

Violations against children in conflict alarmingly high

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According to the report, the highest numbers of grave violations were verified in Afghanistan, the DRC, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen [File: Omar Sobhani/Reuters]

United Nations, June 22 (RHC)-- Grave violations against children in conflict remain “alarmingly high”, with the coronavirus pandemic increasing their vulnerability to abduction, recruitment and sexual violence, a new United Nations report has found.

In its annual Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) report (PDF), released on Monday, the UN said at least 19,379 children affected by war in 2020 were victims of grave violations such as recruitment or rape.

The UN verified a total of 26,425 grave violations, of which 23,946 were committed in 2020 and 2,479 were committed earlier but verified only in 2020. "Escalation of conflict, armed clashes and disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law had a severe impact on the protection of children," the report found.

According to the report, the highest numbers of grave violations were recorded in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. While more than 8,400 children were killed or harmed in ongoing wars, nearly 7,000 others were recruited to fight, mainly in the DRC, Somalia, Syria, and Myanmar.

Verified cases of abduction and sexual violence against children increased by 90 and 70 percent, respectively, it said – with abductions often coupled with the "recruitment and use of children and sexual violence" including rape.

The UN said the coronavirus pandemic "aggravated existing vulnerabilities of children, including by hampering their access to education, health and social services, limiting child protection activities and shrinking safe spaces."

Attacks on schools and hospitals were also prevalent in 2020, including serious attacks committed against girls' education and against health facilities and their staff. There was also an increase in the military use of schools and hospitals, especially with the brief closure of schools during COVID lockdowns – making them easy targets for military occupation and use, the report said.

"The wars of adults have taken away the childhood of millions of boys and girls again in 2020," Virginia Gamba, the Secretary-General's Special Representative on CAAC, said.

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