increased conflict. When the military seized control, as of July 2021, at least 75 children were reportedly killed and approximately 1,000 children were detained.[128] There was an estimated 18% contraction in gross domestic product in 2021, with increasing numbers of households falling into poverty.[129]

The impact of conflict on children

As with many of the countries and regions discussed in this report, the impact of the conflict on children is heavily influenced by the prolonged and complex nature of overlapping crises within the country. Since 2017, in Myanmar this has included atrocities committed against the Rohingya leading to massive forced displacement, existing internal displacement, high-intensity conflicts in Rakhine and Kachin States, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the coup in 2021. In each year since 2017, there have been significant – and even increasing – numbers of conflict events affecting children. According to staff we spoke to, this demonstrates the longstanding disregard for the protection of civilians, including children, which has characterised the Tatmadaw's behaviour.

Among interviewees for this report, the Arakan Army–Tatmadaw conflict peaking in 2019–20 stood out as a particularly intense period, although UCDP data shows battle deaths peaking in 2017, with 2,391 recorded. The second highest total in recent years was in 2019 with nearly 600 fatalities. As Figure 26 shows, when it comes to the data specifically on children, both grave violations and exposure to conflict remained high from 2016 to 2020.

Grave violations against children in conflict

Three of the grave violations stand out as more prevalent in Myanmar than others. The killing and maiming of children, the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, and attacks on schools and hospitals account for more than 95% of all violations from 2016 to 2020. While these are no more or less important than other rights violations, with abduction and sexual violence also regularly featuring in UN reporting, these three were of particular concern to interviewees.
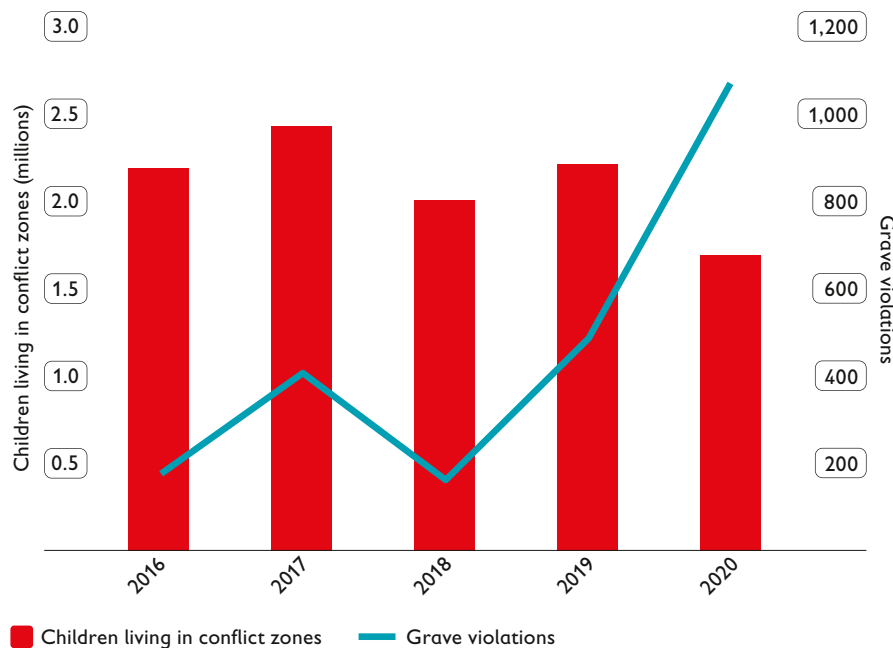
FIGURE 26: THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT IN MYANMAR AND OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST THEM

Legend: Children living in conflict zones — Grave violations

Recruitment and use
Despite continued verified cases of recruitment and use, the Tatmadaw were delisted for this violation from the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. This decision was partly informed by an increased willingness from the military to address the issue – especially formal recruitment (as distinct from ad hoc use), and an overall reduction from 362 cases in 2014 to 88 in 2018. Organisations – including Save the Children – were concerned that this decision was premature given the lack of progress in implementing both preventative and remedial measures,[130] as well as a dramatic rise from 88 to 247 cases in 2019.

It was therefore troubling that in 2020, the UN verified 790 cases of recruitment and use – the fourth highest total globally. Throughout the year, there were a number of high-profile cases, including one incident where children were first used to walk a path through a known minefield, before being caught in crossfire between the Tatmadaw and an ethnic armed group. A number of children were killed. In total, according to analysis commissioned by Save the Children, 1,754,322 children were at risk of recruitment in 2020.

The rise in the number of cases of recruitment and use comes following some limited positive engagement in prior years. This is particularly true for recruitment – where considerable efforts from the UN and civil society had led to positive dialogue with the Tatmadaw. In 2015 and 2016, recruitment was the dominant grave violation in Myanmar for protection actors, but due to the work of civil society and the UN, this was – until recent reversals – falling. While recruitment and use are not systematically reported separately, interviewees for this report suggested the fall up until 2019 could largely be attributed to less formal recruitment, with less progress on the military use of children.

As globally, underage recruitment and use in Myanmar predominantly affect boys. While Save the Children and partner organisations have received reports of girls also being recruited, this seems less systematic. It is mostly perpetrated by ethnic armed organisations. When girls are recruited, one study found that "a gendered division of labour could facilitate female soldiers' militarization by replicating gender roles familiar from the household. Demonstrating how this negatively impacts on women's experience of the army by limiting, devaluing and stigmatizing women's military participation."[131]

Killing and maiming
In 2020 there were 216 verified incidents of killing and maiming of children in Myanmar – the seventh highest country total included in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict and the highest in Myanmar since 2017. This corresponds with the intensification in conflict – especially between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw – discussed in interviews for this report, with the majority of incidents of civilian harm affecting children described as being linked to the use of explosive weapons. This includes the indiscriminate shelling of villages, as well as mines and explosive remnants of war. Efforts to demine from previous spikes in conflict have been extremely limited in Myanmar, and parties to conflict continue to deploy mines as part of hostilities.

While the 2020 total for killing and maiming is a huge concern in its own right, it is especially alarming when situated in the broader character of conflict and violence in Myanmar. As already mentioned, events in 2017 included horrific and widespread acts of killing and maiming of Rohingya children. Subsequent spikes in conflict also had huge effects on children, and even in the crackdown following the military coup, at least 75 children were killed, with many more physically injured and thousands arrested and

detained. Despite the ratification of the Child Rights Bill in 2018, children's fundamental right to life is routinely denied across Myanmar.

Attacks on schools and hospitals
While less prevalent than other grave violations (42 in 2020) and other countries included in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (11th), attacks on education were cited as an issue of concern in interviews. While there is concern about the use of schools by military actors since the coup – with actors using schools as forward operating bases in urban areas especially – the failure to protect education from attack and occupation was cited as a strong indicator of the impunity with which military actors behave, and the disregard for core norms, rules and standards in the conduct of hostilities in Myanmar. With some schools damaged by shelling and the use of explosive weapons – key drivers of killing and maiming of children in Myanmar – as well as occupied or used by parties to the conflict, there has been a clear and significant impact on education related to the conflict.

Beyond the grave violation of attacks on schools, the wider issue of access to education was cited as a key factor in the situation of children in conflict-affected areas in Myanmar. This includes restrictions on movement, documentation and rights, which prohibit some groups from accessing education, and concerns related to the quality and scale of education services for vulnerable communities – particularly those internally displaced and in camps.

Hunger, food insecurity and the climate crisis
While Myanmar did not experience the levels of hunger of major crises in other countries in 2020, interviewees noted there were links between the conflict and hunger. For example, it was highlighted how the Tatmadaw's 'Four Cuts' strategy specifically aims to increase food insecurity by limiting supplies to conflict-affected areas. Moreover, economic contraction, widespread conflict and displacement in 2021 since the coup are causing severe food insecurity for many families in Myanmar. Over the course of 2021, the number of people in need of humanitarian food assistance increased from 1 million to 3 million according to the World Food Programme. The precarity resulting from both income loss and increased food security was noted, anecdotally, as a risk factor for recruitment by the Tatmadaw as a form of coping mechanism.

Recommendations

1. **The international community** must work together to ensure that the Tatmadaw and other parties to the conflict put an end to grave violations against children, particularly killing and maiming, recruitment and use, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and attacks and occupation of schools and hospitals. This includes holding perpetrators accountable through existing accountability mechanisms.

2. **International NGOs and UN aid agencies** working in Myanmar should systematise and enhance communities' abilities to prevent and respond to the six grave violations. Families, communities, and community-based organisations are at the frontline of the protection from grave violations, while international NGOs and UN agencies are operating at reduced capacity due to access constraints. Aid agencies must take child protection approaches that are rooted in the context, rather than imposing cookie-cutter solutions established by agencies.

3. **The international community, including humanitarian aid agencies**, should strengthen local commitments to reduce and respond to violence in conflict settings, while maintaining minimum engagement with the Tatmadaw to address grave violations. It is of particular importance to ensure effective engagement with duty bearers within non-state armed groups including ethnic armed organisations. Humanitarian aid agencies should push them to respect humanitarian norms and principles and promote the protection of civilians including children with the rapidly changing environment.

THE PHILIPPINES

Overall, in 2020 there were more than 31 million children living in conflict zones across the Philippines – representing an extremely large proportion of the child population (80%), and a significant rise from both 2019 (28 million) and 2018 (21 million). This is despite a comparable number of battle-related deaths nationwide in those years with 370, 355 and 391 battle related deaths recorded by UCDP in 2020, 2019 and 2018 respectively. In absolute terms, the population of children living in conflict zones in the Philippines was the fifth highest globally in 2020. While the overall number of children living in conflict zones is high, the number of verified grave violations has remained relatively low by comparison.

Despite this overall figure, it is important to stress that the impact of conflict on children differs greatly across different parts of the country. With highly localised conflict dynamics, the drivers of violations against children – as well as the consequences of them – vary greatly across the country. Currently, the main violence is a result of conflict between state actors and nationalist/separatist groups in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, a communist-inspired guerrilla campaign in western Mindanao, and different local conflicts around resources and community rights.[132] The actors involved vary from non-state armed groups fighting each other to conflict between the government and guerrilla armies and non-state armed groups. In addition to the types of actors involved, there are also major geographical differences, as well as distinct effects and drivers based on urban/rural locations.

The situation for children in conflict in 2020

As a result of conflict, access to services is greatly limited. In Mindanao, for example, children are unable to access healthcare facilities or child protection services – a situation that has been further exacerbated by Covid-19.

As in most contexts in 2020, due to limited opportunities for Save the Children and other organisations to travel to different parts of the country and have direct contact with children, it was difficult to provide necessary services, which saw a further deterioration of children's rights in 2020. Additionally, due to the lack of reporting and documenting, the full extent of the situation and changes of the reality of children is not clear.

Grave violations

Killing and maiming
Over the last five years, the dominant verified grave violation against children in the Philippines has been killing and maiming, with a total of 228 incidents since 2016 – representing nearly half of all violations in that period (48%). Those interviewed for this report suggested that many of these cases – more than 50 in 2020 alone – were due to crossfire or because of actual or perceived links to armed groups. In addition, a number of children were killed in police operations linked to the national war on drugs. Regardless of drivers, the majority of those children killed or maimed were reported by interviewees to be boys – linked to their increased likelihood of any actual or perceived links to armed groups.

TABLE 7: GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT IN THE PHILIPPINES

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Killing and maiming	38	33	57	49	51
Recruitment and use	9	30	19	18	13
Attacks on schools and hospitals	20	62	27	12	2
Abduction	1	7	13	0	1
Denial of humanitarian assistance	–	–	–	–	–
Sexual violence	–	3	3	–	2

SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN ANALYSIS OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Recruitment and use
While differing in terms of the drivers and nature across the country, recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups remains a pervasive issue in all conflict areas, with a relatively even number of boys and girls recruited. For example, while the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) recruit more boys, the extremist Islamist group Jemaah Islamiyah recruits many girls as child wives. The drivers and process of recruitment were discussed in interviews for this report as being extremely varied based on local dynamics.

For instance, in Marawi, children as young as 15 were noted to have been actively recruited as part of a radicalisation process targeting disenfranchised children and youth – linked both to their political and economic status and exclusion. However, in Mindanao, due to the conflict's root causes and the history of armed political movements in the region, the MILF has no need to actively recruit children – with families *expecting* and *encouraging* their children's participation. By contrast, the Communist New People's Party has – since 1969 – employed a specific strategy of actively recruiting children and youth.

While historically this took place in urban areas, with economic development and increased prosperity over time, and as a result higher levels of education among urban communities especially, this recruitment has since moved to rural areas and towards the centres of conflict. As a result, there has also been a shift in the demography of children and youth recruited – with indigenous communities much more involved than in previous decades.

As well as variation between how groups recruit children, there are also important differences between how open to engagement different groups are – for example, while the Communist New People's Party fails to acknowledge the recruitment and use of children, MILF are more open – engaging with actors such as UNICEF on how to prevent and respond to the recruitment and use of children.

Attacks on education, schools and hospitals
According to the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict, attacks on schools and hospitals were the second-most prevalent grave violation from 2016 to 2020, with 123 verified cases, peaking in 2017 (62). The fighting around the country, and especially the large

number of splinter groups emerging from non-state armed groups, results in a number of attacks and regular use of education facilities – particularly in southern provinces. For instance, the UN reports the destruction of schools in Bukidnon and Agusan del Sur provinces.[133]

In addition to attacks on schools and hospitals, it is important to note the wider impact of conflict on access to education – not only in terms of physical safety, security and damage to facilities, but as a result of the intersection between household income, poverty and education. For example, in 2020 government estimates suggested that in the conflict-affected Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao alone, more than 400,000 adolescents were out of school for reasons linked to the economy.

Recommendations

1. We call on **the government of the Republic of the Philippines** to sign off on the Safe Schools Declaration to ensure that children, teachers, school personnel and universities are protected from attacks and other forms of violence in armed conflict situations, and that learning continues during these periods.
2. We call on **local government units** to localise and contextualise the Republic Act 10821 [134] (or the Emergency Relief and Protection Act), so that

the fundamental rights of children are protected before, during and after disasters and other emergency situations when children are gravely threated or endangered by circumstances that affect their survival and normal development. This includes the formulation of a comprehensive emergency programme for children, taking into consideration humanitarian standards for their protection that shall be used as the basis in handling disasters and other emergency situations to protect children, pregnant and lactating mothers, and support their immediate recovery.

3. We call on **local government units** to ensure that Republic Act 11188 [135] (or the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act) is fully implemented and resourced to protect children from all forms of abuse, violence, neglect, cruelty, discrimination and other conditions prejudicial to their development, taking into consideration their gender and cultural, ethnic and religious background. This includes declaring children as 'zones of peace', which means the government and all parties to the conflict have the duty to protect children at all times against abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, especially during times of conflict.

APPENDIX: DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

This report uses the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) definitions of conflict. The UCDP is the world's foremost provider of data on organised violence. Its Georeferenced Event Dataset and other datasets inform this research.

Battle-related deaths: Deaths resulting from the use of armed force between warring parties in a conflict.

Child recruited: Any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes.

Children at risk of recruitment: Children (under the age of 18) who live within 50km of one or more conflict events with at least one fatality where at least one active conflict actor is reported to have recruited children in a given year.

Children living in conflict-affected areas/ conflict-affected children: Children who reside within **conflict zones**.

Conflict/armed conflict: When armed force is used by an organised actor against another organised actor or against civilians. A low-intensity conflict results in up to 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year. A medium-intensity conflict is defined as 25–999 battle deaths, and a high-intensity conflict as 1,000 or more battle-related deaths in a country-year. The definition includes three types of conflict:
- State-based conflict takes place between two states (inter-state conflict), or between one state and one or more rebel groups (civil conflict).
- Non-state conflict is fought between two organised, armed actors, of which neither is the government of a state.

- One-sided violence is perpetrated by an organised armed group, either a state's military forces or an armed group, against civilians.

Conflict incidents/events: a conflict event is defined as a lethal incident, either a violent clash between two armed groups or an attack on civilians by a group or groups, at a given time and place. Conflicts usually consist of multiple conflict events.

Conflict zone/area (or an area affected by conflict): an area within the borders of a country that is within 50km of a conflict incident or event.

Gender: the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for a person, often based on their sex.

The six grave violations against children: the UN Security Council has identified six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict:
- killing and maiming of children
- recruitment or use of children in armed forces and groups
- rape and other forms of sexual violence against children
- abduction of children
- attacks on schools and hospitals
- denial of humanitarian access to children.

These grave violations were defined on the basis of their egregious nature and their severe impact on children's wellbeing. In addition to the six violations, the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict has verified incidents of detention of children since 2012.

ENDNOTES

1   The Paris Principles on children associated with armed forces and armed groups and the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups were adopted in 2007.

2   G Østby, S A Rustad and A Arasmith (2021) Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990–2020, PRIO Background report for Save the Children Global Flagship Report on Children in armed conflict, 'Protecting children in war'

3   Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University (2020) 'UCDP Georeferenced Events Dataset', available at: ucdp.uu.se/downloads/; United Nations (2019) World Population Prospects, available at: population.un.org/wpp/; and CIESIN (2016) 'Gridded Population of the World', available at: sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/data/collection/gpw-v4

4   G Østby et al (2021) – see note 2

5   R Haer and T Böhmelt (2016), The impact of child soldiers on rebel groups fighting capacities, *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 33(2), 153–173; R Haer and T Böhmelt (2016) Child soldiers as time bombs? Adolescents' participation in rebel groups and the recurrence of armed conflict, *European Journal of International Relations* 22(2): 408-436; Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security, https://dallaireinstitute.org/contact/

6   United Nations, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNSG (2005–2020) *Children and Armed Conflict Report*, https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org; Save the Children (2020) *Weapon of War: Sexual violence against children in war*

7   United Nations, Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005)

8   Christine McCormick, Monitoring, reporting and addressing child rights and protection violations in 'non-listed' countries, *Disasters*, 2013, 37(S1): S121–S138; Save the Children (2021) Study on NGO Engagement in the UN-led Monitoring & Reporting Mechanism, and Strengthening Monitoring, Reporting and Responding to Grave Violations against Children in Afghanistan

9   Save the Children (2020) *Weapon of War: Sexual violence against children in war*; UN Women (2020) 'Facts and figures: Ending violence against women'. https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures; Together for Girls (2020) Violence Against Children Surveys, https://www.togetherforgirls.org/violence-children-surveys/, I C Mochmann and I Skjelsbæk, 2018, *Children Born of War: Between stigmatization, integration and empowerment*, PRIO; UN Secretary-General, 2019, Conflict-related Sexual Violence: Report of the UN Secretary General. S/2019/280. https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/report/s-2019-280/Annual-report-2018.pdf; Save the Children (2013) *Unspeakable Crimes against Children: Sexual violence in conflict*, https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/imce/docs/unspeakable_crimes_report.pdf

10   H Seddigi and I Seddigi, Child abuse in natural disasters and conflicts: a systematic review, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 2021, Vol. 22(1) 176-185.

11   M Mendelsohn, Child soldiers: psychosocial implications of the Graca Machel / UN Study, *Journal of Peace Psychology*, 4 (4), 399-444, 1998

12   Save the Children counts the verified incidents in the year made up of incidents that come to light from previous years and in the given year.

13   J Morris and Tristan Dunning, Rearing Cubs of the Caliphate: An Examination of Child Soldier Recruitment by Da'esh, *Terrorism and Political Violence, 2020*, Vol.32, No.7.

14   Save the Children (2017) Programme Guidelines on Addressing Recruitment and Use of Children

15   T Betancourt, Classifying childhood war trauma exposure: latent profile analyses of Sierra Leone's former child soldiers, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 62:6 (2021).

16   Save the Children Colombia, April 2021, Las dinámicas del conflicto armado y de la violencia

Save the Children

organizada en los municipios focalizados de Arauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander y Valle del Cauca para la estrategia de conflicto y migración de Save the Children Colombia.

17   We recognise that other factors also contribute to increasing children's vulnerability to recruitment in armed conflict. See end of this section for more on drivers of recruitment.

18   Unlike UN reports, which cover a limited number of conflicts, this report uses the Uppsala Conflict Data Program definition of conflict where conflict events relate to state-based conflicts, non-state conflicts and one-sided conflicts. Each event with at least one fatality, is coded as involving child soldier recruitment if at least one conflict actor engaged in the event is reported to having recruited child soldiers. See Appendix for more definitions.

19   G Østby et al (2021) – see note 2

20   Paris Principles: Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups, 2007

21   L Steinl (2017) Child Soldiers as Agents of War and Peace, International Criminal Justice Series 14

22   UN, Impact of armed conflict on children, Report of the expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Machel, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157, 1996; M G Wessells, The changing nature of armed conflict and its implications for children: the Graca Machel/UN study, *Journal of Peace Psychology*, 4 (4), 321-334, 1998

23   UN children and armed conflict agenda report

24   S O'Neil and K van Broekhoven (eds) (2017) *Cradled by Conflict*, United Nations University

25   Displaced and migrant children are particularly vulnerable to recruitment, as noted in the Paris Principles (Art. 6.14), 2007

26   J Morris and T Dunning, Rearing cubs of the caliphate: an examination of child soldier recruitment by Da'esh, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2020, Vol.32, No.7

27   B Kohrt, Recruitment of child soldiers in Nepal: mental health status and risk factors for voluntary participation of youth in armed groups, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 2016, Vol.22, No.3

28   D K Cohen and R Nordås, Do states delegate shameful violence to militias? Patterns of sexual violence in recent armed conflicts, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2015, Vol. 59(5) 877–898; D K Cohen, Explaining rape during civil war: cross national evidence (1980-2009), *American Political Science Review*, 2013, Vol. 107, No.3: Save the Children (2020) *Weapon of War: Sexual violence against children in war*

29   F Gutiérrez-Sanín (2007) Organizing minors: The case of Colombia. Working paper, Ford Institute for Human Security

30   R Haer and T Bøhmelt, The impact of child soldiers on rebel groups' fighting capacities, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 2016, Vol. 33 (2); Save the Children CAAFAG situation analysis, Northern Nigeria, 2017

31   R Haer, C M Faulkner and B E Whitaker, Rebel funding and child soldiers: exploring the relationship between natural resources and forcible recruitment, *European Journal of International Relations*, 2020, 26(1): 236-262

32   R Tynes and B R Early, Governments, rebels, and the use of child soldiers in internal armed conflicts: a global analysis 1987–2007, *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, 2015 21(1): 79–110

33   P W Singer (2006) *Children at War*, University of California Press

34   Examination across all annual UN reports on children and armed conflict from 2006 can provide a deeper picture of gendered vulnerabilities to recruitment.

35   R Haer and T Böhmelt, Girl soldiering in rebel groups, 1989–2013: introducing a new dataset, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2018 55(3): 395-403.

36   R Haer and T Böhmelt (2018) – see note 35; Plan International (2021) Technical note on girls associated with armed forces and armed groups

37   As reported in situation analyses conducted by Save the Children in Northern Nigeria (2018) and Somalia (2019)

38   D E Mazurana, S A McKay, K C Carlson and J C Kasper, 2002, Girls in fighting forces and groups: their recruitment, participation, demobilization, and reintegration *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 8(2): 97-123

39   S Carleial, S Schmitt and A Chibashimba, The treatment of posttraumatic stress symptoms and aggression in female former child soldiers using adapted Narrative Exposure therapy – an RCT in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 2019, 123

40   J C K Kyala, Dynamics of child soldiers' psychosocial rehabilitation and well-being: perspective from bioecological systems theory in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 2021

41   K Robjant, S Schmitt, A Chibashimba, S Careleial, T Elbert and A Koebach, Trauma, aggression and post conflict perpetration of community violence in female former child soldiers – a study in Eastern DR Congo, *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 2020

42   K Amone-P'Olak, Predictors of somatic symptomatology in war-affected youth in northern Uganda: findings from the WAYS Study, *Psychological Studies* 65(1), 2020

43   N Boothby and T Thomson, Child soldiers as adults: the Mozambique case study, *Journal of Aggression Maltreatment & Trauma* 22(7) (2013)

44   W I Hauge Gender dimensions of DDR – beyond victimization and dehumanization: tracking the thematic, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 2019

45   International Alert, Nigeria report, 2017

46   K Robjant et al (2019) – see note 41

47   Human Rights Watch (2019) Everyone must confess abuses against children suspected of ISIS affiliation in Iraq

48   F N Aoláin (2021) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, UN

49   Save the Children,(2020) *Defenceless: The impact of the Israeli military detention system on Palestinian children*, https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/defenceless_impact_of_detention_on_palestinian_children.pdf

50   Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019), General comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice ('The Beijing Rules'), adopted by General Assembly resolution 40/33 of 29 November 1985, and The United Nations rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty ('The Havana Rules'), adopted by the General Assembly in 1990

51   UN (2012) Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the protection of human rights of juveniles deprived of their liberty

52   Migration Studies and Research Group, Genre, l'environnement, la religion & les migrations, Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis, Senegal; Save the Children, Analyse du Sahel central sur le niveau de risque pour les enfants recrutés par des groupes armés, July 2021

53   G Østby et al (2021) – see note 2; Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University: http://pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/; United Nations (2019) *World Population Prospects: The 2019 revision*, http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/

54   S Barakat, S A Rustad, M Hedaya and S Milton, Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, Doha and Peace Research Institute Oslo (2021) *Conflict Trends in the Arab World, 1946–2019*, https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=12788

55   D Mikavica and C Monaghan, The children and armed conflict agenda and forced displacement, *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 11 No. 3, 2016

56   I Goldin (2016) *The Pursuit of Development: Economic growth, social change and ideas*, Oxford University Press

57   J Pearn, Children and war, *Journal of Paediatrics*, Child Health, 2003, 39, 166–172

58   R Haer, C M Faulkner and B E Whitaker, Rebel funding and child soldiers: exploring the relationship between natural resources and forcible recruitment, *European Journal of International Relations*, 2020, Vol. 26(1) 236–262

59   ICC, Lubanga Case, ICC-01/04-01/06

60   J I Kizilhan and M Noll-Hussong, Post-traumatic stress disorder among former Islamic State child soldiers in northern Iraq, *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2018 213, 425–429

61   M Denov and I Marchand, "One cannot take away the stain": rejection and stigma among former child soldiers in Colombia, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 2014, Vol. 20, No. 3, 227–240

62   R Haer and T Böhmelt, Could rebel child soldiers prolong civil wars?, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2017, Vol. 52(3) 332–35

63   L J Benstead and D V Lehman, Two classes of "marriage": race and sexual slavery in Al-Shabaab-controlled Somalia, *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 2021

64   M Y Essar, C Tsagkaris, H Ghaffari, S Ahmad, A T Aborode, H T Hashim, A Ahmadi, R Mazin and D E Lucero-Prisno III (2021): Rethinking 'Bacha Bazi': a culture of child sexual abuse in Afghanistan, *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*; US State Department verifies the practice in their Trafficking in Persons Report 2021, Available at: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf

65   B D Nelson, L Collins, M J VanRooyen, N Joyce, D Mukwege and S Bartels, Impact of sexual violence on children in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 2011 27:4, 211-225

66   T Plumper and E Neumayer, The unequal burden of war: the effect of armed conflict on the gender gap in expectancy, *International Organization*, 2006 60 (3): 723-54

67   T Plümper and E Neumayer – see note 66

68   ICC; Ntaganda Case, ICC-01/04-02/06 and ICC, 'Ntaganda case: ICC Appeals Chamber confirms conviction and sentencing decisions', 30 March 2021

Save the Children

69 C Briody, L Rubenstein, L Roberts et al. Review of attacks on health care facilities in six conflicts of the past three decades, *Conflict and Health*, 2018, 12, 19

70 A Durrani, N Mahsood, I Ali, Z Kibria, A Imtiaz, Psycho-social impact of army public school terrorist attack on high school children in district Peshawar, Kybyer Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, *KUST medical journal*, 2017-10-01, Vol.9 (3), p.130–134

71 S Scrimin, U Moscardino, F Capello and G Axia, Attention and memory in school-age children surviving the terrorist attack in Beslan, Russia, *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 38(3), 402–414, 2009

72 M H Afzal and A J N Jafar, A scoping review of the wider and long-term impacts of attacks on healthcare in conflict zones, *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 2019, 35:1, 43–64

73 S Su, A Desrosiers, R T Brennan, J Farrar and T S Betancourt, Classifying childhood war trauma exposure: latent profile analyses of Sierra Leone's former child soldiers, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 62:6 (2021), pp 751–761

74 N Mukasa, War-child mothers in northern Uganda: the civil war forgotten legacy, *Development in Practice*, 2017 Vol. 27, No. 3, 354–367

75 ICC, Dominic Ongwen sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment, 6 May 2021, ICC, Summary of the delivery of the sentence on 6 May 2021

76 UN, Security Council, Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Myanmar, 17 December 2020.

77 UN, Security Council – see note 76

78 C P Martin-Shields and W Stojetz, Food security and conflict: empirical challenges and future opportunities for research and policy making on food security and conflict, *World Development*, 119 (2019), 150–164

79 UNICEF, Ethiopia – 2021 Revision 1, 13 October 2021

80 UNICEF, Millions of children in Tigray remain out of reach, despite access agreement, 15 December 2020 https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/millions-children-tigray-remain-out-reach-despite-access-agreement-unicef

81 IOM, Over 1.7 million people displaced due to conflict need urgent assistance in northern Ethiopia, 25 May 2021

82 UNICEF, Continuing crisis for children in Tigray, Ethiopia, amid reports of atrocities, 19 March 2021

83 Amnesty International, Ethiopia: lack of accountability for past violations haunts the present, 29 May 2019, https://www.amnistia.org/ve/noticias/2019/05/10659/

84 UN Office of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, Nigeria (webpage), https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/where-we-work/nigeria/; UN (2021) – see note 99

85 The Guardian, More than 200 children remain abducted in Nigeria amid 'kidnap epidemic', 10 August, 2021

86 Save the Children, Save Our Education National Advocacy Briefing Nigeria, October 2020

87 Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, Education under Attack 2020

88 National Bureau of Statistics – National Demographic and Health Surveys, January 2018

89 Save the Children, State of the Nigerian Girl Child Report 2021

90 The Mirror, Deadly flash floods destroying lives as young people demand action on climate change, 19 October 2021

91 Action Against Hunger, Nigeria, 2020

92 K A Abay, M Amare, L Tiberti and K S Andam, Covid-19 induced disruptions of school feeding services exacerbate food insecurity in Nigeria, *The Journal of Nutrition*, 24 May 2021

93 CAAC Bulletin 2020, https://www.unicef.org/sop/media/1621/file/CAAC%20Bulletin%202020.pdf

94 Middle East Monitor, Israel's deliberate damage of healthcare system in the Gaza Strip, 28 June 2021

95 Aljazeera, Domestic abuse against Palestinian women soars, 20 April 2020

96 UNFPA & Juzoor for Health and Social Development, Impact of the Covid-19 outbreak and lockdown on family dynamics and domestic violence in Palestine, June 2020

97 B'tselem, Spike in settler violence during pandemic: Palestinians and homes repeatedly attacked, March 2020

98 Human Rights Watch, A Threshold Crossed: Israeli authorities and the crimes of Apartheid and persecution, 27 April 2021

99 UN, Report of the Secretary General, Children and armed conflict, 2021, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2021/437&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC

100 UN – see note 99

101 Arab America, Violence against Palestinian farmers increases now that olive harvesting has begun, 22 October 2020; Haaretz, Settler violence against Palestinians increases during annual olive harvest, 21 October 2020.

102 Middle East Eye, Gaza 2020: worsening conditions lead more Palestinians to take their own lives, 28 July 2020.

103 Save the Children (2020) – see note 49

104 UN (2021) – see note 99

105 UN (2021) p.13 – see note 99

106 UNICEF, State of Palestine: Humanitarian Situation Report, End of Year 2020, 20 January 2021

107 Save the Children, Danger is our Reality, 29 April 2020

108 WHO, Occupied Palestinian Territory Covid-19 Response Plan, 24 April 2020

109 Middle East Monitor, 96% of Gaza's water unfit for use, 7 January 2015, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20150107-96-of-gazas-water-unfit-for-use/

110 Save the Children, Denial of healthcare outside Gaza is a death sentence for children, 29 July 2020

111 Mondoweiss, Farmers in Gaza struggle to access lands near Israel, 18 October 2021, https://mondoweiss.net/2021/10/farmers-in-gaza-struggle-to-access-lands-near-israel/

112 The Borgen Project, Living problems in West Bank and Gaza, 10 March 2019

113 WFP, WFP Palestine Country Brief, August 2021

114 WFP (2021) – see note 113

115 The World Bank, World Bank report calls for coordination to fight the spread of Covid-19 in the Palestinian territories, 22 February 2021

116 World Bank, 22 February 2021 – see note 115

117 ACAPS, Palestine – Humanitarian needs after the escalation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, September 2021

118 World Vision, Syrian refugee crisis: facts, FAQs, and how to help, 2021

119 The conflict in Yemen continues to be characterised as of non-international character, as the international parties to the conflict have been invited by the internationally recognised government. Under the traditional concept of the law of armed conflict, blockades could only be conducted by the naval forces of belligerent states, thus making it legally impossible for a blockade to occur outside of an international armed conflict.

120 Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen Group, Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, (September 2021)

121 Mwatana for Human Rights, Global Rights Compliance (2021) Starvation Makers: The use of starvation by warring parties in Yemen

122 Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (2020) A Pandemic of Impunity in a Tortured Land, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26315

123 UNICEF, Acute malnutrition threatens half of children under five in Yemen in 2021 (press release), 11 February 2021, https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/acute-malnutrition-threatens-half-children-under-five-yemen-2021-un

124 WHO Europe, Portraits from Ukraine's conflict line, where humanitarian assistance is most needed, 20 February 2018

125 The New Humanitarian, 'Like a precipice': Children growing up with war on Europe's frontlines, 18 October 2021

126 Save the Children, Education Cluster Strategy 2019–2020, 29 July 2019

127 Save the Children, Listen to Us – Girls' and boys' gendered experiences of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, 20 August 2020

128 Al Jazeera, 75 children killed, 1,000 detained since Myanmar coup: UN experts, 17 July 2021

129 The World Bank, Myanmar economy expected to contract by 18 percent in FY2021: report, 23 July 2021

130 Save the Children, The UN Secretary General must explain why he lets powerful parties get away with killing children and attack schools and hospitals, 15 June 2020

131 J Hedstrom and E Olivius (2021) The Politics of Sexual Violence in the Kachin Conflict in Myanmar, International Feminist Journal of Politics

132 S Herbert, Conflict analysis of the Philippines, October 2019, https://gsdrc.org/publications/conflict-analysis-of-the-philippines/

133 UN (2021) – see note 99

134 Republic Act 10821 mandates the provision of emergency relief and protection for children before, during and after disasters and other emergency situations, Republic of the Philippines, May 18, 2016.

135 Republic Act 11188 provides for the special protection of children in situations of armed conflict and providing penalties for violations thereof, Republic of the Philippines, January 10, 2019.

Save the Children

STOP
THE WAR
ON CHILDREN

Violations against children in armed conflict don't stop during a pandemic. If anything, they get worse.

This latest report in our Stop the War on Children series looks in detail at children at risk of recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups.

The findings are serious cause for alarm. Verified incidents of children recruited and used by armed forces and groups have risen, and more groups are recruiting children. We set out a series of recommendations for governments to protect children in conflict.

Save the Children

stopwaronchildren.org