

# STOP THE WAR ON CHILDREN



**THE  
FORGOTTEN  
ONES**



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.

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Names of children portrayed in case studies have been changed to protect identities.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Stop the War on Children: The Forgotten Ones* is the seventh report in the series from Save the Children.

**“THE SITUATION IS TERRIFYING, CHILDREN ARE DYING AND WE’VE BEEN BOMBARDED FROM ALL DIRECTIONS.”**

Yasmine age 11, Gaza Strip

As the world endured the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, children affected by conflict continued to suffer grave violations of their rights. This latest report in Save the Children’s ‘Stop the War on Children’ series identifies deeply concerning trends for the safety and wellbeing of children living in conflict areas. This comes from analysis of the 2022 report of the United Nations Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, combined with updated numbers from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) of children living in conflict zones (defined as areas within 50km of a conflict incident each year). Both sources cover the year 2021. Based on these we have identified the 10 worst conflict countries to be a child.

In addition, with massive media attention on the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, this report presents a new analysis by media monitoring service Meltwater that examines how coverage of conflict affected countries has fared since then.

## KEY FINDINGS:

- Approximately 449 million children – globally, one child out of six – lived in a conflict zone in 2021.
- Some 230 million children lived in high-intensity conflict countries in 2021 – meaning they lived in countries with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in one calendar year. This is an alarming 9% increase from the previous year.
- Africa was the region with the greatest number of children affected by conflict, with about 180 million children living in conflict zones.
- In the Middle East, almost one-third of children were living in conflict zones in 2021, a higher proportion than in any other region.

- A total of 24,515 grave violations against children were verified in 2021, a 9% decrease from 2020, and the lowest in five years. However, not all cases and incidents are captured by the monitoring and reporting mechanism.
- The number of children killed and maimed that is recorded in the 2022 UN annual report on children and armed conflict has been decreasing for four consecutive years, from 12,125 in 2018 to 8,113 in 2021. That is still an average of 22 children being killed or injured a day in 2021. The dramatic increase in overall battle deaths over the same period, along with the growing number of children living in high intensity conflict, suggests, however, that the decrease might be due to under-reporting and difficulties in verifying reports, rather than an actual positive trend.
- From 2019 to 2021, compared with previous years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of reported and verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access.
- According to our analysis, Yemen, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo top the list of the ten worst conflict affected countries to be a child in 2021.
- Between January and end of September 2022, Ukraine received five times more media coverage than the combined coverage of the ten worst conflict affected countries to be a child in 2021.
- Over the same period, media coverage of the conflict in Yemen – which topped the list as the worst conflict country to be a child – was just 2.3% of the media coverage given to the Ukraine conflict.
- The humanitarian response plans in the 10 worst conflict affected countries to be a child in 2021 are on average only 43% funded as of 4 November 2022. With growing humanitarian needs globally, the prevailing narrative has been that there are simply not enough resources to respond to needs everywhere. However, the escalation of the Ukraine crisis, and the immediate and effective response from donors have shown that when there is collective political and financial will, the aid system can move effectively and efficiently to ensure children most in need are supported.

**“TWO OF MY CHILDREN DIED IN AN EXPLOSION AND TWO WERE INJURED”**

“Two of my children died due to an explosion and two were injured... I heard an explosion, and I don’t know what happened after that. The next thing I knew, four of my children were lying on the ground. I couldn’t understand what had happened to them. When I started shouting people came to help and they took all four children to hospital.”

Three years ago, Farah and four of her children were caught up in an explosion near their house in Sar-e-Pul province, Afghanistan. Two of her children – Naseema, age 12, and Mirwais, 7 – survived, but the other two children died in hospital from their injuries. Farah’s

mental health was severely affected by the traumatic events she’d experienced. She couldn’t sleep, she cried continuously, she had panic attacks and found it very challenging to interact with her friends and family.

“I want my children to rest in peace. But I worry about my other two children, about their health,” says Farah. “I worry about the shrapnel that’s still in my son’s skull. My daughter always complains about the pain in her stomach.”

PHOTO: SACHA MYERS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

The international community’s response to the escalation of conflict in Ukraine should be a lesson in what is possible. All children in all their diversity who are caught up in conflict must be given the attention, solidarity, and protection they are entitled to and that they need to rebuild their lives.

Children can be incredibly resilient, and, with the right support, they can recover from the toughest situations, and thrive. Save the Children calls on countries around the world to do far more to support children in conflict zones with humanitarian aid – and, as this report sets out, to stop the war on children.

There is both a moral and a strategic imperative to act. If we do nothing, we risk the continued breakdown of hard-fought standards and legal progress enshrining

the rights of children living in conflict, ushering in a world of unchecked barbarity, inhumanity and injustice that will have far-reaching consequences both for children today and for future generations.

Save the Children calls on all duty-bearers and actors with influence over the lives of children living in conflict settings to take practical action across three key themes:

- uphold international laws and standards
- hold violators to account
- support children’s resilience and recovery



Issac, aged 14 from Taiz in Yemen, was shot by a sniper while he was playing football at school. Here with a friend. You can read more about Isaac on page 26.

PHOTO: ALBARAA MANSOOR / SAVE THE CHILDREN





# 1 CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES

## ONE CHILD IN SIX IS GROWING UP IN A CONFLICT AREA

In 2021, approximately 449 million children, or more than one-sixth of children globally, lived in a conflict zone, meaning within 50km of a conflict incident in any given year (see methodology page 35). This number is a slight decrease of one percentage point from 2020.<sup>1</sup>

In 2021, approximately 1.6 billion children – more than two-thirds of children globally – were living in a conflict affected country, meaning in a country where conflict incidents have occurred. Out of these children, as many as 230 million lived in high-intensity conflict, which means they lived in conflict affected countries with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths over the year. This represents an alarming 9% increase from the previous year.

IN 2021, APPROXIMATELY 1.6 BILLION CHILDREN WERE LIVING IN A CONFLICT AFFECTED COUNTRY, MEANING IN A COUNTRY WHERE CONFLICT INCIDENTS HAVE OCCURRED.

## SOME DEFINITIONS:

**Battle-related deaths:** the use of armed force between warring parties in a conflict, be it state-based or non-state, resulting in deaths. We use the term to include both combatant and civilian deaths, and adults and children.

**Conflict/armed conflict:** when armed force is used by an organised actor against another organised actor or against civilians, resulting in:

- 1–24 battle-related deaths in one calendar year (low-intensity conflict)
- 25–999 battle deaths in one calendar year (medium-intensity conflict)
- 1,000 or more battle-related deaths in one calendar year (high-intensity conflict).

**Conflict affected countries:** countries with at least one battle death in one calendar year (low-/medium-/high-intensity conflict as above).

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

**Conflict zone/area** (or an area impacted by conflict): an area within the borders of a country and within 50km from where one or more conflict incidents takes place in a given year.

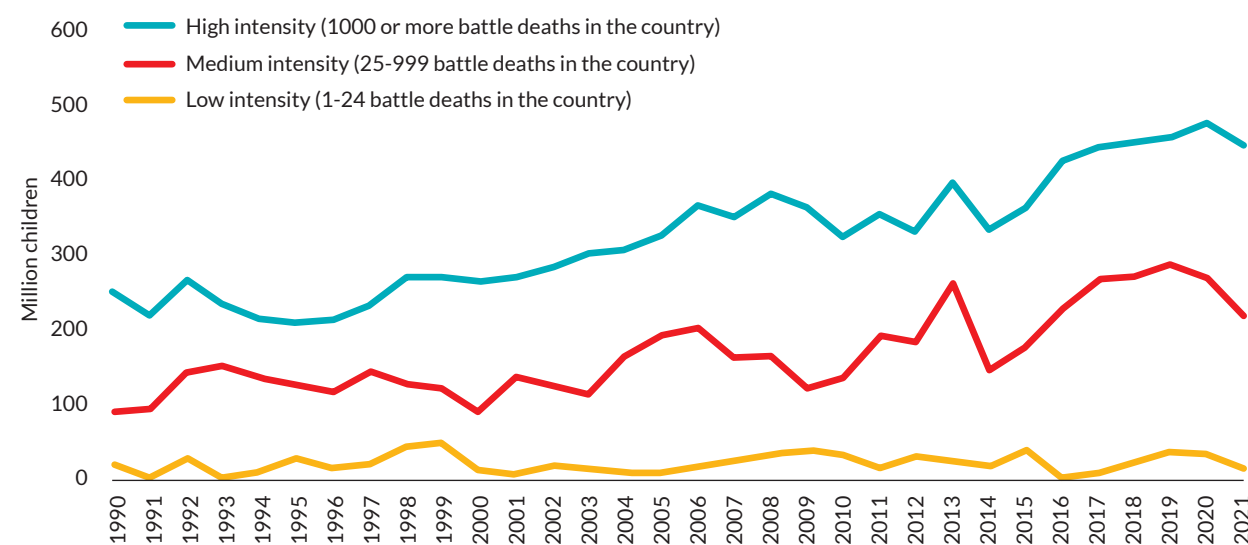
**Children living in conflict affected areas:** children who reside within conflict zones.

## MORE CHILDREN EXPOSED TO INTENSE CONFLICT

As Figure 1 shows, the overall number of children living in conflict zones has decreased for the first time since 2014. However, the number of children living in areas of more intense conflicts has increased. Overall, slightly fewer children are exposed to conflict but, among those who are, a larger proportion live in areas with more intense fighting.

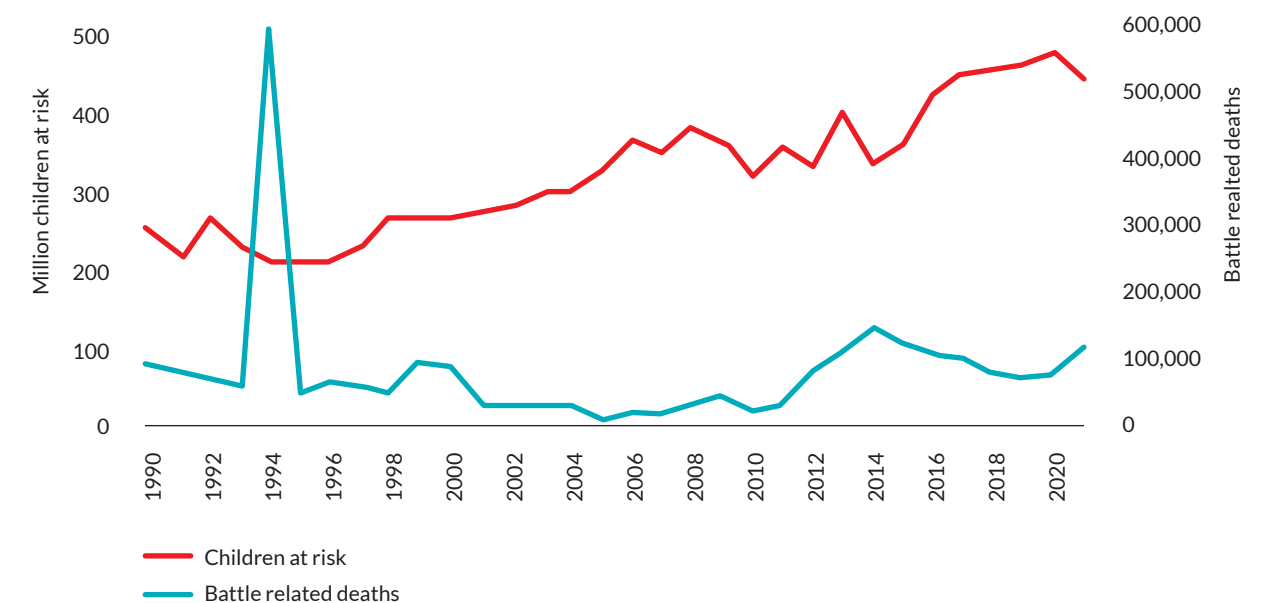
From 2020 to 2021, there was a substantial increase in battle-related deaths globally (see Figure 2). The increase in battle deaths is caused mainly by events in Afghanistan in August and September 2021, and intensified conflict in Yemen. However, the increase in battle deaths did not affect the total number of children affected by conflict in 2021 given children were already exposed to conflict prior to these developments.

FIGURE 1. MANY MORE CHILDREN ARE GROWING UP IN WAR TODAY THAN 30 YEARS AGO  
CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT, BY CONFLICT INTENSITY, 1990–2021



SOURCE: UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM GEOREFERENCED EVENT DATASET (UCDP GED) DATASET V.22.1 AND UN (2019) WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS

FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF CHILDREN AT RISK OF CONFLICT AND TOTAL BATTLE DEATHS, 1990-2021



SOURCE: UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM GEOREFERENCED EVENT DATASET (UCDP GED) DATASET V.22.1 AND UN (2019) WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS

## REGIONAL TRENDS

As shown in Figure 3, in 2021 Africa was the continent with the most conflict affected children, with approximately 180 million children living in conflict zones. Asia followed, with approximately 152 million children living in conflict zones. In the Americas the number was 64 million, in the Middle East it was 49 million, while in Europe 19 million children were exposed to conflict.

**Number of conflict affected children:** The number of children living in conflict zones  
**Share of children who are conflict affected:** Share of children within a country or a region living in conflict zones, relative to overall child population within the country or region.

However, to capture the regional risk to children, these numbers must be considered relative to the overall regional population size. As Figure 4 highlights, although Africa had the largest number of children

living in conflict zones in 2021, it also had a high number of children living in peaceful areas.

The relative share of children living in conflict zones was slightly higher in the Middle East. Here, almost one-third of children were living in conflict zones in 2021, a higher proportion than in any other region.

A positive for the Middle East – shown in Figure 5 – is the sharp downward trend in the number of children living in conflict since 2017. In Africa, however, we see a sharp increase during the same period, though going slightly down between 2020 and 2021. The Americas have seen an increase in the proportion of children exposed to conflict over the past five years, with 22% of children in conflict zones, higher than at any point in the previous three decades. In Europe and Asia, the share of children exposed to conflict has remained at the same level for the last four years, with a slight decrease from 2020 to 2021. However, we expect to see the numbers for 2022 increase substantially for Europe because of the war in Ukraine.

FIGURE 3. THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES IS IN AFRICA (2021)

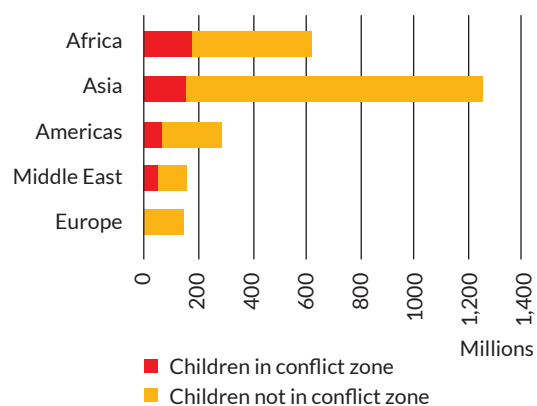
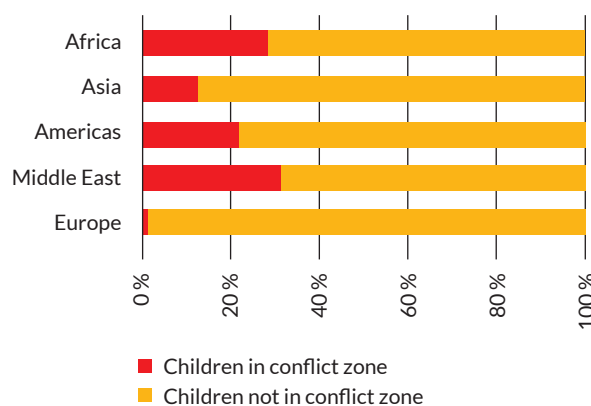
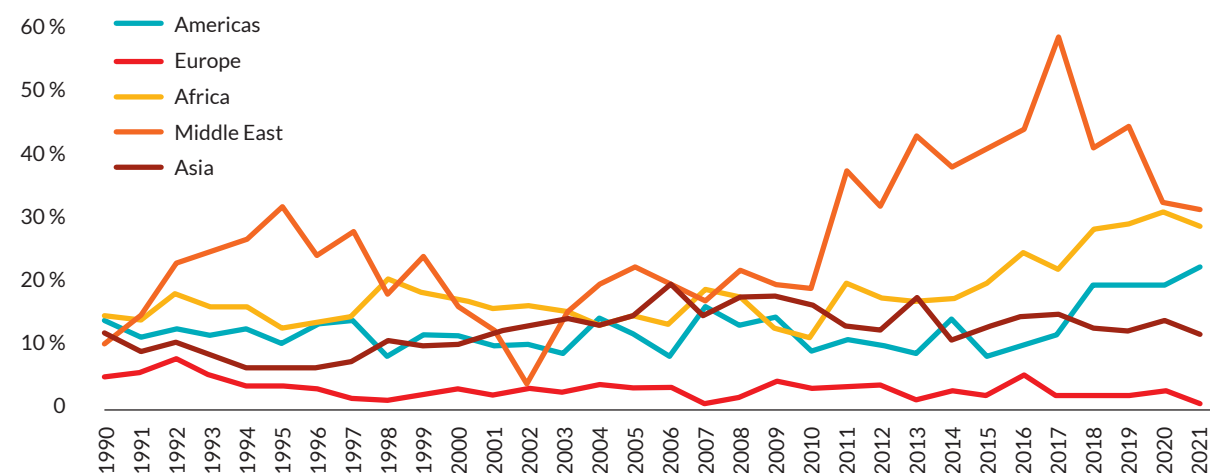


FIGURE 4. THE HIGHEST SHARE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES IS IN THE MIDDLE EAST (2021)



SOURCE: UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM GEOREFERENCED EVENT DATASET (UCDP GED) DATASET V.22.1 AND UN (2019) WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS

FIGURE 5. SHARE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT 1990–2021, BY REGION



SOURCE: UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM GEOREFERENCED EVENT DATASET (UCDP GED) DATASET V.22.1 AND UN (2019) WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS

# 2 GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

As the world endured the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, children living in areas affected by conflict continued to suffer heavily from the six grave violations of children's rights in conflict (see box). Overall, 24,515 grave violations against children were reported and verified in 2021, as presented in the annual UN report on children and armed conflict.<sup>2</sup> This is a slight decline from the previous year, and the lowest in five years.

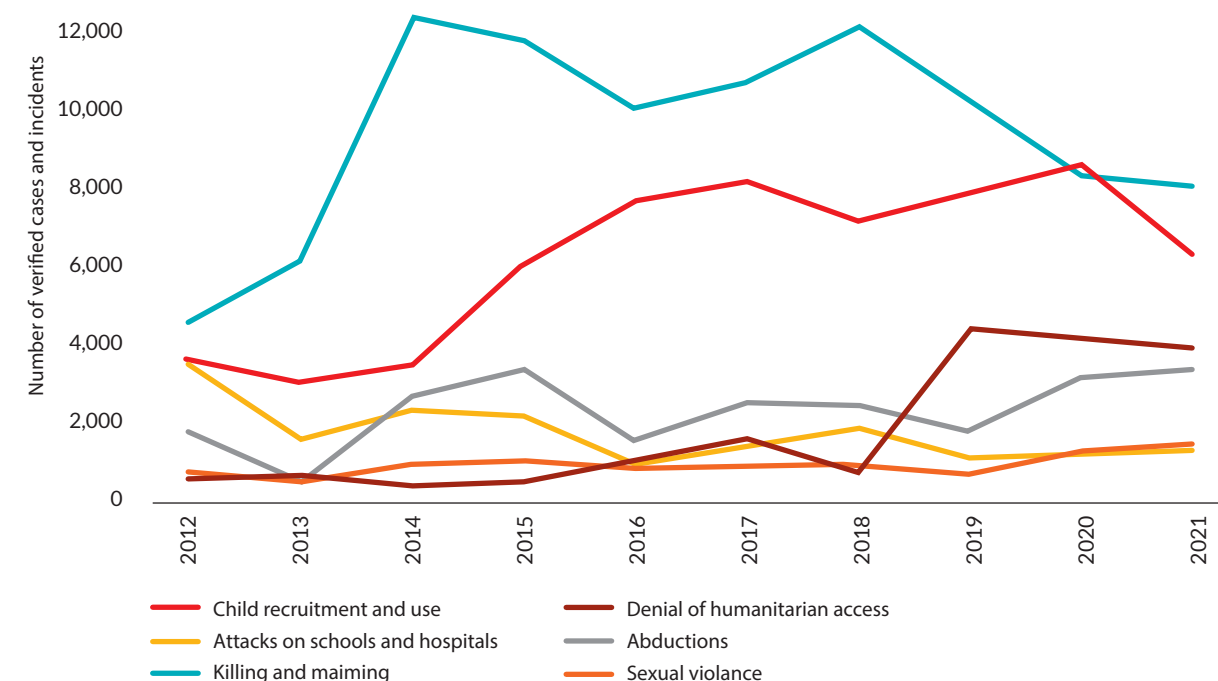
In 2021, children in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), Somalia, Syria and Yemen suffered the highest number of verified violations.

## Grave violations against children in conflict

The UN Security Council set out in 1999 the following six grave violations against children in conflict:

- killing and maiming of children
- recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups
- abduction of children
- attacks on schools or hospitals
- denial of humanitarian access
- rape or other sexual violence against children.

FIGURE 6. TEN YEARS OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN



SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN'S ANALYSIS OF THE UN ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT COVERING 2012 - 2021



## HOW GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT ARE MONITORED

The methodology of the monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) that informs the UN Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict is designed to report on the six specified grave violations in conflict settings. Inevitably, due to access restrictions, security threats and limited resources, the MRM only paints a partial picture. Not all cases can be reported or verified and are therefore not included in the annual UN report on children and armed conflict. Also, the MRM does not capture broader categories of rights violations against children beyond the six violations and is

not designed to measure the prevalence of grave violations within affected populations.

It is widely acknowledged that all the grave violations against children in conflict, and especially when it comes to rape and other forms of sexual violence, are significantly under-reported. Verified cases of violations against children are the tip of the iceberg. Undertaking accurate documentation of grave violations against children is challenging in times of peace, and even more so in times of conflict.

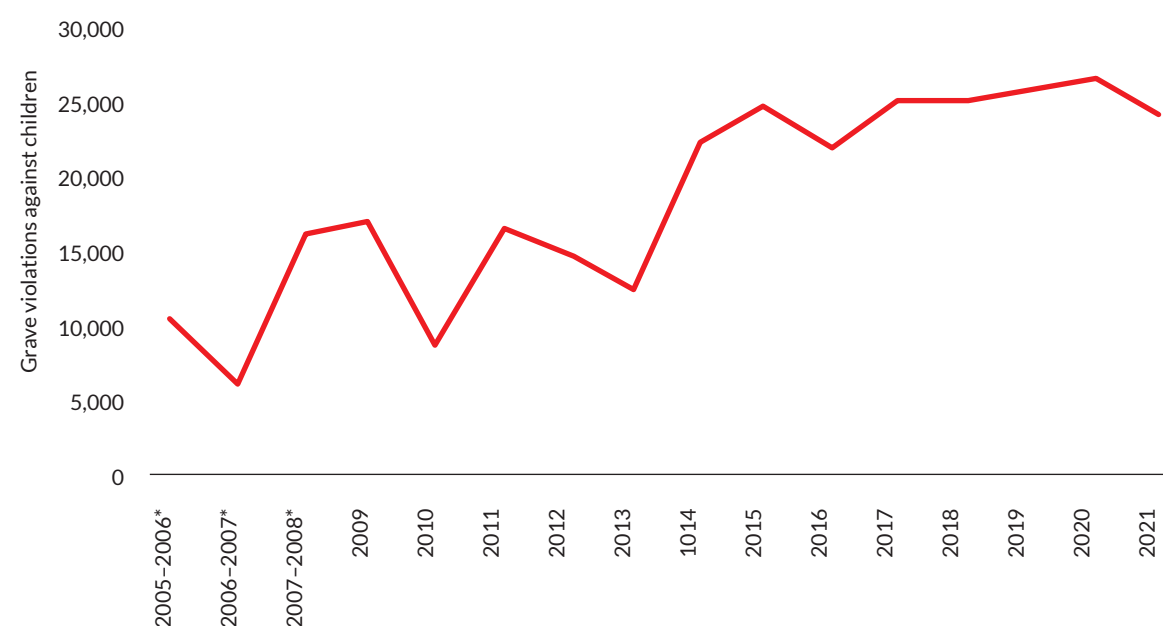
It is important to remember that, given significant under-reporting of actual violations, these verified grave violations are only the tip of the iceberg. Additionally, the six grave violations only record violations perpetrated by armed actors in the conflict, leaving out other reported rights violations experienced by children living in conflict affected areas.

The numbers referred to in this chapter are as reported and verified in the 2022 UN annual report on children and armed conflict covering events taking

place in 2021, as well as Save the Children's analysis of grave violations against children, as presented in these reports over time (see methodology page 35).

The 2022 UN annual report on Children and armed conflict, documenting violations committed in 2021, covers 21 conflict situations that are part of the UN Security Council's agenda, as well as the Lake Chad Basin. In addition, concerns around grave violations committed in Mozambique, Ethiopia and Ukraine were noted but are not included in the 2022 report.

FIGURE 7. GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN 2005 - 2021



SOURCE: SAVE THE CHILDREN'S ANALYSIS OF THE UN ANNUAL REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT COVERING 2005 - 2021



Rami, 15 years old, was injured by two successive airstrikes near his home in Yemen.

PHOTO: SAMI M. JASSAR / SAVE THE CHILDREN

### GENDERED NATURE OF VIOLATIONS

Harmful gender norms and structural inequalities affect children's risks and experiences of the six grave violations. In the data for 2021, boys represented around 70% of all children who were abducted, killed, or maimed. This is likely due to gender norms that perceive adolescent boys as a threat, which leads to them being targeted, and that girls are more likely to be confined to their homes or temporary shelters. Boys also accounted for 90% of those recruited or used by armed forces and groups, which similarly derives from harmful masculinities that promote violence as a demonstration of power, and regard armed conflict a pursuit for men and boys as opposed to women and girls. Girls were at the highest risk amongst children subjected to sexual violence committed by armed groups. They were also increasingly subjected to abductions, killings, and maiming, specifically in the Lake Chad Basin area. Children in conflict zones also often face increased risk from other gendered human rights violations and compounding harms, for example, girls living in crises contexts are 20% more likely to marry as children.<sup>3</sup> These other gendered violations of children's rights are not always captured by the MRM and the wider agenda around children and armed conflict.

It is important to acknowledge that gendered dynamics affect reporting on children and armed

conflict. While girls are at higher risk from sexual violence committed by armed groups, stigma associated with reporting it results in significant under-reporting. In addition, there tends to be a focus on reporting grave violations that happen in the public sphere. These, as killing and maiming, recruitment, and abductions, more often experienced by boys, and are easier to identify and verify. By contrast, violations in spaces that girls are more likely to occupy are often unseen or ignored by others, rendering experiences of sexual violence and violations against girls and children of diverse gender identities under-reported and invisible.<sup>4</sup>

### CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND GRAVE VIOLATIONS

One in ten children around the world has a disability, and 16% of disabilities worldwide can be attributed to armed conflict.<sup>5</sup> Children with disabilities are at high risk of violence and exclusion while also less likely to be able to access services in humanitarian crises, but the impact of conflict on children with disabilities is under-reported. A survey by the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting personnel found that 42% of respondents believed that children with disabilities were not given sufficient space in the mandate of the children and armed conflict agenda.<sup>6</sup>





Mohammed, aged 13, lost his right leg in a bomb blast where he was shining shoes with other children. He now lives in a camp for internally displaced people in Somalia, where he has lived since fleeing the conflict in his community.

PHOTO: MUSTAFA SAEED / SAVE THE CHILDREN



Destruction and rubble after airstrikes in Gaza, May 2021.

PHOTO: MOHAMMED LIBED / OCHA PHOTO ARCHIVE

## 1 KILLING AND MAIMING OF CHILDREN

■ The recorded number of children killed and maimed has decreased for four consecutive years, from 12,125 in 2018 to 8,113 in 2021. However, this still means that in 2021 on average 22 children were killed or injured in conflict every day. The dramatic increase in battle deaths (see page 22) over the same period, along with the growing number of children growing up in high intensity conflict, however, indicates that the decrease might be due to under-reporting and difficulties in verifying reports, rather than an actual positive trend.

Afghanistan and the OPT have the highest verified number of children who were killed or maimed in conflict in 2021.

In Afghanistan, 633 children were killed and 1,723 children were maimed, bringing the total number of cases to 2,356. Of these casualties, 2,074 occurred before the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021. Boys made up 1,506 of the total number of violations, with girls making up 797; the gender of the remaining 53 victims is unknown. Children were killed or maimed mainly due to ground engagement (912), non-suicide improvised explosive devices (699) or explosive remnants of war (261).

Despite the high numbers, Afghanistan has seen a decrease in the number of reported and verified killings and maiming of children during the last eight years, 2021 had the lowest number of verified cases since 2016.

The reporting from OPT and Israel shows that 1,216 children were victims of killing or maiming, of

which 1,207 were Palestinian and nine were Israeli. Among them, 88 children were recorded as killed, 59 of them by air strikes carried out by Israeli forces during the escalation of hostilities in Gaza in May 2021.

Both Syria and Yemen have high verified numbers of children killed and maimed. However, between 2018 and 2021, based on cases reported and verified, there seems to be a positive trend in both countries. In Yemen, the number of reported and verified cases of killing and maiming decreased over four consecutive years. It halved from 1,689 cases in 2018, to 827 cases in 2021. In Syria, the number of child casualties has also nearly halved from 1,854 reported cases in 2018 to 961 reported cases in 2021.

In Nigeria, the number of verified cases of killing and maiming of children has decreased steadily and significantly from 881 in 2017 to 88 in 2021.

In the DRC in 2021, there was a record high number of 474 verified cases of children killed or maimed.

In Somalia, 793 cases were verified in 2021. The reported number of child casualties of conflict has been consistently high in Somalia for a decade, with 847 children recorded as killed and maimed on average every year.

In Burkina Faso, which has only been covered by the annual UN report on children and armed conflict since 2020, a total of 227 children were verified as killed and maimed in 2021, an increase from 54 children the previous year.

## CHILDREN AND URBAN CONFLICT

The challenges of urban conflict are not new, but today they are on a scale not witnessed in a generation. Increasing urbanisation means 66% of the world's population is projected to live in cities by 2050. For civilians living in cities, explosive weapons – a central component of modern warfare – are far more deadly. Data shows that when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 90% of the victims are civilians.

Within the civilian cohort of those killed and maimed, children are particularly vulnerable. Our previous Blast Injuries report<sup>7</sup> highlighted that children are more likely to die following blast injuries than adults. In 2019, along with Imperial College London and other partners in the Paediatric Blast Injury Partnership, we helped to produce the world's first Paediatric Blast Injury Field Manual.<sup>8</sup> Today, that manual has been translated into five languages and is being used in 13 countries, from Syria to the Philippines.

On 17 June 2022 in Geneva, states, civil society groups and international organisations finalised the text of the political declaration aimed at strengthening the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in towns, cities and other populated areas.

It is the first formal international recognition of the fact that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has severe humanitarian consequences and that this must be addressed urgently. Crucially from our perspective, the text recognizes how “particularly children, are exposed to severe and long-lasting indirect effects – often referred to as reverberating effects”.

In terms of operational commitments, states endorsing the declaration will look to help avoid civilian harm by “restricting or refraining as appropriate from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas”. In addition to this new opportunity to leverage political will and good practice, there is a need for a multi-disciplinary initiative to help bring research in this field together and apply it to the urgent needs of children in Ukraine.

It is vital that those who understand the physics of blast, the biomechanics of blast on the child, emergency medical needs, rehabilitation, and surgical and rehabilitation technology can work in a truly interdisciplinary environment. This is the only way to address the numerous challenges around paediatric blast injury. Save the Children is therefore calling for a Centre for Paediatric Blast Injury Studies. We will do everything we can to make this a reality.





## CAPTURED BY AN ARMED GROUP IN DRC: JEAN'S STORY

"We were at the river swimming when people took us into the forest by force. They tortured us, beat us, and taught us how to kill, smoke hemp, and kidnap people. We have suffered a lot."

Jean is a 17-year-old boy from a village in the province of South Kivu in the DRC. At the age of 16, he was captured by an armed group and, along with other children, taught to steal, kidnap, and kill.

"When I was in the forest, I felt very bad. I was very scared. My life in the forest was difficult. We spent the night on the ground without eating anything. I lived in the forest for seven months. We were a large group of children. Many of the children remain in the armed group."

He also says that he was often going to bed hungry and sleeping on the ground. After seven long and hard months amongst the armed group, Jean was rescued.

"Since my return, I'm treated differently. Parents are afraid to let their children play with anyone who was in the forest. They were afraid of me because they knew that I was in an armed group."

PHOTO: HUGH KINSELLA CUNNINGHAM/SAVE THE CHILDREN

## 2 RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN BY ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS

■ The number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups decreased from the record high 8,595 in 2020, to 6,351 in 2021. This is the lowest number of verified cases since 2015. In spite of this overall drop, in some countries, the opposite occurred; for example, in Colombia, Syria, Nigeria, Lebanon and Burkina Faso, the number of verified cases of children recruited and used by armed forces groups increased in 2021 from the previous year.

The highest number of cases reported was in the DRC, where 2,033 children were recorded as victims of this violation; 1,776 boys and 257 girls. Most violations happened to children in areas bordering Uganda in North Kivu and Ituri. At least 241 of these children were used in combat roles and 42 of the girls recruited were verified victims of sexual violence.

Between 2017 and 2021, a total of 10,085 children were verified victims of this violation in the DRC. This peaked in 2020 at 3,265 children, the highest reported number of children recruited and used over those five years in any conflict situation.

Syria has the second highest recorded rate of recruitment and use of children for 2021, with 1,301 in total, namely 1,262 boys and 39 girls. This is the highest number ever reported in the country, and considerably higher than the last peak in 2016 when 961 cases were reported.

In Somalia, 1,161 children were recorded to have been recruited and used by armed forces. Among these, 1,116 were boys, while 45 were girls. This is a 35% decrease from 2020. However, the numbers of cases in Somalia have been consistently high. Since 2007, when reporting started, 21,510 children, a number higher than in any of the other conflict situations covered by the UN annual report on children and conflict, have been recorded as used by armed forces and groups in Somalia. Over ten years from 2012–21, on average 1,567 children have been recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups every year.

## 3 ABDUCTION OF CHILDREN

■ The number of children who suffered abduction in 2021 is the highest since recording started in 2005. In 2021, 3,460 cases were verified; 69% were boys and 30% were girls. Around 300 more girls were verified as having been abducted in 2021 compared with 2020.

The highest numbers of verified abductions were in the DRC, with 1,192 children recorded as abducted, accounting for 34% of the total number across all conflict situations in 2021. Among these children, 850 were boys and 342 were girls. The recorded number of girls abducted increased by 48%, from 231 girls in 2020 to 342 girls in 2021. Many of the abducted children also suffered from other grave violations: 460 were also recorded as recruited and used by armed forces and groups, and 94 were recorded as having suffered from sexual violence.

The number of recorded cases of abduction was also alarmingly high in Somalia, with 1,030 cases, of which 933 were boys and 97 were girls. Children abducted in Somalia account for about 30% of the total number across all conflict situations. Over the last ten years, 10,000 children have been abducted in Somalia, accounting for 42% of the total recorded number of children abducted across conflict situations in this period.





## SURVIVING SEXUAL ABUSE AND VIOLENCE: VALENTINA'S STORY

Valentina, age 14, lives in Arauca, near the border between Colombia and Venezuela, and is from an indigenous community. Valentina had to leave school so she could earn money to help with household expenses. She was sexually abused by a member of an armed group and became pregnant. Afterwards, she was kidnapped from her family by a man who beat and abused her for more than 15 days and threatened her family. Thankfully, through collective action led by Save the Children, she was found, given psychosocial support, and relocated with her family.

## 4 RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

■ The total number of verified recorded cases of sexual violence against children in 2021 was 1,323, the highest number since 2009. According to the UN's children and armed conflict agenda, sexual violence includes rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, forced abortion, sexual mutilation, sexual abuse, and sexual torture.

Girls comprised 98% of the verified and recorded child survivors of sexual violence in the 2021 report. This percentage has been consistent over the years.

While all six grave violations are under-reported, this is particularly an issue when it comes to sexual violence. Girls may not report violations because of the potential backlash and stigma generated by harmful gender norms about girls' purity, honor and value. Boys who are victims of sexual violence may fear potential stigma and taboo as a result of similarly entrenched gender norms, as sexual violence may be seen as humiliating and emasculating.

In 2021, the highest verified numbers of cases of sexual violence against children in conflict were reported in three African states, namely in the DRC, Central African Republic and Somalia.

In the DRC, 557 cases of sexual violence were recorded in 2021, with the vast majority – 547 cases – committed against girls. Most of the recorded incidents referred to a verified rape of a child, with 96 incidents of gang rape, while 47 children experienced sexual slavery. Since the start of the UN Secretary-General's annual reporting of grave violations in 2005, as many as 10,983 children have been verified as survivors of sexual violence in the DRC alone, almost half of the cases verified across all conflict situations.

Somalia has the second highest number of verified cases of sexual violence against children, with 307 child victims, again with the vast majority girls. Reporting included 187 cases of recorded rape and 66 incidents of attempted rape, while 42 children were verified as forcibly married by armed actors in the conflict. 2020 saw the highest number of verified cases – 401 – in ten years. While there was a 24% reduction in verified cases from 2020 to 2021, any incident of sexual violence is unacceptable.

In the Central African Republic, 276 cases of sexual violence were verified, all of which were committed against girls. Of these, 205 were rapes.

## 5 DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

■ In 2021, a total of 3,945 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were reported and verified, a slight decrease from 4,144 incidents in 2020. However, since the first UN annual report on children and conflict in 2005, there has been a very sharp increase in the number of reported and verified incidents of the denial of humanitarian access: two-thirds of incidents have been recorded over the three years from 2019 to 2021. Though this steep rise could be partly due to under-reporting in previous years, it is nevertheless a deeply alarming trend.

Yemen remains the country with the highest number of verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children. This resulted in 1,813 incidents where humanitarian access was denied and included such acts as attacks on humanitarian service providers, restrictions on movement of humanitarian actors, and interference with the implementation of humanitarian activities. This number constitutes 46% of the incidents reported across all conflict situations in 2021. Over the last five years, almost half of the incidents of denial of humanitarian access across conflicts covered in the annual UN reports on children and armed conflict are reported in Yemen.

In OPT, we find the second highest number of such incidents, with 1,582 recorded denials of humanitarian access in 2021. The political situation and ongoing conflict continued to have grave implications for children in need of medical care. Children in the Gaza Strip who need access to specialised medical care outside Gaza must apply for a permit. However, in 2021, approximately 38% of permits to cross the Erez land crossing, the only feasible crossing point, were recorded as delayed or denied, affecting 933 boys and 648 girls.

Mali has the third highest number of incidents of denial of humanitarian access – 159 incidents. This is a 20% decrease from 2020.



# HIJACKING, IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES AND ATTACKS ON CONVOYS: INTERVIEW WITH A HUMANITARIAN WORKER IN BURKINA FASO

*What are the levels of need in Burkina Faso and what does Save the Children do there?*

“Burkina Faso is one of the most forgotten crises, with more than 4.9 million people in urgent need of assistance. Save the Children has been operating here for over 40 years and is operational in eight of the 13 regions. We provide programming ranging from education in emergencies, to protection, food security, health and nutrition, and advocacy. In the first half of 2022 we reached more than 200,000 people, including 130,000 children.”

*Why is it so hard to operate in Burkina Faso? Can you tell us about some of the operating challenges resulting in denial of access?*

“Between multiple armed groups, improvised explosive devices and general insecurity, Burkina Faso continues to be difficult to operate in. As a result, it is not only difficult for our staff to reach children and their families, but also in some areas, especially those labelled as ‘areas of military interest’, families are forced to leave and be once more displaced. Those with no means to move and who remain in these areas can be accused of being associated with the non-state armed groups (NSAGs).

“It is very hard to put a number on those that cannot be reached with assistance. Several cities are under blockade – for example, 300,000 people in Djibo [in the Sahel region close to the Mali border] – living in areas where it is extremely difficult to operate for humanitarian actors.”

*What is the biggest challenge you face in terms of access?*

“50% of the country is currently not in control by the government with enclaves currently

blocked by NSAGs and roads are dangerous to use due to the risk of hijacking and as well as threats of IEDs [improvised explosive devices]. Convoys carrying food and basic commodities have been regularly attacked. We are also told that we need military escorts if we want to deliver goods to certain areas. This poses a high risk to our ability to operate independently and neutrally in line with our core humanitarian principles.”

*Considering roads are so dangerous, how does Save the Children provide assistance to children in need?*

“Save the Children works with local partners who are rooted in the communities. We continue to be very flexible and mobile, constantly on the move depending on the security dynamics. UN Humanitarian Air Service helicopters operate at a limited capacity for both cargo and staff. Unfortunately, this is not enough to cover the ever-growing needs of children and their families.”

**“BURKINA FASO IS ONE OF THE MOST FORGOTTEN CRISES, WITH MORE THAN 4.9 MILLION PEOPLE IN URGENT NEED OF ASSISTANCE”**

## 6 ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS

■ The number of recorded attacks on schools and hospitals increased by 13% in one year, from 1,166 in 2020 to 1,323 in 2021. These incidents included attacks on school and hospital buildings, the military use of schools and hospitals, and attacks on health and education personnel.

The highest number of recorded attacks on schools and hospitals in conflict situations in 2021 was in the OPT, with 289 verified incidents, followed by 154 in Mali and 151 in Afghanistan.

In the OPT, there were 133 recorded attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as 156 recorded incidents of use of schools or hospitals for military purposes. The recorded attacks involved 67 air strikes.

In Afghanistan, 116 attacks on schools and hospitals were verified in 2021, and 35 recorded incidents of use of such facilities for military purposes. Most of these occurred before the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

In Mali in 2021, there was a record high number of 153 verified attacks on schools or education/health personnel, and one verified use of such facilities for military purposes.

In addition, there were some alarming developments across other conflict situations. In Yemen, there were 89 incidents of attacks on, and military use of, schools and hospitals, the highest recorded number since 2015, mostly due to an increase in military use of schools. In Myanmar, where 63 incidents were verified in 2019 and 42 in 2020, the number reached a record high of 80 in 2021. In 2020 and 2021, according to Education under Attack 2022, around 40% of all incidents reported globally of military use of schools, universities and other education facilities occurred in Myanmar.<sup>9</sup> In the Central African Republic, the numbers of attacks on schools and hospitals increased from 22 in 2019 to 41 in 2020, reaching 114 in 2021. Such attacks were also frequent in Burkina Faso with 80 incidents recorded in 2021.

On the positive side, there is a decrease in verified incidents in Syria, from 296 verified incidents in 2019 to 125 in 2020, and 66 in 2021, the lowest number since the war broke out in 2011. Somalia has also seen a steady decrease over the past four years, from 91 reported incidents in 2018 to 33 incidents in 2021.



**“MY FRIENDS AND I USED TO STUDY, BUT THE SCHOOL WAS ATTACKED.”**

Hayat and her family fled their home and are now living in tents in a playground used as a collective shelter in Idlib.

But here, too, they experienced further conflict. They talk about the airstrikes and the attack on a nearby market.

“They hit the houses, we were scared. They hit the market.

We fled here and the people welcomed us into their homes.”

PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN



EVERY CHILD COUNTS, BUT NOT EVERY CHILD IS COUNTED

The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) has proved an important tool in verifying cases and incidents where children are victims of one of the six grave violations. Its data has been essential in attempts to hold parties of conflict to account for their crimes.

However, the mechanism does not capture all cases and incidents. As noted in previous Stop the War on Children reports, some violations, such as sexual violence committed by armed groups, are particularly challenging to capture.

Other violations also go under the radar. One indicator of this is the steep increase in battle deaths in conflict settings<sup>10</sup>, while the number of verified cases of children killed and maimed<sup>11</sup> has gone down. These two sets of data, of course, measure different factors: battle deaths cover all conflict related deaths, and do not distinguish between combat and civilian deaths or between adults and children. Battle deaths also only refer to fatalities and do not include other casualties. Data on children and armed conflict on the other hand report on verified cases of killing and maiming of children only. Nevertheless, the growing gap between the two datasets suggests that, compared with numbers of battle related deaths, proportionally fewer cases of children killed and maimed are being captured by the MRM and reflected in the annual UN report on children and armed conflict.

Looking at the development of the gaps between the two datasets over time, a trend is evident. While the

**Battle deaths:** deaths resulting from the use of armed force between warring parties in a conflict, be it statebased or non-state. We use the term to include both combatant and civilian deaths, adults, and children.

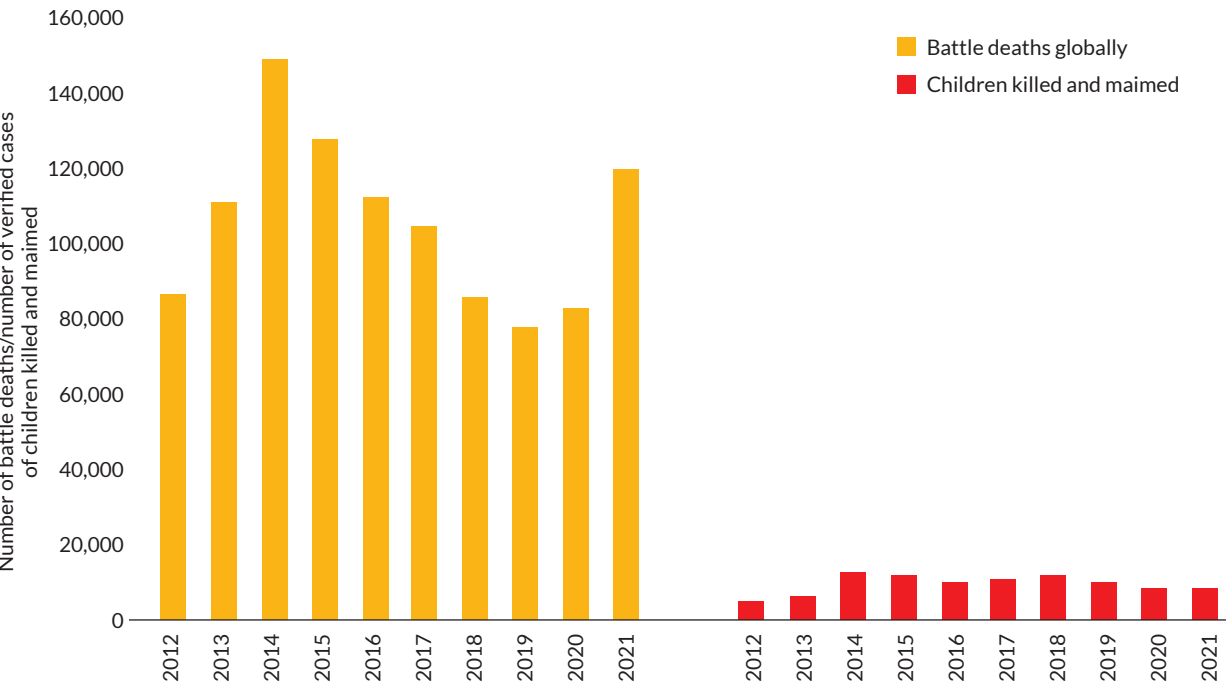
**Children killed and maimed:** Number of children killed or maimed as reported and verified in the annual UN reports on children and armed conflict

overall battle deaths in conflict, including combatants and civilians, adults, and children, are going up, verified cases of children killed or maimed in conflict are going down (see Figure 8).

The gap is significantly different in various contexts. For example, in Syria, there are two battle deaths for each verified case of a child being killed and maimed, while in Nigeria, the number of battle deaths – 3,144 – is 36 times higher than the 88 cases of children killed and maimed. In Yemen, there are 28 battle related deaths for each verified case of a child being killed or maimed.

The battle deaths data are from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)/ Uppsala Conflict Data Program Georeferenced Event Dataset and are based on publicly accessible sources. It is quite likely that there are

FIGURE 8. THE GAP BETWEEN BATTLE DEATHS AND VERIFIED CASES OF CHILDREN KILLED AND MAIMED IN CONFLICT 2021



SOURCE: UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM GEOREFERENCED EVENT DATASET (UCDP GED) DATASET V.22.1 AND UN (2019) WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS (BATTLE DEATHS) AND: ANNUAL REPORT ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT (CHILDREN KILLED AND MAIMED)



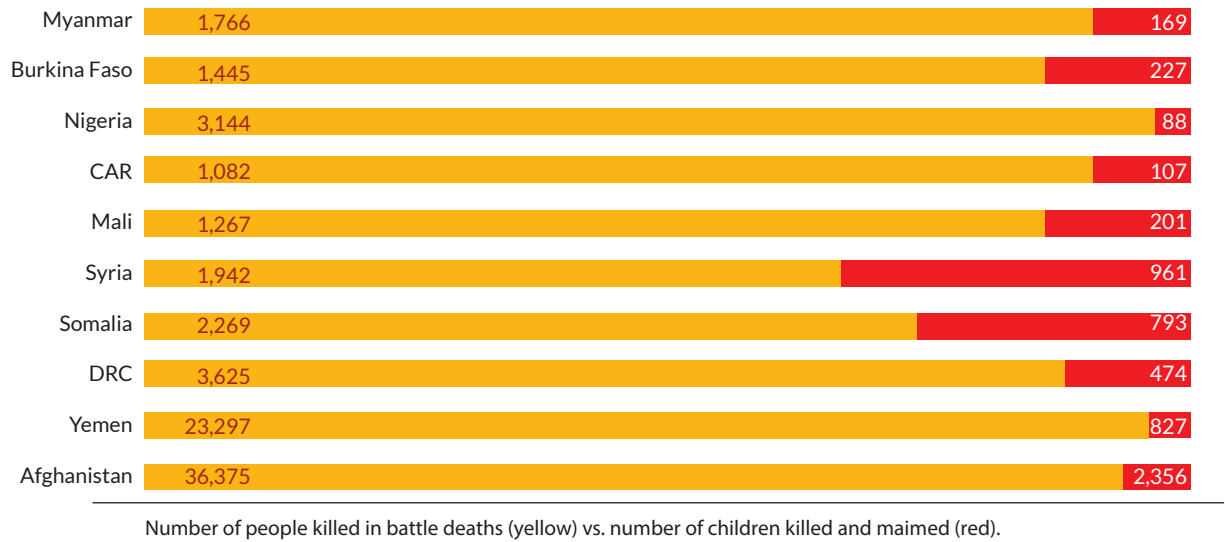
Thirteen-year-old Mohammed was displaced from his home in Mosul when ISIS seized control of the city in 2014.

PHOTO: CLAIRE THOMAS / SAVE THE CHILDREN

more fatalities than given in the best estimate, but it is very unlikely that there are fewer.<sup>12</sup> The steep increase in battle deaths could be partly explained by improved reporting. These comparisons between battle deaths and verified cases of children killed and maimed might indicate something about the nature of the conflict

and to what extent civilians, including children, are victims of violence. However, a potentially more likely explanation for the gap is a weakening capacity to monitor and verify cases of children killed and maimed.

FIGURE 9. BATTLE DEATHS AND THE VERIFIED NUMBER OF CHILDREN KILLED AND MAIMED IN TEN CONFLICT AFFECTED COUNTRIES 2021



SOURCE: UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM GEOREFERENCED EVENT DATASET (UCDP GED) DATASET V.22.1 AND UN (2019) WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS (BATTLE DEATHS) AND: ANNUAL REPORT ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT (CHILDREN KILLED AND MAIMED)





## SCARS THAT MAKE SOULEYMANE TREMBLE

Souleymane was forced to flee his home in the dead of night when armed men attacked his village, beating his father, amid the violence sweeping Africa's Sahel region, including his country Burkina Faso.

The family left with nothing, spending three days on the road, sleeping in the bitter cold, until reaching their new home.

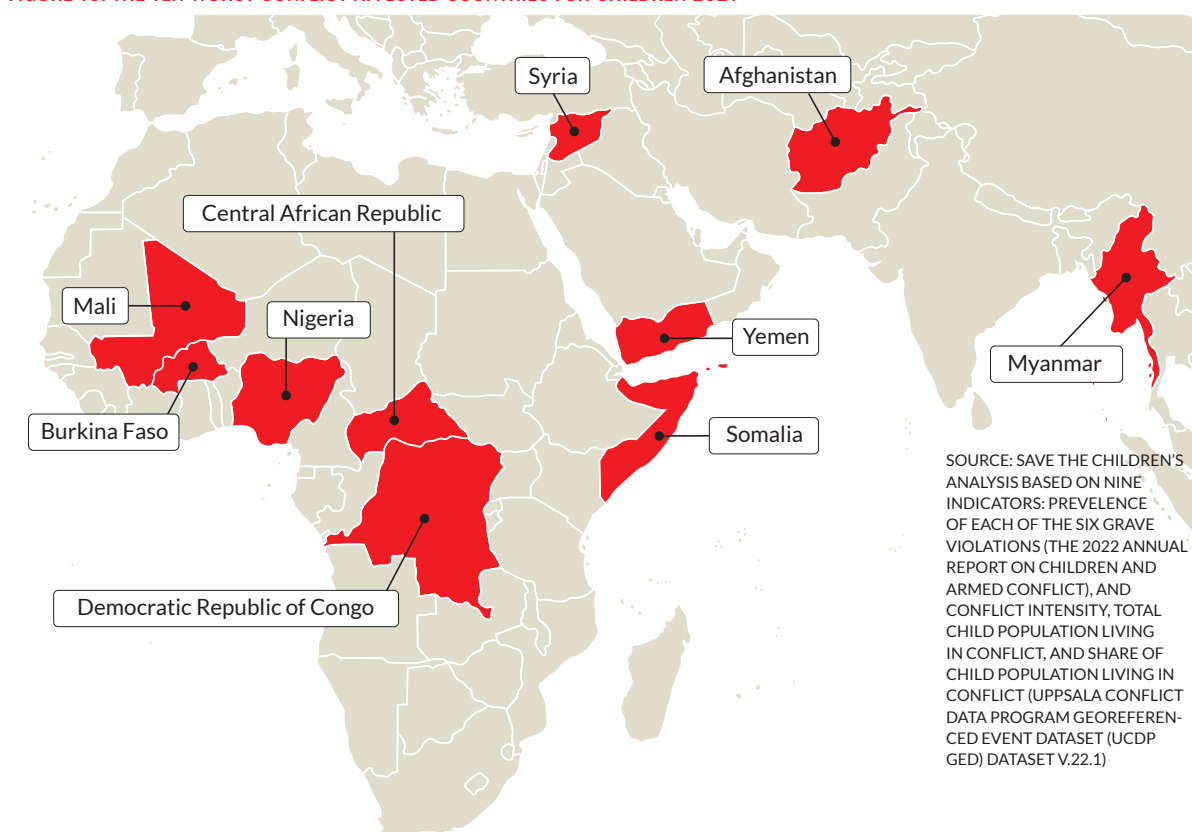
Souleymane still lives with the psychological scars of his experiences. Even someone visiting his home can fill him with dread: 'If Souleymane doesn't know who it is, he'll tremble,' says his father.

But there is hope. Souleymane has enrolled in school and can now start to rebuild a life torn apart by war.

PHOTO: ADRIEN BITIBALI/SAVE THE CHILDREN

## 3 THE 10 WORST CONFLICT AFFECTED COUNTRIES FOR CHILDREN

FIGURE 10. THE TEN WORST CONFLICT AFFECTED COUNTRIES FOR CHILDREN 2021



Combining PRIO's research and analysis of the UN's data on grave violations for 2021, as reported in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, Save the Children identified the ten worst conflict affected countries for children:

- 1 Yemen
- 2 Afghanistan
- 3 Democratic Republic of Congo
- 4 Somalia
- 5 Syria
- 6 Mali
- 7 Central African Republic
- 8 Nigeria
- 9 Burkina Faso
- 10 Myanmar

In 2020 these countries were: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sudan, Central African Republic.

Save the Children's analysis and determination is based on nine indicators. Six indicators show in turn the prevalence of verified cases or incidents of each of the six grave violations and three further indicators draw on PRIOs research to show conflict intensity measured in turn by battle deaths, total child population living in conflict affected areas, and the share of children living in conflict zones relative to the child population of the country (see methodology page 35).





## “I HAVE NEVER FELT SO SCARED OF BEING AT SCHOOL BUT NOW I AM VERY SCARED BECAUSE SCHOOL IS NOT A SAFE PLACE ANYMORE.”

Isaac, age 14, is from south-west Yemen. He was in eighth grade in a school close to where he lives. One day when he was at school playing football, the ball rolled over to the other side of the schoolyard. That area was known to be in reach of a sniper and the students avoided it because the sniper would sometimes shoot in their direction. But on this occasion, Isaac took a chance.

“I assumed the sniper would spare me when he saw I was only picking up the ball. He doesn’t usually shoot at us, he rarely does, but he did this time. He shot my leg.”

“I picked up the ball and turned around to run to my friends. I didn’t feel anything. I remember looking down to see the flesh hanging from my leg, blood pouring out. I understood that he had shot me.”

Isaac crawled back to take cover and seek help. He was taken to a hospital.

“I didn’t really feel the pain in the beginning. It was a few hours later when the pain became intolerable. I have never felt anything like this pain before. I needed sedatives to put me to sleep.”

PHOTO: ALBARAA MANSOOR/SAVE THE CHILDREN

### YEMEN

Yemen ranks as being the worst conflict affected country to be a child in 2021. There is almost complete impunity for perpetrators of grave violations of children’s rights, with no independent accountability mechanism in place and severe economic decline. Children continue to suffer from the six grave violations, with many cases not being captured by the reporting mechanism.

The Group of Eminent Experts, the accountability mechanism for Yemen that has since been dissolved, presented their fourth report in September 2021. The report showed that between March 2015 and September 2021, there had been 23,000 airstrikes in Yemen, approximately 10 airstrikes a day, which resulted in the killing or injuring of 18,000 civilians.<sup>13</sup>

While humanitarian needs continue to soar, with more than 20 million people in need of assistance, only 63% of the 2021 humanitarian response plan was met. Funding for education and protection was even lower, with only 37% and 50% of requirements met respectively in 2021.<sup>14</sup> As of 4 November 2022, the funding for 2022 is even more precarious. Only 48% of the plan is covered, with only 9.8% of the requirements for child protection met, and only 7.9% for education.<sup>15</sup>

### AFGHANISTAN

Although there was a significant change in the security situation in Afghanistan following the transition of power in August 2021, looking at the data for the year overall, Afghanistan was the second-worst conflict country to be a child in 2021 in this ranking. The number of recorded deaths caused by direct conflict increased from 20,838 in 2020 to 36,375 in 2021.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond the grave violations, children in Afghanistan continue to face extreme hunger and are missing out on school. Child labour is rising, and the economic crisis is pushing children into situations of danger, including unaccompanied migration and child marriage. The situation for girls is especially dire.

In 2021 alone, 2,356 children were verified as killed or maimed in Afghanistan, and a staggering 31,000 children were verified as killed or maimed since 2005 – five children on average every day. Although the humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan was met in 2021, funding for child protection was only 35.4% met and education was equally underfunded at only 31.6%.<sup>17</sup>

### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The DRC was identified as the third worst conflict country to be a child in 2021. Conflict has been raging in parts of the country for two decades. Human rights violations are widespread, with sexual violence being recorded as a weapon of war. In 2021, according to the UN annual report on children and armed conflict, 474 children were recorded as being killed or maimed, the highest number ever reported in the country. The number of recorded deaths caused by direct conflict declined slightly from 3,905 in 2020 to 3,625 in 2021.<sup>18</sup>

DRC ranks the highest for verified cases of three out of the six grave violations against children. It has the highest number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, with 2,033 cases. It has the highest number of verified child abductions; with 1,192 cases of abduction of children, the DRC accounts for one-third of the total verified abductions across all conflict situations in 2021. And in 2021, the 557 cases of sexual violence recorded in DRC was higher than any other conflict situation. Since the start of reporting of grave violations in 2005, more than 10,983 children in DRC have been victims and survivors of sexual violence – nearly half of all the cases that have been verified across all conflict situations.<sup>19</sup>

Only 44% of the humanitarian response plan for the DRC was funded in 2021. Funding for education and protection was even lower, with only 20–30% of the requirements met for each.<sup>20</sup>

**“YEMEN RANKS AS BEING THE WORST CONFLICT AFFECTED COUNTRY TO BE A CHILD IN 2021.”**



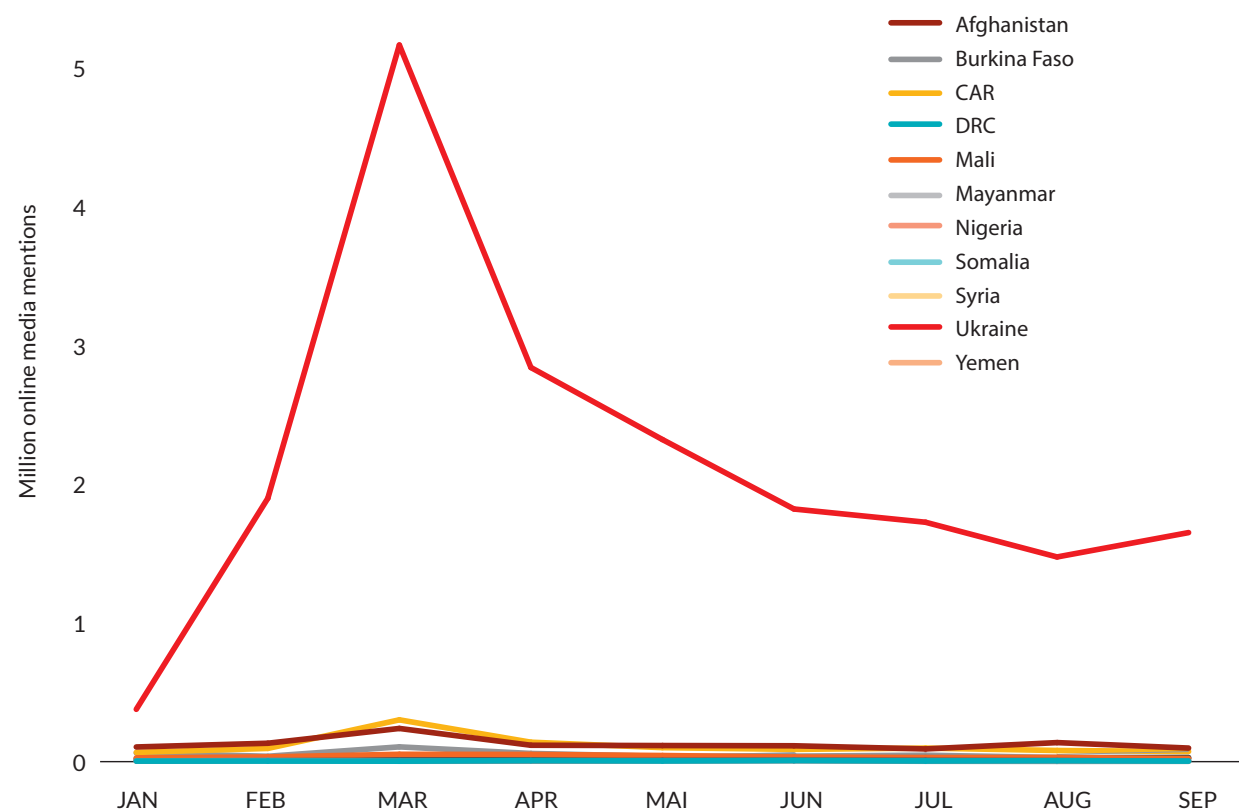
# 4 THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

With extensive media attention on Ukraine following the escalation of the conflict there, Save the Children has examined how coverage of other conflicts has fared over the same period. In collaboration with the media monitoring service Meltwater, Save the Children has analysed the media coverage of the 10 worst conflict affected countries for children in 2021, as determined by our criteria and assessment (see page 35), compared with media coverage of the crisis in Ukraine in 2022. More than 4.3 million articles published between 1 January and 30 September in 2022 were analysed. The media analysis is based on online articles in the 13 most common languages in the world (see methodology page 35).

The analysis provides valuable insight into the amount of media coverage given to different conflicts and the needs and experiences of the children impacted by them.

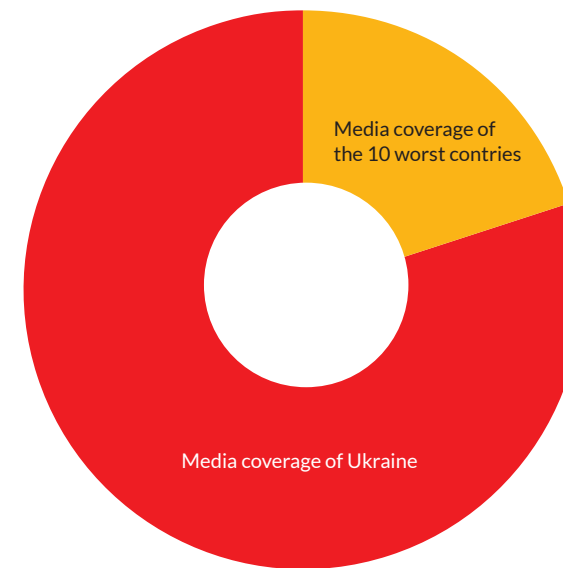
The graphs below and opposite reveal a stark gap between coverage of 2021's 10 worst conflict affected countries for children, compared with Ukraine in 2022. Between 1 January and 30 September 2022, Ukraine got five times more media coverage than all ten of the worst conflict affected countries for children combined. Yemen, which topped the list as the worst conflict country to be a child, had only 2.3% of coverage compared to the media coverage Ukraine received in the same period.

FIGURE 11. MEDIA COVERAGE OF UKRAINE CONFLICT AND COVERAGE OF OTHER CONFLICTS JANUARY–SEPTEMBER 2022



SOURCE: MELTWATER MEDIA MONITORING (SEE PAGE 35)

FIGURE 12. FIVE TIMES MORE MEDIA COVERAGE FOR UKRAINE THAN THE TEN-WORST CONFLICT AFFECTED COUNTRIES FOR CHILDREN



SOURCE: MELTWATER MEDIA MONITORING (SEE PAGE 35)

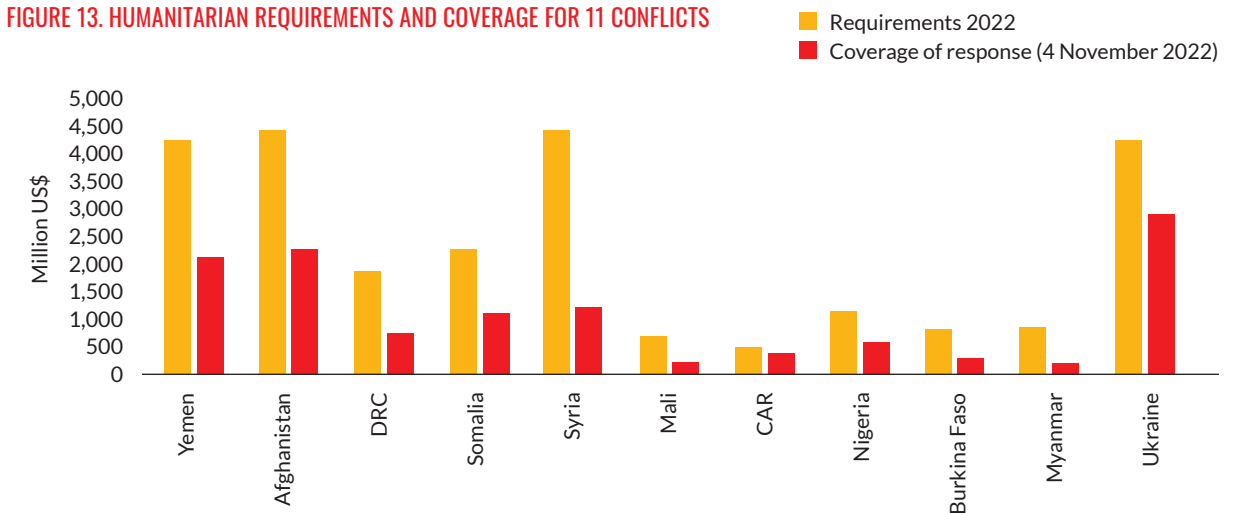
## HUMANITARIAN FUNDING TO CONFLICT AFFECTED COUNTRIES

With the backdrop of the ten worst conflict affected countries for children in 2021, how have humanitarian responses been funded in these contexts since then? As of 4 November 2022, the humanitarian response plans covering 2022 for these ten countries are only 43% funded on average.<sup>21</sup> While the humanitarian response plan for the Central African Republic is 76.4% funded, other countries remain grossly underfunded as of 4 November 2022. For example, Syria, which is ranked the fifth-worst place to be a child in 2021, was only 27.5% funded, and Mali, ranked the sixth-worst place to be a child, is 30.7% funded. Myanmar, ranked the tenth-worst place to be a child, is only 22.5% funded.

Ukraine's original annual humanitarian response plan was published on 11 February 2022, before escalation of the crisis. It sought to reach 1.8 million people and required \$190 million. Following escalation of the crisis on 24 February 2022, a Ukraine Flash Appeal was issued, requiring US\$2.2 billion. This was close to being fully funded at 83% when, amid the evolving humanitarian needs approaching winter, the Flash Appeal was updated in August 2022. The updated appeal was increased from the initial US\$2.2 billion required to US\$4.3 billion, with a target of reaching 11.5 million people. As of 4 November 2022, the plan was 68.1% covered.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 14 illustrates the difference in funding for Ukraine compared with other humanitarian crises, for whom funding comes in at a slower pace. For example, Somalia's humanitarian appeal to meet increasing needs due to three failed rainy seasons, was launched in December 2021. Eight months later, in July 2022, it was 68% funded. In contrast, Ukraine's Flash Appeal reached this level of coverage within six weeks.

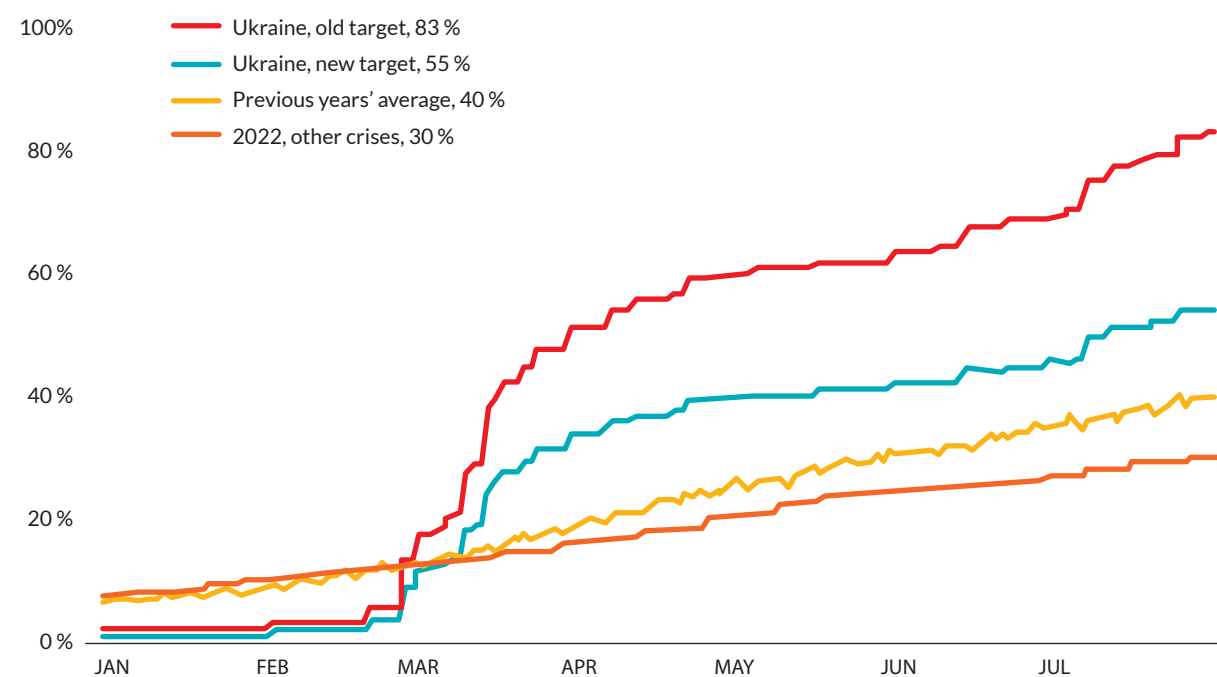
FIGURE 13. HUMANITARIAN REQUIREMENTS AND COVERAGE FOR 11 CONFLICTS



SOURCE: OCHA FINANCIAL TRACKING SYSTEM, DOWNLOADED 4 NOVEMBER 2022

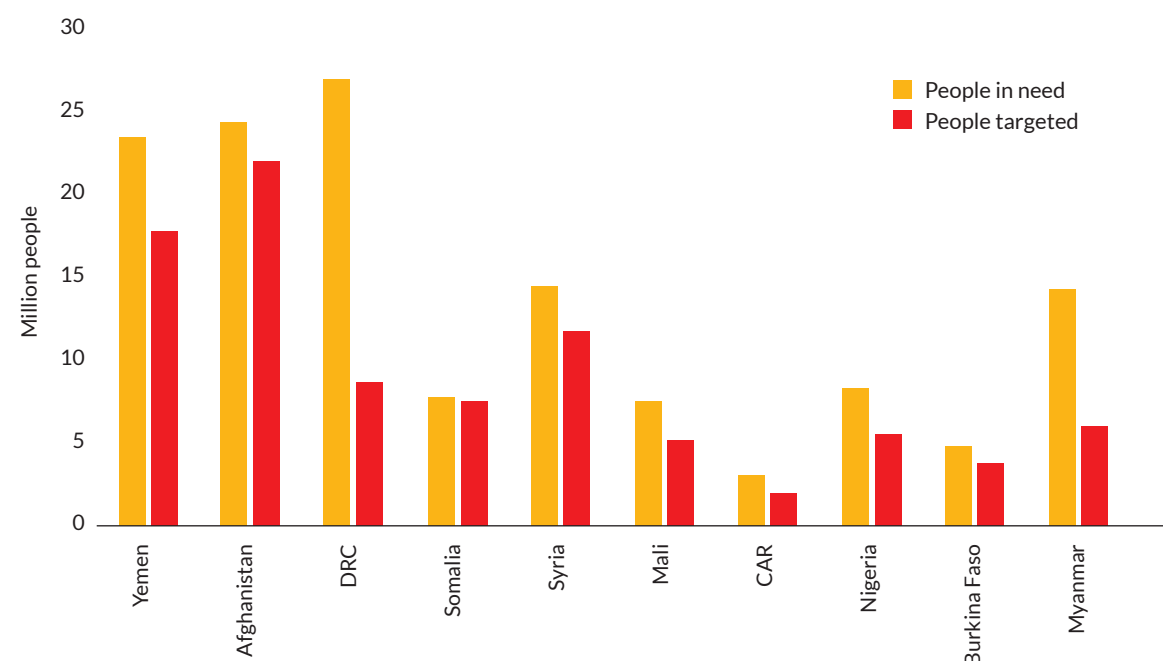


FIGURE 14. HUMANITARIAN FUNDING FOR UKRAINE FAR OUTSTRIPS OTHER CRISES



SOURCE: OCHA FINANCIAL TRACKING SERVICE (FTS) DATA (DOWNLOADED 9 SEPTEMBER 2022), FTS APPEALS OVERVIEW, AS PUBLISHED BY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (2022): THE UKRAINE CRISIS AND DIVERTED AID: WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR, 20 SEPTEMBER 2022<sup>23</sup>

FIGURE 15. PEOPLE IN NEED VERSUS AMBITIONS IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLANS



SOURCE: OCHA FINANCIAL TRACKING SYSTEM, DOWNLOADED 4 NOVEMBER 2022

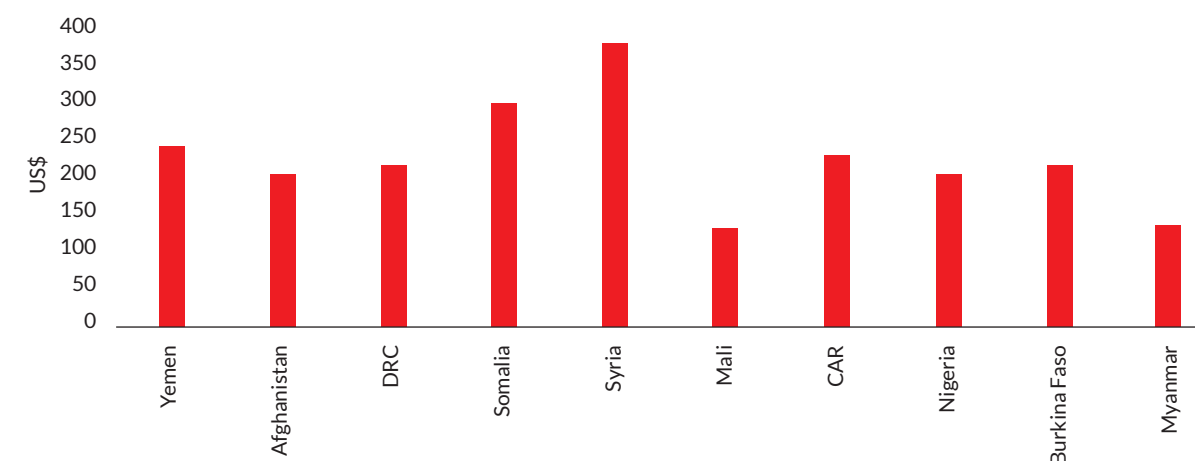
## DOES MEDIA ATTENTION INFLUENCE AID ALLOCATIONS?

There are multiple factors that influence donor allocations, such as geopolitical interests, foreign policy issues, proximity, colonial history, trade links and language. The question of whether media attention influences donors' humanitarian aid allocations have been debated for many years.

The CNN effect, a theory in political science and media studies, suggests that the media plays a significant role in determining humanitarian aid allocations. This theory has been contested

by many, including recently by Scott, Bunce and Wright.<sup>24</sup> Based on in-depth interviews with directors and policy-makers in large donor countries, they argue that, while rapid-onset national news coverage can increase the levels of aid to a sudden emergency, the larger, more established annual humanitarian aid allocations are unaffected by news pressure. On the contrary, many of the respondents in the study explained that they interpreted a lack of attention in media as an indicator that greater support is needed.

FIGURE 16. AVERAGE REQUESTED SPENDING PER PERSON TARGETED IN COUNTRIES' HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLANS



SOURCE: OCHA FINANCIAL TRACKING SYSTEM, DOWNLOADED 4 NOVEMBER 2022

## FUNDING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE – VARIED AMBITIONS

The portion of funding a humanitarian response receives based on the appeal and people identified for support says a lot, but not all, about whether the needs are met or not.

Looking at the ambition level of the different responses, these vary in the 10 ranked countries. In DRC, only one-third of the people seen as needing humanitarian assistance are identified for assistance in the humanitarian response plan, and in Myanmar, only 43% of the population in need is identified for assistance. In Somalia and Afghanistan, by contrast, the ambition of the humanitarian response plan is much higher. In Somalia, for example, the aim is to help as many as 97% of the people identified as needing assistance.

There is also the issue of how much in terms of financial resources the humanitarian response plan aims to spend, on average, per person in need. This is obviously partly shaped by operational costs, the context, and the nature of the needs, but it also says something about the quality or quantity of assistance that it sets out to provide.

These also vary in the ten different countries. In Mali, when the requested amount in the Humanitarian Response Plan is divided by the number of people identified for assistance, it comes on average to only US\$130 per person. In Afghanistan it is US\$201, in DRC it is US\$214. At the other end, in Syria it is US\$375 and in Somalia US\$298.



## THE NON-DISCRIMINATORY NATURE OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The convention of the rights of the child has been ratified by all but one country in the world, indicating that children's rights are widely acknowledged. But as we have seen, crimes against children continue. We clearly see an imbalance in funding and attention to the different crises of the world. Children in some crises are at increased risk of violence and violations, but are not receiving the help and protection they are entitled to.

A core component of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the right to non-discrimination, formulated in Article 2.<sup>25</sup> It means that no child should be treated differently than others because of his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

### UKRAINE AND THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

Globally, in recent years, it has become the norm that humanitarian response plans have large funding gaps. This means that children are missing out on the delivery of life-saving services, such as food, water, protection, and education. With the narrative being that there are simply not enough resources, humanitarian partners are forced to continue to make tough decisions on distributing funding. However, the ability of the international community to collectively come together to ensure quick and effective funding has been demonstrated in the support to the Ukraine Flash Appeal and its subsequent revisions.

Media coverage of the Ukraine crisis has reminded many people of the brutality of war and what it is like to be a child in conflict. The 2023 Stop the War on Children report will be able to provide a detailed analysis of the Ukraine conflict based on verified data. However, the vital reporting of events in Ukraine should remind us all that many of the grave violations that are happening there have been happening to children in protracted, less reported conflicts for years.

Ukraine should be seen as a lesson as to what is possible. It has highlighted that, when there is collective political and financial will, the aid system can move effectively and efficiently to ensure children are supported. Now the world must act swiftly to make sure children living in the 10 worst conflict affected countries are better protected so that millions of children do not suffer lifelong physical and psychological trauma and disabilities.

It is at the core of international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles to distribute humanitarian aid based on needs and needs alone. If Ukraine has been a wake-up call for many to the trends facing children in modern conflict, then it must also be the catalyst for doing far more to address these challenges in war-torn countries across the globe.

**UKRAINE SHOULD BE SEEN AS A LESSON AS TO WHAT IS POSSIBLE. IT HAS HIGHLIGHTED THAT, WHEN THERE IS COLLECTIVE POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL WILL, THE AID SYSTEM CAN MOVE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY TO ENSURE CHILDREN ARE SUPPORTED.**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Approximately 449 million children**, more than one-sixth of children globally, lived in areas affected by conflict in 2021. The failure to prevent grave violations committed against children and to protect them from harm should be one of the defining issues of our time. Continued violations of children's rights will have far-reaching consequences – not only for children today but for future generations, as they endeavour to rebuild and recover at every level.

Save the Children calls on states, duty-bearers and decision-makers to renew their commitment to protecting children affected by conflict by acknowledging the findings of this report and adopting the following policy recommendations.

## UPHOLD INTERNATIONAL LAWS AND STANDARDS

- All states and armed actors must abide by their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law (IHRL), and international refugee law, comprised of treaties, customary international law, general principles, and humanitarian decisions, as well as the entire extensive and existing body of normative frameworks, policies and political commitments related to children affected by armed conflict.
- States must provide specialised pre- and post-deployment training to their security forces on IHL, IHRL and international refugee law, including a gender- and child-sensitive perspective, and deploy disciplined security forces that are well-trained on the rights of children and the prevention and monitoring of violations
- All states should endorse and implement the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles.
- All states should endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration.
- All states should sign and abide by the Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) declaration to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to limit the harm they cause to civilians.
- All states should support dedicated resources for qualified child protection advisers, child protection officers and women protection adviser posts across

all UN peacekeeping and special political missions, as well as missions and forces of the African Union, European Union, NATO and other regional organisations' forces.

- All states engaged in the transfer of military equipment should prevent any transfers of arms and ammunition that are at credible risk of being used to facilitate violence against children, including gender-based violence, and attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure.
- In conducting arms transfer risk assessments, states should include analysis of whether the receiving state has been listed for grave violations against children in the annual UN reports on children and armed conflict.
- Non-state armed actors should sign and implement the 'Geneva Call' Deed of Commitment for the protection of children from the effects of armed conflict.

## HOLD PERPETRATORS TO ACCOUNT

- Countries affected by conflict should commit to systematically tracking harm to civilians, particularly children, in current and future conflicts, including by disaggregating casualties by age and sex at a minimum, and tracking all attacks on civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools.
- All states must strengthen the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) by investing in the identification and verification of cases of grave violations against children in conflict, including through the application of technological innovations to improve reporting and verification.
- All states and funding partners must advocate that data collection through the MRM must be sex-disaggregated.
- All other mechanisms that serve to strengthen documentation of crimes committed against children in conflict and enable accountability should be sex- and age-disaggregated at a minimum and disaggregated by other identity factors, such as disability status and gender identity, whenever possible under standard data collection safeguarding protocols.



- All states must strengthen the link between the MRM, and operational assessments and programmes of humanitarian partners to ensure a response to the needs of children whose rights have been violated.
- All states should support complete, accurate and impartial listing of perpetrators of grave violations perpetrated against children in conflict in the annexes of the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict and ensure their delisting only when parties to conflict have ceased to commit those grave violations and/or have complied with UN-agreed action plans, as defined by the criteria for delisting set forth in the 2010 annual report (A/73/907-S/2010/181), pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1882 (2009).
- States should politically support and invest resources in ensuring that international, regional and national justice and accountability mechanisms address the wide range of violations of children's rights in conflict. This includes:
  - support international mechanisms to investigate and prosecute violations and crimes of children's rights, including through resourcing dedicated gender-sensitive and child-specific expertise in international investigations.
  - strengthening collaboration and dialogue among various accountability mechanisms to avoid re-traumatisation of victims, notably children, and credibility of evidence.
- Children should be supported to raise complaints of violations of their rights in conflict directly – in Africa through the complaints procedures of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child – and globally by committing to sign and ratify the third Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which enables children to hold parties to the Convention to account for failing to uphold their rights.
- International financial institutions should consider methodologies to pool funding for compensation and rehabilitation of children affected by conflict and grave violations, including appropriating seized or sanctioned funds.
- Funding partners and governments must recognise the life-saving importance of child protection interventions and commit to prioritising and investing in children and their protection in humanitarian appeals and funding allocations. This includes:
  - Scaling up support to all children impacted by conflict, including children formerly associated with armed forces and groups. This includes sustainable reintegration; mental health psychosocial support services; child protection case management; education and continued learning and training opportunities; gender-based violence prevention, mitigation and response services; family strengthening and support; and community-based child protection mechanisms.
  - Ensuring integrated, gender, age and disability responsive multi-sector programming that recognises both the centrality of protection and the need for specialised child protection and gender-based violence prevention and response services.
  - Increasing investments in capacity building to more comprehensively collect data disaggregated by disability and to develop tools that will improve specialist responses for children with disabilities.
- Funding partners and governments must 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 actors, including child- and youth-led groups.
- Funding partners must allocate at least 4% of humanitarian budgets towards Child Protection.
- Funding partners must allocate at least 10% of humanitarian budgets towards education in emergencies, prioritise political support for Education Cannot Wait's High-Level Financing Conference in February 2023, and ensure it receives at least \$1.5 billion to fulfil the ambitions in its new Strategic Plan 2023 - 2026<sup>26</sup> including reaching 20 million children affected by crisis with quality learning opportunities.
- Funding partners should significantly increase investment in age- and gender-responsive and child- and youth-led conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives, including girl-led initiatives and movements, building a generation of peace-builders, and increased capacity building.

## SUPPORT CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

- Countries affected by conflict must ensure that protection of children is a high priority and that the needs and rights of children, in all their diversity, are met during and after conflict.
- Funding partners and governments must allocate funding across responses according to needs, and ensure that funding arrangements are predictable, timely, flexible and multi-year to enable stable programming and sustainable outcomes.

# APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this report are based on the five main sources mentioned below. We have included limitations associated with each of the sources.

1. Updated data on the number 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). The UCDP dataset provides the geographical location, timing and intensity of each conflict event globally, covering the years 1989–2021. To estimate the number of children living in conflict areas, and populations more generally, PRIO cross-referenced the conflict data with population data from Gridded Population of the World (GPW) and from the UN (2019).

UCDP GED is the world's foremost provider of data on organised violence. However, the fatality numbers are based on publicly accessible sources. Due to lack of available information in many conflict zones, it is quite likely that there are more fatalities than given in the best estimate, but it is very unlikely that there are fewer. The data does not distinguish between civilians and military personnel, or between adults and children.

2. Analysis by Save the Children of the 2022 United Nations Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, based on data reported and verified in 2021. The analysis also draws on previous Save the Children mapping of the number of grave violations in the reports on children and armed conflict from 2005–21. Unlike the annual UN reports on children and conflict, we have included verified cases of military use of hospitals and schools, and attack on education and health personnel, when we add up the grave violations in each conflict setting.

The MRM data in the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict inevitably only paints a partial picture due to access restrictions, security threats and limited resources. This means that not all cases can be reported and verified and are therefore not included in the report. Although the numbers on verified violations are likely to only be the tip of the iceberg, the trends are measurable and reflect the reality that we see

in conflict zones today. There is also a time-lag. As the process of reporting and verifying takes time, some violations that have taken place one given year might only be included in the report covering the following year.

3. Save the Children's analysis and determination is based on nine indicators. Six indicators show in turn the prevalence of verified cases or incidents of each of the six grave violations (as set out in the annual UN reports on children and armed conflict). Three further indicators draw on PRIO's research to show conflict intensity measured in turn by battle deaths, total child population living in conflict affected areas, and the share of children living in conflict zones relative to the child population of the country.

The indicators we have used to identify the ten worst countries to be a child are based on the annual UN reports on children and armed conflict and the UCDP GED dataset/PRIO as outlined above, shaped by the very same data limitations.

4. Meltwater Media Monitoring has looked at media coverage of the ten worst countries to be a child in 2021 and of Ukraine, covering the period 1 January 2022 to 30 September 2022. This is based on more than 4.3 million online articles in the 13 most common spoken languages in the world<sup>26</sup>, namely Arabic (standard), Bengali, Chinese (traditional and simplified), English, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Urdu.

The analysis is based on these 13 languages only. It is limited to standard use of these written languages, based on online news articles, and does not capture other outlets, such as video, TV or audio.

5. Mapping of humanitarian financing to the ten worst countries to be a child, plus Ukraine, so far in 2022. From the Financial Tracking Service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, accessed on 4. November 2022. These numbers change continuously as funds are received and registered in the system.



# APPENDIX 2

## DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

This report uses the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) definitions of conflict.

**Battle-related deaths:** deaths resulting from the use of armed force between warring parties in a conflict, be it statebased or non-state. We use the term to include both combatant and civilian deaths.

**Conflict/armed conflict:** when armed force is used by an organized actor against another organised actor or against civilians, resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year (low-intensity conflict). Medium intensity is defined as 25–999 battle deaths in one calendar year, and high intensity defined as 1,000 or more battle-related deaths in one calendar year.

The definition includes three types of conflict:

- State-based conflict takes place between two states (inter-state conflict), or between one state and one or more rebel groups (civil conflict).
- Non-state conflict is fought between two organised, armed actors, of which neither is the government of a state.
- One-sided violence is perpetrated by an organised armed group, either a state's military forces or an armed group, against civilians.

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

**Conflict zone/area (or an area impacted by conflict):** an area within the borders of a country and within 50km from where one or more conflict incidents takes place in a given year.

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

**Children:** we use the definition from the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines children as individuals under the age of 18 years.

**The six grave violations against children:** the UN Security Council has identified six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict: killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children in armed forces and groups; rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; abduction of children; attacks against schools and hospitals; and denial of humanitarian access to children. These grave violations were defined on the basis of their egregious nature and their severe impact on children's wellbeing. In addition to the six violations, the annual UN report has verified incidents of detention of children since 2012.

## ENDNOTES

1) Updated data on the number 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). The UCDP dataset provides the geographical location, timing and intensity of each conflict event globally, covering the years 1989–2021. To estimate the number of children living in conflict areas, and populations more generally, PRIO cross-referenced the conflict data with population data from Gridded Population of the World (GPW) and from the UN (2019). See more page 35.

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11) See endnote 2

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14) OCHA Financial Tracking System, accessed on 4 November 2022, [fts.unocha.org](https://fts.unocha.org)

15) See endnote 14

16) See endnote 1

17) See endnote 14

18) See endnote 1

19) See endnote 2

20) See endnote 14

21) See endnote 14

22) See endnote 14

Also used in Development Initiatives (2022) article *The Ukraine crisis and diverted aid: What we know so far*, access on 4 November 2022, <https://devinit.org/resources/ukraine-crisis-diverted-aid-what-we-know/#downloads>

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24) *Education Cannot Wait*, accessed on 4 November 2022, <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/about-us/our-strategy>

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**“WE WERE AT  
PEACE BEFORE  
THE ARRIVAL  
OF THE  
INSURGENTS.  
THEY KILLED  
PEOPLE IN  
AND OUTSIDE  
THE VILLAGE.  
WE WERE  
SHOCKED.”**

Balkissa, 13 years old from Niger, lost everything she had known her whole life. The places she knew, the children who were her friends, the toys she played with – all gone forever. They fled.

She found the strength to rebuild her life. She is back in school. After struggling to adjust, she is now meeting new friends and doing well in class.

PHOTO: APSATOU BAGAYA / SAVE THE CHILDREN







**EGLANTYNE JEBB SAID  
“THE ONLY INTERNATIONAL  
LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD IS  
A CHILD’S CRY.”**

**WE HAVE HEARD THAT CRY  
AND IT WILL NOT GO  
UNANSWERED.  
THE WAR ON CHILDREN  
MUST STOP.**

**[stopwaronchildren.org](http://stopwaronchildren.org)**



**Save the Children**