



STOP THE WAR
ON
CHILDREN

I Feel
Protected
When
there is
no war
and I can
Play Outside



Pathways
to peace



Save the Children

Save the Children exists to help every child reach their potential. In 120 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

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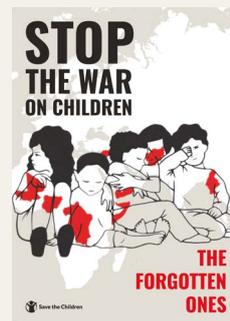
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PREVIOUS REPORTS ON THE WAR ON CHILDREN



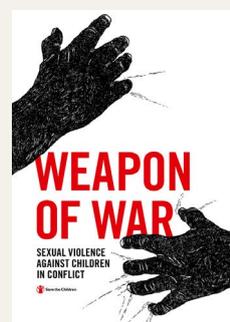
Stop the war on children – let children live in peace, 2023



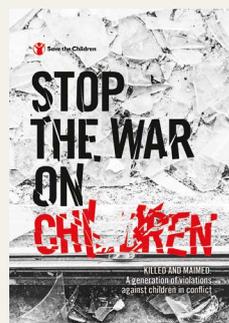
Stop the war on children – the forgotten ones, 2022



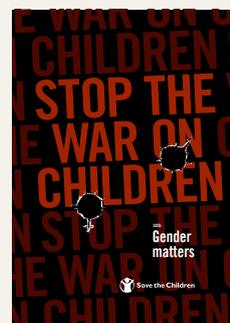
Stop the war on children – a crisis of recruitment, 2021



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

Photos used on cover:

Stop the war on children

Jonathan Hyams / Save the Children, 2020

Hope to me is peace and quiet

Children from Nigeria made some drawings to express their hopes of life in peace, with no conflict / Save the Children, 2023

I feel protected when there is no war and I can play outside

Children from Nigeria made some drawings to express their hopes of life in peace, with no conflict / Save the Children, 2023

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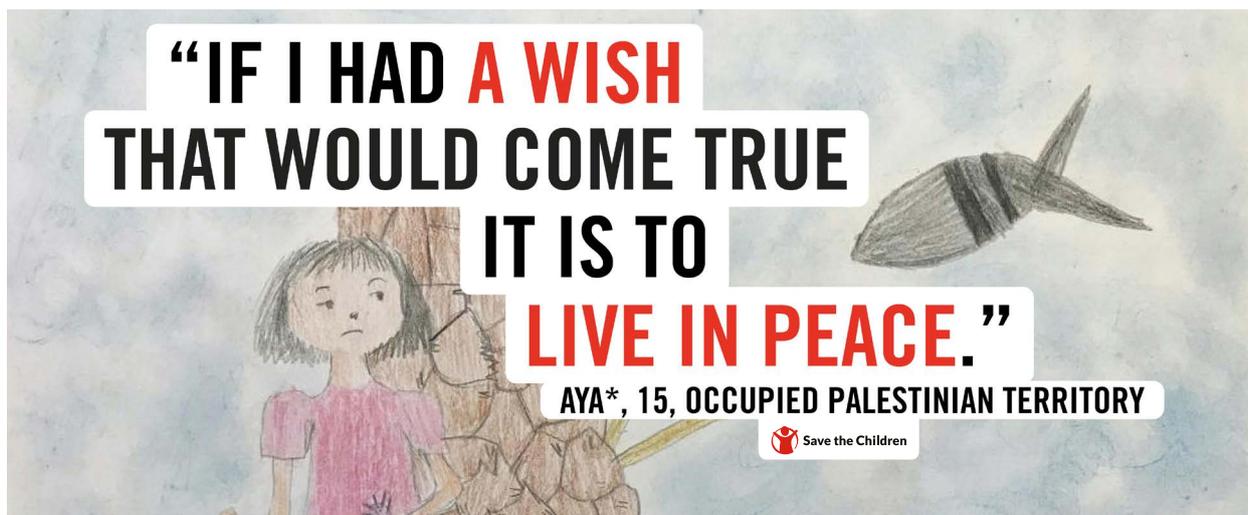
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FOREWORD



Our latest data paints a bleak picture: the share of children living in conflict zones worldwide has nearly doubled during the past 30 years. This alarming trend coincides with a troubling reality – global military spending continues to climb, reaching a staggering US\$2.4 trillion in 2023. Meanwhile, investments in conflict prevention are declining.

The consequences of not investing in peace are devastating. Ongoing conflicts in Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and so many other countries have seen a horrific escalation in attacks against children, schools and hospitals. Our analysis of UN data reveals that in 2023 verified grave violations against children in conflict zones reached their highest levels since UN records began. The most dramatic increase among verified violations was in the killing and maiming of children, as well as in denial of humanitarian access.

While many conflicts still attract far less attention than they are deserving, we have seen a rising global outcry against the egregious violations committed against children. Millions of people have mobilized in protest, particularly towards ending the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, a response that offers a glimmer of hope.

Save the Children urges all stakeholders to honour their commitments to the protection of children's rights in conflict. That includes ensuring international humanitarian law is respected, humanitarian funding prioritises child protection and full humanitarian access is upheld.

Clearly, though, nothing protects children better from war than the elimination of war itself. So governments and relevant institutions should prioritise conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding alongside their protection work. The international community must act collectively and decisively to end this war on children.

As 15-year-old Palestinian Aya poignantly told my Save the Children colleague:

«IF I HAD A WISH THAT WOULD COME TRUE, IT'S TO LIVE IN PEACE.»

It's time to fulfil that wish for Aya and countless others. Peace is urgent. And as this report reveals, the pathways to peace are readily accessible.

Inger Ashing
CEO, *Save the Children International*

KHALID, 18, FROM GAZA:

- MY ADVICE TO EVERYONE IS TO STAY UNITED

«The thing I want to happen now is for the war in Gaza to stop so that we have the opportunity to see our families, friends, and reunite with our loved ones again.»

Khalid lives with his mother in Egypt. His father is still in Gaza.

«My advice to everyone is to stay united, we are all sisters and brothers, and not be divided, and to work hard, and to look forward to the future.»

«What I remember most about my home is that there were trees and many beautiful things. We used to always play together and stay up late playing and talking.»

In the future, Khalid dreams of becoming a police

officer, after graduating from university. He describes himself as respectful, well-regarded by others, and kind. He loves playing sports and lifting weights.

«My message to the world is to stand by the people of Gaza. The entire Arab people must support and stand with Gaza as well. They must work to stop the war because it has been ongoing for way too long.»

«The world needs to unite so that peace can prevail and the Arab nations should unite too. The thing I want to happen now is to have ceasefire in Gaza and to stop the war, so that we can see our families, friends, and reunite with our loved ones again. I wish to see Gaza better than it was before.»

Street scene in Kabul.

PHOTO: JIM HUYLEBROEK / SAVE THE CHILDREN





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report identifies concerning trends for the safety and wellbeing of children living in areas impacted by conflict. The last three decades have seen a staggering rise in the number of children living under the shadow of war, as well as an increase in heinous attacks committed against children. There is an urgent need for action to end what is too often a war on children.

THE REPORT'S KEY FINDINGS (CHAPTER 1-3) ARE:

- **Doubling of children affected:** In the mid-1990s, around 10% of the world's children resided in conflict zones. This share has nearly doubled, reaching a heart-wrenching 19% in 2023. The lives of 473 million children are directly impacted by armed conflict today.
- **Africa and Middle East most affected:** Africa is home to the highest absolute number of children living in conflict zones. However, the Middle East holds the grim distinction of having the highest proportion of its total child population living in conflict zones.
- **Record-high violations:** In 2023, verified grave violations against children in conflict hit 31,721 cases, a 15% increase from 2022. This represents 86 violations per day, with underreporting suggesting this is just the tip of the iceberg.
- The highest surge in verified grave violations against children was recorded in Sudan and the occupied Palestinian territory.
- **Killing and maiming most prevalent:** The killing and maiming of children has risen an appalling 31% compared to the previous year. This amounts to an average of 31 children per day – an entire classroom's worth. More than a third of these victims were Palestinian children.
- **Humanitarian access increasingly challenged:** Incidents of denial of humanitarian access reached a historic high in 2023: 5,158 incidents compared to 3,931 the previous year. This is over 11 times more than a decade ago. Humanitarian access was denied

3,250 times in the occupied Palestinian territory alone in 2023, the highest number ever recorded in any conflict setting.

- Attacks on schools and hospitals increased dramatically, reaching the highest number in the last decade in 2023. 38% of such incidents took place in the occupied Palestinian territory. Ukraine recorded the highest number of attacks on schools.
- **10 worst countries:** Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Myanmar, occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine were the worst conflict-affected countries to be a child.

Given the gruesome reality for children living under the weight of war, we have tracked states' commitments and actions to protect children in conflict (chapter 4), and found that:

- **Many countries lack commitment and implementation:** As many as 43 UN member states have committed to less than half of the key international legal and political instruments that protect children in conflict and even among signatories, implementation often lags behind.
- **Reason for optimism:** 65 of the 193 UN member states have signed on to all, or nearly all, the legal and political instruments protecting children in war. There are also examples of progress, including advancements in accountability, more effective implementation practices, and growing popular mobilisation for peace.
- **Problematic weapon exports:** Several states, despite being parties to key legal instruments and duty bearers under customary international law, undermine child protection efforts by selling arms to parties that commit grave violations against children in conflict. This highlights the frequent disconnect between stated commitments and actual practices.

Nothing protects children from the brutalities of war and provides hope for the future better than peace.

Despite this, we found that while the cost of conflict is rising, investments in peace are waning (chapter 5):

- **Investment in peace – a missing piece:** Global military spending surged to a staggering \$2.4 trillion in 2023, while investments in peace and conflict prevention dwindled to a 15-year low in 2021 of 9.6% – or \$15.3 billion – of total Official Development Assistance (ODA).
- **Cost of conflict steals from peace and development:** The economic impact of violence – including the costs of preventing and containing it, and addressing its consequences – has steadily risen, reaching \$19.1 trillion in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms in 2023. This alarming figure reflects the diversion of resources away from critical areas, exacerbating the existing \$4 trillion annual investment gap in achieving the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

Pathways to peace are readily available. With almost 19% of the global child population living in an active conflict zone, it is imperative that states choose these paths - millions of children’s lives and futures are at stake. States should:

1. Prioritise national long-term plans for peace by:
 - strengthening international cooperation, diplomacy and a rules-based world order
 - investing in addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict and violence
 - strengthening ‘peace literacy’
2. Uphold standards of conduct in conflict
3. Hold perpetrators of violations to account
4. Support children’s resilience and recovery
5. Protect humanitarian access and action
6. Listen to and meaningfully involve children

The findings of this report are stark, and the message is clear. We need to take concerted, collective action to turn back the tide of brutality and indifference. We need to better protect children in conflict, and embark on the paths to peace.



A day of mobilization was held by civil society organizations, international cooperation agencies, the government and children to call for «No more children and adolescents in war».

PHOTO: YAIRA OJEDA

SHARMAKE, 14, FROM SOMALIA:

- WE NEED NOT JUST ABSENCE OF WAR, BUT PRESENCE OF PEACE

«If I had one wish, it would be for peace in Somalia. Peace is something that we have been without for so long that many of us don't even know what it feels like. I wish for a country where families like mine don't have to run from their homes in fear, where children can go to school without being afraid. Somalia has been broken by war, and it's time for us to heal.»

Sharmake (14) comes from a family of eight children—six boys and two girls. The ongoing conflict in Somalia has marked his life in profound ways. His father, a construction worker, works tirelessly to provide for the family, but their lives have been shaped by the violence and instability of the Somali civil war.

Despite the hardships, Sharmake's heart remains steadfast. His dreams for his country and for himself are a beacon of hope.

«Peace isn't just about stopping the fighting. It's about creating a place where people can live without fear, where children can play and learn, and where families can stay together. I wish for a Somalia where peace is real, where it's not just the absence of war, but the presence of hope. That's my wish. I want to wake up one day and know that my country is at peace, and that I can grow up in a safe and stable environment.»

What is your message to grown-ups, for instance for politicians and global leaders?

«My message to the grown-ups, especially the leaders, is to focus on the children and the youth. Somalia's future

depends on us, and we need your help. You need to invest in education and give us the tools we need to succeed. Without education, Somalia has no future. We are the ones who will grow up to rebuild this country, but we can't do that if we don't have schools, if we don't have teachers, if we don't have the chance to learn.»

What do we need for the world to be more peaceful?

«For the world to be more peaceful, I think we need to start by focusing on education. When people are educated, they can understand each other better. They can solve problems without turning to violence. In Somalia, many children like me have grown up knowing nothing but war. We've seen the worst that humanity has to offer, but I believe that if we are given a chance to learn, we can become the ones who make the world a better place.»

«Education teaches us how to live together, how to understand different perspectives, and how to solve problems peacefully. That's what we need. If every child in the world had access to education, I believe we would see less violence and more cooperation. It's not enough to just hope for peace, we need to build it, and education is the foundation.»

What is the Somalia that you want?

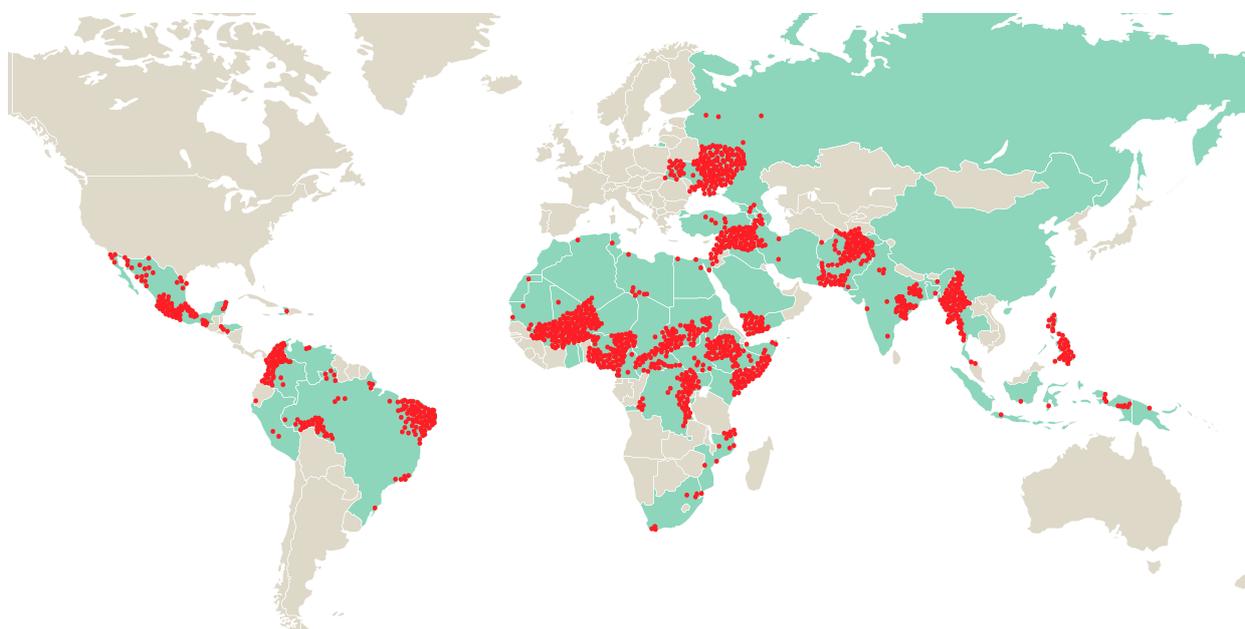
«The Somalia that I want is one where peace is real, not just a dream. I want a country where children can grow up without fear, where families don't have to flee their homes, and where people work together to build a better future.»



PHOTO: DOOKHPRESS / SAVE THE CHILDREN

1 CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES

FIGURE 1: CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES AND CONFLICT ZONES, 2023



CREATED BY PRIO, USING UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM GEOREFERENCED EVENT DATASET (UCDP GED)

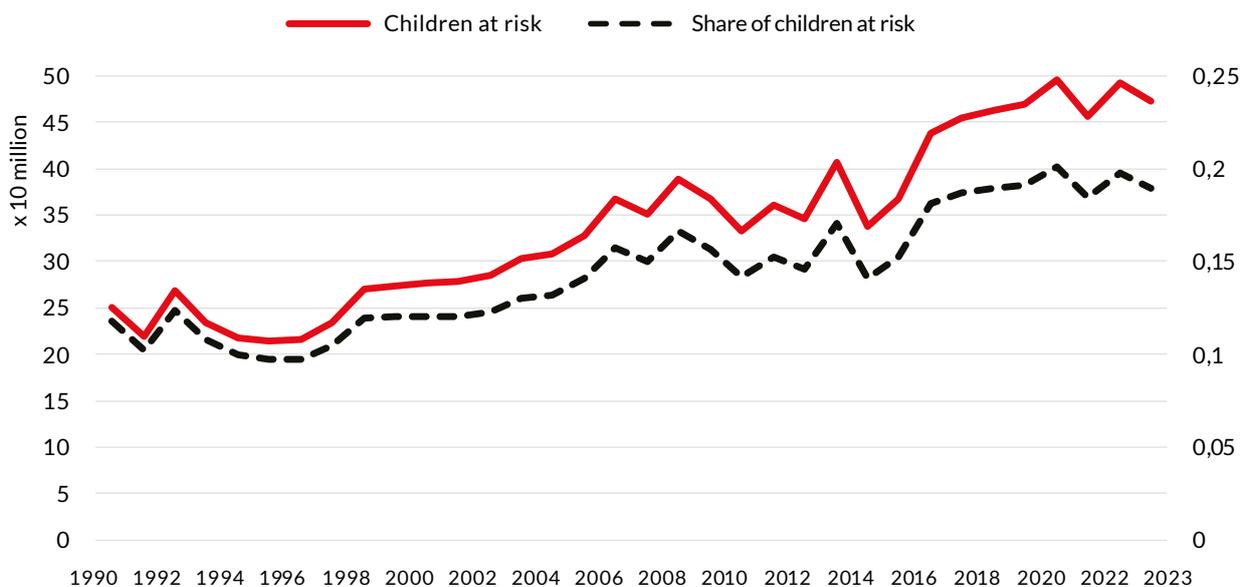
CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES¹: A DRAMATIC RISE OVER TIME

In 2023, the number of conflicts involving states totalled 59, the highest number since 1946, when conflict data collection started.² The last three years have been the most violent since the end of the Cold War, with a sharp increase in battle deaths³ mainly driven by the wars in Tigray in Ethiopia, in Ukraine and in Gaza.⁴

At the same time, the number of children living in close proximity to conflict has risen dramatically in recent decades. The 'children living in conflict zones' indicator⁵, developed by Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), is the first to provide a systematic measure of the numbers and proportion of children living in conflict. Our 2023 estimates show a staggering 473 million children (18.9% of the global child population)

- 1 PRIO uses UCDP's definition of armed conflict: 'armed force used by an organized actor against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year', which is a wider definition than the one used by the UN in their CAAC-report.
- 2 Uppsala Conflict Data Program. 2024. [UCDP: record number of armed conflicts in the world, June 2024.](#)
- 3 Battle deaths are 'deaths resulting directly from violence inflicted through the use of armed force by a party to an armed conflict during contested combat, and include all people, combatants and civilians killed in combat'.
- 4 PRIO. 2024. [Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946-2023, June 2024.](#)
- 5 'Conflict zone' is defined as an area within 50 km from where one or more conflict incidents take place in a given year, within the borders of a country. See methodology annex for more information.

FIGURE 2: NUMBER AND SHARE OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT ZONES 1990-2023



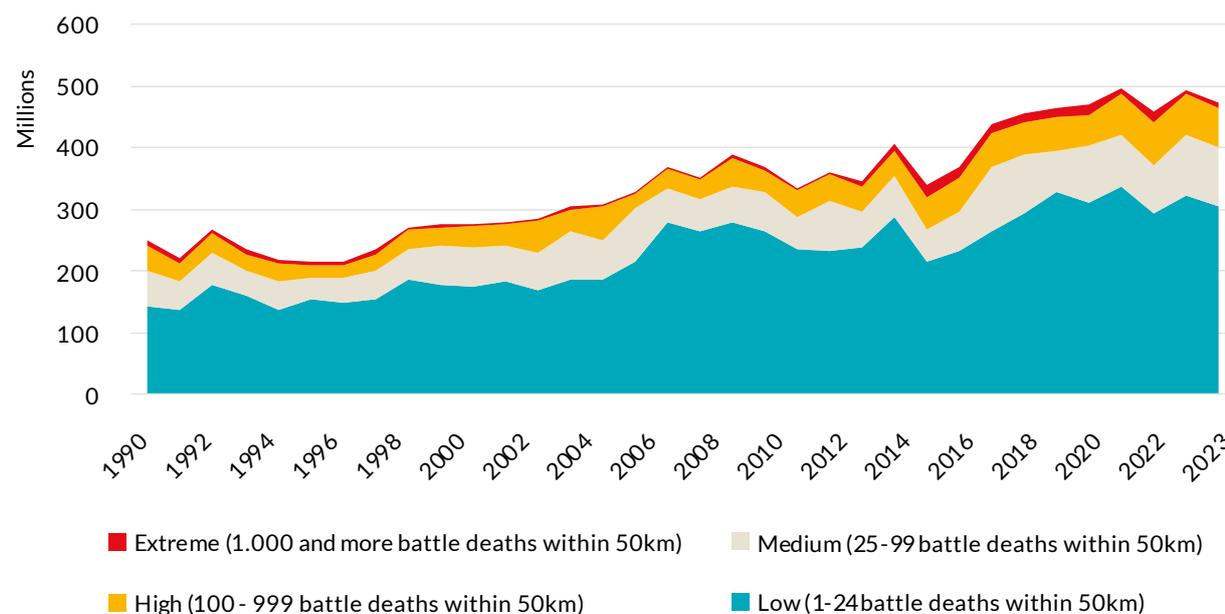
CREATED BY PRIO, USING UCDP GED, DATASET V.23.1 AND UN WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS

live within an active conflict zone. That is more than 1 in 6 children worldwide.

Despite some fluctuations over time, figure 2 reveals a concerning long-term trend: a near-doubling of the number of children living in conflict zones (as represented by the solid line) since the mid-1990s. This

alarming rise cannot be solely attributed to population growth, as the proportion of children living in conflict zones (as represented by the dashed line) has also seen a very significant increase. This share has nearly doubled too, jumping from around 10% in the mid-1990s to almost 19% in 2023.

FIGURE 3: CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED ZONES, BY CONFLICT-ZONE INTENSITY, 1990–2023



CREATED BY PRIO, USING UCDP GED, DATASET V.23.1 AND UN WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS

In 2023, the countries with the highest percentages of children living in what PRIO defines as conflict zones were: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Israel, Mexico (included due to gang violence), Myanmar, the occupied Palestinian territory, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. Note that this list does not explain the level of violations children are exposed to nor the conflict intensity; rather, it lists countries in the world with the highest share of children living close to conflict incidents.

Conflict zones can be broken down in terms of their intensity based on the number of battle deaths within a 50km range within a particular year. Figure 3 above reveals the distribution of conflict intensity for children living in conflict zones. In 2023, the majority (64%) faced low-intensity conflict. A fifth (20%) lived in areas of medium intensity. Another 14% were exposed to high-intensity conflict. A smaller portion (1.7%, or 8.2 million children) endured extreme conflict.⁶ Worryingly, the data shows an increase across all conflict categories over time. Notably, the largest rise has been among children experiencing low-intensity conflict.

BIG REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Figures 4 and 5 below show significant regional differences in how children are impacted by conflict. As we see from figure 4, **Africa had the highest number of children living in conflict zones in 2023, with an estimated 181 million.** Asia follows closely with 161 million. The corresponding 2023 number for the Americas is around 68 million, for the Middle East 52 million, and for Europe 8 million children in conflict zones.

Figure 5 reveals a different perspective, showing the proportion of children in each region living in conflict zones. The proportion of children living in conflict zones – at approximately 32.1% – is higher in the Middle East than in Africa, despite Africa’s higher absolute numbers. In other words, in the Middle East, more than one in three children were living in a conflict zone in 2023. In Africa, approximately 27.5% of children were living in a conflict zone. In the Americas, the proportion was 23.8%, in Asia 13%, and in Europe a much lower 5.7%.

In conclusion, while **Africa has the most children directly affected by conflict, the Middle East has the highest percentage of its child population living in conflict zones.**

FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT ZONES 2023

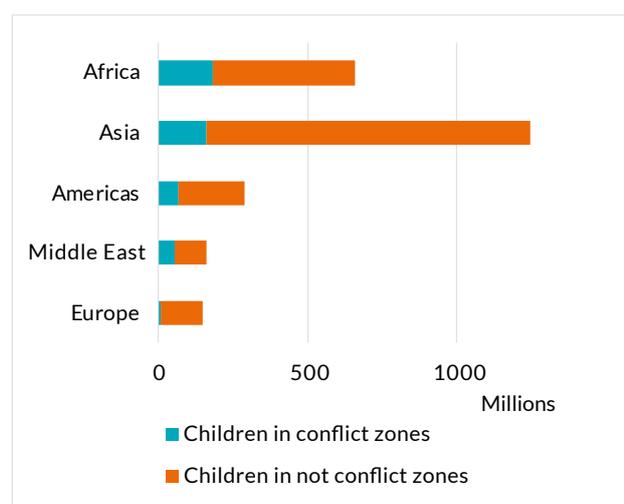
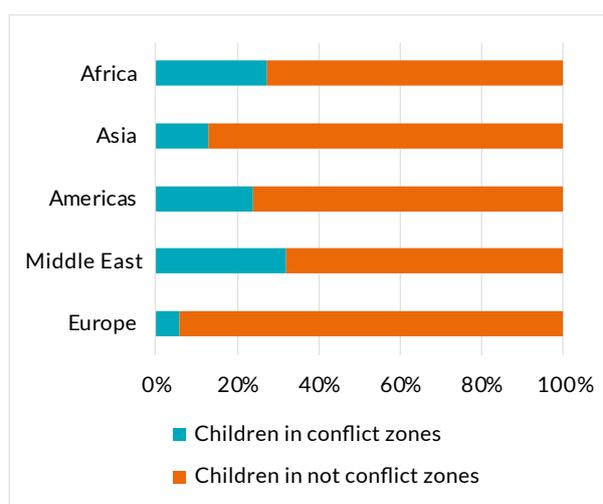


FIGURE 5: SHARE OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT 2023



CREATED BY PRIO, USING UCDP GED, DATASET V.23.1 AND UN WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS

⁶ Note that this methodology does not account for conflict-related harm that does not involve battle deaths, such as harm to civilian infrastructure or environmental degradation, which also affect the experienced intensity of conflict and totality of risk to children living in conflict-affected areas.

2 GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

“I WISH NO OTHER CHILD HAD TO UNDERGO WHAT I WENT THROUGH.”

Janvier*, 16, former child soldier from the DRC, addressing UN CAAC debate, June 2024

HORRIFIC RISE IN CHILD VIOLATIONS

2024 marks 25 years since the Security Council adopted Resolution 1261, the first to condemn attacks on children in armed conflict. The resolution set out six grave violations against children in conflict:

1. killing and maiming of children
2. recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups
3. abduction of children
4. attacks on schools or hospitals
5. sexual violence against children
6. denial of humanitarian access.

The UN Secretary-General reports on these grave violations in an annual *Children and Armed Conflict* (CAAC) report.⁷ Our analysis of the UN data shows that **never before has the number of verified grave violations against children in conflict been higher than in 2023.** The verified number of grave violations reached a staggering 31,721 cases. This number is **3.6 times** higher than in 2010, as shown by figure 6. The whole period features an upward trend, despite some fluctuations.

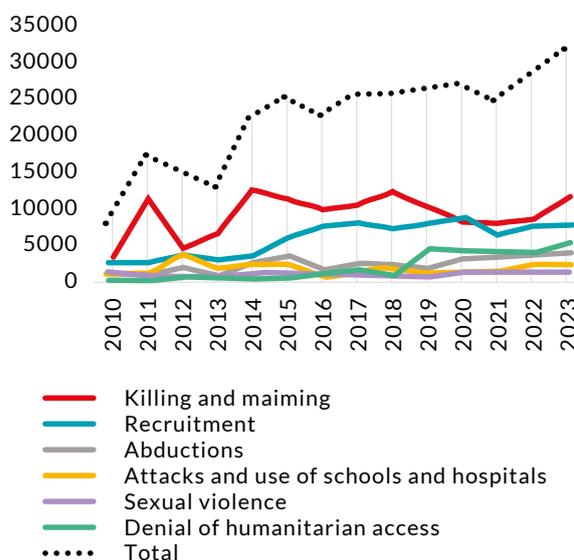
*The name of this child has been changed to protect their identity.

7 The CAAC report tracks military use of schools and hospitals, but does not record them as grave violations. In this report, military use of schools and hospitals are also considered grave violations. The verified incidents of use is therefore added to the 'attacks on schools and hospitals' category of grave violations. This methodology is chosen to give a fuller picture of the harm experienced by children in each country context.

Notably, there is also a sharp increase since 2022, which until now had the grim record of the highest number of grave violations.

The number of violations verified in 2023 translates to an average of 86 per day, a figure that cannot be ignored. Even worse, this is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg, as we know grave violations, especially those involving sexual violence, are underreported.

FIGURE 6: GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT 2010-2023



SOURCE: UN ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

The 2023 increase is especially high in verified cases of the killing and maiming of children, as well as in cases of denial of humanitarian access.

The highest surge in grave violations was verified in Sudan, where cases more than quintupled compared to 2022 (reaching 1,759 incidents), and in the occupied Palestinian territory where 8,434 grave violations were verified, the highest number of any conflict monitored in 2023, and a 170% increase from the year before.

Other conflicts with worryingly high numbers of verified grave violations were in the DRC (with 3,805 verified cases), Somalia (2,290), Myanmar (2,891), Nigeria (1,996), Afghanistan (1,897) and Syria (1,608).

THE GENDER DIMENSION OF VIOLATIONS⁸

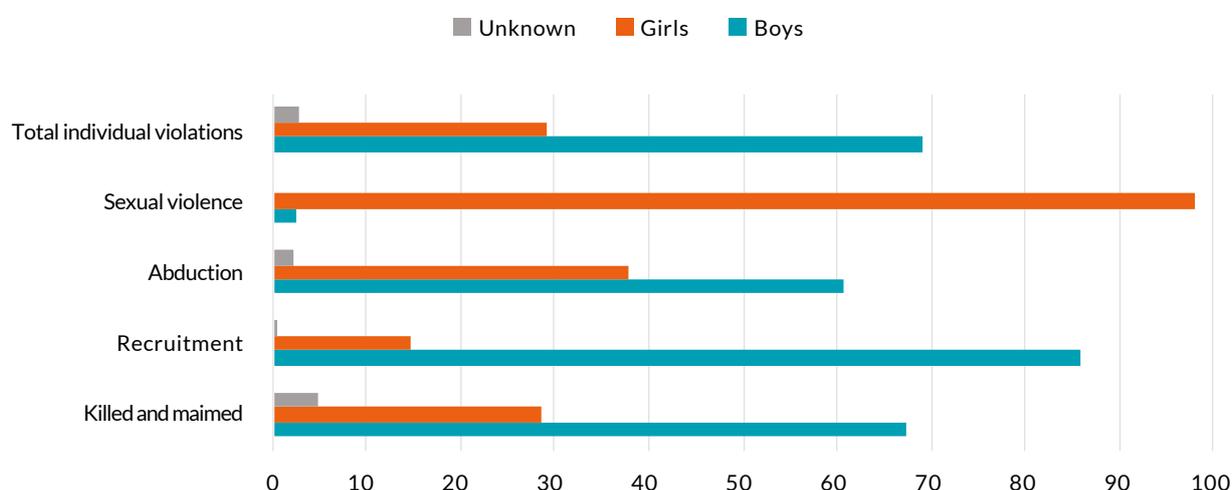
Gender-specific roles and vulnerabilities impact children’s experience of armed conflict. Boys are more often forcibly recruited, and tasked with combat or labour, exposing them to violence and trauma. Girls, on the other hand, face heightened risks of sexual violence, child marriage and other forms of exploitation. While boys may be targeted for their perceived ability to fight, girls are frequently seen as commodities, subjected to abuse and servitude. Both face severe psychological

and physical harm, but the nature of their suffering reflects deep-seated gender inequalities that are amplified during conflict.

Children with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) face heightened risks amid the chaos and breakdown of social structures in conflict zones. These children, often invisible in official data (including UN data on grave violations), endure extreme vulnerability, particularly to sexual violence.⁹ Prejudices that are pervasive even in peacetime are intensified during conflicts, leading to targeted violence and exploitation.

While the total number of verified grave violations against children rose in 2023, their impact was not equal for boys and girls. Boys made up two-thirds (67%) of confirmed cases of killings and maiming, and 85% of recruitment cases. Boys also accounted for 60% of abductions. However, girls were far more likely to experience sexual violence, making up 98% of verified cases, as shown by figure 7. It should be noted that sexual violence is consistently underreported, particularly against boys and SOGIESC children. So the full extent of its impact is not available.

FIGURE 7: GENDER DIMENSION OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN 2023

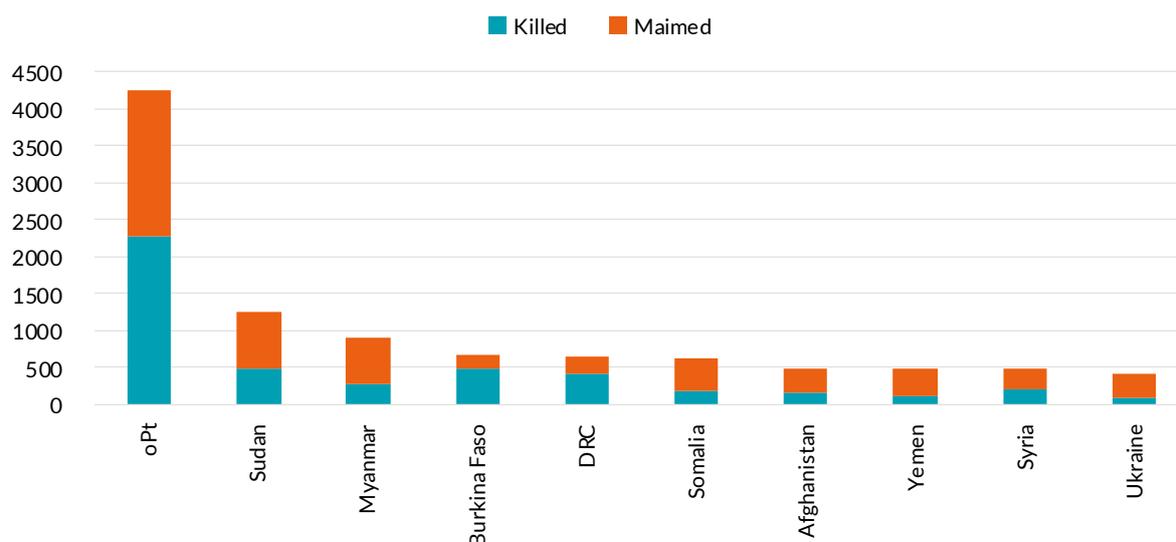


SOURCE: THE UN ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

⁸ For a further elaboration on the gender dimensions of violations, see: **Save the Children**. *Stop the War on Children 2020: Gender Matters*. 2020.

⁹ **OHCHR**. *From Wars Against Diversity to an Inclusive Peace*. 2022.

FIGURE 8: NUMBER OF CASES OF CHILDREN KILLED AND MAIMED IN 2023



SOURCE: ANALYSIS OF THE UN ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Analysis of the past three years reveals minimal year-to-year variation in the gender distribution of grave violations. Boys constitute between 67% and 69% of the children killed or maimed. When it comes to recruitment, boys represent between 85% and 90% of the cases, while those targeted by sexual violence are girls in 98% of verified cases. Only abduction varies a little bit more between the years, with girls constituting between 30% and 37% of the cases and boys between 55% and 69%. This is partly explained by a relatively big portion of abduction cases being of ‘unknown gender’ in 2022.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Globally, one in ten children has a disability, and a staggering 16% of these disabilities are directly linked to armed conflict.¹⁰ Children with disabilities living in conflict are especially vulnerable to violence and exclusion, often losing access to education and basic services first and being the last to regain it.

Injuries caused by mines and explosives are among the key factors leading to disability. That is why it is so vital that the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) is endorsed and implemented.

In 2023, the highest number of verified cases of the maiming of children was in the occupied Palestinian territory, as figure 8 shows. Many of these children will

live with disability for the rest of their lives. Attacks on Palestinian healthcare facilities far exceeded those in any other conflict monitored by the UN in 2023 (see figure 9), making it extremely difficult for child amputees and injured children to get help. On top of this, as the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) points out: “People with disabilities in Gaza have been put in extreme distress with the expectation that they will be the first and the next to be killed because of the limited opportunities to flee or take part in evacuations due to their impairment.”¹¹

BREAKDOWN OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS FROM THE CAAC REPORT

KILLING AND MAIMING¹²

A staggering 11,338 verified cases of killing and maiming took place in 2023, representing a 31% rise compared to the previous year. This is equivalent to an average of 31 children – an entire classroom’s worth – losing their life or being maimed every day.

The occupied Palestinian territory and Sudan saw the highest increases in this type of violation. More than every third child killed or maimed in conflict in 2023 was Palestinian. Palestinian children comprised 43% of all verified cases of killing. But even this tells only part of the story. The UN notes that the difficulty in conducting verification work in Gaza means the number is likely to be significantly higher.

10 OCHA. *Persons with Disabilities in Armed Conflict: Inclusive Protection*. 2020.

11 CRPD, OHCHR. *Gaza: Palestinians with Disabilities Fear Being Killed First, Says UN Committee*. May 2024

12 UN. *CAAC Report*, 2023.

RECRUITMENT AND USE¹³

In 2023, there were 7,751 verified cases of recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, a slight increase from the 7,610 cases recorded the year before.¹⁴ Countries with the highest recruitment numbers were the DRC, Myanmar, Syria, Mali and Somalia. There has been a very steep increase in recruitment in Myanmar – by 340% between 2022 and 2023, reaching 1,171 cases. Child recruitment and use has consistently been one of the top two most reported violations, emphasising the need for states to endorse and implement the Paris Principles and Commitments.

ABDUCTION¹⁵

There was a slight decrease in verified child abductions by parties to conflict in 2023 compared to the year before. But the numbers remained exceedingly high in the DRC with 870 verified cases, Nigeria with 859 cases and Somalia with 719 cases. Considering the Central African Republic's relatively small child population, its 126 verified cases of abduction is also highly worrying.

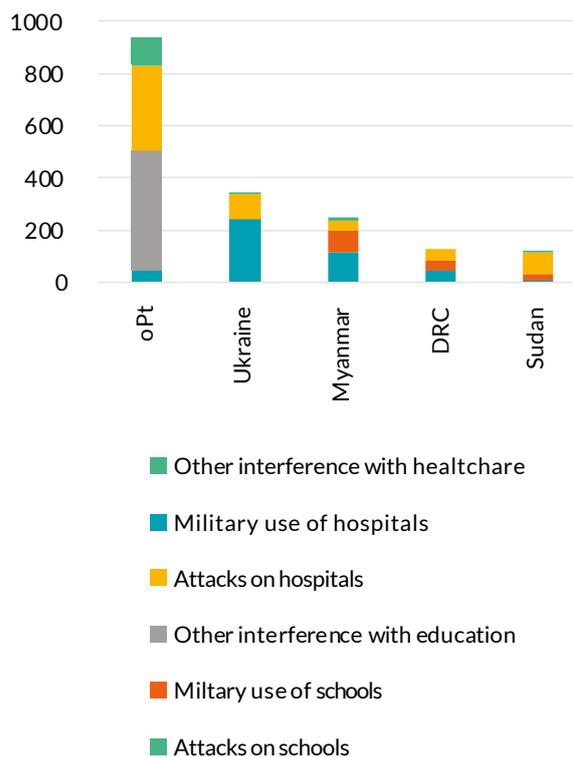
ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS¹⁶

While not as frequent as some other violations, attacks on schools and hospitals increased dramatically between 2021 and 2022, and continued going up in 2023. Last year saw 2,414 verified incidents, the highest number in the past decade. This underscores the importance of signing and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), and respecting the protected status of both schools and hospitals. 937 of these incidents, that is 38%, took place in the occupied Palestinian territory.¹⁷ Other conflicts topping this grim statistic were Ukraine with 338 incidents and Myanmar with 246 cases.

Like the year before, the highest number of attacks on schools in 2023 was recorded in Ukraine. The military use of schools occurred most often in Myanmar, with 82 incidents.¹⁸ Attacks on 45 Palestinian schools were verified. Education was also interfered with 461 times in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Out of 714 attacks on hospitals in all conflicts monitored by the UN, almost half – 326 incidents – took place in the occupied Palestinian territory. On top of that, the military use of five Palestinian hospitals was verified, as well as 100 other interferences with health care.

FIGURE 9: ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS IN 2023



SOURCE: THE UN ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE¹⁹

There were 1,226 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in conflict verified in 2023, marking a slight increase from the year before. While underreporting is a problem for all six grave violations, it is most pronounced in the case of sexual violence, due to stigma, social norms, taboos and fear of retaliation.²⁰

Even though sexual violence often goes underreported, there were still numerous conflicts with disturbingly high levels of verified sexual violence against children. Nigeria tops the list with 366 cases, followed by the DRC with 281 cases, Somalia with 197 and Sudan with 114. The small child population in CAR also makes the 67 cases recorded there a very high number.

Every third victim of conflict-related sexual violence in 2023 was a child, and 98% of these were girls, according to data gathered by the office of the

13 UN. *CAAC Report*, 2023.

14 'Military use' in this context connotes all use of schools by armed forces or groups

15 UN. *CAAC Report*, 2023.

16 UN. *CAAC Report*, 2023.

17 See also: GPEA. *Education under Attack*, 2024.

18 'Military use' in this context connotes all use of schools by armed forces or groups.

19 UN. *CAAC Report*, 2023.

20 It's also important to note that this data only takes into account acts perpetrated by parties to the conflict, which beyond the underreporting, means that we do not have a complete picture of the risk of sexual violence children in conflict zones are exposed to.

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten.²¹ CAAC data corroborates these statistics, showing that 98% of verified cases of sexual violence against children in conflict concerned girls, both in 2023 and in previous years. The research highlights the heightened vulnerability of adolescent girls to sexual violence, while emphasising that though girls are disproportionately affected, boys are also at risk – and sexual violence against boys is particularly underreported.²²

DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS²³

The denial of humanitarian access has reached a historic high – with 5,158 incidents in 2023 compared to 3,931 the previous year. This is over 11 times more than a decade ago. The occupied Palestinian territory alone recorded 3,250 incidents of denial of humanitarian access in 2023, the highest number ever recorded in any conflict setting.

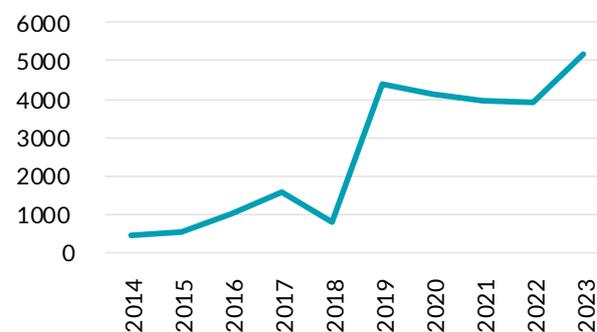
These incidents include violence and threats directed at humanitarian aid workers, the theft of humanitarian facilities and supplies, and various physical and administrative barriers.

A single incident of denied humanitarian access can have a far-reaching impact on thousands of children's survival, hampering their access to basic services and protection. That makes this an extremely serious violation.

The global humanitarian community suffered its deadliest year ever in 2023, with 280 aid workers losing their lives in 33 countries. Over half of them were killed in Gaza between October and December 2023.²⁴

The dramatic increase in 2019 shown by figure 10 is mostly due to frequent access denial in the occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen. In 2019, 2022 and 2023, the occupied Palestinian territory topped the list. In 2020 and 2021, it was Yemen. Humanitarian access was frequently denied in Afghanistan in 2022 and 2023. There was also a sharp increase in the denial of humanitarian access in Sudan, Ukraine and Myanmar in 2023 compared to the year before.

FIGURE 10: INCIDENTS OF DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS 2014-2023



SOURCE: THE UN ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

«WE HOPE THAT ALL WORLD LEADERS AND THOSE CONCERNED WITH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND HUMANITY COME TOGETHER TO PROTECT CIVILIANS DURING WARS AND CONFLICTS.»

Ahmed, occupied Palestinian territory

21 Patten, Pramila, SRGS. «Remarks of SRSG Pramila Patten at the Security Council Open Debate on Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Through Demilitarization and Gender-Responsive Arms Control, New York, 23 April 2024.» 2024.

22 Save the Children. *Weapon of War: Sexual Violence Against Children in Conflict*, 2021.

23 UN. *CAAC Report*, 2023.

24 OCHA. *World Humanitarian Day: UN Demands Action as Aid Worker Deaths Hit Record High*, August 2024.

CHANCEL, 9, FROM DRC:

- FOR PEACE TO RETURN, IT IS ENOUGH FOR THE ARMED GROUPS TO LEAVE

«I just want peace to return. All those who make a mistake in wanting to return today will die there.»

Nine-year-old Chancel was forced from his home by conflict in the DRC. He advises other displaced people against returning home before the conflict is over, fearing that they will be killed during attacks.

«The Congo that I would like to see is a peaceful Congo. It will be very good when the thieves stop stealing, stop burning people so that we can have good peace. We could be very happy with that.»

Chancel is trying to continue his education through a distance-learning programme, but he's yet to receive the school supplies he needs. His best long-term chance of completing his education and building a future is for the fighting to end and the armed groups to leave so he can return home to his village.

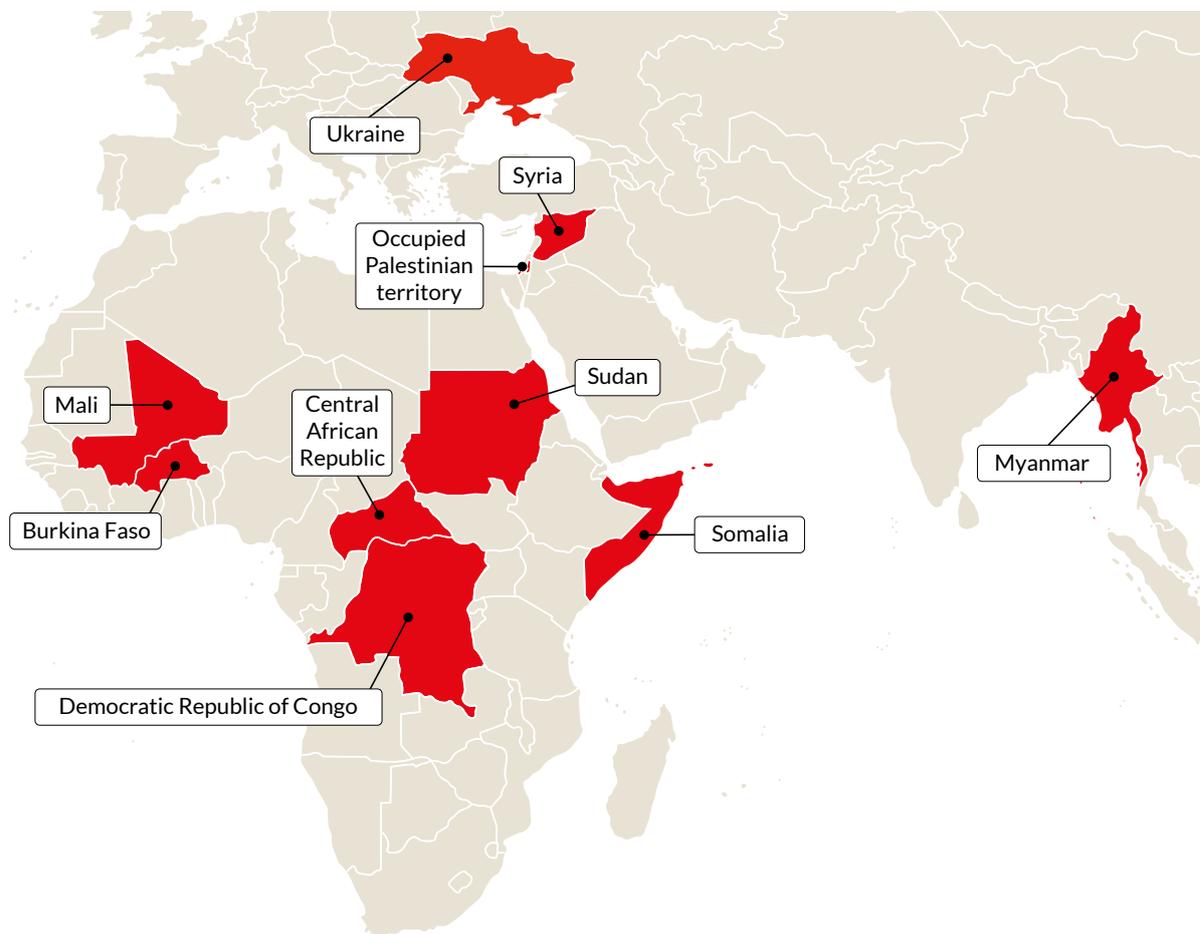
«I can only wish for peace to return. Let them go home. Let us open the way for them to pass and we are not going to stop them. Let our soldiers have the courage to fight. But it is not up to me to give them ammunition. I am not their commander», he says.



PHOTO: GLOIRE MUNESHA / SAVE THE CHILDREN

3 THE 10 WORST CONFLICT COUNTRIES TO BE A CHILD IN 2023

FIGURE 11: THE 10 WORST CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES FOR CHILDREN IN 2023



SOURCE: ANALYSIS BASED ON INDICATORS CONCERNING THE PREVALENCE OF SIX GRAVE VIOLATIONS (2023 ANNUAL CAAC REPORT), AS WELL AS INDICATORS ON THE SHARE OF CHILD POPULATION IN CONFLICT ZONES AND CONFLICT INTENSITY (UPPSALA AND PRIO). RESULTS TAKE INTO ACCOUNT CHILD POPULATION SIZE AND HISTORIC RECORD.

Combining the PRIO's research on children living in conflict zones, as presented in chapter 1, with the analysis of the UN's data on grave violations against children in conflict for 2023 contained in chapter 2, the ten worst conflict-affected countries for children were identified. They are: Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Myanmar, Occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine.²⁵

Countries at the top of the index exhibit exceptionally high numbers across all six grave violations (dimension 1), and on conflict intensity and the proportion of children in conflict zones (dimension 2). Exposing the highest number of children to conflict and grave violations, these countries represent the direst situations for children. Growing up in these places, children are exposed to unimaginable horrors, constant danger, trauma and deprivation, severely impeding their physical, psychological, emotional and cognitive development.

**IF I COULD CHANGE THE WORLD,
I WOULD MAKE IT A SAFE PLACE AGAIN.
BRING BACK THE HOMES THAT GOT
DESTROYED AND PUT AN END TO THIS
WAR ONCE AND FOR ALL.**

Tamara, Yemen

25 We have enhanced the index's methodology used in previous years by shifting from absolute numbers to shares, allowing for more equitable comparisons across countries of varying population sizes. In addition, the individual indicators now exhibit greater consistency over time, accurately reflecting changes within specific countries rather than solely their relative performance. See the methodology annex for details.

JANNAT, 11, FROM SUDAN:

- I WANT SUDAN TO BE MODERN AND DEVELOPED

«To have peace, we need security, and a president to rule the country and stop the war.»

Jannat lives with her father, mother and two brothers, aged three and 12. She's constantly smiling and loves to tell jokes. Her favourite subjects are Arabic, the sciences and religious studies.

Jannat loves to watch the National Geographic channel to learn new things and is a hardworking student. She has made some new friends, but says her school back

home was better than the one she is in now. It had a partnership with Khartoum University, which could secure a place for her there, enabling her to fulfill her dream of becoming a gynecologist.

«My wish for the future is to become a doctor and travel the world. I wish to travel to Korea. They have a developed technology.»

«To leaders [I say] stop the war because a lot of children have lost their parents.»



PHOTO: STILL FROM VIDEO INTERVIEW / SAVE THE CHILDREN

4 GLOBAL OUTLOOK ON STATES' COMMITMENTS TO THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Given the grim outlook for children affected by conflict, this chapter outlines states' commitments to protecting children in conflict. It sets out the international legal commitments they have made and political declarations they have endorsed. The chapter also examines how these commitments translate into practice, giving examples of national implementation, and reviewing arm sales to parties to conflict that commit grave violations against children.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL COMMITMENTS TO PROTECTING CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Commitment to protecting children in conflict can be demonstrated through various means, but a key dimension is the legal obligations and political pledges states have committed themselves to internationally.

The legal commitments reviewed include:

- the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols I and II
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its additional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict
- the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
- the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (Mine Convention)

- the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)
- the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Nuclear Treaty)

The political commitments tracked are:

- the Paris Commitments
- the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD)
- the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA)

These international instruments all play an important role in enhancing the protection of children in armed conflict. The Geneva Conventions with additional protocols and the Rome Statute provide both for the general protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as particular protections for children. The CRC broadly stipulates the rights of children in and out of armed conflict, while its additional protocol, along with the Paris commitments, seek to protect children from recruitment and use by armed forces or groups. The mine convention, ATT, nuclear treaty and EWIPA all seek to restrict the transfer and use of weapons that represent a particular risk of harm to children. Finally, the Safe Schools Declaration commit parties to avoid the military use of schools and strengthen protection of children and education in conflict.²⁶

26 For a further elaboration of the legal and political commitments, see methodology annex.

As it stands, there is significant variation in commitments among states, with only a handful committing to all of these instruments. These countries are Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Ireland, Malta, New Zealand, Peru, San Marino and Uruguay. A bigger group of 37 countries have signed on to all but one of these commitments, while 17 states are two signatures away from full legal and political commitment. In total, 65 of the 193 UN member states have signed up to all, or nearly all, of these instruments.

As many as 43 UN member states have signed on to five or fewer of these 12 instruments, demonstrating alarming gaps in their commitment to protecting children in conflict. This means that more than 20% of UN member states, many of which are currently involved in armed conflict, have signed on to less than half of these commitments. Although there has been a steady increase in some of these commitments over the recent decades, especially the political commitments,²⁷ much work remains.

But even strong legal and political commitments to protecting children in conflict are only as good as their implementation – and that implementation often lags behind. That said, there has been progress, as the boxes below on legal accountability for children in conflict, advancing the CAAC agenda and implementing the SSD show. Some states also demonstrate strong commitment to child protection through other means, such as humanitarian aid for child protection or domestic legislation.

ADVANCING LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

Despite growing recognition of the importance of accountability for conflict-related violations and crimes, children continue to be overlooked in international accountability efforts, and their needs are still not consistently addressed.

Violations of children's rights in conflict situations remain under-documented, under-investigated and under-reported. However, the increasing number of commissions of inquiry, international investigative mechanisms and both domestic and international court processes that integrate a child-centred approach shows progress is being made in addressing this issue. Accountability is key to recognising the serious harm conflict inflicts on children, breaking the cycle of violence and rebuilding peaceful societies that respect the rule of law.

Notable developments and achievements:

- UN-mandates for investigative mechanisms have started emphasising the importance of documenting crimes and violations against children. As a result, more child rights expertise is being incorporated into these mechanisms.
- A couple of thematic reports²⁸ from commissions of inquiry and Human Rights Council special procedures have exclusively focused on violations against children.
- Consultations and interviews with children are now integrated as part of the methodology of some commissions of inquiry.²⁹
- A significant milestone was achieved when the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) updated its policy on children in 2023.³⁰ The policy now reflects a commitment to addressing crimes involving children at all stages of investigation and prosecution, and to hearing from children in each case. It also demonstrates an enhanced understanding of a child's rights approach.
- Save the Children, in consultation with experts, has developed a new Guiding Framework on Accountability for grave violations affecting children. This framework outlines six key principles to ensure a child-rights approach is integrated into all stages of documentation and investigation.

27 For example 120 countries have endorsed SSD since 2015. **The Norwegian Government.** [The safe schools declaration.](#)

28 **Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.** "[They Have Erased the Dreams of My Children](#)": Children's Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic. Conference Room Paper, Human Rights Council, Forty-third Session, 24 February–20 March 2020, Agenda Item 4. **OHCHR.** [Losing a Generation: How the Military Junta Is Devastating Myanmar's Children and Undermining Myanmar's Future.](#) Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, June 2022.

29 **Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and Israel.** [Detailed Findings on the Military Operations and Attacks Carried Out in the Occupied Palestinian Territory from 7 October to 31 December 2023.](#) Human Rights Council, Fifty-sixth Session. (Paragraph 16).

30 ICC. [Policy on Children.](#) 2023.

- A new e-learning module, 'Integrating a Child Rights Approach in Accountability Work',³¹ was developed by Justice Rapid Response and Save the Children. This practical, self-paced course is a groundbreaking training tool for professionals involved in accountability efforts.

Lessons learnt:

- The inclusion of child experts is a valuable asset for investigative mechanisms. Their presence increases the investigation team's focus on child-related issues, leading to more comprehensive evidence collection and reporting on crimes and violations affecting children.
- Sustained and longer-term deployments of child rights experts need to be supported.
- Accountability mechanisms should focus not only on child-specific crimes and violations, but also on documenting the particular impact of any violation on children, including the immediate and long-term effects on their physical and mental health.

ADVANCING NATIONAL LAWS AND POLICIES ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Research by Watchlist

National implementation of the CAAC agenda requires governments to adopt a wide array of legal and policy measures, including strategic plans, executive orders, military directives and legislation. Such measures are essential to set government and military objectives, coordinate key stakeholders' activities, and establish accountability mechanisms.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo various legal and policy measures are advancing efforts to end the recruitment and use of children. When the UN's listing mechanism launched in 2002, it identified the armed forces of the DRC government (FARDC) as being involved in child recruitment and use. After intensive multilateral and domestic mobilisation, violations decreased, ultimately resulting in the delisting of the FARDC

for recruitment and use in 2017.³² Key legal and policy measures adopted as part of these efforts include:

- endorsement of the Paris Principles and Commitments
- the Operational Framework for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups, which the DRC adopted in 2004,

and guided efforts to separate children from armed forces as part of the country's broader disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration work

- article 190 of the DRC's constitution, which entered into force in 2006 and prohibits youth armies
- the 2009 Law on the Protection of the Child, which criminalises and establishes penalties for the recruitment and use of children.
- standard operating procedures developed by the government in 2016, which have guided age-verification processes for new FARDC recruits.

These measures played an important role in rapidly reducing incidents of government recruitment and use of children in the DRC. The last five UN annual CAAC reports did not document a single case of child recruitment by FARDC. More work is still needed to protect children from recruitment into other armed groups, however.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

Research by GCPEA

The number of reported incidents of military use of schools and universities declined by more than half between 2015 and 2020 in the 13 countries that endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) in 2015 and 2016 and experienced at least one reported incident of military use during the same period. These countries are Afghanistan, CAR, the DRC, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, the occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.³³

31 Justice Rapid Response & Save the Children. «Integrating a Child Rights Approach in Accountability Work»

32 It remains on the list of parties that commits rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, however.

33 GCPEA. *SSD Fact Sheet*. 2022.

Mali endorsed the SSD in February 2018. In 2019, Mali's Ministry of National Education established a National Technical Committee to help implement the declaration. The committee includes representatives from all the relevant ministries, and from civil society. An action plan was adopted, with concrete activities to disseminate the SSD and guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use. Several regional and local committees have been created since.

During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the Ministry of Education issued a letter to the Ministry of Defence asking it to respect the spirit of the guidelines and refrain from using schools for military purposes. Capacity building and training led to a shift in the conduct of defence and security forces. They stopped occupying schools and started to use prefabricated military buildings instead. At the same time, agreements were reached with non-state armed groups to respect the guidelines and reopen closed schools. To support these efforts, the SSD and the guidelines were translated into several languages.

Mali is also developing a law on the protection of schools and universities in armed conflict. As part of the SSD commitment to meet regularly to review its implementation, Mali has shared its good practices in several international and regional fora. Most importantly, Mali has seen a decrease in attacks on education in 2022-2023 compared to 2020-2021.³⁴

ARMS SALES TO CONFLICT PARTIES THAT COMMIT GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN

Exporting arms to parties perpetrating grave violations against children is deeply problematic, potentially enabling them to continue committing grave violations against children. Such exports contravene the third-party state responsibility under the Geneva Conventions and customary international humanitarian law (IHL). They also conflict with the Arms Trade Treaty, which prohibits arms transfers where there's an overriding risk of their use in serious human rights violations, including against children. Finally these exports also violate the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which mandates states to protect children from violence and exploitation, including extraterritorially.

Cross-referencing the annex of the last annual CAAC report with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Arms Transfers Database, reveals that several of the parties listed for committing grave violations against children in armed conflict received arms transfers from other countries in 2023.³⁵

Figure 17 shows these transactions, sorted by the largest trend-indicator value (TIV). The TIV of an item is intended to reflect that item's military capability rather than its financial value.³⁶

The SIPRI database shows that these transfers were not isolated to dealings with neighbouring countries, but rather reflect shipments from at least ten countries, including in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. While the parties involved in armed conflict bear the primary responsibility to protect children from grave violations, the global community must also uphold its part by ensuring that its weapons are not used to exacerbate these violations.

FIGURE 13: ARMS TRANSFERS TO PARTIES COMMITTING GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN, 2023

RECIPENT	TOTAL TREND INDICATOR VALUE (MILITARY CAPABILITY)
Israel	1 404.1
Myanmar	372.0
DRC	51.2
Ansar Allah (Yemen)	21.2
Somalia	4.0
Russia	1.1

SOURCE: SIPRI ARMS TRANSFERS DATABASE.³⁷ RESEARCH BY ANALYSE & TALL

34 GCPEA. [Mali Country Profile](#), 2024.

35 Note that a limitation of this database is that it only tracks major arms and does not track indirect exports. SIPRI. [Sources and methods](#).

36 The Trend Indicator Value (TIV) is a constructed measure of the notional value of military equipment, defined by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. It aims to provide a way of assigning comparable values to any arms transfer regardless of the countries involved, the price paid (which is not always known), or the date of the transfer. Weapons systems from different countries that are judged to have similar capabilities are thus given similar TIV values. As such, the value is normalised for inflation and currency, and reduced based on previous ownership and use.

37 SIPRI. [Arms Transfers Database](#), 2024.



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

SUNDUS, 13, FROM SOMALIA:

- THE CONSTANT THREAT OF VIOLENCE FORCED US TO LEAVE

«We left our home because of the constant wars. We were confined inside our house unable to go out or attend school. My older siblings could not even go out to do simple tasks like buying groceries. The lack of education and the constant threat of violence forced us to leave.»

Sundus dreams of becoming a doctor to help her people. She and her family fled their home due to constant wars that confined them indoors and meant she couldn't go to school. She wishes for peace in Somalia and the chance of an education.

Sundus' message to global leaders is clear: end the violence and focus on dialogue and education to build

a prosperous and peaceful future for her country.

«I want my country to be peaceful and prosperous. The wars should end, and people need to come together and talk to stop violence. We need to learn and be educated.»

«To achieve peace, people need to resolve conflicts and wars through talking and end the wars. I want a peaceful Somalia where there is no more war. People should stop the violence and focus on education.»

«I miss my family and community, who we lost or were harmed during the wars.»

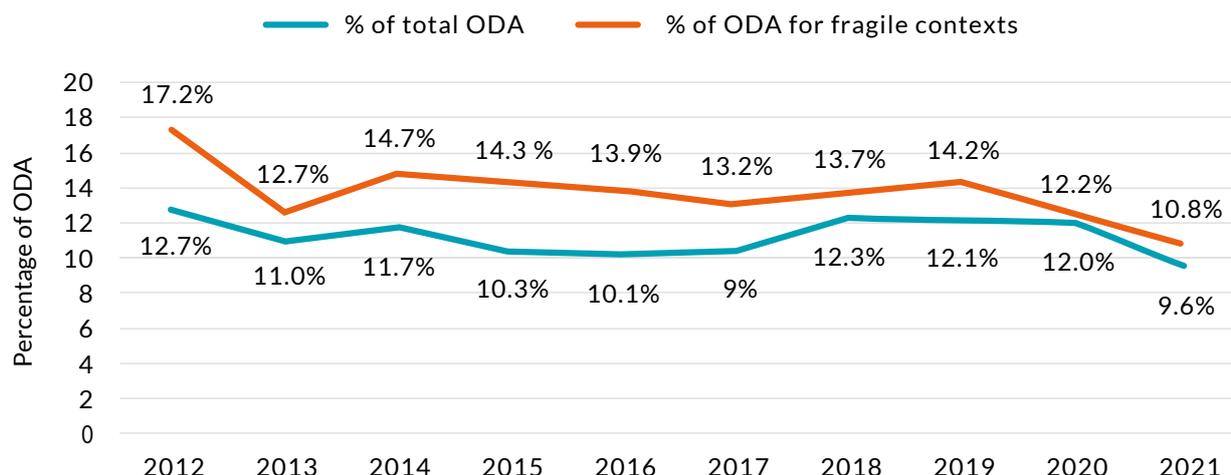
5 PATHWAYS TO PEACE

«WE CAN PLAY UNDER THE TREE WHEN THERE IS NO WAR.»



CHILDREN FROM NIGERIA MADE SOME DRAWINGS TO EXPRESS THEIR HOPES OF LIFE IN PEACE, WITH NO CONFLICT

FIGURE 14: DAC MEMBERS' PEACE EXPENDITURE AS A PERCENTAGE OF THEIR TOTAL ODA (2012-2021)



SOURCE: OECD (2023), PEACE AND OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE, OECD PUBLISHING, PARIS

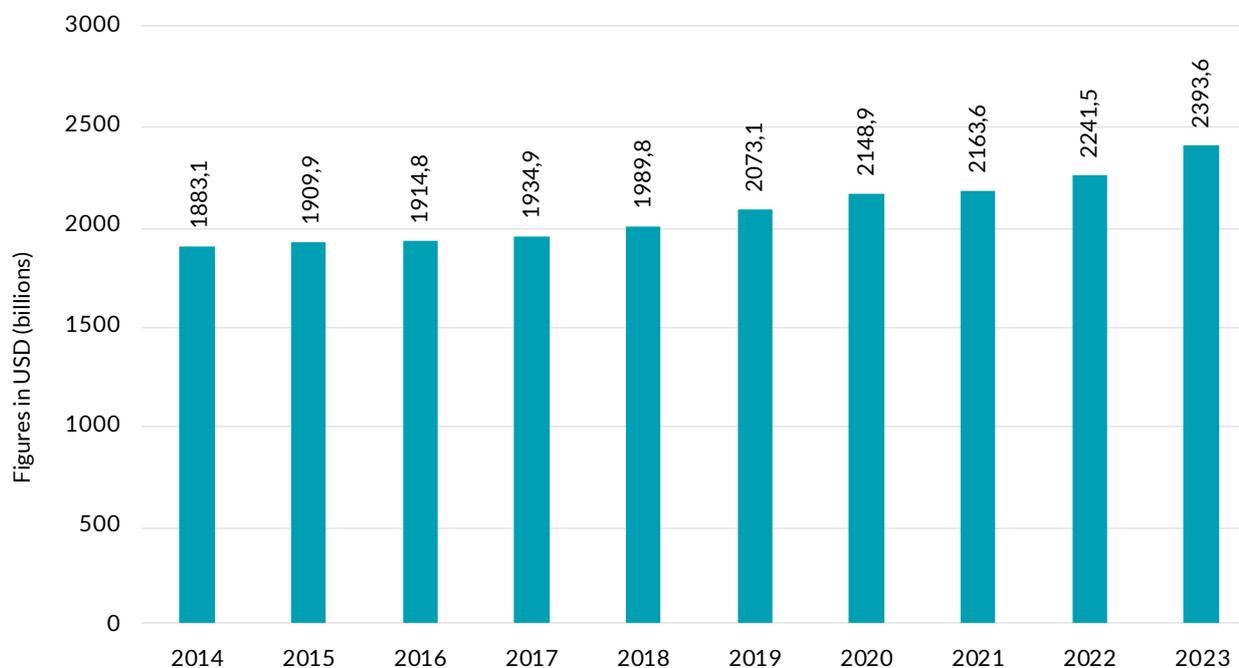
The world is witnessing levels of conflict unprecedented since the second world war. Inaction is no longer an option.

Nothing protects children from the brutalities of war and provides hope for the future better than peace. Peace is not just a moral imperative, it's also a practical necessity. A 20% reduction in conflict would free up almost \$4 trillion – 20 times the total of global aid³⁸ and the annual cost of achieving the the UN's

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These funds could be redirected towards urgent global challenges like tackling climate change and building a sustainable future for all.

This chapter traces global trends in peace and military expenditure, and the economic impact of violence. It also outlines the policy areas that states must prioritise to reduce tensions and build lasting peace.

FIGURE 15: DEVELOPMENT IN GLOBAL MILITARY EXPENDITURE 2014–2023



SOURCE: SIPRI 2024

38 Calculation based on data from: **Institute for Economics & Peace**. *Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*. Sydney, June 2024. **OECD**. *Peace and Official Development Assistance*. 2023. OECD Publishing, Paris.

INVESTMENTS IN PEACE VERSUS MILITARY EXPENDITURE AND THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VIOLENCE

Investments in conflict prevention and peacebuilding are dwindling. In 2021, OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members' spending on peace fell to a 15-year low of 9.6% – or \$15.3 billion – of total Official Development Assistance (ODA). In fragile contexts, where such spending is most needed, the decline was even sharper, falling to a record low of 10.8% (\$5.27 billion), as illustrated by figure 14.

In stark contrast to the decreasing investment in peace and conflict prevention, global military spending reached a new high of \$2.4 trillion in 2023, growing by 6.8% from the previous year. This is the largest annual increase since 2009.³⁹

The economic impact of violence – which comprises the costs and other economic effects of containing and preventing it, and dealing with its consequences – has steadily increased over the past five years. The cost of violence in 2023 was as high as \$19.1 trillion in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, as figure 16 shows. That is equivalent to 13.5% of global GDP.⁴⁰

Enormous military expenditure and the escalating costs of conflict come at a time when developing countries face a \$4 trillion annual investment gap to achieve the SDGs. This gap represents around 20% of the global annual cost of violence. In other words, if the world could reduce conflict (or its cost) by 20%, the savings would be sufficient to achieve the SDGs.

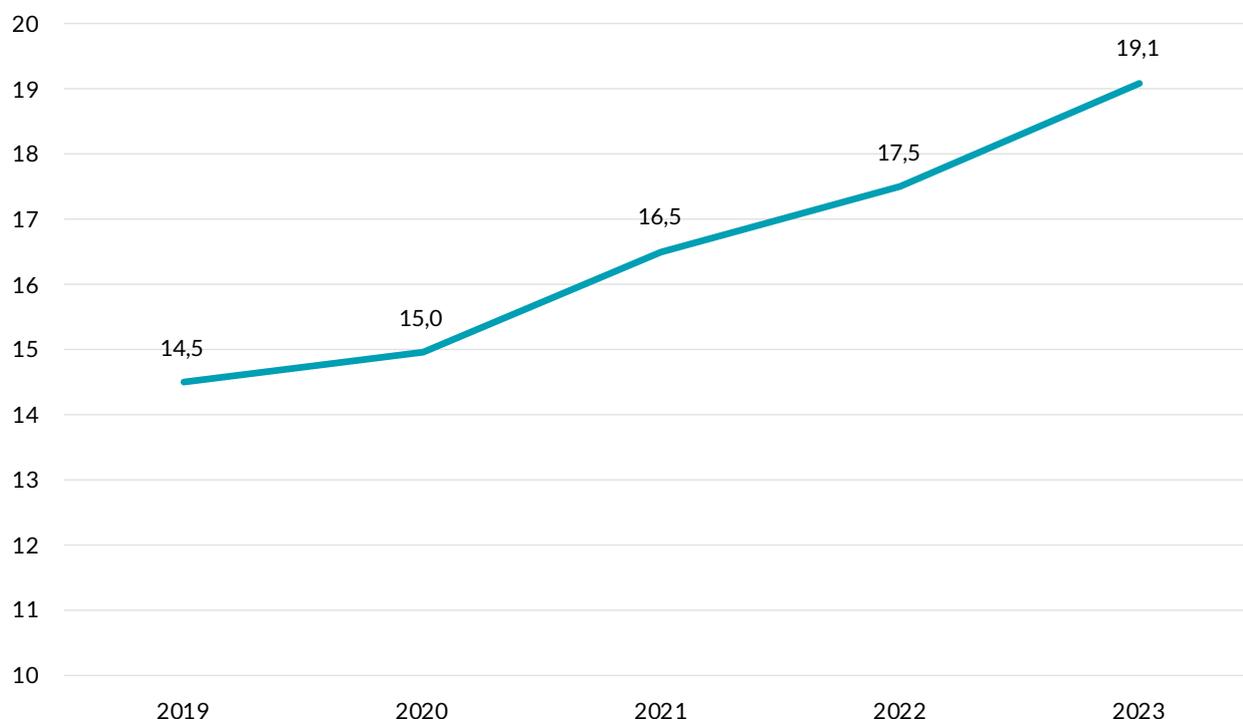
PRIORITISING PEACE

In a world where war and military expenditure is rampant, states need to forge a more peaceful path to a sustainable future for our children. This section outlines some of the policy areas that states must prioritise to build that future.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, DIPLOMACY, AND A RULES-BASED WORLD ORDER

International cooperation: Global challenges are best addressed through collaborative international, regional and bilateral diplomacy efforts. Dialogue and cooperation are also crucial in averting and defusing conflicts. Growing polarisation and isolationism, coupled with declining confidence in international institutions, hinders progress towards a peaceful, fair and rules-based world order. States should actively

FIGURE 16: THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VIOLENCE 2019–2023, \$US TRILLION, IN PPP TERMS



SOURCE: IEP, GLOBAL PEACE INDEX 2024

39 SIPRI. *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2023*. 2024.

40 Institute for Economics & Peace. *Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*. Sydney, June 2024.

support and participate in international organisations that uphold the rule of law. These organisations should be adapted to contemporary realities and promote fair agreements among nations.

Respect for international law and the prevention of impunity: Adherence to international law is fundamental to a peaceful and just world. The legitimacy of international law in armed conflict and legal proceedings is under attack, and many conflict-affected areas lack impartial investigative mechanisms. States should help strengthen institutions such as the International Criminal Court and other investigative bodies to ensure that violations of international law during armed conflict are thoroughly investigated, and perpetrators brought to justice. This includes prioritising the investigation and prosecution of crimes against children, which often go unpunished.⁴¹

Peaceful conflict-resolution mechanism: Conflict is unavoidable, but violent conflict is not. To address conflict through non-violent means, it is imperative that conflicting parties have access to robust and transparent local, national or global conflict-resolution mechanisms. For post-conflict societies, this includes transitional justice mechanisms responsive to the needs of the whole population. Transitional justice must acknowledge and address the unique needs of children as conflict victims, yet research shows that children are typically excluded from these processes.⁴² This oversight undermines the effectiveness of transitional justice and perpetuates cycles of violence.

Arms export control and disarmament: States should ensure that they are not exporting weapons to parties where there is an overriding risk they will be used to violate international humanitarian law or commit grave violations against. States should implement stricter controls and requirements for arms exports, including restrictions on re-export, regardless of the recipient. All states should support the UN's multilateral disarmament efforts, and ratify and implement key legal instruments, including the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017) and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (1997).

FINANCIAL INVESTMENT IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING

Education: Research shows that improved educational attainment is correlated with fewer conflicts and higher levels of peace.⁴³ An additional year of schooling reduces the likelihood a child will be recruited into an armed group by 13%.⁴⁴ Rights-based education can also increase conflict-resolution skills, transform harmful gender inequalities, and provide children with the knowledge and skills they need to help prevent conflict in childhood and as they grow into adults. So investing in education is crucial to addressing root causes of conflict and building stable and peaceful societies.

Climate and environment: Investing in climate action can mitigate conflicts stemming from resource scarcity and environmental degradation. In the past 60 years, at least 40% of internal conflicts have been directly connected to the exploitation of natural resources.⁴⁵ These conflicts often involve valuable commodities such as timber, diamonds, gold and oil, as well as scarce resources such as fertile land and water. Research indicates that conflicts over natural resources are twice as likely to recur.⁴⁶

Democratization, civil society and human rights: Democracies rarely wage wars against each other, and are at much lower risk of conflict or instability than autocracies.⁴⁷ 'Autocratization' leads to more wars and conflicts, and it is on the rise: 72% of the world's population now live in autocracies, up from 46% a decade ago, and a record 42 countries are in the process of becoming more autocratic.⁴⁸ Working with human rights defenders and wider civil society to help create stable, just and more democratic societies can act as a counterweight to authoritarian forces.⁴⁹ Addressing structural inequalities, including those based on historical discrimination and marginalisation, defuses conflict and increases participation across societies, leading to fairer and more stable systems.

Poverty alleviation: Poverty makes countries more prone to conflict.⁵⁰ It weakens government institutions and hinders the provision of public goods, making people more vulnerable to the impact of violence. Poverty can also increase the likelihood of people and communities participating in conflict because they

41 Save the Children. *Advancing Justice for Children: Innovations to Strengthen Accountability for Violations and Crimes Affecting Children in Conflict*. 2021.

42 Save the Children. *Building Peace with Children*. 2024. Save the Children. *Advancing Justice for Children: Innovations to strengthen accountability for violations and crimes affecting children in conflict*. 2021.

43 Institute for Economics & Peace and Global Partnership for Education. *Key Findings from Analyses on the Relationship Between Education and Peace*. April 2024.

44 UNDP. *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement*. 2023.

45 UNEP. *International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict*.

46 UNEP. *International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict*.

47 Blattman, Chris. *Why We Fight: The Roots of War and the Paths to Peace*. 2022.

48 V-Dem. *Case for democracy report*. 2023.

49 Paffenholz, Thania. *Civil society and peacebuilding*. 2015.

50 Goodhand, Jonathan. *Violent Conflict, Poverty, and Chronic Poverty*. CPRC Working Paper 6. London: Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2001.

have less to lose by doing so.⁵¹ Combating poverty can reduce the underlying causes of violence and instability.

The participation of children in peace processes:

Broad civil society participation should be central to peace-building efforts. Studies show that women's involvement significantly increases the likelihood of long-lasting peace agreements.⁵² Including children's perspectives can increase the legitimacy of a peace agreement and ensure it addresses child protection and child rights.⁵³

PEACE LITERACY

Advance peace research: To identify the most effective conflict-resolution strategies, we must invest in rigorous peace research. Many conflicts remain unresolved, and their shifting dynamics need dedicated research work.

Prioritise peace education: Fostering a culture of peace involves revising the education curricula to promote the qualitative values, attitudes and behaviours inherent in such a culture. Integrating conflict sensitive and multi-perspective education into primary, secondary, and higher education will equip young people with a deeper understanding of dialogue, conflict resolution, and human rights. Rights-based education can also increase conflict resolution skills in childhood, reduce gender inequalities, and provide children with the knowledge and skills they need to contribute to the prevention of conflict.

Enhance peace diplomacy capacity: Investing resources and expertise into peace diplomacy, enables a more robust capability for peaceful conflict resolution. Each conflict is unique in its own way and is therefore best resolved through deep contextual understanding and specialized expertise.

«HOPE TO ME IS WHEN
WORLD LEADERS
ENSURE THAT EVERY
CHILD ENJOYS THE
RIGHT TO EDUCATION.»

Nafisa, Nigeria

51 Humphreys, M., and Weinstein, J. M. «Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War.» *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008): 436-455.

52 UN Women. *Global Study on the Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325*. 2015.

53 Save the Children. *Building Peace with Children*. 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

473 million children (18.9% of the global child population) live within an active conflict zone. It is time for states to better protect children and build a more peaceful world - millions of lives and futures are at stake. The following recommendations are aimed specifically at states:

1. Prioritise national long-term plans for peacebuilding and conflict prevention

- Make gender-sensitive peace, diplomacy, conflict prevention and conflict resolution a priorities in budgets, plans and policies. Actively participate in international and regional organisations, as well as bilateral engagements, to support peace efforts.
- Strengthen and support peaceful gender-sensitive conflict-resolution mechanisms, including transitional justice processes that acknowledge and address the unique needs of children as conflict victims and survivors.
- Increase investment in addressing the evidence-based root causes and drivers of conflicts. Fund education programmes, climate and environmental action, gender equality and social justice, child protection, poverty reduction, democracy-building, civil society and human rights. Such investment is crucial to building individual, familial, and community resilience to shocks, and creating a more just, equal and peaceful world for all.
- Advance peace research to find the best conflict-resolution methods and strategies to foster a lasting and inclusive peace.
- Strengthen peace literacy, integrating peace education into teaching programmes at all educational levels. Invest in and support peace diplomacy.
- Implement stricter controls and requirements for arms exports, such as end-user agreements with re-export clauses, regardless of the recipient.
- Sign and ratify the International Arms Trade Treaty, ensuring steps are taken to suspend and/or ban the supply, export or transfer of arms, weapons and other military assets, including dual-use goods, to parties to conflict

where there is an overriding risk that such items may be used to commit or facilitate violations of IHL or IHRL, or other serious crimes against civilians, including children.

- Sign and ratify the Mine Convention, the Cluster Munitions Conventions and the Nuclear Treaty. Encourage and support other states to do the same.

2. Uphold standards of conduct in conflict

- Take all possible measures to protect children in armed conflict, in line with IHL and other applicable international laws and standards in armed conflict. Consistently demand that all parties to conflict adhere to these standards, regardless of the context.
- Endorse and fully implement the SSD and its guidelines on protecting education during conflict, ensuring its comprehensive integration into national policies and practices – and encourage other states to do the same.
- Endorse and fully implement the EWIPA to help protect civilians from the impact of explosive weapons. Encourage and support other states to do the same.
- Ratify and fully implement international instruments to protect children from recruitment into armed groups, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Paris Principles, and the Paris Commitments. Encourage other states to do the same.
- Ensure that all children associated with armed forces and groups, including those with alleged or actual affiliation with proscribed groups, are recognised first and foremost as victims, and that their protection and rights are prioritised.
- Make sure children are only detained as a last resort and for the shortest time possible, and that their rights and protection are prioritised in line with international juvenile justice standards, as well as IHRL.
- Work with parties to armed conflict to ensure their full compliance with IHL, IHRL and

International Refugee Law, and their respect for norms and standards on civilian protection. This includes strengthening training and other capacity-building measures to foster a culture of respect for civilian protection. It also means ensuring partners and allies:

- ✓ understand and consider the reverberating effects of military action on civilians and civilian infrastructure
 - ✓ have the knowledge and skills to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of civilian populations, including the indispensable role of mitigating civilian harm from military actions
 - ✓ record casualties according to internationally agreed standards.
- Develop a national strategy for the protection of children in conflict that brings together diplomacy, military policies and operational procedures, and humanitarian, development and peace approaches.
 - Support and fund the resourcing and embedding of child protection and children's rights expertise in all peacekeeping missions – UN, AU, EU, NATO, and those of other regional organisations.

3. Hold perpetrators to account

- Ensure that international and national accountability mechanisms prioritise the effective investigation and prosecution of crimes and violations against children. This should involve:
 - ✓ making sure crimes against children are explicitly included in their mandate
 - ✓ resourcing dedicated child-specific and gender-sensitive expertise
 - ✓ strengthening collaboration and exchange of information between accountability mechanisms to avoid re-traumatising survivors, especially children.
- Diplomatically and financially support the mandate of the UN Special Representative on children and armed conflict.
- Advocate for the complete, accurate and impartial listing of perpetrators in the UN Secretary-General's annual CAAC report.
- Invest financial and diplomatic resources in the UN's monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRO) for child-rights violations in conflict, including the tracking of age- and sex-disaggregated data.
- Provide diplomatic and financial support for the African Union's work on children and armed conflict.

For members of the UN Security Council:

- Actively support – and refrain from impeding or vetoing – Security Council action to hold perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights in conflict to account. Council members have a particular responsibility to champion adherence to IHL, promote independent accountability mechanisms, identify and call out perpetrators, and make full use of the tools and resolutions available to the Security Council to protect children from grave rights violations.

4. Support children's resilience and recovery

- Recognise the life-saving importance of child protection, protection from gender-based violence, and education in emergencies work. Commit to closing the funding gap in these sectors by prioritising and investing in children and their protection. This includes:
 - ✓ scaling up sustainable, multi-year, flexible, standalone child protection and education in emergencies support to all children affected by conflict, including safe spaces and child protection case management; family strengthening and support to unaccompanied and separated children; mental health and psychosocial support services; and strengthening community-level child protection mechanisms and education services.
 - ✓ ensuring child protection is integrated and mainstreamed in multi-sector, gender-, age- and disability-responsive programmes
 - ✓ increasing investment in primary prevention, guided by the Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, to address the root causes of harm to children within a population or community.
- Tackle the political barriers that preclude investment in children's protection, education, resilience and early recovery.
- Ensure that support is provided in line with children's needs and dignity, and the child protection and education-in-emergencies minimum standards.
- Fulfil commitments made through the Grand Bargain by allocating at least 25% of humanitarian funding directly or as directly as possible to local and national organisations, including child- and youth-led groups.

5. Protect humanitarian access and action

- Engage, directly or indirectly, with all parties to conflict to ensure that children and other civilians can safely access life-saving assistance, protection and basic needs support.

- Prioritise and advocate for principled humanitarian action, avoiding undue interference or politicisation of aid by host state authorities, non-state actors and donor governments.
- Ensure that sanctions and counter-terrorism measures do not prevent aid reaching those in need, including by fully implementing the standing humanitarian exemption across UN sanctions regimes established by UN Security Council Resolution 2664.

6. Listen to and meaningfully involve children

- Meaningfully, safely and systematically include children in peace processes, conflict prevention initiatives, and the development of policies and programmes aimed at protecting children affected by armed conflict.
- Ensure the full participation of children in all global, regional and national fora where issues affecting their rights and futures are discussed, including conflict and climate change.

«IT IS IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT PEACE, SO AS NOT TO NORMALIZE VIOLENCE.»

Cristina, Columbia



PHOTO: ESPEN AARSVOLD / SAVE THE CHILDREN

YULIA, 14, FROM UKRAINE:

- LEADERS NEED TO BE MORE HONEST

«I used to dream about a new phone, and that everything would be fine, that everyone would be healthy. Now I think that most Ukrainians have only one dream: that the war will end, that peace will come and that everything will be fine.»

Yulia lives in the west of Ukraine where a lot of internally displaced people from the east have settled. She aims to go to medical college in the future to become a rehabilitation therapist, as such a profession will be much needed in Ukraine.

«From the very beginning, when it all started, nobody understood anything in the first days. I still thought that we would go to school soon, [that] everything would be fine, but in fact it was not like that. I moved to the village with my parents. We switched to distance learning at first. We studied like that for about half a semester.

Then summer started and the next year we went to school. Of course, there were alarms in school. We have all been going down to the shelter. But somehow you still have to study. If the air raids were there every day for a week, then yes, we could miss three or four lessons, we were constantly staying in a shelter.»

«Because of the war and all these alarms, students and children become anxious and stressed. It's hard. I try not to think. I know that I have to rebuild our country, I have to be smart and study further.»

If you could give a message to the leaders of your country, what would you tell them?

«To be more honest, to tell people the truth, not to give up. First of all, we need to fight corruption.»

METHODOLOGY ANNEX

The findings presented in this report are based on the following main methods and sources set out below. We have included limitations associated with each of them.

- 1. Updated analysis on the number and share of children living in conflict zones conducted by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).** The core dataset used to map conflict patterns in this report is the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Georeferenced Event Data Set (UCDP GED) until 2023. To estimate the number of children living in conflict areas, and populations more generally, PRIO cross-referenced the conflict data with population data from the Gridded Population of the World (GPW) and from the UN World Population Prospects. PRIO uses UCDP's definition of armed conflict: 'armed force used by an organized actor against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year'. A 'conflict zone' is defined as an area within 50km of where one or more conflict incidents take place in a given year, within the borders of a country.
- 2. Analysis of the 2024 UN annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (CAAC),** based on data reported and verified in 2023. The analysis also draws on previous Save the Children mapping of the number of grave violations in the 2005–23 CAAC reports. The CAAC report tracks military use of schools and hospitals, but does not record them as grave violations. In this report, military use of schools and hospitals are also considered grave violations. The verified incidents of use is therefore added to the 'attacks on schools and hospitals' category of grave violations. This methodology is chosen to give a fuller picture of the harm experienced by children in each country context.

The data in the UN's annual CAAC reports inevitably only paints a partial picture due to access restrictions, security threats and limited resources. This means not all cases can be reported and verified, and are therefore not included in the

report. Although the numbers of verified violations are likely to be just the tip of the iceberg, the trends are measurable and reflect the reality we see in conflict zones today. There is also a time-lag. The reporting and verifying process takes time, so some violations that have taken place in a given year might only be included in the report covering the following year.

- 3. Our index of the worst conflict-affected countries for children combines data on children at risk of conflict from PRIO with evidence on reported instances of grave violations from the annual UN CAAC reports.** We calculate risk scores individually for each of the two dimensions, with the final score being the average of both dimensions. As with the data available for children at risk, we calculate the number of grave violations relative to the size of child population. Finally, we compare individual countries against the full distribution of each studied issue over all countries and years. We calculate this by quintiles (1=best 20%, 5=worst 20% of cases) and then place each country within this distribution. This means we are calculating a comparable score of 1-5 for every indicator. We then average the indicators by dimensions (PRIO and grave violations) and finally create a final average of those two.

Dimension 1:

Children at risk of conflict

- Children living in a conflict zone (% of total child population)
- Battle deaths (% of total population)

Dimension 2:

Grave violations against children

- Sexual violence
- Denial of humanitarian access
- Attacks on schools and hospitals
- Abductions
- Killed and maimed
- Recruit as child soldiers

4. **Legal and political commitments.** This framework is built on two dimensions that provide an assessment of the states' commitments to protect children in armed conflict. The first dimension is legal, and consists of international legal instruments that provide general, or special,

protection to children in armed conflict. The second dimension is political and consists of three political declarations that states can voluntarily endorse, as a special commitment to safeguarding children and their rights during armed conflict.

Legal dimension

LEGAL INSTRUMENT	INDICATOR NAME	DESCRIPTION	RELEVANCE
Geneva Conventions I-IV	GC I-IV 1949	Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field. Convention (II) for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea. Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.	The GC I-IV common article 3 protects children as "persons taking no active part in the hostilities", ie., the conventions provide for the general protection of children, as members of the civilian population. GC IV is more specific as it is relative to the protection of civilians in time of war.
Additional Protocol I	AP I 1977	Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977.	Protocol I under article 77, states that: "Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason." The principle of the special protection of children during international armed conflicts is thus explicitly laid down.
Additional Protocol II	AP II 1977	Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977.	Protocol II of 1977 codifies the principles according to which the civilian population, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack.
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	CRC 1989	Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989	The convention stipulates the protection of children and fulfilment of their rights.
Optional Protocol CRC	Opt Prot. CRC 2000	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. New York, 25 May 2000.	Protection of children from taking active part in hostilities or being recruited into the armed forces.
Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court	ICC Statute 1998	Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 17 July 1998	The Rome Statute defines conscription of children under 15 as a war crime. States' commitment to ensuring accountability and combating impunity for international crime is relevant for the protection of children in armed conflict.

Mine Convention	AP Mine Ban Conv. 1997	Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction. Oslo, 18 September 1997.	Research indicates that children are particularly at risk of death or injury as a result of landmines.
Arms Trade Treaty	ATT 2013	Arms Trade Treaty, 2 April 2013	Under article 7 (4) of the ATT, the export authorities must consider the risk of the arms being used to commit serious acts of gender-based violence or violence against women and children.
Nuclear Treaty	TPNW 2017	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 7 July 2017	Nuclear weapons challenge the basic premises of IHL: distinction, proportionality and humanity.

Political dimension

LEGAL INSTRUMENT	INDICATOR NAME	DESCRIPTION	RELEVANCE
Safe Schools Declaration	Safe School Declaration	The Safe Schools Declaration was developed with the objective of avoiding military use of schools and strengthening the protection of children and education in conflict.	States' commitment to avoiding the military use of schools and strengthening the protection of children and education in conflict is relevant to the protection of children in armed conflict.
The political declaration on EWIPA	EWIPA	The Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.	Between 2018 and 2022, explosive weapons were responsible for nearly half – 49.8% – of the more than 47,500 instances of children killed and maimed that were verified by the UN in more than 24 conflict zones globally. The vast majority of these instances occurred in populated areas. The use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) poses a threat to children worldwide.
The Paris Commitments	Paris Commitments	Endorsement of the commitment/principles.	Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups to prevent recruitment or use, securing the release of, protecting, and reintegrating children who have been associated with an armed force or armed group.

The following overview describes the legal and political instruments, and explains their relevance to the protection of children in armed conflict. All indicators in the framework are the individual datasets that make up the commitment-index, for example, whether

the UN member state is party to the Geneva Conventions I-IV or not. Indicators have been chosen on the basis of being open source and continuous, globally consistent and replicable from year to year based on objective information.

All state's commitments⁵⁴

Country	LEGAL									POLITICAL		
	GC I-IV 1949	AP I 1977	AP II 1977	CRC 1989	Opt Prot. CRC 2000	GC I-IV 1949	ICC Statute 1998	AP Mine Ban Conv. 1997	TPNW 2017	Safe School Declaration	EWIPA	The Paris Commitments/ Principles
Afghanistan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Albania	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Algeria	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Andorra	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Angola	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Antigua and Barbuda	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Argentina	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Armenia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Australia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Austria	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Azerbaijan	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Bahamas	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
Bahrain	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Bangladesh	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Barbados	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
Belarus	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Belgium	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Belize	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Benin	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Bhutan	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Bolivia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES
Bosnia and Herzegovina	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Botswana	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Brazil	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Brunei Darussalam	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

54 Includes entities that are not UN Member States, but that have signed one or more instruments.

Bulgaria	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Burkina Faso	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES								
Burundi	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES							
Cabo Verde	YES	NO	YES	YES									
Cambodia	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES							
Cameroon	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Canada	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Central African Republic	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Chad	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES								
Chile	YES												
China	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES
Colombia	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES							
Comoros	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Congo	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES							
Cook Islands	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Costa Rica	YES												
Côte d'Ivoire	YES	NO	NO	YES									
Croatia	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Cuba	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Cyprus	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Czech Republic	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Democratic Republic of Congo	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES							
Denmark	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Djibouti	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES							
Dominica	YES	NO	NO	NO									
Dominican Republic	YES												
Ecuador	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES							
Egypt	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO						
El Salvador	YES	NO											
Equatorial Guinea	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Eritrea	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Estonia	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES								
Eswatini	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ethiopia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Fiji	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO							

Finland	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
France	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Gabon	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES								
Gambia	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES						
Georgia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Germany	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Ghana	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Greece	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Grenada	YES	NO	NO	NO									
Guatemala	YES												
Guinea	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES								
Guinea-Bissau	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES
Guyana	YES	NO											
Haiti	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Holy See	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Honduras	YES	NO	NO										
Hungary	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES								
Iceland	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
India	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO							
Indonesia	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Iraq	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Ireland	YES												
Iran	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO								
Israel	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO							
Italy	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Jamaica	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Japan	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES								
Jordan	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES						
Kazakhstan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Kenya	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO						
Kiribati	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO
Kuwait	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Kyrgyzstan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO							
Lao People's Democratic Republic	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES
Latvia	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES								

Lebanon	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Lesotho	YES	NO	NO	NO								
Liberia	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Libya	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO						
Liechtenstein	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES							
Lithuania	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES							
Luxembourg	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES							
Madagascar	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO							
Malawi	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO						
Malaysia	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Maldives	YES	NO										
Mali	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES							
Malta	YES											
Marshall Islands	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Mauritania	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES
Mauritius	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO							
Mexico	YES	YES	NO	YES								
Micronesia (Federated States of)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO						
Monaco	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Mongolia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Montenegro	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES							
Morocco	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Mozambique	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Myanmar	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Namibia	YES	NO	NO									
Nauru	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Nepal	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Netherlands	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES							
New Zealand	YES											
Nicaragua	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Niger	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES							
Nigeria	YES	NO	NO									
Niue	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
North Korea	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO

North Macedonia	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Norway	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Pakistan	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO							
Palau	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
occupied Palestinian territory	YES	NO											
Panama	YES	NO	YES										
Papua New Guinea	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Paraguay	YES	NO	YES										
Peru	YES												
Philippines	YES	NO	YES	NO									
Poland	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES								
Portugal	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Qatar	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Moldova	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Romania	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Russian Federation	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES						
Rwanda	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Saint Kitts and Nevis	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
Saint Lucia	YES	NO	NO	NO									
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	YES	NO	YES	NO									
Samoa	YES	NO	NO										
San Marino	YES												
Sao Tome and Principe	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Saudi Arabia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES						
Senegal	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Serbia	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Seychelles	YES	NO	YES										
Sierra Leone	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Singapore	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO							
Slovakia	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Slovenia	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Solomon Islands	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Somalia	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES

South Africa	YES	NO	YES										
South Korea	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES						
South Sudan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Spain	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Sri Lanka	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Sudan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES
Suriname	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO								
Sweden	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Switzerland	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Syria	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO						
Tajikistan	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO							
Thailand	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Timor-Leste	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES							
Togo	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Tonga	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO							
Trinidad and Tobago	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Tunisia	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES						
Turkmenistan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Tuvalu	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Türkiye	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Uganda	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES							
Ukraine	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES
United Arab Emirates	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO							
United Kingdom	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES								
Tanzania	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO							
United States of America	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Uruguay	YES												
Uzbekistan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO						
Vanuatu	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO							
Venezuela	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO							
Vietnam	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Yemen	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES
Zambia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Zimbabwe	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

5. Peace and conflict prevention expenditure

The following activities (purpose codes) are included in the OECD's definition of peace and conflict prevention:

Core peacebuilding (152)	
	Basic safety and security / prevention
15210	Security system management and reform
15220	Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution
15230	Participation in international peacekeeping operations
15240	Reintegration and small arms and light weapons (SALW) control
15250	Removal of landmines and explosive remnants of war
15261	Child soldiers (prevention and demobilisation)
Secondary peacebuilding (151)	
	Basic safety and security / prevention
15110	Public sector policy and administrative management
15111	Public financial management
15112	Decentralisation and support to subnational government
	Inclusive political processes
15113	Anti-corruption organisations and institutions
15130	Legal and judicial development
15150	Democratic participation and civil society
15152	Legislatures and political parties
15153	Media and free flow of information
15160	Human rights
15170	Women's rights organisations and movements, and government institutions
15180	Ending violence against women and girls
15190	Facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility

6. Analysis of problematic arms transfers

Our analysis of problematic arms transfers crosses the annex of the last UN Secretary-General's annual CAAC report, which lists parties to armed conflict that have committed grave violations against children,

with the most comprehensive database worldwide on international arms transfers. The database is hosted by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). We use the newest available version of the SIPRI database, updated in March 2024. For this report we only look at the arms delivery data for 2023.

NADIA, 18, FROM GAZA:

- I WISH FOR MORE HUMANITY IN THIS WORLD

«My advice to anyone going through tough times is to be patient because, one day, there will be a good time. After hardship comes relief.»

Nadia, an 18-year-old girl, lives with her mother, a sister, and two brothers. She dreams of finishing her studies with good grades and eventually graduating from university. Her wish is to travel abroad, get to know new countries, and reunite with her father after the war ends. Nadia's message to leaders is to think thoroughly before making decisions, so as to ensure peace and cooperation in the world.

She longs for the war in Gaza to end, so its people can recover and Gaza can return to its former beauty. Passionate about becoming a businesswoman, Nadia hopes to support Gaza through her future success. She enjoys playing music, singing and watching TV.

Nadia believes that patience is key during tough times, as relief follows hardship. She recalls her home

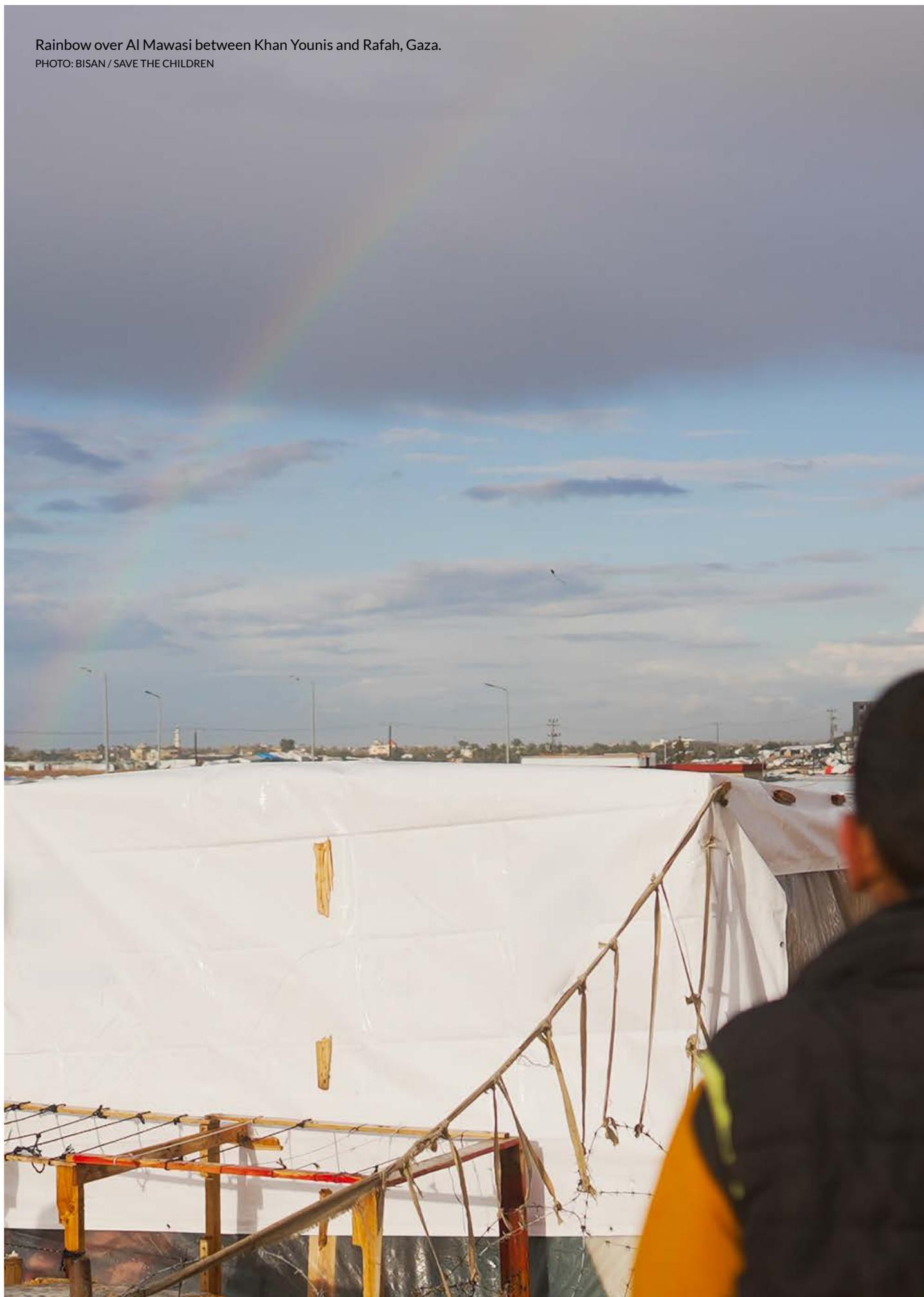
in Gaza as a place of warmth and happy times, which drastically changed after the war. Her journey so far has been tiring, involving multiple displacements. Despite the challenges, Nadia finds hope in familiar faces at her new school and expresses gratitude to Save the Children for the cash assistance that supported her studies. Her favorite subjects are culture, history and mathematics.

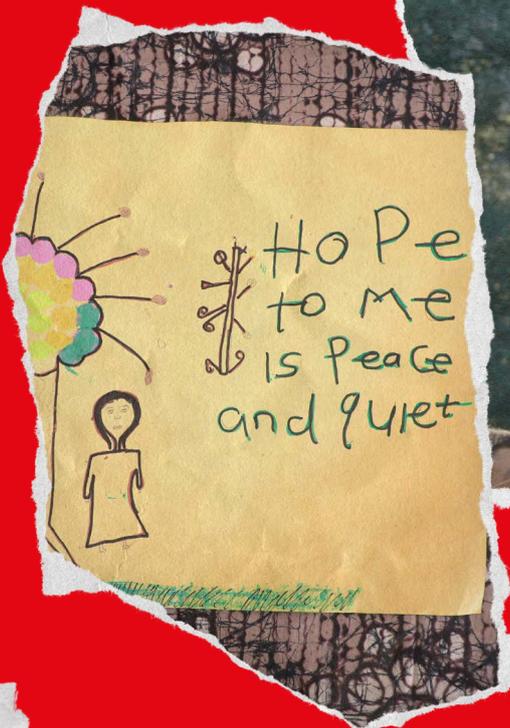
«My message to leaders and decision-makers is to not rush into decisions, as not everything they think is right might actually be right. Things need to be thought through thoroughly before making decisions.»

«I wish for more humanity in this world. For the world to live in peace, unity and cooperation are essential, along with dialogue and discussions.»

«Gaza was one of the most beautiful cities, and it might become even better in the future, allowing us to live like before.»

Rainbow over Al Mawasi between Khan Younis and Rafah, Gaza.
PHOTO: BISAN / SAVE THE CHILDREN





«I want to remind you that cemeteries are calm too. Silence is not worth anything. Silence does not mean peace.»
-Shirin Ebadi



data.stopwaronchildren.org

