



Security Council

Distr.: General
15 October 2024

Original: English

Children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the ninth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2024.

The report documents the effects of conflict on children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations, namely the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals,^a the abduction of children and denial of humanitarian access. Where available, the report contains information on perpetrators. It also outlines the progress made in addressing grave violations against children.

The report provides recommendations to parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for ending and preventing grave violations against children and recommendations on strengthening child protection.

^a For the purposes of the present report, the phrase “protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals”, used in Security Council resolutions [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#) as well as in the statements by the President of the Security Council of 17 June 2013 ([S/PRST/2013/8](#)) and 31 October 2017 ([S/PRST/2017/21](#)), refers to teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.



I. Introduction

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict and covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2024. It is the ninth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be submitted to the Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The report highlights trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and provides details on the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report ([S/2022/745](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in the country ([S/AC.51/2022/7](#)). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the engagement with parties to the conflict and on the implementation of action plans and road maps. Where possible, parties to conflict responsible for grave violations are identified.

2. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/78/842-S/2024/384](#)), under List A of listed State actors, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were listed for sexual violence against children. Under List B of listed non-State armed groups, 16 armed groups were listed for one or more grave violations against children: Alliance des forces de résistance congolaise (AFRC) and Twigwaneho, for the recruitment and use of children; Mai-Mai Zaïre, for the killing and maiming of children; Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS), for recruitment and use and abduction; Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO), for killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and attacks on schools and hospitals; Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi (FDLR-FOCA) and Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI), for recruitment and use, sexual violence, abduction and attacks on schools and hospitals; Lord's Resistance Army, for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence and abduction; Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale, Nyatura, and Raia Mutomboki, for recruitment and use, sexual violence and abduction; Mai-Mai Mazembe, for recruitment and use, killing and maiming and abduction; Mai-Mai Simba, for recruitment and use and sexual violence; Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové (NDC-Rénové), for recruitment and use, killing and maiming and sexual violence; and Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and Mouvement du 23 mars (M23), for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and attacks on schools and hospitals.

3. The information contained in the present report was verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is co-chaired by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Challenges relating to insecurity in and access to conflict-affected areas, including due to access restrictions imposed by parties to conflict, anti-MONUSCO sentiment and logistical challenges, significantly hampered the documentation and verification of grave violations against children. Therefore, the information contained in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the reporting period, and the actual number of violations is likely to be higher. Where incidents were committed earlier but verified only during the reporting period, the information is qualified as relating to an incident that was verified at a later date.

II. Overview of political, security and humanitarian developments

4. The reporting period was marked by a significant deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation, particularly in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a prolonged and increasingly complex conflict persisted, further exacerbating the vulnerabilities and protection needs of children. A multitude of armed actors remained active in the eastern provinces, and fighting for control over territory, natural resources and political power intensified.

5. Since 2022, tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda have been marked by continued escalation, antagonistic rhetoric and mutual accusations regarding support for armed groups. Regional diplomatic efforts, facilitated by the President of Angola, João Lourenço, were initiated in July 2022 and were ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

6. In April 2022, the East African Community launched a regional peace process articulated around a political track and a military track, resulting in the deployment of a regional force to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to support the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in their fight against armed groups and assist in re-establishing peace and security in the eastern provinces. In November 2023, the withdrawal of the regional force by December 2023 was decided and subsequently executed. Earlier, in May 2023, the Southern African Development Community had approved the deployment of a mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to support the Government in the fight against armed groups. The mission was deployed on 15 December 2023.

7. In North Kivu, the security situation remained extremely volatile, and the humanitarian situation worsened to unprecedented levels as a result of fighting between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, supported by armed groups, and M23. For example, in November 2022, M23 elements were responsible for reprisal attacks against civilians in Kishishe and Bambo, North Kivu, leading to at least 171 civilians killed, including 25 children. During the same attack, five schools were looted by M23 elements. By the end of the reporting period, M23-controlled territory comprised most of Rutshuru, eastern Masisi and northern Nyiragongo territories.

8. An increase in the number and scope of military operations by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other forces in North Kivu was noted over the reporting period, at times raising concerns over the protection of civilians. The increased use of heavy artillery by parties to conflict raised additional risks for children. The conflict between M23 and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and allied armed groups also caused further population displacement, worsening living conditions for and increasing vulnerabilities of children. For instance, in February 2023, three girls were raped by Union des patriotes pour la défense du Congo (UPDC) elements close to the internally displaced persons camp where they lived, near Goma.

9. In the context of the M23 resurgence, various armed groups proclaimed to be operating under the label “Wazalendo” (roughly translating to “patriots” in Swahili). In response to the call by the Government to join the national defence forces in their fight against M23, self-proclaimed Wazalendo armed groups at times forged informal alliances with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against M23. This development triggered increased activity by armed groups, while also increasing the perceived legitimacy of these armed groups’ participation in the conflict. This in turn restricted the ability of the country task force to make contact

with the leadership of armed groups to engage with them on the prevention of grave violations and the release of associated children.

10. In July 2023, in reaction to the M23 crisis, a law establishing a national Armed Defence Reserve, aimed at creating a reserve force for the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was promulgated. The law requires candidates to be at least 18 years old at the time of recruitment. Subsequently, a new coalition of armed groups named *Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie* was established in September 2023. In contrast to the self-proclaimed Wazalendo, armed groups operating under *Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie* adhere to a joint command and control structure and are materially and financially supported by the Government. Of concern, some of the armed groups that are part of *Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie*, namely AFRC, APCLS, NDC-Rénové and Nyatura, are listed in annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, including for the recruitment and use of children.

11. Further, in 2023, ADF again extended its area of operations to North Kivu, as well as further into Ituri Province, leading to a significant deterioration of the security situation, despite the ongoing joint operations of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against the group. For instance, during an incursion into a village in Beni territory, North Kivu, ADF elements carried out an attack against civilians, killing 14 children with machetes and gunfire in January 2023.

12. In Ituri, attacks against civilians, including children, intensified. In particular, attacks against internally displaced persons by CODECO and ADF increased. For instance, during an attack on the Lala internally displaced persons camp in Djugu territory, CODECO elements killed 46 civilians, including 23 children, in June 2023. In Djugu and Mahagi territories, cycles of retaliatory attacks between CODECO and Mai-Mai Zaïre resulted in civilian casualties, including children.

13. With over 130 armed groups, South Kivu had the highest number of active armed groups during the reporting period. The province was also affected by the spillover of the M23 crisis, in particular in its northernmost territories. As regional and intercommunal tensions increased in the province, there was also an increased risk of recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict. For instance, during a mission to Kalehe territory in early 2024, the country task force was able to separate 288 children, aged 12 to 17, from Raia Mutomboki.

14. Further, intercommunal fighting erupted in Kwamouth territory, Mai-Ndombe Province, and in Tshopo Province in mid-2022. These intercommunal clashes resulted in the displacement of over 150,000 people, including over 80,000 children, during the reporting period. Limited information on grave violations was available owing to limited child protection capacity in these areas and access constraints resulting from insecurity.

15. Children were severely affected by the humanitarian crisis in the country. At the end of the reporting period, 15.4 million children were in need of humanitarian assistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Over 6.7 million people, over 40 per cent of whom were children, were internally displaced in the conflict-affected provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri and Tanganyika. Further, as a result of conflict, insecurity and displacement, an estimated 7.5 million children were out of school at the end of the reporting period, placing them at heightened risk of recruitment and use, and other grave violations.

16. Climate shocks further worsened the humanitarian situation. Flooding and landslides, coupled with inadequate infrastructure, restricted children's access to clean water, good sanitation, quality education and health services. For example,

heavy rains resulted in massive flooding and mudslides in Kalehe territory, South Kivu. The impact of the flooding raised serious concerns regarding the protection of children, putting them at an increased risk of violence, including sexual violence, as a result of displacement, separation from their families and trauma.

17. As mandated by the Security Council in resolution [2717 \(2023\)](#), MONUSCO began implementing the joint disengagement plan, which had been agreed upon with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in November 2023, towards the Mission's gradual, responsible and sustainable withdrawal. MONUSCO had ceased its operations in South Kivu Province by 30 April 2024 and had withdrawn from the province by 30 June 2024.

18. As part of the disengagement of MONUSCO from South Kivu, the country task force conducted a series of consultations with partners on the post-MONUSCO child protection landscape, the consolidation of child protection gains, the continuity of prevention, protection and response efforts for children affected by armed conflict and options to support the transfer of child protection-related tasks carried out by MONUSCO to UNICEF and other United Nations entities, as directed by the Security Council in resolution [2717 \(2023\)](#). The withdrawal of MONUSCO from that region raises concerns regarding the capacity to report and verify information on the six grave violations. In the context of the Mission's disengagement from the province, the retention of human resources, especially the expertise and experience of personnel, within the Mission's residual civilian presence in South Kivu and/or the United Nations country team will be crucial to ensuring the sustainable continuation of the engagement with armed groups by the Resident Coordinator Office and the United Nations country team.

III. Grave violations against children

19. The country task force verified 8,208 grave violations against 6,196 children (4,325 boys; 1,871 girls) by 77 parties to the conflict that occurred during the reporting period. This represents an 8 per cent increase compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2022/745](#)). The increase can largely be explained by a high number of children released from armed groups following engagement of the country task force, in particular in South Kivu, which allowed for an increased ability to verify violations committed against them, as well as by the deterioration of the overall security situation in Ituri, and the M23 crisis in North Kivu.

20. A total of 1,810 children (1,239 boys; 571 girls) were victims of two or more violations, including recruitment and use through abduction (1,271), recruitment and use and sexual violence (121), abduction and sexual violence (83), recruitment and use and maiming (47), abduction and killing (25) and other combinations of violations (263).

21. Recruitment and use (4,006), abduction (2,028) and killing and maiming (1,298) were the most prevalent verified violations and increased by 3 per cent, 31 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively, compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2022/745](#)). Verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access (21) increased by 62 per cent. Sexual violence (662) and attacks on schools and hospitals (193) both decreased by 30 per cent.

22. The overwhelming majority of verified violations were attributed to armed groups (98 per cent, 8,021), including Raia Mutomboki (1,056), Nyatura (966), ADF (911), M23 (798), Mai-Mai Mazembe (766), CODECO (704), AFRC (340), APCLS (304) and other armed groups (2,176). A total of 150 violations could not be attributed to a specific perpetrator. Government armed and security forces were responsible for

187 violations (2 per cent): the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (155), the Congolese National Police (27), the National Intelligence Agency (3) and the General Directorate for Immigration (1), as well as the Burundi National Defence Force (1).

23. The number of verified grave violations attributed to government armed and security forces decreased by 63 per cent compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2022/745](#)). The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular through the work of the joint technical working group on children and armed conflict and collaboration with the country task force on the screening of recruits, have continued to show a strong commitment to preventing the recruitment and use of children. However, sexual violence continued to be the violation most attributed to government armed and security forces (109), followed by killing and maiming (60). Further efforts to end and prevent these violations are needed.

24. North Kivu, with 4,146 violations, and South Kivu, with 1,903, were the provinces with the highest numbers of verified violations, accounting for 74 per cent of the total, followed by Ituri (1,883), Tanganyika (231) and Maniema (36). Nine violations were committed in Uganda and continued being committed on Congolese territory as children were either recruited and/or abducted in Uganda and subsequently brought to and used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the violations were verified. The notable increase in the number of grave violations verified in South Kivu can be attributed to the successful engagement of the country task force with armed groups in the province, which led to the voluntary release of over 1,000 children and the resulting increased ability to verify the grave violations committed against them.

25. In addition, 510 grave violations against 267 children (172 boys; 95 girls), including children who were victims of two or more violations, that had occurred during previous reporting periods were verified during the period under review: sexual violence (190), recruitment and use (168), killing and maiming (78), abduction (72) and attacks on schools and hospitals (2). Violations were attributed to Raia Mutomboki (86), CODECO (66), Nyatura (54), Mai-Mai Mazembe (46), ADF (33), the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (33), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (29), APCLS (26), Twigwaneho (25), Bantu militia (17), Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke (14), NDC-Rénové (11), the Congolese National Police (3), the National Intelligence Agency (1) and 21 other armed groups (66). The violations had been committed in North Kivu (204), South Kivu (149), Ituri (107), Tanganyika (49) and Maniema (1).

26. The ability of the country task force to monitor and verify violations was hampered by a volatile security situation, armed group activities and corresponding military operations by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the state of siege in North Kivu and Ituri and anti-MONUSCO sentiment throughout the reporting period. The lack of access was particularly pronounced in North Kivu owing to the M23 crisis. Therefore, the actual number of violations is likely to be much higher.

A. Recruitment and use

27. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 4,006 children (3,266 boys; 740 girls) by armed groups.

28. Of the 4,006 children, 1,489 (1,249 boys; 240 girls) were recruited before the reporting period and continued to be used until their separation during the reporting period. The remaining 2,517 children (2,017 boys; 500 girls) were recruited and used during the reporting period. Compared with the previous reporting period (see

[S/2022/745](#)), the number of children newly recruited increased by 36 per cent, mainly owing to increasing tensions between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, affiliated armed groups and M23, which led parties such as M23 and AFRC to increase their ranks. Further, a high number of cases of recruitment and use was verified when children were released from armed groups, following engagement of the country task force.

29. Children were recruited and used by 69 armed groups, including Raia Mutomboki (780), Nyatura (538), Mai-Mai Mazembe (522), AFRC (263), ADF (229), APCLS (193), Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke (189), M23 (176), Front patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo (FPIC) (109), UPDC (90), Twigwaneho (90), FDLR-FOCA (85), NDC-Rénové (77), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (58), FRPI (1) and 54 other armed groups (606).

30. Children were recruited and used in North Kivu (2,052), South Kivu (1,420), Ituri (450), Tanganyika (63) and Maniema (15). Six children were recruited by ADF in Uganda and later used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

31. Children were used in combat (1,412) and in support roles (2,594) such as escorts (462), porters (269), spies (165), fetish keepers (114), sex slaves (74) and unspecified roles (1,510).

32. For instance, two boys were killed in clashes between Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke and Twigwaneho while they were being used in combat roles by Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke in South Kivu.

33. Means of recruitment included forced recruitment (1,516), including through abduction (1,435). Another 2,426 children (60 per cent) joined armed groups to seek security (1,284), because of pressure from peers, family or community members (819), for financial reasons (247) or for revenge (76). In 64 cases, the methods of and reasons for recruitment were unknown.

34. For instance, 12 girls, aged 13 to 17, were abducted by Raia Mutomboki while collecting charcoal or fetching water and were then used for sexual slavery purposes. In one case, the sexual slavery resulted in a girl giving birth before her release from the group. Six of the victims received medical care.

35. Children were separated from armed groups through escape (1,677), voluntary release by their commander (1,347), surrender as a result of the disarmament and demobilization of the armed group they were associated with (194), capture by government armed and security forces (183), release after the payment of ransom (17) and in an unspecified manner (7). A total of 558 children (492 boys; 66 girls) were still being used by armed groups at the end of the reporting period. A total of 23 boys were killed (10) and maimed (13) after their recruitment and use. Separated children systematically benefited from transitional care.

36. Of note, of the 1,347 children voluntarily released by commanders, 1,096 (81 per cent) were released in South Kivu, following engagement by the country task force.

Deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with armed forces or armed groups

37. A total of 142 children (120 boys; 22 girls), aged 4 to 17, were detained by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for their alleged association with armed groups in North Kivu (103), Ituri (23), South Kivu (15) and Tanganyika (1) for a period of two days to three years. All children were released at the end of the reporting period, following advocacy by the country task force.

38. The country task force also continued to advocate the application of the 2013 directives issued by the Minister for Defence and the National Intelligence Agency, according to which children formerly associated with armed groups must be immediately handed over to the United Nations and partner organizations.

B. Killing and maiming

39. The killing (798) and maiming (500) of 1,298 children (800 boys; 498 girls), ranging in age from infants to 17 years old, was verified. Children were killed or maimed in the last three quarters of 2022 (535), in 2023 (673) and in the first quarter of 2024 (90). The verified number of children killed and maimed increased by 40 per cent compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2022/745](#)), making the present reporting period the deadliest for children since the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

40. Thirty-five armed groups were responsible for 95 per cent of verified child casualties (1,197), while casualties by government armed and security forces (60) decreased compared with the previous reporting period. CODECO was the main perpetrator (369), followed by M23 (278), ADF (205), Mai-Mai Zaïre (106), the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (51), Nyatura (31), Mai-Mai Mazembe (28), the Congolese National Police (9), NDC-Rénové (5) and 28 other armed groups (175). A total of 41 child casualties were attributed to unidentified perpetrators.

41. About half of all verified cases of killing and maiming of children were verified in Ituri (655). This increase was mainly due to a surge in intercommunal violence between groups affiliated with the Hema, Lendu and Bira communities in Irumu and Djugu territories, the emergence of new armed groups, such as Chini ya Tuna, and the splintering and movement of armed groups, such as Mai-Mai Kyandenga and Mai-Mai Kabido, from North Kivu into Ituri. In addition, regular attacks against civilians, including children, by ADF and CODECO continued. Beyond Ituri, cases of killing and maiming were verified in North Kivu (533), South Kivu (75), Tanganyika (31) and Maniema (4).

42. A total of 1,016 children were killed and maimed as a result of attacks against civilians, among whom 457 children were shot, 378 children were attacked with bladed weapons and 29 children were burned. Child casualties also resulted from explosive ordnance (169) and torture (51) and occurred during recruitment (42) and crossfire (20).

43. Of concern, M23 was responsible for 50 per cent (25) of child casualties caused by ill-treatment. Children were ill-treated for their alleged ties with opposing armed groups (11) and as a tactic for terrorizing the civilian population (8). Ill-treatment included denial of medical support (6) and sexual violence (5). For instance, M23 elements, after taking control of a village in Rutshuru territory, North Kivu, forced the local population to carry ammunitions and food. Those who refused, including six children, were beaten and whipped.

44. In another instance, in an attack in Ituri, CODECO elements killed 65 civilians, including 17 children between the ages of 8 months and 12 years, at a mining site in Djugu territory. During the same attack, another 34 civilians whose age and sex could not be verified were maimed and abducted by CODECO, while a number of houses and shops were looted and destroyed.

45. Children who were victims of killing and maiming were also victims of recruitment and use (58), abduction (39), recruitment and use and abduction (17), sexual violence (11), recruitment and use, abduction and sexual violence (2), recruitment and use and sexual violence (1) and abduction and sexual violence (1).

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

46. The country task force verified sexual violence against 662 children (7 boys; 655 girls), between the ages of 1 and 17. Of these, 290 cases were verified in the last three quarters of 2022, 336 in 2023 and 36 in the first quarter of 2024.

47. Perpetrators of sexual violence included: government armed and security forces (109), namely the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (87), the Congolese National Police (18), the National Intelligence Agency (3) and the General Directorate for Immigration (1); and Nyatura (100), M23 (86), CODECO (76), Raia Mutomboki (53), ADF (34), Mai-Mai Mazembe (29), AFRC (23), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (20), UPDC (19), FPIC (16), APCLS (14), FDLR-FOCA (10), Mai-Mai Malaika (9), NDC-Rénové (3), FRPI (2) and 18 other armed groups (47). Sexual violence remained the grave violation most attributed to government security forces, although there was a decrease compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2022/745](#)). A total of 12 cases were attributed to unidentified perpetrators.

48. Cases were verified in North Kivu (359), Ituri (174), South Kivu (98), Tanganyika (19) and Maniema (12).

49. Cases of sexual violence involved rape (386), forced marriage (106), gang rape (100), sexual slavery (65) and attempted rape (5). For instance, three girls, aged 14 and 15, were abducted, recruited and used and then forcibly married to FDLR-FOCA elements. The girls were abducted in Virunga National Park while buying charcoal. They spent one year with FDLR-FOCA before they escaped. They received interim care through non-governmental organization partners.

50. In another example, two girls, aged 12 and 14, were raped and then decapitated by Chini ya Tuna elements while on their way back from the fields.

51. The number of children who were victims of sexual violence and another grave violation is of concern: 191 girls and 1 boy were victims of abduction and sexual violence, 123 of whom were also recruited and used, including 1 girl who was also maimed. A total of 68 girls were recruited and used and experienced sexual violence and 11 were subjected to sexual violence and then killed (9) or maimed (2). Two victims of sexual violence and maiming were also victims of abduction (1) and recruitment and use (1).

52. Despite its high prevalence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sexual violence remained underreported. Survivors feared reprisals, in particular because of the continued proximity of perpetrators and stigma, and often experienced blame and alienation from their communities. Many victims lack access to adequate services owing to insecurity.

53. In 48 cases of sexual violence against children, the perpetrators were arrested, 91 per cent of whom were members of government security forces (44), namely the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (35), the Congolese National Police (7) and the National Intelligence Agency (2). Perpetrators from armed groups who were arrested belonged to Mai-Mai Zaïre (2), Conseil national pour le renouveau et la démocratie (1) and APCLS (1).

54. The country task force continued its advocacy to hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable, particularly through the joint technical working groups on children and armed conflict at the provincial and national levels. However, fear of retaliation, access constraints and the limited capacity of the Government to identify, locate and prosecute individual perpetrators, especially those belonging to armed groups, posed challenges to accountability efforts.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

55. The country task force verified 193 attacks on schools (110) and hospitals (83), representing a 31 per cent decrease compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2022/745](#)). Incidents were verified between April and December 2022 (85), in 2023 (89) and in the first quarter of 2024 (19).

56. Armed groups were responsible for 176 attacks on schools and hospitals. Perpetrators included M23 (70), CODECO (57), ADF (12), the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (10), Twigwaneho (6), unidentified perpetrators (6), Nyatura (5), Mai-Mai Kifuafua (4), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (3), Mai-Mai Malaika (3), Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke (3), Mai-Mai Yakutumba (3), Raia Mutomboki (2), Mai-Mai Mazembe (2), Mai-Mai Zaïre (2), NDC-Rénové (1), FRPI (1), Mai-Mai Kijangala (1), Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi (1) and the Burundi National Defence Force (1).

57. Attacks were verified in North Kivu (100), Ituri (67), South Kivu (20), Tanganyika (3) and Maniema (3). The high number of attacks on schools and hospitals verified in North Kivu resulted primarily from the *modus operandi* of the hostilities between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and M23, during which civilian infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, are regularly damaged.

58. Attacks on schools and hospitals involved looting (94), the destruction of infrastructure and facilities (91) and attacks on protected personnel (9), including killing (3) and maiming (2).

59. For example, in November 2023, in South Kivu, two schools were destroyed when Twigwaneho launched an attack against the facilities. The schools were set on fire after Twigwaneho killed some of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo elements who were using the schools for military purposes.

60. In another incident, in North Kivu, M23 carried out an aerial attack against an Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo position in Rutshuru territory. One of the bombs destroyed a medical facility and killed eight civilians, including a doctor.

61. The damage, destruction, military use or closure of hospitals are further weakening the capacity of the health system. As at the end of the reporting period, access to essential medical care was being limited for children in North Kivu (730,084), South Kivu (189,656), Ituri (68,024) and Tanganyika (6,170).

62. Further, over 2.7 million children, including in North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri and Tanganyika, faced severe disruptions to their education, mainly owing to armed conflicts and intercommunal tensions. In some cases, schools were also repurposed as shelters for internally displaced persons. Attacks, destruction by armed groups and natural disasters led to the closure of 848 schools, affecting over 718,523 children.

Military use of schools

63. The country task force verified 55 incidents of military use of schools, which took place between April and December 2022 (12), in 2023 (41) and during the first quarter of 2024 (2), in North Kivu (48), South Kivu (5) and Ituri (2).

64. The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were responsible for 18 incidents, and 37 incidents were perpetrated by armed groups, namely M23 (15), Mai-Mai Mazembe (7), Nyatura (7), AFRC (4), ADF (1), APCLS (1), Mai-Mai Kyandenga (1) and Raia Mutomboki (1). Schools were used for a time frame ranging from two days to one month. All schools were vacated at the end of the reporting period, following advocacy by the country task force.

E. Abduction

65. The country task force verified the abduction of 2,028 children (1,436 boys; 592 girls) between the ages of 1 and 17. This represents a 31 per cent increase compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2022/745](#)). Cases were verified between April and December 2022 (904), in 2023 (921) and in the first quarter of 2024 (203).

66. Abductions were attributed to ADF (430), Nyatura (292), Raia Mutomboki (209), M23 (187), Mai-Mai Mazembe (185), CODECO (131), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (109), APCLS (85), UPDC (59), AFRC (52), NDC-Rénové (45), Mai-Mai Zaïre (37), FDLR-FOCA (34), Mai-Mai Kyandenga (22), FPIC (18), Mai-Mai Kifuafua (11), the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (7), FRPI (3) and 23 other armed groups (64), as well as unidentified perpetrators (48).

67. Abductions were verified in North Kivu (1,100), Ituri (532), South Kivu (276), Tanganyika (115) and Maniema (2), and in neighbouring Uganda (3).

68. The purpose of abductions included recruitment and use (1,435), unknown reasons (343), extortion and/or ransom (154), sexual violence (71) and alleged association with an opposing party to conflict (3). A total of 22 children were killed (20) and maimed (2) after having been abducted.

69. For instance, three boys were abducted by ADF in Uganda and brought to North Kivu. Two of the boys were then used by ADF until their arrest by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while one child escaped from captivity during a joint military operation by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces. All three boys were handed over to partners for interim care and reintegration support.

70. In another example, in Ituri, a girl was abducted at school by CODECO, who alleged that she was a spy for Mai-Mai Zaïre elements. The girl was maimed by gunfire while in captivity. She managed to escape after two weeks.

71. Of the abducted children, 1,427 were released or escaped, while 601 remained in captivity at the end of the reporting period.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

72. A total of 21 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified, representing a 62 per cent increase compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2022/745](#)). Incidents were verified between April and December 2022 (10), in 2023 (10) and in the first quarter of 2024 (1).

73. Violations were attributed to CODECO (5), Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke (4), unidentified Mai-Mai groups (2), Mai-Mai Yakutumba (2), Raia Mutomboki (1), ADF (1), M23 (1), Twigwaneho (1), Mai-Mai Mamadou (1), Mai-Mai Kamama (1), Mai-Mai Toronto (1) and Mai-Mai Mutetezi (1).

74. Violations occurred in South Kivu (14), Ituri (5) and North Kivu (2).

75. Incidents involved the looting of humanitarian vehicles (11) and abduction of humanitarian personnel (10).

76. Humanitarian actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to face challenges to gain access to certain areas during the reporting period. While there continued to be relatively few instances of denial of access by parties to the conflict, access to children and vulnerable populations was an ongoing challenge, with access being restricted owing to ongoing military operations and to the exercise of territorial control over certain areas by armed groups. Further, reporting on and verification of

incidents was hampered by a lack of information-sharing resulting from fear of retaliation.

77. For example, in the Petit Nord area, in North Kivu, most United Nations entities, funds and programmes had to restrict their movements because of the volatile security situation.

IV. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children

78. Throughout the reporting period, the country task force made progress in its efforts to end, prevent and respond to grave violations against children, including through engagement with parties to conflict, collaboration with and support for the Government in reforming legislative frameworks and advancing accountability efforts, awareness-raising and training sessions on child protection for relevant stakeholders and programmatic support for children affected by armed conflict.

79. Further, in January 2024, the country task force began an evaluation of the progress made by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in implementing the 2012 action plan, focusing on the success factors, remaining challenges and the sustainability of the gains made. The evaluation, which will be finalized later in 2024, is focused on efforts made to end, prevent and respond to grave violations, to separate children from parties to the conflict and to fight against impunity. It will include recommendations for the way forward, including in the context of the disengagement of MONUSCO.

A. Action plans and dialogue with parties to the conflict

80. The country task force continued collaborating with the national joint technical working group on children and armed conflict, which had been established by the Government to implement the 2012 action plan to end the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations against children. The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to implementing the action plan, including through joint age screening exercises and the issuance of directives to prevent grave violations against children. For example, the country task force supported the Armed Forces with the screening of 32,190 candidates, through which 1,430 children (1,359 boys; 71 girls) were identified and separated prior to their recruitment. The success of this engagement is evidenced by the fact that no cases of recruitment or use of children by the Armed Forces or the Congolese National Police were verified during the reporting period.

81. At the provincial level, the provincial joint technical working group on children and armed conflict in South Kivu was reactivated in November 2022, through the nomination of eight members from the provincial government. The provincial joint technical working group in Tanganyika was launched in March 2024, two years after the designation of a focal point in October 2022. The provincial joint technical working groups in Ituri and North Kivu remained active throughout the reporting period.

82. In its engagement with armed groups, the country task force encountered several challenges, namely an increasing number of armed groups that proclaimed to be operating under the label “Wazalendo” and that expressed anti-MONUSCO sentiment. For example, following attacks against MONUSCO peacekeepers and looting and destruction of United Nations property in July 2022, MONUSCO field

missions were temporarily suspended, which hampered the ability of the task force to monitor and verify allegations of grave violations.

83. Despite these challenges, during the reporting period, the engagement of the country task force led to the signing by armed groups of two unilateral declarations to end and prevent the recruitment and use and other grave violations against children and accompanying road maps for their implementation. A unilateral declaration was signed by the commander of Mai-Mai Machine in October 2022, leading to the immediate release of 13 children. In November 2023, the commander of Raia Mutomboki Kiriku signed a unilateral declaration, which resulted in the immediate release of 20 children. At the end of the reporting period, negotiations on a unilateral declaration with FPIC and other armed groups were ongoing.

B. Legislative reform and administrative measures

84. The period under review saw legislative advances on child protection, with the adoption of a law on protection and reparations for victims of conflict-related sexual violence and the establishment of the National Reparations Fund for Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Other Crimes against the Peace and Security of Mankind by the Parliament of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in December 2022. However, the decree related to the implementation of the law was pending signature as at the end of the reporting period.

85. In May 2023, as a result of a review of the 2022 disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operational framework for children, the provisions on children contained therein were aligned with the national strategy set out under the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. Thereafter, decentralized coordination structures of the Programme were established in North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, Tanganyika and Maniema Provinces. The country task force supported the decentralized implementation of the Programme, including through training sessions on age assessment.

86. Further, in March 2024, then-Prime Minister, Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde Kyenge, signed a decree regarding a military and police code of conduct and ethics for the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which protection against gender-based violence, child protection and gender were mainstreamed.

C. Accountability for perpetrators of grave violations

87. The Government continued its efforts in the fight against impunity as part of the continued implementation of the 2012 action plan and the 2009 law on the protection of the child, which, inter alia, criminalizes child recruitment. A total of 67 members of government armed and security forces, namely from the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (55), the Congolese National Police (10) and the National Intelligence Agency (2), were arrested for sexual violence and killing and maiming of children. A total of 16 perpetrators, 15 of whom were from the Armed Forces and 1 from the Congolese National Police, were convicted and sentenced to between four years and life in prison for sexual violence and the killing of children.

88. Further, 13 elements from armed groups were arrested for recruitment and use, abduction, killing and maiming and sexual violence against children. While most of these proceedings were ongoing at the end of the reporting period, some perpetrators were convicted and sentenced. For example, in September 2022, ADF member, Ghislaine Kavira, was convicted and sentenced to 20 years of “penal servitude” by the Bunia military court for recruitment and use of children between 2013 and 2021.

89. The country task force continued its advocacy to hold accountable all perpetrators of grave violations against children.

D. Advocacy and mainstreaming of child protection

90. The country task force continued awareness-raising initiatives to end and prevent grave violations against children. Training sessions on the protection of children in armed conflict were provided to 12,695 elements of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congolese National Police, the National Intelligence Agency, the General Directorate for Immigration and armed park rangers from the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation. In addition, over 120 justice actors were trained on child protection and child-sensitive investigations and court procedures.

91. In addition, 88 armed group focal points and 58 ex-combatants were trained as part of the implementation of unilateral declarations to end and prevent grave violations against children.

92. Awareness-raising and outreach activities further reached a total of 9,591 community and religious leaders and members of local and community-based organizations, including at least 2,670 women. Moreover, 1,522 child protection focal points and 853 stakeholders from non-governmental organizations participated in community-based awareness-raising and capacity-building activities to strengthen community-level monitoring and reporting capacities on grave violations in the conflict-affected provinces of the country. These efforts included the strengthening and expansion of networks to alert the country task force of incidents of alleged grave violations, and enhancing prevention and response efforts, including for sexual violence.

93. As part of the mainstreaming of child protection in MONUSCO, training sessions were provided to 2,881 MONUSCO uniformed personnel, including 355 women.

E. Release of children

94. Engagement with armed groups led to the voluntary release of 1,347 children (983 boys; 364 girls). Children were released by Raia Mutomboki (645), Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke (170), FPIC (82), Nyatura (57), Mai-Mai Malipo-Soni (44), Autodéfense Muchingwa Alota (38), Mai-Mai Kipangu-Mahano (37), unidentified perpetrators (36), ADF (29) and other armed groups (209), in South Kivu (1,096), Ituri (145), North Kivu (93), Maniema (10) and Tanganyika (2) Provinces and in Uganda (1). It is important to note that not all armed groups that voluntarily released children during the reporting period have formally signed the unilateral declarations to end and prevent child recruitment and other grave violations against children. Rather, some have instead engaged with the country task force on the separation of children through informal means.

F. Programmatic response

95. Child protection actors continued to provide identification, documentation, family tracing and reunification services to children formerly associated with armed groups and to children who were unaccompanied owing to conflict. Children awaiting family reunification or other suitable solutions received temporary care, including referrals to age- and gender-tailored services, notably medical care and psychosocial support. Members of the United Nations Child Protection Area of Responsibility in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo provided support, including transitional care and placement into foster families and/or transit centres, to 14,747 children (10,739 boys; 4,008 girls) formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups. In addition, 16,479 unaccompanied and separated children (9,004 boys; 7,475 girls) were reunified with their families or provided with family-based alternative care solutions in North Kivu (9,254), Ituri (3,262), South Kivu (2,644) and Tanganyika (1,319).

96. To ensure sustainable community-based reintegration, socioeconomic and school reintegration support was provided to 12,492 children (8,755 boys; 3,737 girls) formerly associated with armed groups and other vulnerable children in host communities in North Kivu (4,172), South Kivu (4,170), Tanganyika (2,570) and Ituri (1,580). These socioeconomic and school reintegration activities were accompanied by social reintegration activities, including the provision of psychosocial and mental health support to 1,197,232 children (591,319 boys; 605,913 girls) affected by armed conflict. Such support was delivered mainly through age- and gender-specific focus group discussions, access to child-friendly spaces and one-on-one psychosocial support.

97. In addition, activities on how to prevent, mitigate the risk of and respond to sexual violence against children were implemented in conflict-affected areas.

98. Despite these achievements, challenges for conflict-affected children remained significant. In this regard, efforts were undertaken to strengthen a wide network of qualified paraprofessional social workers in communities to mitigate and address child protection risks and to identify, support and refer vulnerable children to adequate service providers. The social workers are trained, accredited and supervised by the provincial divisions of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and National Solidarity.

V. Observations and recommendations

99. I remain deeply alarmed by the devastatingly high number of grave violations committed against children, particularly by armed groups. I condemn the further increase in grave violations, especially the killing and maiming and abduction of children. I reiterate my call to all parties to put an end to and prevent these violations and adhere to their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

100. I welcome the commitment of the Government to implement the 2012 action plan. I urge the Government to prioritize the prevention of sexual violence, which remained the violation most attributed to government security forces. I welcome the establishment of the National Reparations Fund for Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Other Crimes against the Peace and Security of Mankind. I further welcome the prosecution and conviction of perpetrators of grave violations, including for sexual violence, and encourage the continuation of these efforts.

101. I commend the cooperation between the Government and the United Nations on screening, age assessment and separation of children from the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police during recruitment processes and encourage the continuation and extension of these efforts to the national Armed Defence Reserve. I welcome the absence of verified cases of recruitment and use of children by government security forces during the reporting period.

102. I encourage the Government to further operationalize the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme and to prioritize

the specific needs of conflict-affected children. I call upon donors, especially international financial institutions, to support the Programme.

103. I note with concern that children continued to be detained for their alleged association with armed groups and call upon the Government to treat these children primarily as victims in line with international juvenile justice standards and to hand them over to child protection actors, in line with its 2013 directives.

104. I further encourage regional forces deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to include child protection in predeployment training sessions.

105. I remain deeply concerned by the high number of cases of recruitment and use and abduction of children by armed groups. I urge commanders to immediately cease the recruitment and use of children and to immediately and unconditionally release children from their ranks. I urge the groups who have not yet done so, in particular those listed in annex I to my most recent report on children and armed conflict ([A/78/842-S/2024/384](#)), to enter into dialogue with the United Nations and sign commitments to end and prevent grave violations.

106. I am appalled by the sharp increase in the killing and maiming of children owing to military operations, clashes between parties and attacks on civilian communities and in the context of intercommunal violence, all of which take a heavy toll on children. I appeal to all parties to refrain from targeting children, and civilians in general, and to take all necessary measures to minimize the effect of their activities on civilians, including by refraining from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

107. I welcome the signature of unilateral declarations by Raia Mutomboki Kiriku and Mai-Mai Machine on ending and preventing grave violations against children and am encouraged that several commanders of armed groups continued collaborating with the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations through dialogue. I welcome the voluntary release of 1,347 children by armed groups during the reporting period, following United Nations advocacy. I commend the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for supporting such outreach by the United Nations.

108. I urge all parties to immediately end and prevent attacks on schools and hospitals and to immediately vacate all schools used for military purposes.

109. There is a need to address possible capacity gaps for the protection of conflict-affected children as MONUSCO implements its gradual, responsible and sustainable withdrawal from the country in accordance with Security Council resolution [2717 \(2023\)](#). In this regard, I further call upon Member States and donors to contribute sufficient resources for the continuation of child protection efforts to sustain the gains made, including, in the context of the withdrawal of MONUSCO, towards the capacity of the Resident Coordinator Office and UNICEF, as well as other United Nations entities contributing to child protection efforts.

110. I remain concerned by the lack of predictable funding for long-term reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, which hampers their effective and sustainable reintegration into communities. I urge the donor community, together with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to support these critical programmes to reduce the risks of child recruitment and re-recruitment and contribute to peace and stability in the country, while emphasizing that inclusive and sustainable development remains the most effective long-term solution to the underlying conflict drivers and fragility in the country.