

ANNUAL BRIEF ON VIOLENCE AFFECTING CIVILIANS

HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2024, UNMISS HRD documented 1,019 incidents of violence affecting 3,657 civilians in South Sudan: 1,561 killed, 1,299 injured, 551 abducted, and 246 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).
- In comparison with 2023, this constitutes a 15 percent increase in violent incidents (from 885 to 1,019) and a nine percent increase in the number of victims (from 3,340 to 3,657). The number of civilians killed and injured increased by two and 23 percent, compared with 2023 (from 1,524 to 1,561 and from 1,052 to 1,299), respectively. While the number of abductions decreased by eight percent (from 601 to 551), the number of CRSV victims increased significantly by 51 percent (from 163 to 246).
- Similar to 2023, Warrap State experienced the highest number of civilian casualties in 2024 (758 killed and 636 injured), accounting for 49 percent of the total number of civilian casualties in South Sudan. Central Equatoria State experienced the highest number of abductions (200), accounting for 36 percent of the recorded abductions nationwide, while Western Equatoria State recorded the highest number of victims of CRSV at 104 out of 246.
- The community-based and/or civil-defense groups accounted for 73 percent of the recorded incidents affecting 2,910 victims, representing a marginal increase of one percent compared with 2023 (from 2,868 to 2,910). Conversely, the number of victims attributed to conventional parties to the conflict increased by 51 percent compared to the previous year (from 358 to 539), while the number of victims attributed to unidentified armed elements or opportunistic violence increased by 82 percent (from 114 to 208).

CONTEXT

This brief presents an overview of the trends and patterns of violence affecting civilians from January to December 2024 by assessing the four major forms of individual harm experienced throughout South Sudan i.e. killing, injury, abduction, and CRSV. While the impact of violence extends beyond these forms of harm, these have been the most common incidents documented nationwide.

The UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD), in accordance with its mandate, issued this annual brief as an advocacy tool to create awareness on the impact of violence on the civilian population and urge the concerned stakeholders to take action to mitigate, if not eradicate, the armed violence experienced by civilians; and continue to urge the national authorities to hold all perpetrators of violence accountable.

Sources of information include victims and eyewitnesses' accounts, as well as reports from secondary sources

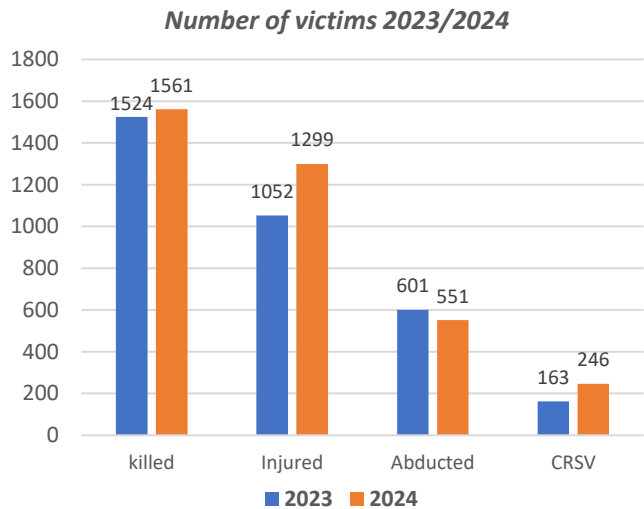
identified during field missions, service providers and protection partners. All reported incidents, particularly sub-national violence by community-based militias and/or civil defense groups, were deconflicted with incidents documented by the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division, while incidents identified as cases of CRSV were validated in consultation with the UNMISS Women's Protection Advisory Unit.

The data and the incidents presented in this brief should not be considered comprehensive due to various challenges encountered by UNMISS HRD in monitoring, investigating and reporting on violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law such as limited access to various locations due to security considerations, access denials, and inaccessibility due to poor road and weather conditions. Challenges also include victims' and eyewitnesses' unwillingness to report due to fear of

reprisals and underreporting of sexual and gender-based violence due to social stigma.

GENERAL TRENDS

In 2024, civilians continued to experience the brunt of sub-national violence across South Sudan. Between January and December, UNMISS HRD documented 1,019 violent incidents affecting 3,657 civilians subjected to one of the four major types of individual harm (i.e. killing, injury, abduction, and CRSV), representing a 15 percent increase in the number of incidents (from 885 to 1,019), and a nine percent increase in the total number of victims, in comparison with 2023. The number of civilians killed and injured increased by two and 23 percent (from 1,524 to 1,561 and from 1,052 to 1,299), respectively. While the number of civilians abducted decreased by eight percent (from 601 to 551), the number of CRSV victims increased by 51 percent (from 163 to 246). At least nine among the civilians abducted were either humanitarian or aid workers providing lifesaving assistance to the most vulnerable population in South Sudan.



Warrap State experienced the highest level of violence, mainly by the community-based militias and/or civil defense groups, followed by Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria states. While the highest number of civilian killings were recorded in September mainly in the context of intercommunal violence in Warrap State, the highest number of sexual violence cases were recorded in June mainly linked to the renewed communal tension between the armed Azande and Balanda communities in Tambura County, Western Equatoria State. Further, the highest number of abductions were documented in July, mainly in Central Equatoria State attributed to the alleged

members of the National Salvation Front (NAS) splinter groups.

Similar to 2023, the majority of victims in 2024 were attributed to community-based militias and/or civil defense groups (79 percent or 2,910 individuals), followed by the conventional parties to the conflict and other armed groups (15 percent or 539 individuals), and unidentified armed elements and other opportunistic violence (six percent or 208 individuals).

In addition to the documented cases of CRSV cited in this brief, UNMISS HRD documented 145 incidents of sexual and gender-based violence across South Sudan, which affected 156 victims (35 women, 117 girls, and four boys). This is a 16 percent increase in the number of victims (from 134 to 156) compared with 2023.

Community-based militias and/or civil defense groups

As in 2023, armed violence involving community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups was the leading cause of harm affecting civilians in South Sudan in 2024 and accounted for 79 percent of the total number of victims (2,910 individuals), representing a marginal increase of one percent in comparison with the previous year (from 2,868 to 2,910 individuals). The number of killings attributed to these actors decreased by two percent (from 1,416 to 1,385), while the number of injuries increased by 22 percent (from 902 to 1,100). The number of abductions decreased by 44 percent (from 504 to 280), whereas the number of victims of CRSV increased by 215 percent (from 46 to 145).

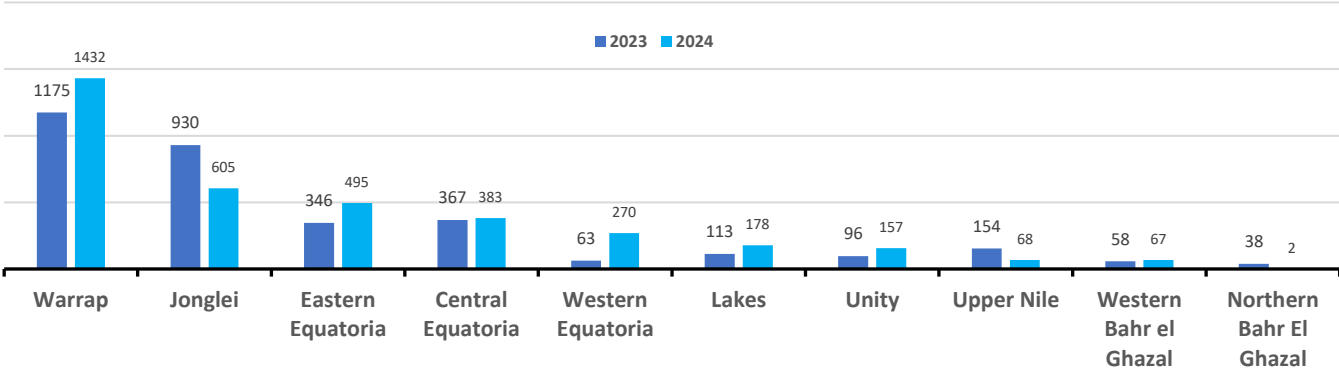
Though intensity of violence involving this type of actors varied, Warrap State consistently recorded the highest in the number of civilian casualties in all four reporting quarters of 2024, with the last quarter being the highest (Q1-334, Q2-317, Q3-356, and Q4-406), while Northern Bahr el Ghazal was the least violence affected State throughout the year. In comparison with 2023, a notable decline in the number of violent incidents was observed in Jonglei and Northern Bahr el Ghazal states (from 229 to 159, and 13 to two respectively).¹ Despite this decline in the number of violent incidents, Jonglei State nevertheless experienced the second highest number of documented victims in South Sudan, similar to 2023.

¹ In Jonglei State, this decline was mainly due to the decrease of mobilization from the side of Dinka and Nuer communities, while in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, there were no documented incidents of cross-border attacks involving armed Misseriya elements from neighboring Sudan in 2024 as compared with 2023.

This localized violence that continued to undermine peace across the country, was exacerbated by long-standing cultural practices, communal tensions over access to natural resources and grazing land, current economic crisis, and extreme food insecurities. Notably, incursions by these armed elements, including road ambushes, have disrupted humanitarian operations, particularly in parts of Central and Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei and Unity States.

Murle armed elements went beyond Greater Jonglei towards parts of Eastern Equatoria State such as Kapoeta East, Kapoeta North, Lafon, and Torit counties. Apart from looting of civilian properties, majority of the attacks by these armed elements were aimed at abducting children. In 2024, UNMISS HRD documented at least 164 incidents affecting 639 civilians attributed to Murle armed elements (221 killed, 192 injured, 219 abducted and seven CRSV), including 63 women and 227 children.

Number of Victims by State (2023 and 2024)



In Warrap State, the recurring communal tensions and cyclical retaliatory attacks amongst armed Dinka groups and sub-groups, as well as cross-border attacks, and territorial disputes (involving armed elements from the bordering areas such as the armed Nuer from Unity State; Dinka Ngok from Abyei Administrative Area, Dinka Gok and Pakam from Lakes State, and the Luo/Dinka Marial-Bai of Jur River County in Western Bahr El Ghazal), concerning remained a challenge to the security and protection of civilians in the region. Between January and December, the State experienced at least five major surges of violence, that is, in March, May, September, October, and December, with the month of September experiencing the highest number of civilian casualties with 114 individuals killed and 131 others injured. Overall, violence involving these armed elements resulted in 1,340 civilian casualties (734 killed and 606 injured), of which 92 were women and 24 children. In comparison to 2023, there was a 16 percent increase in the number of incidents (from 165 to 192) and a 23 percent increase in the number of civilians impacted (from 1,088 to 1,340).

Out of the 219 abducted, 55 were from Eastern Equatoria State.

Likewise, in Eastern Equatoria State, incidents of attacks and counterattacks amongst the civil-defense groups from Buya, Didinga, Dongotono, Logir, Lotuko, Tenet, and Toposa communities persisted. In addition, violence related to cross-border attacks involving alleged armed elements from Nyangatom and Suruma communities from the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Turkana community of the Republic of Kenya remained a challenge and continued to pose threats among civilian communities. In total, UNMISS HRD documented 172 incidents attributed to these armed elements affecting 321 civilians, of which 172 were killed, 137 injured, three abducted and nine subjected to CRSV.

Relatedly, Jonglei State recorded the second highest number of civilian victims, mainly due to the persisting incidents of violence and attacks involving Murle armed elements, predominantly from the *Kurenen* age-set of the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA). Incursions by these armed elements occurred in parts of Akobo, Ayod, Bor South, Duk, Nyirol, Pigi and Twic East Counties in Jonglei, and in Gumuruk, Pochalla and Verteth Counties in GPAA. Additionally, attacks by the

Further, the resurgence of tension between the Azande and Balanda communities in Tambura, Ezo and Nagero counties, in Western Equatoria State that started between March and April, led to the collapse of the peace initiatives aimed at reconciling both communities. Reportedly, the recurrence of violence was primarily driven by the involvement of the same actors involved in the 2021 crisis in the region and exacerbated by a lack of accountability, availability of weapons, insinuations of the politicians, long standing disputes, polarization and lack of governance, economic situation, and stalled peace dialogues, including the cancellation of peace conference in October 2024 that contributed to the increase of violence in November 2024. Overall, UNMISS HRD

documented 90 incidents affecting 133 civilians linked to the on-going tension between the two communities: 34 killed, six injured, 10 abducted, and 83 victims of rape and gang raped.

Conventional parties to the conflict

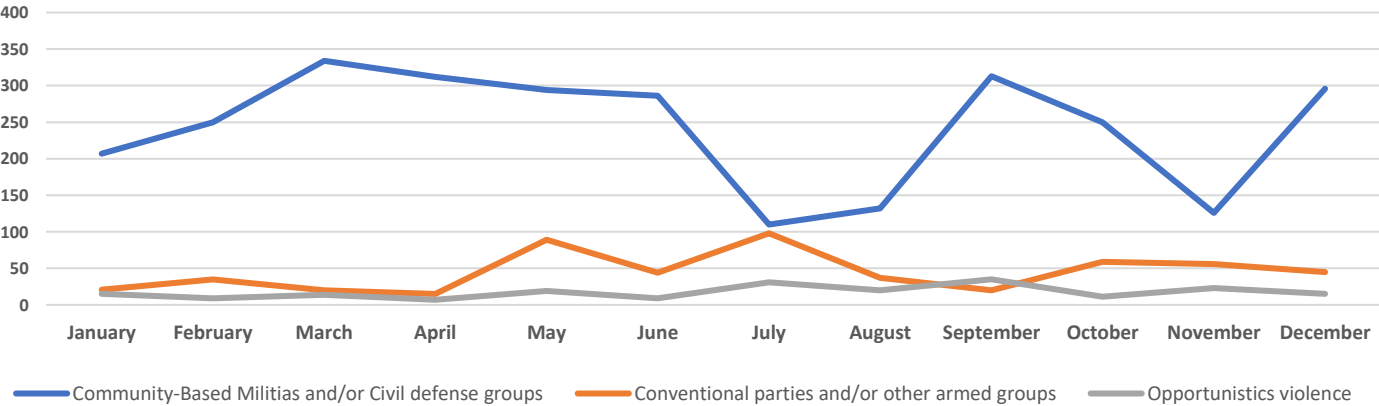
In 2024, incidents of violence against civilians attributed to the conventional parties to the conflict and other armed groups remained relatively low nationwide, accounting for 18 percent of the total number of incidents (185 out of 1,019) and 15 percent of the victims (539 out of 3,657). However, compared with 2023, this represents an 18 percent increase in the number of incidents and a 51 percent increase in the number of victims (from 358 to 539).² Of the 185 incidents, 123 were committed by the government security forces, largely by the South Sudan People’s Defense Forces (SSPDF) in Central Equatoria and Warrap states. Eighteen incidents were attributed to the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement – in Opposition (SPLA-IO), while 44 incidents were attributed to the NAS splinter groups, mainly in Greater Equatoria region.

Mainly, these victims were civilians perceived as sympathizers or collaborators of the NAS. Further, SSPDF operations displaced affected civilians to remote areas near the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo and other areas within Juba, Lainya, and Yei River Counties.

On the other hand, the NAS splinter groups’ operations across Central and Western Equatoria States resulted in 260 civilian casualties (14 killed, 15 injured, 230 abducted, and one subjected to sexual violence). Concerningly, civilians were abducted for forced recruitment and labor and as a punitive measure against civilians perceived as collaborating with the Government. Among the civilians abducted, eight were working as humanitarian aid workers.

While abductions (230) by alleged elements of NAS splinter groups were mainly documented in Central and Western Equatoria States, incidents of killing (48), injury (66) and sexual violence (22), as well as other human rights violations perpetrated by the conventional parties

Trends in the number of civilians affected (2024)



Consistent with previous years, the security and human rights situation in some areas of the Greater Equatoria region, particularly in parts of Juba, Kajo-Keji, Lainya, Morobo and Yei Counties in Central Equatoria State and Mundri East County in Western Equatoria State, remained a concern due to hostilities between the Government security forces, mainly the SSPDF, including its alleged allied militias and the NAS splinter groups.

On one hand of the 309 victims, 75 were attributed to the SSPDF and their allied militias notably during alleged counter-insurgency operations against the NAS splinter

to the conflict, mainly the government security forces, were recorded in all other parts of South Sudan with the exception of Greater Jonglei region.

Separately, in Upper Nile State, the fragile security environment in Nassir County, exacerbated by longstanding disputes and competition over control and access to the Sobat River and previous political and ethnic grievances were marked by three recurrences of clashes between the SSPDF and the local armed groups, widely known as the “White Army”. In 2024, the confrontations between these groups resulted in 30 civilian casualties (nine killed and 21 injured). In addition to the civilian

² Nevertheless, it should be noted that beyond the scope of violence described in this brief, UNMISS HRD continued to document concerning incidents of other human rights violations and abuses (i.e. arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention, extra-judicial executions and ill-treatment) perpetrated by the Government security forces and other armed groups that greatly affected the safety and security of civilians in the community.

casualties, 33 members of the SSPDF were reportedly killed and 15 others were injured (nine SSPDF and two White Army) during the encounter. Further, the hostilities and volatility in the area led to the forced displacement of civilians and destruction of their properties. Civilians, particularly women and children and other vulnerable individuals continued to live in fear of indiscriminate attacks, bearing the brunt of violence.

Unidentified and other opportunistic armed elements

Incidents of violence by armed elements referred to as unidentified and other opportunistic armed elements, which do not fall within the above-mentioned categories but bear a link to conflicts or violence affecting civilians based on the modus operandi of the suspected perpetrators, geographic locations, and other relevant factors (such as objective of violence, clothing, language spoken, etc.), were also documented. Overall, violence involving these armed elements accounted for nine percent of the total number of incidents affecting 208 victims: 65 killed, 79 injured, 40 abducted, and 24 subjected to sexual violence (15 women and eight girls). Of the 208 individuals, 40 were women and 26 were children (16 boys and 10 girls). Western Equatoria State recorded the highest number of victims attributed to this type of armed actors, followed by Central Equatoria and Unity States.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

In 2024, UNMISS HRD documented 145 incidents of SGBV across 10 states, which affected 156 victims (35 women, 117 girls, and four boys). Among these 145 incidents, 105 were rape, 13 gang-rape, seven attempted

rape, 10 forced marriage, nine sexual assault case, and one physical assault leading to death³. Compared to 2023, this represents a 20 percent increase in SGBV incidents. These 145 incidents (156 victims) were in addition to the 192 CRSV incidents (246 victims, including 101 girls), affecting a total of 402 victims. Twenty-one of these incidents happened prior to the coverage of this brief; however, they were documented in 2024. At least 13 percent of the alleged SGBV perpetrators were not known to the victims; 70 percent were family members, fellow community members or neighbors; and 17 percent were members of the SSPDF, SPLA-IO and National Police Service (NPS), and National Prison Service. This demonstrates that victims and potential victims require more protection in family and community settings, where they remain vulnerable due to gender discrimination exacerbated by harmful traditional practices.

UNMISS HRD considers that incidents of SGBV are underreported due to various factors, including stigma, trauma and fear of retaliation, that prevent victims and families from reporting. The dearth of formal justice structures across most South Sudan impedes survivors’ access to justice. Consequently, many families are compelled to resort to adjudication by traditional leaders. Furthermore, intersectional vulnerabilities faced by the victims often result in families preferring the immediate economic benefits from compensation ordered through customary courts and the perceived reduced stigma by addressing sexual violence through marriage between the perpetrator and victim rather than filing criminal charges for the prosecution of offenders.

GEOGRAPHICAL TRENDS

In 2024, most of the civilians affected by violence were concentrated in Warrap, Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria, and Central Equatoria states, which together accounted for 80 percent of the total number of victims. Warrap State experienced the highest level of violence, followed by Jonglei State, accounting for 39 and 17 percent of the victims, respectively. Violent incidents were concentrated in specific hotspots, with 238 payams (out of 321) accounting for more than 87 percent of the victims. Notably, the highest number of victims was recorded in Alabek Payam, Warrap State, which alone accounted for 257 victims.

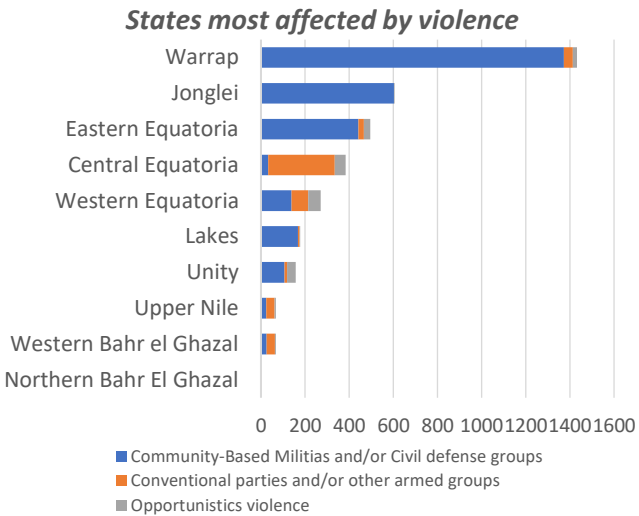
Warrap State experienced the highest number of killings (758) and injuries (636), accounting for 49 percent of the

total victims of killing and injury in South Sudan (2,860). Central Equatoria State experienced the highest number of abductions (200) followed by Jonglei State (184), accounting for 36 and 33 percent of all abductions documented, respectively. Western Equatoria and Central Equatoria States experienced the highest number of CRSV cases, 104 and 42, respectively.

Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, Lakes, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, Upper Nile, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Western Equatoria, and Warrap States were primarily affected by violence involving community-based militias and/or civil defense groups. Conversely, Central Equatoria State was primarily affected by violence involving the conventional parties to the conflict.

³ On October 19, 2024, an incident of domestic violence in Mugwo Payam, Yei County, Central Equatoria State involving a member of SSPDF has led into a murder of his 30-year-old wife. In a fit of rage, the SSPDF shot his wife, killing her on the spot.

Notably, Western Equatoria State experienced the sharpest percentage increase in the number of documented victims compared to 2023 (329 percent or from 63 to 270), followed by Unity (64 percent or from 96 to 157), and Lakes (58 percent or 113 to 178). Conversely, Upper Nile State experienced the sharpest percentage decrease in the number of documented victims (56 percent or from 154 to 68), followed by Jonglei (35 percent or from 930 to 605).



VICTIMS

As previously noted, UNMISS HRD’s capacity to comprehensively document the number of victims affected by violence was impacted by capacity constraints, safety, and security concerns, as well as access restrictions, particularly in conflict-affected areas, which may have resulted in the underreporting of the number of incidents and victims. Notwithstanding, UNMISS HRD documented 3,657 victims of four major forms of harm experienced in South Sudan – a nine percent increase compared to 2023 (3,340).

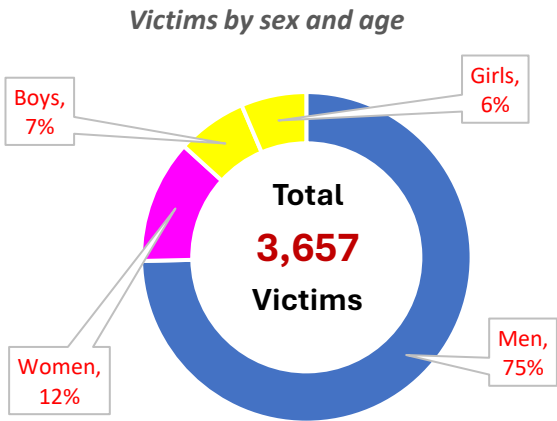
Men

As in the previous years, men comprised the majority of the victims and were killed or injured in the context of inter-communal violence in nine states (74 percent), followed by the on-going conflict between the SSPDF and NAS splinter groups in the Greater Equatoria region (17 percent). In 2024, at least eight men were abducted, primarily for forced military recruitment and/or forced labor, by community-based militias and/or civil defense groups in three States (eight) and the NAS (220) in Greater Equatoria.

Women

In 2024, women comprised 12 percent (442 individuals) of the total victims. The primary form of harm perpetrated against women was CRSV (32 percent or 140 individuals), followed by injury (29 percent or 130 individuals), killing (28 percent or 122 individuals), and abduction (11 percent or 50 individuals). Female victims were killed or injured across the 10 states primarily in the context of inter-communal violence, while 15 abductions targeting female victims occurred mainly in parts of Juba,

Lainya, Morobo, and Yei counties in Central Equatoria State and Mundri East county in Western Equatoria; and in Ayod, Nyirol, Uror, Akobo in Jonglei State by the community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups (59 percent) and the conventional parties to the conflict (10 percent). The number of women recorded as victims of killing or injury decreased by five percent in 2024 compared to 2023.



Overall, the number of women recorded as victims of CRSV increased by 46 percent compared with 2023. Nevertheless, women remained the primary victims of CRSV in South Sudan, accounting for 57 percent of all cases recorded in 2024 (with girls accounting for 41 percent). Further, UNMISS has strong grounds to believe that many abducted women and girls were also subjected to sexual violence.

Children

Violence affecting children remained a significant concern, with children accounting for 13 percent of all victims (or 485 children: 251 boys and 234 girls) in 2024. Abduction was the leading form of harm affecting both boys and girls, accounting for 51 percent of all child victims. UNMISS HRD documented a 36 percent decrease in the number of abductions involving children in 2024 compared to 2023 (from 380 to 245). Among child abductees, 95 percent were abducted in the context of inter-communal violence in six states,⁴ of which Jonglei State accounted for 55 percent of the victims (or 155 children: 78 boys and 77 girls).

PERPETRATORS

UNMISS HRD identified three major categories of alleged perpetrators involved in conflict-related violence affecting civilians: i) community-based militias and/or civil defense groups; ii) conventional parties to the conflict; and iii) unidentified and/or opportunistic armed elements, including foreign armed actors.

Community-based militias and/or civil defense groups

In 2024, community-based militias and/or civil defense groups were the primary perpetrators of violence affecting civilians. UNMISS HRD attributed responsibility for 79 percent of victims to these groups. This represents a one percent increase in the number of victims attributable to these perpetrators as compared to 2023 (from 2,868 to 2,910).

Violence perpetrated by community-based militias and/or civil defense groups accounted for most victims in all states except for Central Equatoria, Upper Nile and Western Equatoria States. In Warrap and Jonglei states alone, these groups were responsible for 1,975 victims, which represents 54 percent of all victims across South Sudan.

The Dinka armed elements from Tonj East and North were accountable for the highest number of victims (974 victims or 70 percent) in Warrap state, followed by Murle armed elements from GPAA during attacks in Duk county (118 victims or 20 percent), Jonglei State. The primary form of harm perpetrated by these groups was killing (47 percent), followed by injury (38 percent), abduction (two percent), and CRSV (five percent).

Killing and injury were the next most prevalent forms of harm affecting children, accounting for 29 percent of all child victims (105 boys and 34 girls). The majority of children were killed or injured in the context of inter-communal violence in nine states.

Further, girls continued to be severely affected by sexual violence, with 218 cases documented in 2024 for both CRSV and SGBV.

Community-based militias and/or civil defense groups are a longstanding feature of pastoralist communities across South Sudan. Traditionally, their main objective was to protect herds of cattle from external attacks. However, as a consequence of years of armed conflict and the resultant illicit proliferation of small arms amongst local communities, members of these community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups have been co-opted, armed, and used as proxy armed elements by all parties to the conflict and by local actors, which has contributed to the progressive militarization of inter-communal violence. The organization and structure of these groups are complex and often remain unclear. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the localized violence in Warrap, Jonglei, and Eastern Equatoria states, attacks by community-based militias and/or civil defense groups demonstrated a degree of planning and coordination. UNMISS HRD documented that some of these groups were armed with assault rifles, light machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and specialized communication devices.

Conventional parties to the conflict and other armed groups

During the reporting period, the conventional parties to the conflict and other armed groups accounted for 15 percent of the total number of victims. Notably, the number of victims attributable to this group increased by 51 percent compared to 2023 (from 358 to 539). Nevertheless, violence perpetrated by the conventional parties to the conflict and other armed groups accounted for the majority of victims in Central and Western Equatoria States. In particular, military operations carried out by government forces against NAS elements, as well as abuses committed against civilians by NAS splinter

⁴ Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria, Warrap, Western Equatoria, Lakes, and Central Equatoria States.

groups, triggered violence in areas of Central Equatoria State, particularly in parts of Juba, Kajo-Keji, Lainya, Morobo, and Yei counties, as well as Mundri East County, Western Equatoria State.

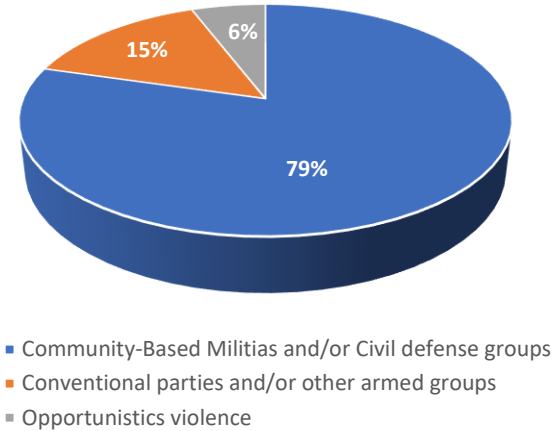
Among the conventional parties to the conflict and other armed groups, the highest number of victims were attributable to the NAS splinter groups (48 percent) followed by the SSPDF (36 percent).. The primary form of harm perpetrated by these actors was abductions (43 percent), followed by injuries (22 percent), killings (21 percent) and CRSV (14 percent). Among government forces, acts of violence affecting civilians were primarily attributed to SSPDF, SSNPS, NSS, NUF, and CID.

The conventional parties to the conflict and other armed groups include government security forces, as well as organized opposition armed groups and their allied proxy armed elements who willfully perpetrated the violations under the control and direction of the former. The distinction between government forces and organized armed groups should not obscure the extreme fluidity between and within these entities, whose loyalties often shift according to the formation of alliances of convenience, defections, and buy-offs.

Unidentified and other opportunistic armed elements

Unidentified and opportunistic armed elements were responsible for a minor proportion of violence affecting civilians, accounting for six percent of the victims. The primary form of harm perpetrated by these actors was injuries (38 percent), followed by killings (31 percent), abductions (19 percent), and CRSV (12 percent). Geographically, the highest number of victims attributable to opportunistic and unidentified armed elements, including foreign armed groups were concentrated in Western Equatoria, followed by Central Equatoria, and Unity States.

Civilian casualties by type of perpetrator



This category of perpetrators, who often have a historical affiliation with an armed group or community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups, have become autonomous from their sponsors and now carry out acts of violence against civilians from their own or rival communities without any clear strategic or military objective.

Location of Violence Affecting Civilians in South Sudan January – December 2024

