



**WAR**  
On **CHILDREN**

## **WAR ON CHILDREN**

*There are approximately 350 million children living in areas affected by conflict today. Many of these children have been subjected to unimaginable suffering. They are not just caught in the crossfire or treated by combatants as expendable collateral damage, but often deliberately and systematically targeted. They are killed, maimed, and raped. They are bombed in their schools and in their homes. They are abducted, tortured, and recruited by armed groups to fight and to work as porters, cooks and sex slaves.*

*Hereby discussing the Report "War on Children" to discuss the impact of war on children and their livelihoods.*

### **Index**

1. Introduction
2. Conflict Trends
3. Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups
4. Sexual Violence
5. Abduction
6. Attacks on Schools and Hospitals
7. Why are Children Increasingly Harmed by Conflict?
8. Recommendations

## WAR ON CHILDREN

---

### Introduction

One in six children across the world are living in conflict areas, and children are more at risk in conflict now than at any time in the last 20 years. From Syria to South Sudan, Yemen to DRC, children are caught up in violence, which is not of their making. Children are being killed and maimed, raped and recruited, and being denied aid and medical care. Warring parties are bombing schools and hospitals on a scale not seen for decades.

Children also suffer the indirect consequences of conflict. Children living in conflict-affected settings are less likely to be in school or have access to basic sanitation and clean water, and more likely to die in childhood due to under-nutrition and a lack of medical care, including vaccinations. Recent studies have shown high levels of toxic stress in children who have lived in or fled from war zones, which can have a lifelong impact on their mental health and development. Around the world, untold millions of childhoods have been torn apart by conflict-related violence.

#### *The key findings of the report are:*

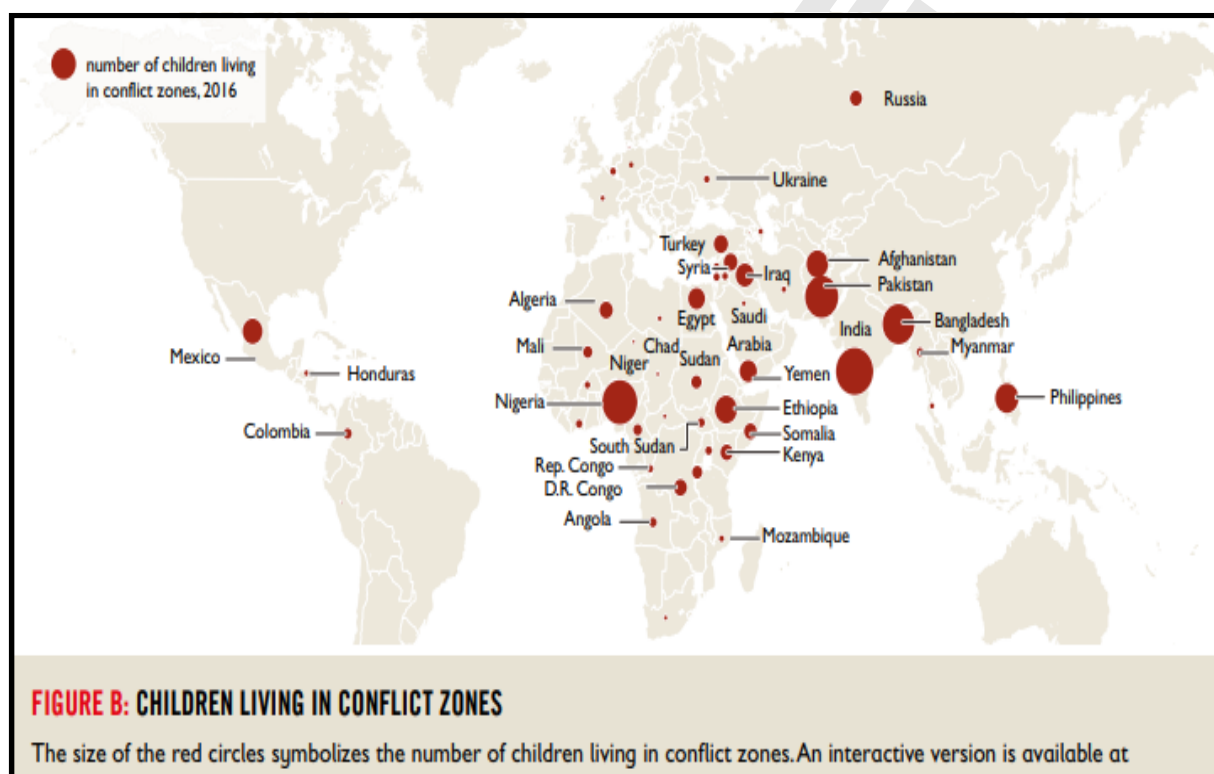
- The number of children living in a conflict zone has increased by more than 75 percent from the early 1990s when it was around 200 million, to more than 357 million children in 2016 – around 1 in 6 of the world's children. 165 million of these children are affected by high intensity conflicts. Children living in such conflict-impacted areas often lack access to school and health facilities, and are more exposed to violence.
- While the majority of the world's conflict-affected children live in Asia, the Middle East is where children are most likely to live in a conflict zone. In 2016, about 2 in 5 children in this region were living within 50km of a conflict event in their country, and children in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other warzones in the region are at high risk of all six grave violations. Africa is second, with 1 in 5 children affected by conflict.
- Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia are at the top of our ranking of the 10 most dangerous conflict-affected countries to be a child in 2016, the latest year for which comprehensive data is available. This is assessed based on factors including rates of the six grave violations and share of children living in conflict in that country.
- By many metrics, children are more at risk in conflict now than at any time in the last 20 years. There are significant limitations and variations in data collection across conflict contexts, but some of the trends are clear: for example, there has been an escalation in the number of UN-verified cases of killing and maiming of children, with an increase of nearly 300 percent since 2010. The number of incidents of denial of humanitarian access has also risen 15-fold in the same period, and there has been a growing trend of abductions.
- Despite improved international legal and normative standards to protect children, that increasingly brutal tactics are being utilized – including the use of children as suicide bombers, direct targeting of schools and hospitals and the widespread use of indiscriminate weapons like cluster munitions, barrel bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).
- The psychological impact of toxic stress on children living in conflict zones is profound and can lead to a vicious cycle of conflict, in which the next generation struggles to rebuild peaceful societies following the trauma of violence.

- The nature of modern conflict is changing, and it is changing in a way that often protects soldiers more than civilians. This report explains an increase in reported grave violations against children mainly due to the crisis of compliance, lack of monitoring and reporting, increase in urban warfare and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as well as increased conflict intensity, duration and complexity.

## Conflict Trends

Today's conflicts are increasingly being fought in populated civilian areas under the control of proliferating numbers of non-state armed groups. A recent World Bank - UN study showed how there was an average of eight armed groups in a civil war in the 1950s. By 2010, the figure had jumped to 14.

In Syria in 2014, by contrast, the study showed there were more than 1,000 armed groups. Conflicts today are also often protracted, which leads to the erosion of governance structures, market economies and essential service provision. Protracted crises also have a knock-on effect on displacement — 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from their homes today and a refugee spends an average of 17 years of his or her life in exile.



The situation in Syria is the single largest contributing factor to many of the worsening global trends in children and armed conflict we see in this report. This is devastating for the children of Syria and the surrounding countries, but is also likely to have a further contagion effect without concerted action – the war has undermined the effectiveness of international laws and institutions and set new lows for the modern era in the conduct of hostilities, including the targeting of medical facilities, use of chemical weapons and siege tactics against civilians.

Afghanistan highlights the dangers of protracted conflicts for children. Although the war has now gone on for almost 17 long years, the situation has not necessarily improved for those children born into conflict – 2016 saw the highest number of verified child casualties with 3,512 children killed or maimed, an increase of 24 percent compared to the previous year.<sup>14</sup> UNICEF<sup>15</sup> reported that almost 700 children were killed in the first nine months of 2017 alone.

Somalia being in the top three reflects high numbers of recorded and verified incidents of killing and maiming, sexual violence and recruitment and use of children by armed groups and forces. The long-running armed insurgency has been marked by exploitation of vulnerable children and loss of civilian life, exacerbating existing poverty and fragility.

### **Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups**

In the last 20 years, tens of thousands of boys and girls have been recruited into state forces and non-state armed groups worldwide to serve in a variety of roles such as combatants, messengers, porters, or domestic servants. According to the annual UN CAAC reports, there were at least 49,640 verified cases of boys and girls recruited and used by armed forces and groups from 2005 to 2016.

Boys and girls, some as young as eight years old, are being forced to fight, carry supplies and perform other frontline and support roles. Recruited children are routinely subjected to physical and mental violence by adult combatants and some have been ordered to kill or commit other acts of violence. Girls are often vulnerable and left with no choice but to become the wives or girlfriends of soldiers or fighters in order to gain protection, while both girls and boys are raped and sexually exploited. Others are used as spies, to carry military equipment or supplies, such as water and food, or to serve as cooks or domestic servants. Association with armed groups brings many risks, including death.

Children with disabilities are not exempt. The CAAC reports indicate that Al-Qaeda operated a youth wing in Iraq for children under 14 called “Birds of Paradise”. The group targeted vulnerable children, such as orphans, street children, and the mentally disabled to carry out suicide attacks against government forces and civilian targets.

Being recruited or used by an armed group can have a life-long impact on children, for those that survive the experience. They often miss out on years of education and socialization within their communities – their formative years and childhoods are taken away from them. The traumatic aspect of the brutality they have witnessed, experienced, or been forced to mete out themselves can have a profound psychological effect well in to adulthood. Those who do make it back into their communities may be stigmatized or shunned, creating challenges with recovery and reintegration.

### **Sexual Violence**

Rape and sexual assault\* is a hugely under-reported facet of conflict, as in fact it is outside of conflict settings. Sexual violence against both adults and children has been used as a tactic of war across all continents, from Afghanistan to Syria to Colombia to Myanmar and the Central African Republic. The trends and numbers identified here are likely to be a significant underestimate of the reality.

It should also be noted that while women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, many boys are not exempt from the suffering. The majority of cases reported in Afghanistan, for example, relate to boys.

The impact of sexual violence on children is catastrophic – physically, psychologically and socially. Children who have been victims of sexual violence are often left with serious physical injuries, which can be particularly severe because their growing bodies are not yet fully developed.

Damage to children’s reproductive systems can leave them incontinent, infertile and condemned to a lifetime of bleeding and pain. They are at high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including syphilis, gonorrhoea and HIV. Girls who become pregnant can suffer life-threatening complications during childbirth, will often be forced to drop out of school and can face social exclusion and stigmatisation. Their chances for further education, livelihoods and marriage may be severely diminished or completely eliminated, leaving them vulnerable to further exploitation.

## Abduction

Abduction or seizing of children during conflict can take many forms – children are taken for forced conscription, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, or kidnapped for ransom or revenge.

Abduction and the sometimes horrific ill-treatment children suffer when they are being held captive or in detention, from gang rape to being forced to kill other children, has a devastating impact on victims and their families. Often, the children that do make it back home are returning to communities which have been destroyed by conflict, or are still in the grip of war, with little in the way of psychosocial support to help them recover from their physical and emotional wounds. Many children who are abducted during conflict will never make it home at all.

## Attacks on Schools and Hospitals

Attacks on schools and health facilities are fast becoming the new normal in today's conflicts. Children living in conflict zones are increasingly vulnerable at their school desks and in their hospital beds, both of which should be protected safe spaces.

Direct or indirect violence and threats against schools and health facilities have a devastating impact on children. Around the world, 27 million children are out of school due to conflict<sup>36</sup> – either because they have been displaced and do not have access to school, their schools have been damaged or destroyed, their teachers have fled or their parents are too afraid to send them because of the risk of attack. The interruption of education has a long-term impact on children's futures and the socio-economic recovery of a country.

Attacks on health facilities mean the injured and sick are sometimes too afraid to go to a doctor, and we see more women dying in labour at home in conflict zones because they cannot get to a health facility. In many cases, they are right to be afraid – in 2016, airstrikes on a Save the Children-supported maternity hospital in Idlib, North-West Syria, severed the legs of a woman who was in labour and sent incubators holding premature babies crashing to the floor. The destruction of medical infrastructure has a lasting impact on a country's health system and allows the spread of communicable diseases and resurgence of illnesses normally kept at bay by vaccinations in peace-time, such as polio and diphtheria.

## Why are Children Increasingly Harmed by Conflict?

Recent years have seen an increasing trend toward warfare in towns and cities, with civilian streets and homes becoming battlefields. Rapid urbanization means conflicts are often fought in densely populated areas, with an estimated 50 million people currently suffering the effects of urban warfare.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas – a tactic we see used widely in Syria, Iraq and Yemen today – has a terrible impact on children.

These weapons range from artillery and air-dropped weapons to 'improvised explosive devices' (IEDs), the latter of which were responsible for 46 percent of civilian casualties in 2016 and were used almost exclusively by armed non-state actors. The wide area effect of such weapons tends to be a result of the substantial blast and fragmentation radius from a large explosive content, and the inaccuracy of delivery or the use of multiple warheads.

Children are particularly at risk from the impact of these weapons – epidemiological studies demonstrate that penetrating injuries (e.g. from shrapnel) to the face, head, neck, upper limb and trunk affect 80 percent of child patients, markedly higher than the 31 percent in adults.

## Recommendations

- All countries 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 countries must deploy child protection experts into the UN, African Union, European Union, NATO and other regional organizations' forces.
- Donors should fulfil their commitments in the World Humanitarian Summit Grand Bargain agreement for multi-year funding for protracted crises to allow flexible programming to address the underlying causes of conflict.
- Donors should significantly increase investment in peacekeeping and youth-focused conflict prevention initiatives, building a generation of peace-builders, with a major investment in capacity-building on the concepts, approaches and skills needed to build peace.
- Governments should increase the level of resources invested in peace-building, for example to the US\$27 per capita recommended by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).
- Militaries must train national forces on International Humanitarian Law, human rights law and refugee law and deploy disciplined security forces that are well-trained on the rights of children.
- All military forces and police should ensure they provide specialized child-focused pre- and post-deployment training, including capacity to prevent and monitor violations against children.
- All states and armed actors should abide by their commitments or obligations under International Humanitarian Law.
- All states should endorse and implement the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles.
- All states should endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration.
- 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.
- All states and armed actors should avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in order to limit the harm they cause to civilians.
- States and armed actors should commit to systematically tracking harm to civilians in current and future conflicts, including disaggregating casualties by age and sex and attacks on civilian infrastructure.
- UN member states must strengthen the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) by investing in the identification and verification of cases, including through the application of technological innovations to improve reporting and verification.
- Alongside other obligations, governments must assess arms sales to parties to conflict against whether that party has been listed for grave violations against children in the annual CAAC reports.
- States must demonstrate political will and invest resources in ensuring that international, regional, and national justice systems address violations of children's rights in conflict, including by strengthening collaboration with the ICC and other judicial bodies, such as ad hoc tribunals and independent special courts.
- Donors should scale up investment in and support to programmes that protect children in conflict including those formerly associated with armed forces and groups, such as sustainable reintegration, psycho-social support, child protection case management, education and training, family strengthening and support, and community-based child protection mechanisms.

- Donors should invest in the training and recruiting of social workers and mental health professionals in conflict-affected countries to address the specific child protection, mental health and psychosocial needs of children in those countries.
- International financial institutions should consider methodologies to pool funding for compensation and rehabilitation of children affected by conflict, including appropriating seized or sanctioned funds.
- Donors should increase investment in protection, mental health and psychosocial services, and education in emergencies – currently less than 5 percent of humanitarian funding is on these sectors.

GS SCORE