

A person is shown from the back, wearing a white vest over a dark long-sleeved shirt. They are wearing a patterned cap. The vest has text printed on the back. The person's right hand is raised, pointing towards the right. The background is a blurred green, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees.

CENTER FOR
CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT
RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS TRENDS REPORT **2024**

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ABOUT CIVIC

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international non-governmental organization dedicated to protecting civilians in conflict.

Founded in 2003 by humanitarian Marla Ruzicka, CIVIC works with conflict-affected communities and security forces to prevent and respond to civilian harm and ensure that the protection of civilians is a global priority.

Guided by Marla's belief that civilians are not collateral damage and that civilian harm can and must be prevented, CIVIC continues to advance practical solutions that save lives and strengthen protection in conflict.

METHODOLOGY

The topics covered in this report reflect protection priorities identified by CIVIC through strategic consultation processes with experts and analysis of datasets measuring different aspects of protection, such as civilian fatalities and casualties, violations against children, sexual violence, and displacement, among many others. However, the extent of the protection threats civilians faced throughout 2024 was such that CIVIC was unable to dedicate content to all of the direct and indirect harm that women, men, girls, and boys suffered throughout the year. Although not able to be fully comprehensive, the report seeks to demonstrate the human cost of conflict and amplify the experiences of civilians living in situations of conflict and extreme violence. It also seeks to underscore threats emerging from the changing nature of warfare, and spur collective action in response to these emerging threats.

Unless directly stated otherwise, all conclusions put forward in this report are based on triangulated primary

data (at least three independent sources), secondary data sources assessed as highly credible, or a combination of primary and secondary data sources. For information based on interviews, CIVIC has protected the identity of primary sources by anonymizing interviews. However, we have provided other information in the report citations that is relevant for context.

To identify which indicators to include in CIVIC's Civilian Protection Index, we reviewed existing global indexes related to peace and security, consulted internally across CIVIC's staff, consulted externally with members of an informal NGO working group on the protection of civilians, and relied on the expertise of Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) staff.

The index includes 15 indicators and covers 163 countries, including all countries with populations exceeding 1 million. It thus represents 99.7 percent of the world's population.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



For civilians in conflict-affected countries, the year 2024 was marked by a string of increasingly bleak new records.

The UN recorded more than 36,000 civilian conflict deaths, a 10 percent increase over the already record-high numbers in 2023 (33,443). Children faced unprecedented violence in conflict zones, largely due to Israel's war against Hamas in the occupied Palestinian Territory (oPT). Journalist deaths in conflicts reached the highest figure in decades, while more aid workers were killed than ever

before - the overwhelming majority of them national staff.

More people were killed or injured by explosive weapons in 2024 than in any year since at least 2010, while the highest number of healthcare personnel were killed in 2024 since records first began being systematically collected.

Against this backdrop, global displacement levels also reached an all-time high, with more than 123 million people forced to flee their homes by the end of 2024.



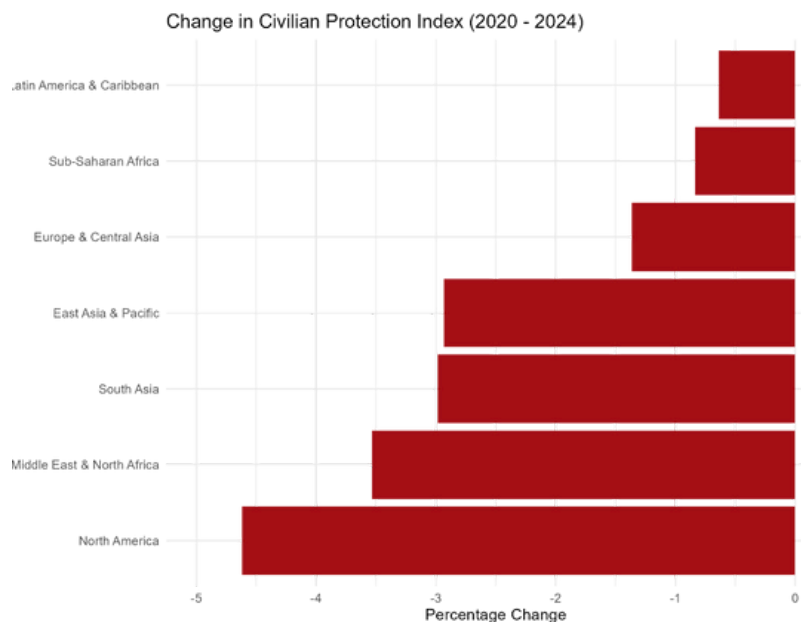


Figure 1: Overall change in the civilian protection environment per region, 2020-2024

Beyond these trends, civilians continued to suffer the often-devastating secondary effects of conflicts. This included long-lasting physical injuries, mental trauma, and lack of access to food, education, healthcare, and other basic services—particularly where high-intensity violence laid waste to schools, hospitals, and other civilian infrastructure.

Several armed actors were also accused of using starvation as a deliberate tactic in warfare in 2024, while conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) was widespread and even worsened in many countries. Access to justice and other remedies remained elusive for most survivors.

This intensifying violence came in a year that, paradoxically, also marked two major milestones in global efforts to better protect civilians in conflict. The 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions took place in 2024. The year also represented 25 years since

the United Nations Security Council first began to recognize protection of civilians as a matter of international peace and security. CIVIC's Civilian Protection Index captured 2024's worsening global outlook. The index, included with this annual report for the second year in a row, helps shed light on the level of protection civilians experience in 163 countries across the globe. The index comprises 15 indicators that measure aspects of protection—including direct and indirect measures of violence like civilian deaths, sexual violence, and the number of firearms circulating among the population—as well as attributes of protective environments, such as trust in government institutions and the quality of civic space. For this year's report, CIVIC also analyzed data dating back to 2020, allowing the index to capture both developments in 2024 and longer-term trends.

The data revealed that civilians in Afghanistan, Myanmar, North Korea, the oPT, Russia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen faced the worst protection environments globally in 2024.

The protection environment deteriorated the most in the oPT, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Lebanon, and Russia from 2023 to 2024. Different factors influence the negative scores in these countries. Burkina Faso, Myanmar, the oPT, and Sudan all experienced among the highest levels of civilian casualties, while in Russia, the low score primarily reflects a lack of trust in governmental institutions and the dire state of independent media and civil society.

This explains, for example, why Russia ranked lower than Ukraine on the index, despite the intense conflict and significant levels of civilian casualties per capita in Ukraine.

Over the longer term, since 2020, the civilian protection environment has worsened in all the regions monitored (see Figure 1 above), while the situations in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Myanmar, the OPT, and Sudan deteriorated the most. This reflects the growing numbers of civilian casualties and, in the case of Afghanistan, the abrupt takeover by the Taliban—an authoritarian regime



imposing severe restrictions on individual rights, particularly for women and girls. Since 2020, all indicators measured by CIVIC have worsened, except those that measure trust in state institutions (see Figure 2).



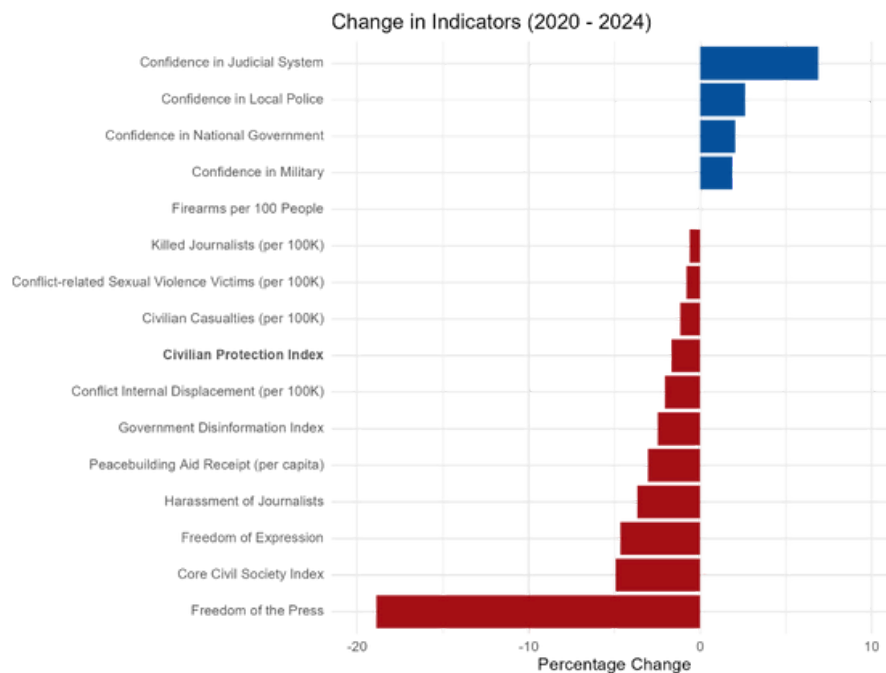


Figure 2: Global changes in the Civilian Protection Index's 15 indicators, 2020-2024

Conversely, according to the Index, civilians enjoyed the strongest protection environment in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, and Timor-Leste. More in-depth analysis of trends highlighted by the index is included throughout this report, while individual country situations can be explored through the interactive map.

The inclusion of some countries with mixed human rights records in this category can be at least partially explained by the Index's reliance on subjective civilian opinion survey data, which can include civilians with lower expectations for government institutions, sometimes rating these institutions more positively than those with higher expectations.

Countries that are relatively stable but still receive peacebuilding aid

are also elevated based on CIVIC's inclusion of a Peacebuilding Aid Receipt indicator.

Beyond the situation in individual countries, technological advances continued to rapidly reshape modern battlefields in 2024, bringing new challenges for safeguarding civilians. Warring parties increasingly relied on Artificial Intelligence (AI), including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, and other autonomous weapons systems.

The use of AI decision-support systems (DSS) came under particular scrutiny, largely due to Israel's reported use of such systems to identify thousands of suspected Hamas-linked targets in Gaza with minimal human oversight.

heighten protection risks for civilians. In Sudan, for example, armed violence and climate factors contributed to famine being declared in parts of the country. At the same time, harmful misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech (MDMH) were ubiquitous in many conflicts, often targeting humanitarian actors in a way that placed both relief efforts and the civilians reliant on them at risk.

With 130 conflicts active across the globe in 2024, some were fought away from the global spotlight despite high levels of civilian suffering. The consequences of a conflict becoming chronically neglected can be significant, as this brings less diplomatic, political, and humanitarian engagement, with civilians paying the price. There were several examples of this in 2024. The intensifying conflict in Sudan continued to be overshadowed by the situations in the oPT and Ukraine, despite a staggering civilian death toll and the worst displacement numbers in the world. In this report, CIVIC also highlights how rampant gang violence in Haiti has led to thousands of deaths and a humanitarian crisis that is perilously underfunded. The UN Security Council, despite meeting a record number of times in 2024, often failed to spotlight the hidden violence in such under-recognized conflicts.





International efforts to stem the rising tide of violence against civilians had, at best, mixed results in 2024. UN peacekeeping efforts continued to move towards leaner missions with often reduced protection mandates, even in situations where civilian protection concerns remained high. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), MONUSCO completed its withdrawal from South Kivu province, but the government requested that its full withdrawal be postponed due to escalating violence by armed groups. In Mali, the security situation for civilians deteriorated during the first half of 2024 following MINUSMA's abrupt withdrawal in late 2023, although the situation stabilized toward the end of the year. This report highlights how peacekeeping mission withdrawals, if not managed correctly, can lead to

perilous protection gaps for civilians, particularly when regional and local actors can lack the capacity and resources of UN-mandated entities.

While impunity too often remains the norm for violations against civilians, there were also notable developments toward accountability in some contexts in 2024. The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants against Israeli and Hamas officials for various crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the Court's first-ever explicit recognition of starvation as a war crime. The ICC prosecutor also requested an arrest warrant against Myanmar military leader Min Aung Hlaing during the year, although it has yet to be officially granted by the Court's judges.

This report also highlights how international justice activists are increasingly making use of universal jurisdiction (UJ) to combat impunity, with a 33 percent rise in such cases just between 2022 and 2024. In 2024, a Swiss court convicted a former Gambian official for various crimes against humanity in a widely publicized case, while in Argentina, a UJ case on the Rohingya genocide led to arrest warrants against Myanmar military and civilian officials. Some efforts to strengthen international legal frameworks and other standards to better protect civilians in conflict moved forward in 2024, although many observers raised concerns about the slow pace of these processes. In December, the UN General Assembly voted to begin formal negotiations on a new international convention on crimes against humanity, which rights groups have long campaigned for. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution on AI while the UN

Secretary-General reiterated his call on states to negotiate a legally binding treaty on lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) by 2026.

However, no significant progress was made toward negotiating such a treaty. At the national level, several countries – including Iraq, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Ukraine, the US, and Yemen – took various steps to better operationalize protection of civilians and integrate civilian harm mitigation and response (CHMR) measures across their armed forces in whole or in part. For example, Yemeni military and security leadership from several governorates signed a POC Code of Conduct Policy and, with support from CIVIC, established an implementation plan for the policy that will include widespread dissemination, strengthened oversight, and community involvement in oversight and implementation.



However, there was backsliding on other international legal commitments. In one such instance, intense debate erupted on military assistance to Ukraine, with many European states voicing support for the transfer of anti-personnel landmines from the US to Ukraine, even though their transfer and use is prohibited by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines (Ottawa Convention). Data also indicated increased production, transfer, and use of cluster munitions in 2024, despite an international convention prohibiting their use. According to the Cluster Munitions Monitor, all 314 recorded casualties caused by cluster munitions in 2024 were civilians, and 42 percent of them were children*.

This report does not just aim to capture trends in civilian harm in 2024, but also to set out concrete steps international and national actors should take to reverse these trends. This Executive Summary is followed by a Roadmap for Action with recommendations for States, the UN Security Council and General Assembly, UN peacekeeping operations, as well as regional organizations such as the African Union.

Most of these recommendations mirror those outlined in CIVIC's POC Trend report covering 2023, reflecting a lack of progress in 2024, and even regression in many areas.



Ukraine Media Centre/savED Charity Fund

*Cluster Munition Coalition, Cluster Munition Monitor 2025, September 2025.



The **Recognize** section of this report profiles conflict-affected regions of the world that are often neglected on the global stage and analyzes why some contexts with significant levels of civilian harm still receive less media attention, political engagement, and donor funding than others.

Spotlight articles profile the situation in two such relatively neglected conflicts—in Haiti and Sudan—which both experienced sharply escalating levels of violence and displacement in 2024, as well as examining how the UN Security Council focused its attention during the year.

The next section, **Prevent**, highlights trends in the use of AI, MDMH, and PSMCs on modern battlefields, as well as how the effects of climate change and conflict on protection concerns increasingly intersect.

It also contains in-depth spotlight articles on the diffusion of drone technology in modern warfare, as well as on how climate change has exacerbated civilian harm and displacement in Nigeria's northeastern Borno state.



The **Protect** section provides an overview of key conflict trends in 2024 and how these impacted civilians, both directly and indirectly. Spotlight articles in this section cover: the situation in Somalia's Lower Juba region, where the government launched an offensive against the NSAG Al-Shabaab, prompting backlash against civilians; recent efforts to strengthen community-based protection (CBP) and CHMR efforts of militaries; the escalation in the use of explosive weapons and their toll on civilians; as well as the protection risks stemming from abrupt withdrawals of UN peacekeeping missions.

The final section, **Amend**, examines the reverberating impacts of wars of civilians, both while violence is ongoing and in post-conflict settings, as well as efforts to secure justice, reparations, or amends for conflict-related abuses.

The spotlight articles focus on the current situation in Afghanistan where, despite a drop in casualty numbers, years of unaddressed harm are compounding alongside fresh violations to undermine civilian well-being, as well as on international justice efforts over the genocide against the Rohingya group in Myanmar.

ROADMAP FOR ACTION



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATES

- Implement at a national level all international legal obligations related to the protection of civilians, including those contained in international humanitarian and human rights law. States should establish relevant policies, guidelines, and doctrine for operationalizing legal protection obligations and non-binding best practices. Such efforts could include: voluntary national IHL reports, national Protection of Civilians policies, civilian harm mitigation and response (CHMR) doctrine, and operational frameworks on protection and CHMR for state security forces.
- Help ensure respect for IHL and the protection of civilians by other States, including by using diplomatic pressure, conditioning military support and joint operations on compliance with IHL, and providing legal support to other States.
- Implement the Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), including by developing or strengthening national plans for preventing conflict-related sexual violence.
- Pursue accountability for violations against civilians in conflict—including CRSV and grave violations committed against children—by supporting timely national investigations and prosecutions. Support international justice efforts on similar violations, including by providing political or other support to international justice bodies, or exploring relevant universal jurisdiction cases through national courts.
- Prioritize child protection and women protection considerations in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration initiatives.

- Endorse and effectively implement the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA), including by discontinuing the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas, taking additional precautions to ensure that explosive weapons do not strike educational infrastructure, health infrastructure, and other infrastructure critical to the survival and well-being of the civilian population, disseminating the policy nationally, and instituting policy review processes to identify the extent to which the Political Declaration is being successfully implemented.



- Take all necessary steps to protect civilian infrastructure in conflict, in line with IHL. Endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD).
- Endorse and advocate for states to adhere to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines (Ottawa Convention). Advocate with states that are retreating from the Ottawa convention to re-evaluate their decision.
- Protect civic space and create an environment where civil society organizations can operate freely and without undue interference. Safeguard and increase financial support to civil society actors across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

- In line with UNSC Resolution 2730, strengthen efforts to protect UN and humanitarian personnel and their facilities in accordance with international law, with a particular focus on ensuring the safety of national staff and other frontline responders.
- Increase—or at least safeguard—funding directly to national and local NGOs and other frontline responders in countries where humanitarian aid is being delivered and support these organizations in strengthening their coordination mechanisms.
- In humanitarian crises and conflicts with high risks to civilians: strengthen support for inclusive, people-centered approaches to protecting civilians, incorporating greater recognition of the specific needs in each context. In addition, integrate the direct participation of affected civilians and communities in decision making, planning, and programs, while prioritizing the safety of frontline responders.
- Refrain from transferring arms to other states when there is an overriding risk that the arms will be used to commit or facilitate violations of IHL and consider how to prevent arms transfers from creating other risks to civilians.
- Guarantee that AI military capabilities are used in compliance with international law, including by ensuring that the use of AI-enabled systems does not cause disproportionate harm to civilians or civilian objects, in line with IHL.
- Subject the design and development of military AI capabilities to rigorous auditing and transparency processes.
- Negotiate a legally binding instrument to regulate all lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). In addition, prohibit LAWS that function without human control and oversight and that cannot be used in compliance with IHL.



UN Photo/Mona Elfateh, via UN Women

- Take all feasible precautions to avoid, or at the very least minimize, civilian casualties, from drones by putting stringent verification protocols in place to distinguish between civilians and military targets. Ensure that all drone operators receive thorough training in IHL, and IHRL as relevant, including the sanctions that apply for violations
- Create or strengthen national legislation regulating mercenaries as well as PMSCs based on established international instruments and guidance. Support UN-led efforts to develop a new international framework for the regulation, monitoring and oversight of PMSCs.
- Invest in media literacy and strengthen national legislation on MDMH—including AI-generated content—by, for example, increasing regulation of social media platforms that profit from the promotion and virality of MDMH (without compromising human rights).
- Prioritize preventive action, including institutional capacity-building at the national level for the regulation of PMSCs in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

- Enhance the capacity of security forces to respond effectively to climate-related threats and invest in stock-taking exercises to assess when security forces (as compared to other actors) are the best actor to respond to climate disasters.
- Help communities build resilience against climate impacts through education, infrastructure development, and sustainable livelihoods programs.
- Ensure accountability and amends for civilian harm, including by increasing investments in national and international victim funds and guaranteeing that funds set aside to redress harm to civilians are distributed to survivors in a timely manner.
- Involve survivors—including marginalized societal groups—more substantively in the shaping of justice and reconciliation mechanisms. Tailor amends and reparations to the self-identified needs and preferences of these groups, ensuring that they are culturally sensitive.
- Prioritize renewed and sustained funding and engagement for resolving conflicts in countries where the level of human suffering is greatest, not just where geopolitical or media interests are highest.
- Ensure situations of extreme violence that fall below the threshold of armed conflict receive adequate policy attention in national and intergovernmental forums.

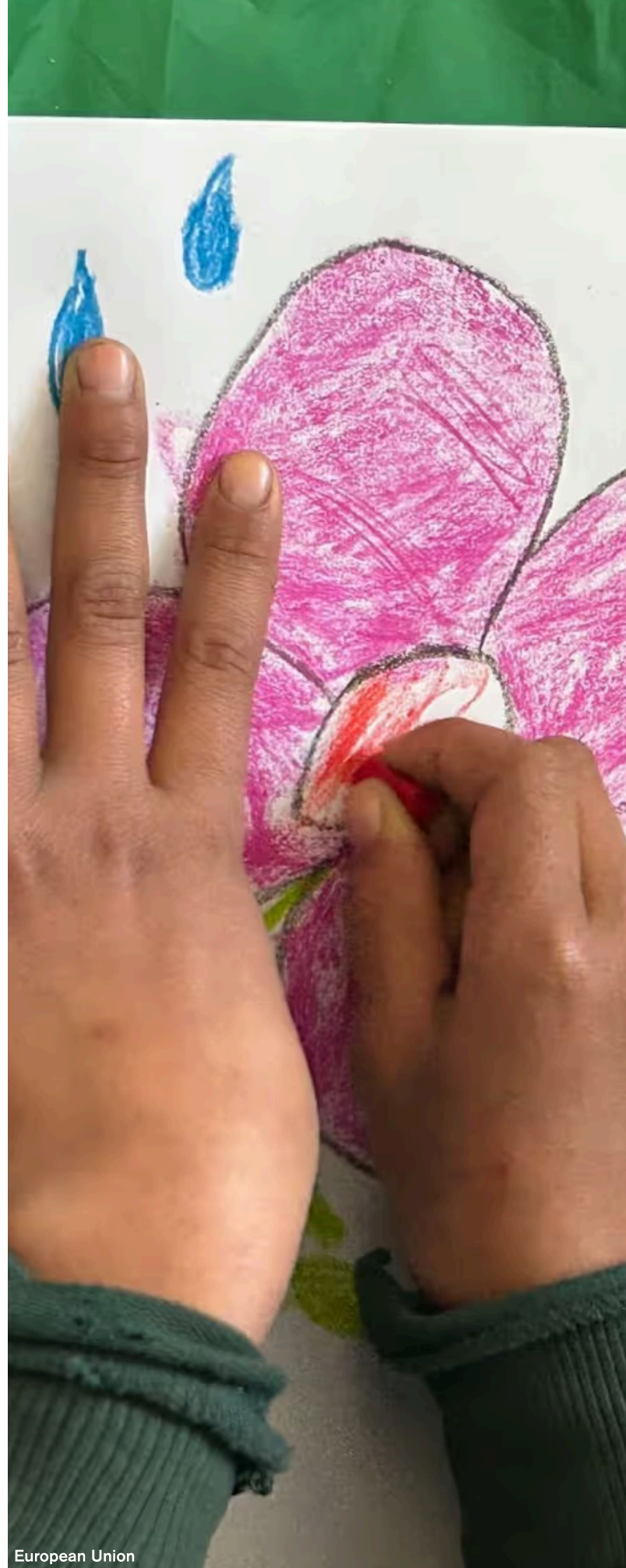


RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNSC AND UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- More fully utilize UN sanctions regimes to promote accountability for violations against civilians—including CRSV and grave violations committed against children—while upholding humanitarian exemptions, as recognized in UNSC Resolution 2664.
- Act on the Secretary-General's call to support the negotiation of a legally binding instrument to regulate the use of LAWS.
- Promote the growth of international norms against the use of MDMH targeted at civilians that is likely to contribute significantly to civilian harm and promote the growth of international norms in support of digital spaces with transparent content moderation policies that respect human rights.



- Support the protection of civilians through UN peace operations by prioritizing protection tasks in mandates, providing guidance on the comprehensive implementation of protection tasks, providing consistent and unified political support for peace operations, and providing missions with appropriate funding and resources to implement their protection mandates.
- Engage in negotiations on a new international convention on crimes against humanity, as set out in UNGA Resolution 79/122.
- Consider measures that can be taken to improve the safety and security of UN and humanitarian personnel, including by acting on recommendations from the UN Secretary-General on implementing Resolution 2730.
- When the UNSC is unable to act in cases of violations against civilians in conflict, the General Assembly should hold the Security Council accountable using the Liechtenstein initiative.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UN PEACE OPERATIONS

- Continue to improve the implementation of comprehensive and integrated Protection of Civilians strategies, strengthen peacekeeping performance and accountability, and better communicate with key stakeholders about the impact of peacekeeping in protecting civilians.
- Support the host states of peacekeeping missions in prioritizing the protection of civilians—in particular, by security and defense forces.
- Better integrate activities with UN Country Team organizations and partner more substantively with national and civil society actors to build sustainable national protection capacity—including dedicated women and child protection mechanisms—that will pave the way for smoother UN transitions.
- Develop exit strategies earlier in mission lifecycles, in close consultation with national stakeholders.
- Build more strategic initiatives to identify, analyze, and address harmful MDMH, including by ensuring such efforts are whole-of-mission endeavors. In addition, better engage civil society in this regard, and optimize the use of UN-operated radio stations for this purpose.
- Where relevant, consider and integrate climate-related security risks into analysis, planning and operations related to the protection of civilians, in coordination with UN agencies and civil society partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND AFRICAN UNION

- When deploying forces to help address insecurity, learn from and build on the past experience of AU and UN missions in mitigating harm to civilians and protecting civilians from harm, including by deploying tools like civilian harm tracking.
- Prioritize comprehensive solutions to conflict that are led by political and protection strategies, and pursue the integration of military, police, and civilian-led protection activities.
- Strengthen good office efforts to further protection efforts and promote continued host state consent to peace operations deployed on their soil.
- Increase regional justice and security coordination and collaboration to prevent cross-border recruitment of children into armed groups. In addition, support holistic, tailored, and sustainable disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs for children.



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