

PRESS RELEASE

More than 9,000 children have been killed or maimed in Iraq since 2008 - UNICEF

At least 120,000 children killed or maimed by wars around the world across continents since 2005, an average of almost 20 a day

BAGHDAD, 6 June 2023 – A staggering 315,000 grave violations against children in conflict were verified by the United Nations between 2005 and 2022 worldwide, a stark illustration of the devastating impact of war and conflict on children.

As states, donors and the humanitarian community meet in Norway for the Oslo Conference on Protecting Children in Armed Conflict*, UNICEF has reported that, since monitoring began in 2005 (since 2008 in the case of Iraq), the UN has verified 315,000 grave violations committed by parties to conflict in more than 30 conflict situations across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.

These include:

- More than 120,000 children killed or maimed.
- At least 105,000 children recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups.
- More than 32,500 children abducted.
- More than 16,000 children subjected to sexual violence.

The UN has also verified globally more than 16,000 attacks on schools and hospitals, and more than 22,000 instances of denial of humanitarian access for children.

For Iraq, the numbers are staggering, with over 9,000 children killed or maimed (3,119 killed and 5,938 maimed) since 2008 to the end of 2022. Despite the considerable reduction on the number of reported cases in the last years, the overall number represents, on an average, more than 1 child killed every other day and one child maimed daily over the reported period.

As these are just the cases that have been verified, the true toll is likely to be far higher.

Additionally, many millions more children have been displaced globally from their homes and communities, lost friends or family, or separated from parents or caregivers.

“Any war is ultimately a war on children,” said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. “Exposure to conflict has catastrophic, life-changing effects for children. While we know what must be done to protect children from war, the world is not doing enough. Year after year, the UN documents the visceral, tragic and all too predictable ways that children’s lives are torn apart. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that children do not pay the price for the wars of adults, and to take the bold,

concrete action required to improve the protection of some of the world's most vulnerable children."

In this context, UNICEF has supported the care and protection of millions of affected children across conflict situations to enhance their well-being, including through the provision of mental health and psychosocial support, child protection case management, family tracing and reunification, and services for child survivors of gender-based violence. In 2022, UNICEF reached almost 12,500 children globally who exited armed forces or armed groups with reintegration or other protection support, and more than 9 million children with information that they can use to protect themselves from explosive remnants of war.

Sheema Sen Gupta, UNICEF Representative in Iraq, also present in the Conference, spoke about the need of reintegration for children in Iraq following so many years of conflict, "As a response to years of conflict, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Government of Iraq and partners, target four profiles of children in need of reintegration, including children returning from North-East Syria, children released from detention, children perceived to be affiliated with armed groups, and other vulnerable children. These UNICEF reintegration programmes target three levels: individual, community and institutional. However, successful long-term reintegration is contingent on on-going basic service provision to ensure that children can access their rights, as highlighted in the Paris Principles."

Unfortunately, the scale of the child protection risks to children affected by conflict is not matched by the scale of funding available to address these issues. New analysis by *Humanitarian Funding Forecasting*, commissioned by UNICEF, Save the Children, the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and the Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility, reveals that by 2024, the child protection sector will require US\$1.05 billion, increasing to US\$1.37 billion by 2026, to address the protection needs of children in armed conflict. This includes critical services like family reunification, mental health support, and the prevention of recruitment into armed groups.

However, the study also indicates an impending funding shortfall. If the current pace of humanitarian funding continues, the projected shortfall would stand at US\$835 million in 2024, growing to US\$941 million by 2026. This gap could leave conflict-affected children exposed to the immediate and lasting impacts of war, child labor, trafficking, and violence.

As leaders convene in Oslo, UNICEF is calling for governments to make bold new commitments to:

- Uphold and operationalize the international laws and norms already in place to protect children in war – including to protect schools, hospitals and other protected objects like water and sanitation facilities from attack, to stop the recruitment and use of children by armed groups and forces, to stop the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- Hold perpetrators to account when children's rights are violated.
- Step up critical resources to fund the protection of children in conflict at the scale and speed required, in line with growing needs. This must include investment in humanitarian response and in national child protection workforces.

UNICEF is also calling on humanitarian actors to invest in policies that place children and their protection at the centre of humanitarian action in situations of armed conflict.

“We must deliver a child protection response that is equal to the challenges we face,” said Russell. “We need to do everything we can to reach all children in need, particularly the most vulnerable. Protection services for children must build upon existing systems and community structures, and support children’s rights, participation, and their best interests. Programmes and advocacy in these contexts must unfailingly put children and their protection at the centre of humanitarian action.”

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Notes to editors:

*UNICEF is a co-organizer of the conference along with the Government of Norway, Save the Children and ICRC, and in partnership with OCHA, the African Union, the Office of the SRSG Children and Armed Conflict (O-SRSG CAAC), and the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

UNICEF has made the following commitments to strengthen its commitment to protect children in conflict:

- UNICEF commits to placing children and their protection at the centre of its work in humanitarian action through the development and implementation of an organizational Centrality of Protection Policy. This commitment integrates the protection of children across sectors and into UNICEF’s global policies, strategies, priorities, and work plans, and means a deliberate doubling down on our mandate to advocate for the protection of children and their rights as a top priority, at a time when children are increasingly under attack.
- UNICEF commits to allocate internal resources equal to fifty per cent of the annual cost of sustaining a minimum level of staffing to monitor, document and verify grave violations against children and to engage with parties to conflict. While doing so, UNICEF will work to mobilize the balance needed from partners, and to go beyond that minimum staffing wherever required.
- UNICEF commits to putting into practice a new *Global Initiative on Child Reintegration* that, together with government and non-governmental partners and across sectors, intends to transform how we support children who have exited armed forces and groups during and after conflict.

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About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children visit www.unicef.org
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