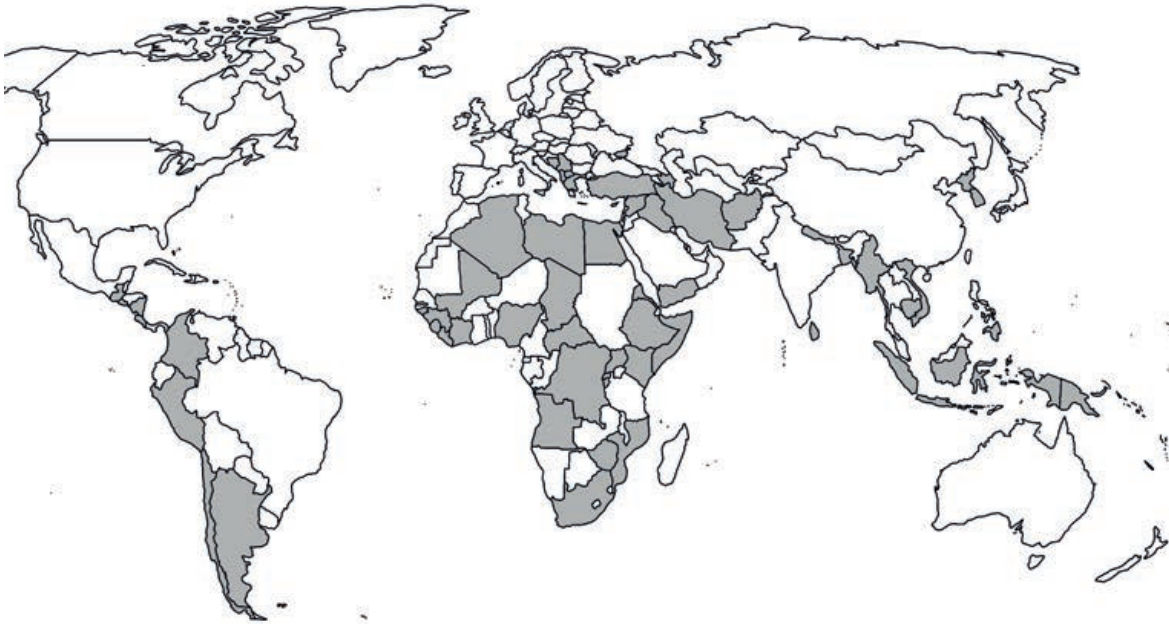


# SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD



Map of sexual violence in conflict-affected countries since 1945  
(based on UK Parliament, "Sexual Violence in Conflict: A War Crime" (2016))

**S**EXUAL VIOLENCE IN conflict continues to take place in every corner of the world. Such violence includes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization.<sup>1</sup> Depending on the circumstances, sexual violence can be a war crime, a crime against humanity or an act of genocide. The true magnitude of sexual violence in situations of conflict may never be fully known. Many survivors feel discouraged from reporting these crimes due to stigma, lack of socioeconomic supports, or a real or perceived lack of justice.<sup>2</sup> In many cases, victims are also killed. Notwithstanding these difficulties with reported numbers, recent studies have shed light on the widespread nature of sexual violence in conflicts.<sup>3</sup> The following list details specific cases of conflict-related sexual violence from around the world to demonstrate the pervasiveness of this crime.

EUROPE: During World War I (1914–1918), rape, forced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence were perpetrated against women in Belgium and France, largely by the German army and the armies of other Axis powers.<sup>4</sup> In World War II (1939–45), rape and other forms of sexual violence, including enforced prostitution and enforced sterilization, were committed on a large scale in Europe. German soldiers raped Russian and Jewish women and girls, and Russian soldiers raped German women and girls on a massive scale.<sup>5</sup>

ASIA: During World War II (1939–1945), between 20,000 and 80,000 girls and women were raped in Nanjing, China, after the city fell to the Japanese Imperial Army in 1937.<sup>6</sup> Sexual mutilation and murder following rape were common, and up to 200,000 women were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army in different countries in Asia.<sup>7</sup>

COLOMBIA: During Colombia's civil war (1964–2016), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and state-based paramilitaries committed sexual violence against more than 24,000 women and men.<sup>8</sup>

BANGLADESH: During Pakistan's invasion of Bangladesh in 1971, Pakistani forces raped at least 200,000 women.<sup>9</sup>

CAMBODIA: Between 1975–1979, approximately 250,000 Cambodian women and men were forced into marriage during the rule of the Khmer Rouge regime.<sup>10</sup>

PERU: During Peru's civil war (1980–2000), more than 538 cases of sexual violence against women and girls were registered with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Peru.<sup>11</sup>

SRI LANKA: In the aftermath of the civil war (1983–2009), Sri Lankan state security forces in the military zones committed sexual violence against ethnic Tamils perceived to be associated with the insurgent group.<sup>12</sup> Men, women and children who were in police custody, or who lived near the military zone, reported being raped and sexually abused.<sup>13</sup>

UGANDA: The rebel group Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) abducted between 60,000 and 80,000 children from northern Uganda during the 1987–2006 conflict with the government. Boys were used as child combatants and girls were often forced to be "wives" to the soldiers as soon as they attained puberty.<sup>14</sup>

**LIBERIA:** Toward the end of the Liberian civil war (1989–1994), 49% of women between the ages of 15 and 70 reported having experienced at least one act of physical or sexual violence at the hands of a soldier or fighter.<sup>15</sup> 32.6% of male combatants surveyed reported being subjected to sexual violence, largely perpetrated by soldiers or rebels.<sup>16</sup>

**HAITI:** Between 1991–1994, during the reign of General Raoul Cédras, who ousted Haiti’s then democratically elected president in 1991, the Commission Nationale de Vérité et Justice documented 140 cases of “political rape” (i.e., rape perpetrated against women because of their husbands’ alleged political affiliation) but estimated that, in view of non-reporting and other circumstances, the actual number of cases could be as much as twelve times higher.<sup>17</sup>

**SIERRA LEONE:** Between 1991–2001, as many as 64,000 internally displaced women were subject to war-related sexual violence.<sup>18</sup>

**BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA:** During the 1992–1995 Bosnian war, an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped, representing about 1-2% of the total pre-war female population.<sup>19</sup> Men detained in concentration camps were also sexually assaulted, as reported by 80% of males in held in Sarajevo Canton.<sup>20</sup>

**KOSOVO:** During the war of 1998–1999, thousands of Albanian women and girls living in Kosovo were victims of sexual violence.<sup>21</sup>

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC):** Between 1998–2003, tens of thousands of women and girls were raped or otherwise subjected to sexual violence during the conflict in the DRC.<sup>22</sup> Between 2005–2007, more than 32,000 cases of rape and sexual violence were registered in the province of South Kivu alone.<sup>23</sup> In a 2010 study of sexual violence in Eastern DRC, rates of reported sexual violence were 39.7% among women and 23.6% among men.<sup>24</sup> In 2017, renewed political unrest resulted in over 6,000 cases of sexual violence, mainly in the Irumu territory.<sup>25</sup>

**TIMOR-LESTE:** During the 1999 siege, the Indonesian military and local militias committed sexual violence against hundreds of girls and women.<sup>26</sup>

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR):** Following a failed coup attempt in 2002, the Presidential Guard and the National Army committed more than 1,000 documented cases of rape.<sup>27</sup> Since 2012, tensions arising from the instability of the Seleka rebel group have resulted in more cases of sexual

violence. In 2017, the UN documented 308 reported incidents of conflict-related sexual violence committed by various forces, including the Seleka and opposition groups.<sup>28</sup>

**SUDAN:** Between 2003–2008 alone, government forces and government-backed Janjaweed militias committed widespread rape and sexual violence in Darfur as a deliberate strategy to terrorize the population.<sup>29</sup> From October 2004 to February 2005, Médecins Sans Frontières treated approximately 500 rape survivors in Darfur, but the total number of cases is likely much higher.<sup>30</sup> According to a Human Rights Watch report, Sudan’s army committed organized mass rapes against more than 220 women in the rebel-dominated village of Tabit in 2014.<sup>31</sup>

**BURUNDI:** Between 2004–2007, the Seruka centre of Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium registered 5,466 cases of sexual violence, an average of 1,366 victims each year and 27 victims each week.<sup>32</sup> In the post-electoral political crisis of 2015, state security forces and members of the Imbonerakure (the ruling party’s youth league) committed sexual violence against perceived government opponents.<sup>33</sup>

**KENYA:** In the aftermath of the post-election crisis (December 2007–June 2008), Kenya experienced a 7,500% increase in the incidence of sexual violence against women, along with a catastrophic breakdown in the health support system for rape victims.<sup>34</sup>

**NIGERIA:** Since their emergence in 2009, Boko Haram insurgents have inflicted sexual violence against thousands of Nigerian women and girls. In 2014, Boko Haram abducted 276 schoolgirls, and subjected them to forced marriage and sexual servitude.<sup>35</sup> In 2017 alone, the insurgents perpetrated nearly a thousand cases of sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage.<sup>36</sup>

**SYRIA:** In the context of the 2011 uprising that led to an ongoing civil war, government forces and militias perpetrated sexual violence against women, girls and occasionally men during ground operations, house raids at checkpoints and in detention.<sup>37</sup>

**SOUTH SUDAN:** After obtaining independence in 2011, South Sudan spiraled into an ethno-political conflict in 2013, during which state-led troops and opposition forces raped, abducted and sexually abused women and girls.<sup>38</sup>

In 2018 alone, more than 1,150 cases of conflict-related sexual violence were documented.<sup>39</sup>

**IRAQ:** In 2014, the attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on Iraq's Sinjar district marked the beginning of the genocide against the Yazidis in the area. ISIS captured thousands of Yazidi women and girls, selling many of them to foreign fighters as sex slaves. Out of the total 6,417 Yazidi women, men and children reportedly captured by ISIS during the attack, half remain missing as of 2018.<sup>40</sup>

**SOMALIA:** Ongoing civil conflict in Somalia has displaced thousands of women and left them vulnerable to sexual violence at the hands of armed assailants, African Union Mission in Somalia troops, Al-Shabab insurgent forces, the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force. In the first eight months of 2014, more than 2,850 cases of sexual and gender-based violence were documented in Mogadishu alone.<sup>41</sup> In 2017, the UN verified 330 cases of conflict-related sexual violence were uncovered.<sup>42</sup>

**UKRAINE:** Between 2014–2017, instability in the region leading to Russia's occupation of Crimea resulted in widespread hostilities, especially near the contact line. Government forces and armed groups sexually assaulted both men and women in detention in order to punish, humiliate or extract confessions.<sup>43</sup>

**MYANMAR:** Since the mass expulsion of the Rohingya people in August 2017, members of the Myanmar Armed Forces, local militia and civilians perpetrated widespread rape and sexual violence as part of a government strategy for eradication. These attacks took place in at least 19 different villages in Burma's Rakhine State, and more than 2,750 victims of sexual and gender-based violence have received humanitarian assistance upon fleeing the country.<sup>44</sup>

## NOTES

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