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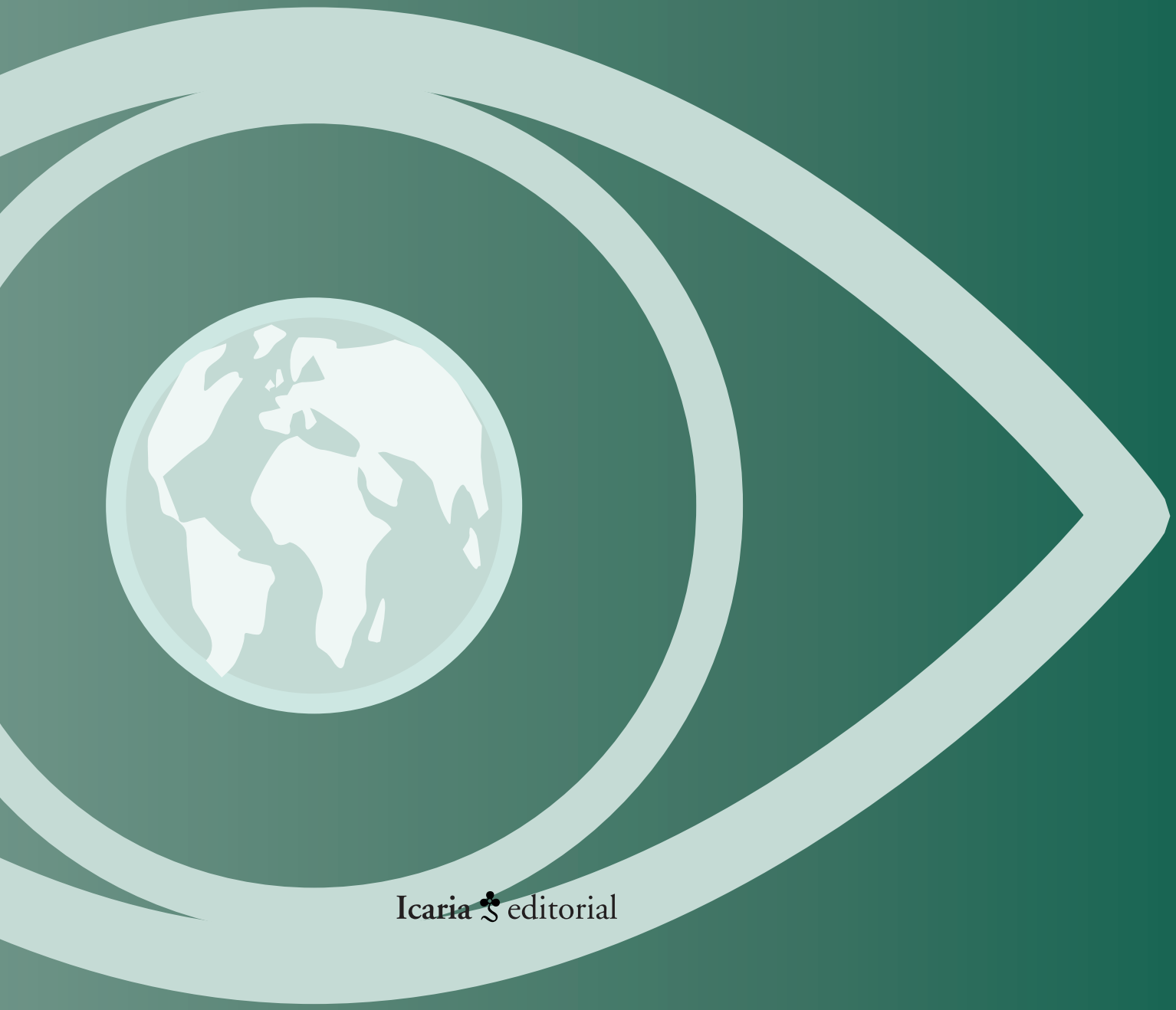
alert 2021!

Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding



Icaria editorial

Alert 2021! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding

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Executive Summary

Alert 2021! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding is an annual report analyzing the state of the world in terms of conflict and peacebuilding based on three main axes: armed conflict, tensions, gender and peace and security. The analysis of the most relevant events in 2020 and the nature, causes, dynamics, actors and consequences of the main scenarios of armed conflict and social and political tension around the world allows for a regional comparative vision and also allows identifying global trends and elements of risk and preventive warnings for the future. Furthermore, the report also identifies peacebuilding opportunities or opportunities to scale down, prevent or resolve conflicts. In both cases, one of the main objectives in this report is to make available all of the information, analyses and identification of warning factors and peace opportunities for decision-makers, those intervening for the peaceful resolution to conflicts, or those giving a greater political, media or academic visibility to the many situations of political and social violence in the world.

As for the methodology, the contents of this report mainly draw on a qualitative analysis of studies and information made available by many sources –the United Nations, international organizations, research centres, communication media or NGOs, among others– as well as on field research in conflict-affected countries.

Some of the most relevant conclusions and information in the *Alert 2021!* report are listed below:

- During 2020 there were 34 armed conflicts, the same number as the previous year. Most of the armed conflicts were concentrated in Africa (15) and Asia (nine), followed by the Middle East (six), Europe (three) and America (one).
- In 2020 there were two new cases: Ethiopia (Tigray) and Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno Karabakh).
- The outlook for armed conflict in 2020 was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN secretary general's appeal for a global truce received a limited and uneven response from the armed groups involved in conflicts. The ceasefires were short-lived and/or did not become entrenched and most of the actors involved in armed conflict continued to favour military methods.
- In 2020, the impacts of clashes between armed actors and the indiscriminate and deliberate use of violence against civilians were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which further aggravated the precariousness and lack of protection of many populations affected by armed conflict. Cases such as Syria and Yemen highlighted the added burden of the pandemic on health systems severely damaged by years of violence.
- The vast majority of armed conflicts were internationalized internal –28 contexts, equivalent to 82%–, 9% were internal and 9% were international.
- 2020 saw a significant increase in high-intensity armed conflicts, which accounted for almost half of the cases, at 47% of the total.
- The 16 cases of serious armed conflict in 2020 were: Cameroon (Ambazonia / North West and South West), Ethiopia (Tigray), Libya, Mali, Mozambique (north), Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel Region, DRC (East), DRC (east-ADF), Somalia, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), Iraq, Syria and Yemen.
- According to OCHA, a total of 235 million people need humanitarian assistance in 2021, an increase of 40% compared to the estimates for the previous year and mainly attributable to COVID-19.
- Crossfire, the use of light weapons, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the excessive use of force by state agents would have caused more than 10,000 victims among boys and girls, including 4,019 deaths and 6,154 minors affected by mutilations, according to UN figures.
- UNHCR's annual report published in June 2020 confirmed the exponential growth trend of forced displacement in the last decade: at the end of 2019 there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people, compared to the 70.8 million recorded at the end of the year previous.
- 26 million of the total number of displaced persons were refugees –20.4 million under UNHCR's mandate and 5.6 million Palestinians under UNRWA's mandate– and 45.7 million were in a situation of internal forced displacement.
- The United Nations denounced the use of sexual and gender-based violence in 19 contexts in 2019 and pointed out the responsibility of 54 armed actors, most of them of non-state character, although it also denounced the involvement of state security forces from various countries, including the DRC, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Syria.
- During 2020, 95 socio-political crises were identified around the world, one more case than in the previous year. This increase is significantly lower than that registered in 2019 compared to 2018, when the number of tensions increased by 11 cases.
- The highest number of socio-political crises was concentrated in Africa, with 38 cases, followed by Asia (25), the Middle East (12 cases) and Europe and Latin America (10 in each region)
- Despite the fact that the increase in the number of socio-political crises in 2020 was almost imperceptible, six new cases of tension were identified.
- Of the 16 socio-political crises of maximum intensity, half were concentrated in Africa –Chad; Mali; Nigeria; Ethiopia; Ethiopia (Oromiya); Kenya; Rwanda-Burundi; and Morocco-Western Sahara–,

four in the Middle East –Iran-USA, Israel; Egypt; Iraq; and Israel-Syria-Lebanon–, two in Asia –China-India and India-Pakistan– and two in Latin America –Mexico and Venezuela.

- 73% of the socio-political crises were linked to opposition to the internal or international policies of certain governments or to the political, social or ideological system of the State as a whole; 39% to demands for self-government and/or identity; and 31% to disputes for control of territories and/or resources.
- 14 of the 34 armed conflicts that took place throughout 2020 occurred in countries where there were serious gender inequalities, with high or very high levels of discrimination, six in countries with medium levels of discrimination and nine armed conflicts took place in countries for which no data is available.
- The UN Secretary General, António Guterres, pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic was exacerbating the impact of sexual violence in conflict.
- In the decade between 2010 and 2019, at least 100 million people in the world were forcibly displaced from their homes, and most of them did not achieve a solution to their situation.
- 48% of the refugees were women.
- 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the approval of resolution 1325 by the UN Security Council and 25 years of the Beijing Platform for Action. These were two anniversaries of enormous importance in the women, peace and security agenda, which should have led to evaluate the progress and pending challenges in the implementation of the commitments acquired in these two decades.
- 13% of the people who negotiated, 6% of those who carried out mediation tasks and 6% of those who signed peace agreements were women. Seven out of ten peace processes still did not include women mediators or signatories. Seven United Nations-deployed peacekeeping missions still did not have a gender advisor on their staff.
- At the end of 2020, 18 countries in situations of armed conflict had a National Action Plan on resolution 1325, 11 of them in Africa.
- *Alert 2021!* identifies four opportunities for peace in Sudan and South Sudan, Papua New Guinea (Bougainville), on the EU gender, peace and security agenda and in Syria.
- The report highlights four risk scenarios regarding the worsening of violence against women caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in Peru, the Middle East and North Africa, and in relation to the dispute between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan.

Structure

The report has five chapters. The first two look at conflicts globally –causes, types, dynamics, evolution and actors in situations of armed conflict or tension. The third chapter looks at the gender impacts in conflicts and tensions, as well as the initiatives being carried out within the United Nations and other local and international organizations and movements with regards to peacebuilding from a gender perspective. Chapter four identifies peace opportunities, scenarios where there is a context that is favourable to resolution of conflicts or to progress towards or consolidate peace initiatives. The final chapter studies risk scenarios in the future. Besides these five chapters, the report also includes a foldable map identifying the scenarios of armed conflict and social-political tension.

Armed conflicts

The first chapter (**Armed conflicts**)[1] describes the evolution, type, causes and dynamics in active conflicts during the year; global and regional trends in armed conflicts in 2020 are analyzed, as well as the impacts of such conflicts on the civilian population.

2020 offered no changes on the total number of armed conflicts worldwide. Following the trend of previous years, 34 cases were identified in 2020 –the same number as the previous year. In the five preceding years the figures were similar: 34 in 2019 and 2018, 33 in 2017 and 2016 and 35 in 2015. At the end of 2020, all cases remained active, unlike other years where a reduction in the levels of violence in some contexts led to these cases ceasing to be regarded as armed conflicts, i.e. Algeria (AQIM) and DRC (Kasai) in 2019. Nevertheless, there were two new additions to the list of armed conflicts. In Africa, tensions between the federal government and the government of Ethiopia's Tigray region led to a military confrontation with serious consequences. In Europe, the historical dispute around the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh –majority Armenian and formally part of Azerbaijan– escalated into a situation of open armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with severe impacts in terms of lethality and forced population displacement.

During 2020 there were 34 armed conflicts

1. In this report, an armed conflict is understood as any confrontation between regular or irregular armed groups with objectives that are perceived as incompatible, in which the continuous and organised use of violence: a) causes a minimum of 100 fatalities in a year and/or has a serious impact on the territory (destruction of infrastructure or of natural resources) and on human safety (e.g., injured or displaced people, sexual violence, food insecurity, impact on mental health and on the social fabric or the disruption of basic services); and b) aims to achieve objectives different from those of common crime normally related to:
   - demands for self-determination and self-government or identity-related aspirations;
   - opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state or the internal or international policy of a government, which in both triggers a struggle to seize or undermine power;
   - the control of resources or land.

Armed conflicts in 2020*

AFRICA (15)	ASIA (9)	MIDDLE EAST (6)
Burundi -2015-	Afghanistan -2001-	Egypt (Sinai) -2014-
Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) -2018-	India (CPI-M) -1967-	Iraq -2003-
CAR -2006-	India (Jammu & Kashmir) -1989-	Israel-Palestine -2000-
DRC (east) -1998-	Myanmar -1948-	Syria -2011-
DRC (east-ADF) -2014-	Pakistan -2001-	Yemen (Houthis) -2004-
Ethiopia (Tigray) -2020-	Pakistan (Balochistan) -2005-	Yemen (AQPA) -2011-
Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) - 2011-	Philippines (NPA) -1969-	**EUROPE (3)**
Libya -2011-	Philippines (Mindanao) -1991-	Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) -2020-
Mali -2012-	Thailand (south) -2004-	Turkey (south-east) -1984-
Mozambique (north) -2019-		Ukraine -2014-
Somalia -1988-		**AMERICAS (1)**
South Sudan -2009-		Colombia -1964-
Sudan (Darfur) -2003-		
Sudan (South Kordofan & Blue Nile) -2011-		
Western Sahel Region -2018-		

Regarding the geographical distribution of the armed conflict, as in previous years, most cases are concentrated in Africa (15) and Asia (9), followed by the Middle East (6), Europe (3) and the Americas (1). In percentage terms, therefore, the African continent accounted for 44% of total global conflicts.

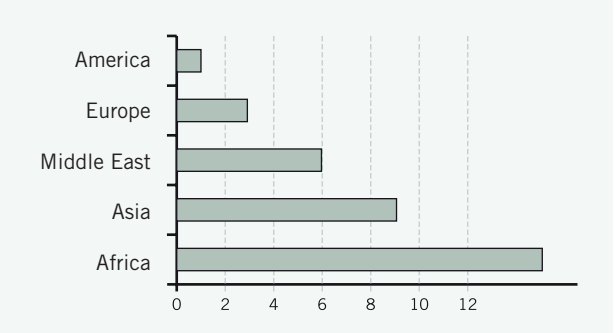
With regard to the relationship between the actors involved in the conflict and its context, we identified internal, international and, for the most part, internationalised internal conflicts. Along similar lines to previous years, in 2020 9% of the contexts were internal in nature, i.e. conflicts in which the armed actors involved in the conflict operated exclusively within the borders of the same state. All three internal armed conflicts were concentrated in Asia: Philippines (NPA), India (CPI-M) and Thailand (South). Three other cases, also equivalent to 9% of armed conflicts, were international and occurred on three continents: the conflict in the Western Sahel Region in Africa, the Palestinian-Israeli case in the Middle East, and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in Europe. The vast majority of armed conflicts were internationalised internal conflicts (28 cases, or 82%). These cases are characterised by the fact that one of the disputing parties is foreign, the armed actors in the conflict have bases or launch attacks from abroad and/or the dispute spills over into neighbouring countries. In many conflicts this factor of internationalisation took the form of the involvement of third-party actors as disputing parties, including international missions, ad-hoc regional and international military coalitions, states and armed groups operating across borders, among others.

Following the trend of previous years, the majority of armed conflicts in 2020 were internationalised internal conflicts

With regard to the **causes of the armed conflicts**, the vast majority were mainly motivated by opposition to the domestic or international policies of the respective governments or to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a given state, resulting in struggles to gain power or erode it. One or the other element, or both, were present in 71% of cases in 2020 (24 out of 34 cases), in line with previous years (73% in 2019, 71% in 2018 and 73% in 2017). Among these 24 cases, 18 contexts involved armed actors aiming for system change, mostly organisations claiming a jihadist agenda and seeking to impose their particular interpretation of Islamic laws. These groups include organisations such as the self-styled Islamic State (ISIS) and its affiliates or related entities in different continents –the group was present in countries such as Algeria, Libya, Lake Chad Region, Western Sahel Region, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Philippines, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, among others; the various branches of al-Qaeda –including AQIM (Algeria, Sahel and Libya) and AQAP (Yemen)–; the Taliban operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the al-Shabaab group in Somalia, among others.

Another factor prominent among the main causes of armed conflicts were disputes over identity and self-

Regional distribution of the number of armed conflicts in 2020



governance claims, which were present in 59% of conflicts (20 cases), the same percentage as in the previous two years. In this regard, it is worth noting that the two armed conflicts that were triggered in 2020 were motivated by such claims. On the one hand, underlying the escalation of violence in Ethiopia's Tigray region were grievances and the Tigray community's perception of a loss of power and privilege in the face of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's policies to reform Ethiopia's federal system. The Tigray region's decision to hold elections in the region despite the federal government's decision to postpone the federal and regional elections due to the pandemic and to extend the mandate of the existing authorities, together with other issues that lie at the genesis of this conflict, led to a dispute of legitimacy that ended in armed confrontation at the end of the year. On the other hand, there is the dispute between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority enclave formally part of Azerbaijan but *de facto* independent. After several escalations of violence since the war in the 1990s, one of the most serious being in 2016, the hostilities sparked off again in 2020. The fighting subsided at the end of the year following a Russian-brokered agreement, which outlined a significant change in the territory's boundaries and ratified the partition of Nagorno-Karabakh, but left the enclave's status unresolved.

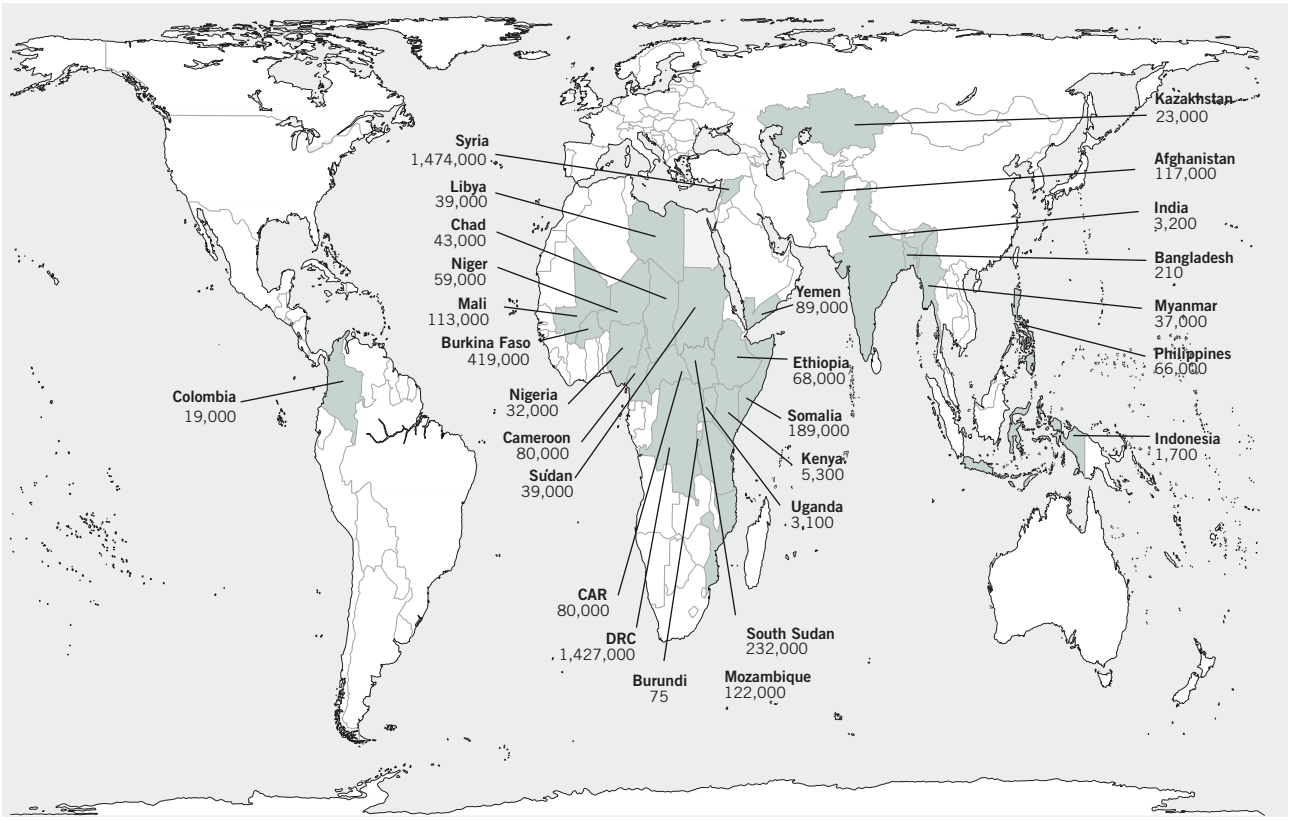
More than a third (35%) of the armed conflicts in 2020 saw a deterioration in the levels of violence and instability compared to the previous year

2020 saw a significant increase in high-intensity armed conflicts, which accounted for almost half of the cases, at 47% of the total

Dispute over control of territory –as also illustrated by the Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) case– and resources was one of the main causes in 35% of conflicts (12 cases) in 2020, continuing the trend of previous years. The issue of resources was a cause that was mostly present in African contexts –in more than half of the armed conflicts in the region (eight out of 15 cases)– although it is a factor that was indirectly present in many contexts in other regions, with violence being perpetuated through war economies.

In terms of the **evolution of armed conflicts** over the course of 2020, just over a third of the cases (12 out of 34, or 35%) saw a deterioration, with higher levels of violence and instability than in the previous year: Ethiopia (Tigray), Mali, Mozambique (north), Western Sahel Region, CAR, DRC (east-ADF), Sudan (Darfur), South Sudan, Myanmar, Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), Yemen (Houthis). The remaining cases were evenly split between those that exhibited similar levels of violence and hostilities to those recorded in 2019 and those that showed a reduction in fighting (11 cases in each category). Asia was the region that saw the largest decrease in hostilities. Two thirds of the armed conflicts in this area evolved towards lower levels of violence: Afghanistan, Philippines (Mindanao), India (CPI-M), Pakistan, Pakistan (Balochistan) and Thailand (south).

New internal forced displacements by conflict and violence – First semester of 2020



Source: IDMC, *GRID 2020: Global Report on Internal Displacement,* May 2020.

With regard to the **intensity of violence** in the different armed conflicts, it is possible to identify and highlight a particular feature in 2020: a significant prevalence of high-intensity cases, that is, contexts characterised by levels of lethality of over a thousand victims per year, in addition to serious impacts on the population, massive forced displacements and severe consequences in the territory. In contrast to previous years when high-intensity conflicts accounted for around a third of cases –32% in 2019 (11 cases), 27% in 2018 (nine cases)–, in 2020 serious armed conflicts increased and accounted for almost half of the cases, at 47% of the total. So far, the highest figure of the decade had been recorded in 2016 and 2017, but with a lower percentage: 40%. The highest prevalence of severe cases in 2020 was observed in Africa, where 11 of the 15 (73%) armed conflicts on the continent were high intensity. This is much higher than in the previous year in Africa, when less than half of the cases –seven out of 16 cases, or 44%– were high intensity. With regard to other regions, in the Middle East, half of the conflicts –three out of six– were considered serious in 2020, while Asia and Europe recorded one such case, respectively. The Americas, on the other hand, did not have high-intensity armed conflicts. The 16 cases of serious armed conflict in 2020 were: Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), Ethiopia (Tigray), Libya, Mali, Mozambique (north), Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel Region, DRC (east), DRC (east-ADF), Somalia, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

In 2020, the impacts of clashes between armed actors and the indiscriminate and deliberate use of violence against civilians were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic

In some of these contexts, fighting and other dynamics of violence resulted in levels of lethality that were well above the threshold of 1,000 fatalities per year. In the Western Sahel region, for example, more than 4,250 deaths were recorded and 2020 was reported as the deadliest year since the start of the violence in 2012, due to the actions of various jihadist groups operating in the area. In Somalia, the violence, mostly al-Shabaab attacks, killed more than 3,000 people. The armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in more than 5,000 deaths. In the case of Syria, estimates suggest that hostilities would have caused at least 8,000 fatalities in 2020, a relative decline from the levels of lethality recorded in previous years (15,000 killed in 2019; 30,000 in 2018). By far the two bloodiest armed conflicts in 2020 were Yemen and Afghanistan. In the Yemeni case, an estimated 20,000 people were killed as a direct result of clashes and explosive attacks. In the case of Afghanistan, the armed conflict is said to have killed more than 21,000 people. Although the figure is high, it is significantly lower than the previous year's figure of 40,000 fatalities.

Cases such as Syria and Yemen highlighted the added burden of the pandemic on health systems severely damaged by years of violence

The two armed conflicts with the highest death toll in 2020 were Yemen and Afghanistan

As in previous years, and as regularly denounced by the United Nations, international organisations and local entities, the civilian population continued to suffer very serious consequences as a result of armed conflicts. In 2020, the impacts of clashes between armed actors and the indiscriminate and deliberate use of violence against civilians were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which further aggravated the precariousness and lack of protection of many populations affected by armed conflict. The UN Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict published in May, a few months into the pandemic, already warned of the implications of the coronavirus and the exacerbation of vulnerabilities among the most fragile groups. It should be recalled that civilians have been identified by the UN as the main victims of armed conflict.

In this sense, it should be noted that armed conflicts continued to trigger and/or aggravate humanitarian crises. According to OCHA projections, a total of 235 million people required humanitarian assistance in 2021, an increase of 40% over the previous year's estimates and mostly attributable to COVID-19. The previous forecast –168 million– had already been highlighted as the highest figure in decades. The socio-economic impact of the pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of populations already severely affected by conflict and violence, as illustrated by the cases of CAR, Ukraine (east), Syria and Yemen. In addition, armed conflict continued to have specific impacts on particular population groups, such as children. The UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict published in June 2020, analysing the situation between January and December 2019, again painted a picture of highly worrying trends. The UN verified more than 25,000 grave human rights violations against children in 19 contexts, more than half of them perpetrated by non-state actors and one third by government or international forces. Crossfire, the use of small arms, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the excessive use of force by state agents reportedly resulted in more than 10,000 child casualties, including 4,019 deaths and 6,154 children maimed.

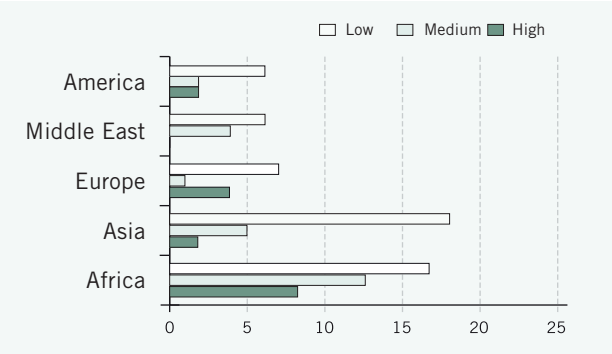
State and non-state armed actors continued to perpetrate sexual and gender-based violence against civilians, especially women and girls, in contexts of armed conflict. The UN Secretary-General's annual report on the subject published in 2020, which analyses events in 2019, confirmed that sexual violence continued to be used as a tactic of war, torture and political repression, as well as

an instrument of dehumanisation and to force population displacement. The report provides verified information on the use of sexual and gender-based violence in 19 contexts and noted the responsibility of 54 armed actors, mostly non-state actors, although it also denounced the involvement of state security forces in several countries, including DRC, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Syria. The UN Secretary-General's assessment notes that sexual violence remains under-reported and that women and girls –who constitute the largest number of victims of this scourge– continue to face numerous gender-based obstacles to accessing justice and redress. In addition, the report highlights the specific vulnerabilities that affect displaced populations in this area, both at the time of transit and at their destination, and their link to the increase in forced child marriages and the withdrawal of women and girls from labour and educational activities in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Myanmar.

Forced population displacement continued to be one of the most visible and dramatic effects of armed conflict. UNHCR's annual report published in June 2020 confirmed the trend of exponential growth of this phenomenon over the last decade: by the end of 2019 there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people, up from 70.8 million at the end of the previous year. Of the total number of displaced persons, 26 million were refugees –20.4 million under UNHCR's mandate and 5.6 million Palestinians under UNRWA's mandate– and 45.7 million were in a situation of forced internal displacement. Another 4.2 million were asylum seekers, while 3.6 million were Venezuelans recognised by UNHCR as having special displacement status. The nearly 80 million displaced people represent 1% of the world's population and 40% of them were children. With the exception of Venezuela, the main senders of refugees were all countries affected by armed conflicts of high-intensity –Syria (6.6 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.2 million)– or medium-intensity –Myanmar (1.1 million). Regarding the cases with the highest number of internally displaced people within the borders of their respective countries, most of the cases were high-intensity armed conflicts. According to data from the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) for 2019 –the latest annual data available– on displacement due to conflict and violence, the countries with the highest number of people in this situation were Syria (6.5 million), Colombia (5.6 million), DRC (5.5 million), Yemen (3.6 million), Afghanistan (3 million), Somalia (2.6 million), Nigeria (2.6 million), Sudan (2.1 million), Iraq (1.6 million) and Ethiopia (1.4 million).

High-intensity crises in 2020 took place in Chad, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Morocco-Western Sahara, Rwanda-Burundi, Mexico, Venezuela, India-China, India-Pakistan, Iran-USA, Israel, Egypt, Iraq and Israel-Syria-Lebanon

Intensity of the socio-political crises by region



Socio-political crises

The second chapter (**Socio-political crises**)[2] looks at the most relevant events regarding social and political tensions recorded during the year and compares global and regional trends. Ninety-five socio-political crisis scenarios were identified around the world in 2020, one more than in the previous year. This increase is significantly lower than the change between 2018 and 2019, when the number of crises rose by 11. As in previous years, the highest number of socio-political crises was concentrated in Africa, with 38 cases, followed by Asia (25), the Middle East (12) and Europe and Latin America (10 in each region). Even though the rise in the number of socio-political crises in 2020 was almost imperceptible, six new cases were identified. Regarding the new cases, four of them took place in Africa –Mali, Tanzania, Algeria (AQMI) and Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan– and two in Asia –China-India and Indonesia (Sulawesi).

The vast majority (57%) of the socio-political crises were of low intensity, 26% were of medium intensity and 17% were of high intensity. Half of the 16 maximum-intensity crises were concentrated in Africa –Chad; Mali; Nigeria; Ethiopia; Ethiopia (Oromia); Kenya; Rwanda-Burundi; and Morocco-Western Sahara–, four in the Middle East –Iran-USA, Israel; Egypt; Iraq; and Israel-Syria-Lebanon, Israel–, two in Asia –China-India and India-Pakistan– and two in Latin America –Mexico and Venezuela.

Regarding the evolution of the crises, 38% of them worsened during 2020, 36% did not substantively change compared to the previous year and 26% enjoyed

2. A socio-political crisis is defined as that in which the pursuit of certain objectives or the failure to satisfy certain demands made by different actors leads to high levels of political, social or military mobilisation and/or the use of violence with a level of intensity that does not reach that of an armed conflict and that may include clashes, repression, coups d'état and bombings or attacks of other kinds, and whose escalation may degenerate into an armed conflict under certain circumstances. Socio-political crises are normally related to: a) demands for self-determination and self-government, or identity issues; b) opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state, or the internal or international policies of a government, which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or c) control of resources or territory.

improvement. Overall, therefore, the number of crises that escalated during the year (36) was clearly higher than the number in which the tension subsided. In 2020, more than half the crises that escalated were located in Africa. Regarding the main causes or motivations for the crises, the outlook in 2020 was very similar to that of the previous year. Seventy-three per cent of the crises analysed were linked to opposition to the internal or international policies of certain governments or to the political, social or ideological system of the state as a whole, 39% to demands for self-government and/or identity and 31% to struggles to control territories and/or resources. In line with previous years, more than half the crises in the world were internal (53%), although this percentage was clearly higher in Africa (61%) and in Latin America, where 100% were internal. Over one quarter of the crises were internationalised internal (26%), although in the Middle East and Europe half were of this type. Finally, just over one fifth (21%) of the crises were international in nature. Despite the fact that there were comparatively less international crises than the other two types, they represent a significant percentage of maximum-intensity cases, such as those of Morocco-Sahara, Rwanda-Burundi, India-China, India-Pakistan, Iran-USA-Israel and Israel-Syria-Lebanon.

20 of the 34 armed conflicts that took place in 2020 were in countries with medium, high or very high levels of gender discrimination

Gender, peace and security

Chapter three (Gender, peace and security)[3] studies the gender-based impacts in conflicts and tensions, as well as the different initiatives launched by the United Nations and other local and international organizations and movements with regards to peacebuilding from a gender perspective. This perspective brings to light

Countries in armed conflict and/or socio-political crisis with medium, high or very high levels of gender discrimination

	Medium levels of discrimination	High levels of discrimination	Very high levels of discrimination	No data
Armed conflict	Burkina Faso DRC (3) India (2) Thailand	CAR Chad[5] Mali Myanmar Nigeria[6]	Afghanistan Cameroon (2) Iraq Philippines (2) Pakistan (2) Yemen (2)	Burundi Egypt Israel Libya Niger Palestine Somalia South Sudan Sudan (2) Syria
Socio-political crises	Chile DRC (4) Haiti India (6) Kenya Senegal Tajikistan Thailand Zimbabwe	CAR Chad Côte d'Ivoire Indonesia (2) Malawi Mali Madagascar Nigeria (2) Sri Lanka Tanzania Togo Tunisia Uganda (4)	Bangladesh Guinea Iran (4) Iraq (2) Lebanon (2) Morocco Pakistan (2)	Algeria (2) Bahrain Brunei Darussalam Burundi China (7) Egypt Equatorial Guinea Eritrea Gambia Guinea-Bissau Israel (2) Kosovo Malaysia Palestine Saudi Arabia Somalia South Korea South Sudan (2) Sudan (4) Syria Taiwan Uzbekistan Venezuela Western Sahara

* The number of armed conflicts or socio-political crises in the country appears between parentheses.
Table created based on levels of gender discrimination found in the SIGI (OECD), as indicated in the latest available report (2020), and on Escola de Cultura de Pau's classifications for armed conflicts and socio-political crises. The SIGI establishes five levels of classification based on the degree of discrimination: very high, high, medium, low and very low.

2. As an analytical category, gender makes it clear that inequalities between men and women are the product of social norms rather than a result of nature, and sets out to underline this social and cultural construction to distinguish it from the biological differences of the sexes. The gender perspective aims to highlight the social construction of sexual difference and the sexual division of work and power. It also attempts to show that the differences between men and women are a social construction resulting from unequal power relations that have historically been established in the patriarchal system. The goal of gender as an analytical category is to demonstrate the historical and situated nature of sexual differences.

the differential impacts that armed conflicts have on women and men, but also to what extent and how one and other participate in peacebuilding and what are the contributions made by women in this process. The chapter is structured into three main parts: the first looks at the global situation with regards to gender inequalities by taking a look at the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI); the second part studies the gender dimension in terms of the impact of armed conflicts and social-political crises; and the last part is on peacebuilding from a gender perspective. At the start of the chapter there is a map showing the countries with severe gender inequalities based on the Social Institutions and Gender Index. The chapter monitors the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, which was established following the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in the year 2000.

According to the SIGI, levels of discrimination against women were high or very high in 29 countries, mainly concentrated in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The analysis obtained by comparing the data from this indicator with that of the countries that are affected by situations of armed conflict reveals that 14 of the 34 armed conflicts that took place throughout 2020 occurred in countries where serious gender inequalities exist, with high or very high levels of discrimination; 6 in countries with medium levels of discrimination; and that 9 armed conflicts took place in countries for which there are no available data in this regard –Burundi, Egypt, Israel, Libya, Niger Palestine, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan. Similarly, in 4 other countries where there were one or more armed conflicts, levels of discrimination were lower, in some cases with low levels (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Ukraine and Turkey) or very low levels (Colombia) of discrimination, according to the SIGI. As regards socio-political crises, at least 45 of the 96 active cases of socio-political crisis during 2020 took place in countries where there are severe gender inequalities (medium, high or very high levels according to the SIGI). 32 socio-political crises took place in countries for which no data are available (Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Burundi, China, DPR Korea, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Palestine, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Israel, Kosovo, Western Sahara, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Taiwan, Uzbekistan and Venezuela).

By the end of 2020, 18 countries in armed conflict had a national action plan on UNSC Resolution 1325

As in previous years, during 2020 sexual violence was present in a large number of active armed conflicts. Its use, which in some cases was part of the deliberate war strategies of the armed actors, was documented in different reports, as well as by local and international media. The UN Secretary-General's report analysed the situation of 19 countries in 2019, 15 of them in conflict situations: the CAR, the DRC, Burundi, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan (Darfur), Nigeria, Colombia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Twelve of the 19 armed conflicts that were analysed in the UN Secretary-General's report experienced high levels of intensity in 2020 –Libya, Mali, DRC (east), DRC (east-ADF), the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel region, Somalia, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen (Houthis)–, topping 1,000 fatalities during the year and producing serious impacts on people and the territory, including conflict-related sexual violence. Seven of these also saw an escalation of violence during 2019 compared to the previous year –Mali, South Sudan, Sudan Darfur, DRC (east- ADF), Colombia, Myanmar and Yemen (Houthis). Most of the armed actors identified by the Secretary-General as responsible for sexual violence in armed conflict were non-state actors, some of whom had been included on UN terrorist lists. UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted that the COVID-19 pandemic was exacerbating the impact of sexual violence in conflict. As a result of the confinement implemented to combat the coronavirus, it was difficult for victims to access justice systems, increasing the serious structural barriers to reporting sexual violence in conflict situations. The Secretary-General also warned of the risk that care services for victims of sexual violence such as access to shelters, psychosocial and health services could cease to be prioritised and that impunity could increase. The pandemic not only had an impact on sexual violence in armed conflicts, but also increased the risk for many women of suffering violence in the family and home.

In addition to sexual violence, armed conflicts and crises had other serious gender impacts. Impunity for human rights violations continued to be a recurring theme. The annual report on forced displacement presented by UNHCR collected demographic data on the displaced population in the world during 2019. UNHCR provided some data disaggregated by sex, noting that 48% of refugees were women. This year there was a total of 79.5 million displaced people in the world, including 26 million refugees. According to data from the United Nations agency, in the decade between 2010 and 2019, at least 100 million people in the world were forcibly displaced from their homes, without most of them achieving a solution to their situation. Only 3.9 million people managed to return to their places of origin and 1.1 million were resettled in other countries. Since 2011, the annual number of refugees has continued to grow. Women accounted for 52% of the internally displaced population in all 16 of the 20 operations for which UNHCR had demographic data.

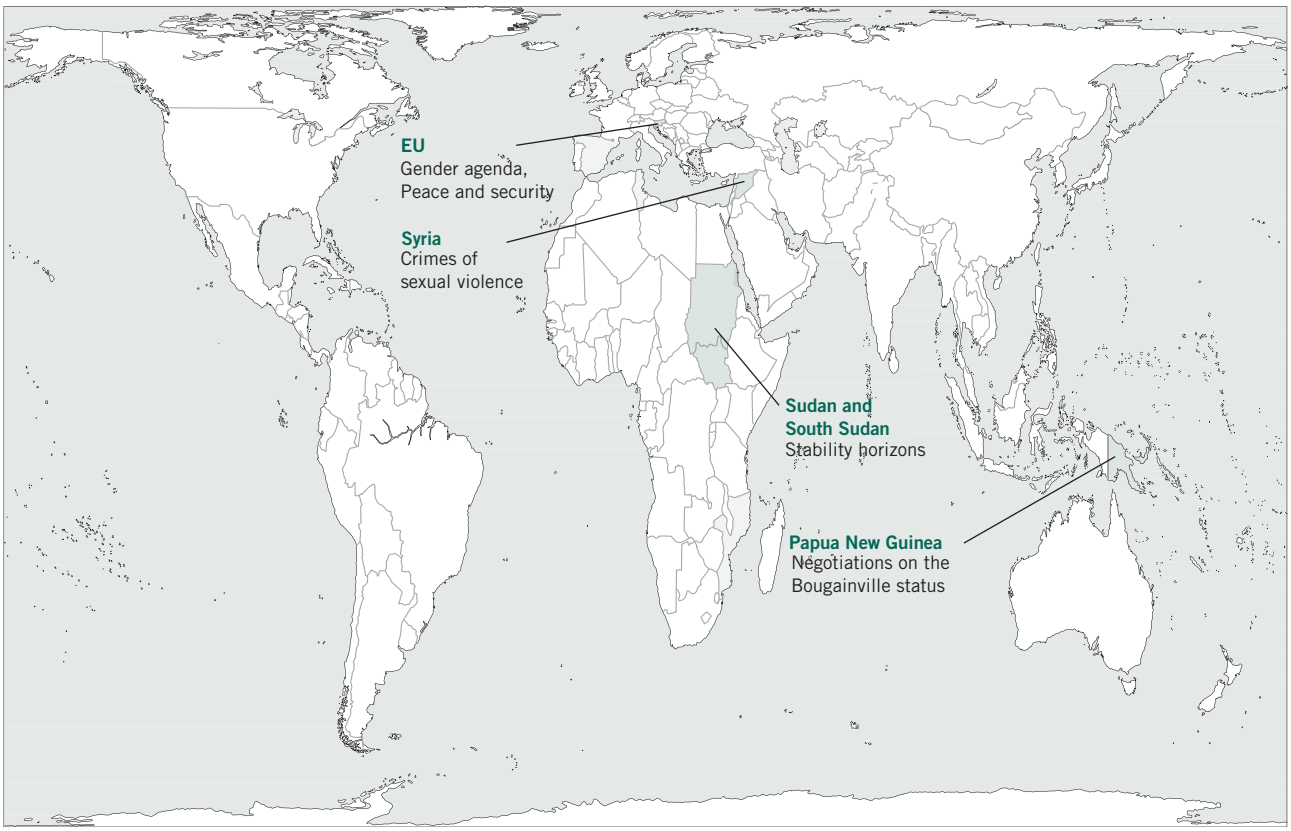
The United Nations independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity presented his report on the situation of LGTBI people during the coronavirus pandemic. The expert highlighted the disproportionate impact that this situation was having, with consequences such as an increase in violence in nearby environments due to the confinement situation, and noted that the response to the pandemic reproduced and exacerbated

previously identified patterns of social exclusion and violence against LGTBI people. In addition, the situations of violence and discrimination that LGTBI people usually face could dissuade them from seeking out healthcare, worsening their situation in the public health emergency caused by the pandemic. The expert also warned of possible regression in the refugee and asylum policy, as well as the intensification of violence against LGTBI and gender-diverse people in the countries of origin of forcibly displaced people and the spread of COVID-19 in refugee camps due to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions at these locations.

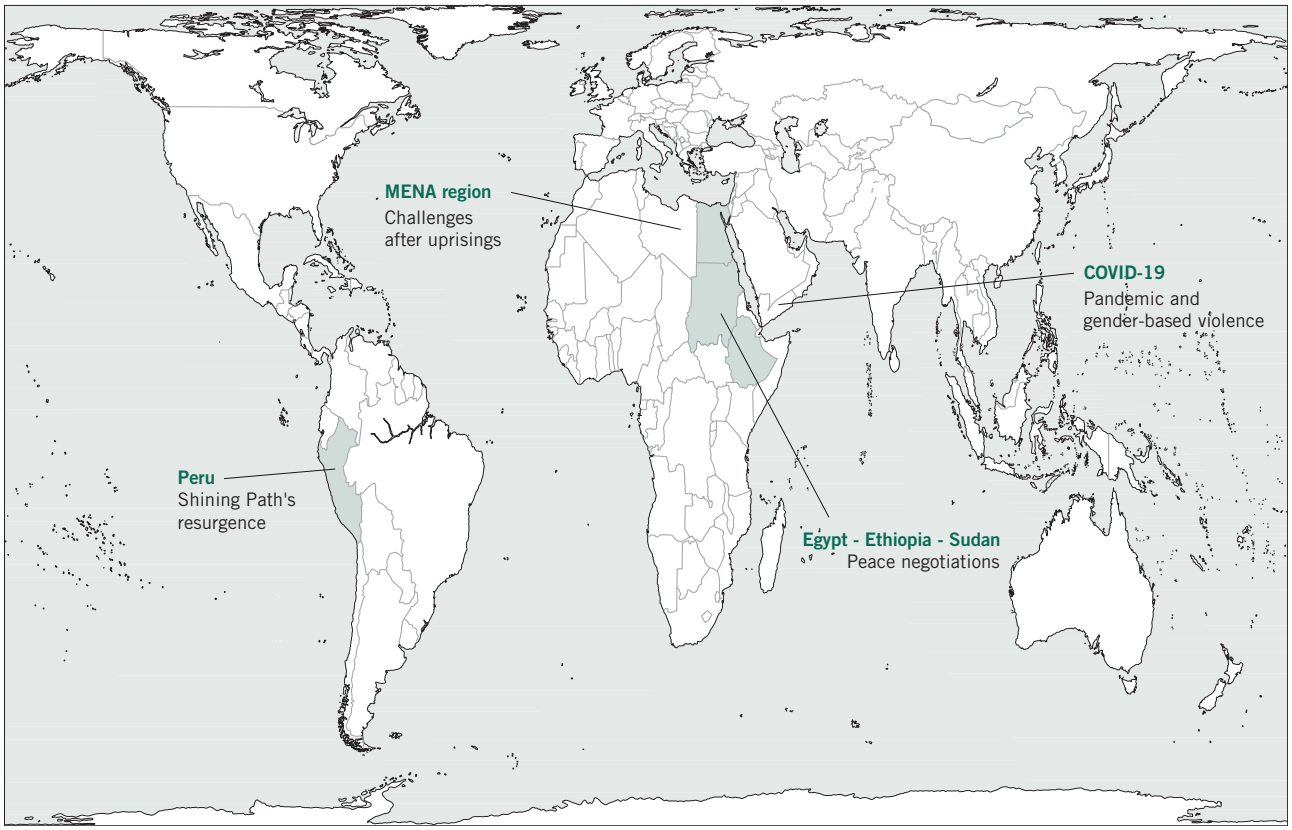
Regarding the impact of armed conflicts on children, the UN Secretary General presented his annual report in which he included some specific gender impacts. The report noted that 735 complaints of sexual violence were made in countries such as the DRC, Somalia, the CAR, Sudan and South Sudan and found that the number of cases attributed to government agents had doubled. Sexual violence particularly affected girls. Other violations of the human rights of girls and boys in armed conflicts were attacks on schools and kidnappings. The report also warned of the risk that children may be detained and deprived of liberty in conflict situations, when they are frequently victims of sexual violence and torture.

The year 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the approval of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. These two anniversaries were enormously important for the women, peace and security agenda, which should have been used to evaluate the progress and pending challenges in the implementation of the promises made in the last two decades. The UN Secretary-General presented his annual report, which included an extensive assessment of the implementation of the agenda, identifying the main challenges. With regard to participation in peace processes, the report stated that between 1992 and 2019, 13% of the negotiators, 6% of the mediators and 6% of those who signed peace agreements were women. Seven out of 10 peace processes still did not include female mediators or signatories. Seven United Nations-deployed peacekeeping missions still did not have a gender advisory figure on their staff. Though the progress was limited, between 1995 and 2019 the proportion of peace agreements that included provisions related to gender equality rose from 14 to 22%. In 2019, 30% of the members of the support teams in the peace processes facilitated or co-facilitated, directed or co-directed by the United Nations, were women. The report also addressed other issues on the agenda, such as the situation of female human rights activists, noting that between 2015 and 2019, at least 102 female defenders were murdered in 26 countries where armed conflicts took place. By the end of 2020, 18 countries in armed conflict situations had a national action plan on Resolution 1325, 11 of them in Africa (Burundi, Cameroon, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, the CAR, the DRC, Sudan and South Sudan). Asia was the region with the least countries in conflict with approved national action plans, since only Afghanistan and the Philippines had one.

Opportunities for peace in 2021



Risk scenarios for 2021



Meanwhile, the UN Security Council approved UNSC Resolution 2538 on peacekeeping in 2020, which focused on female involvement in these missions. This is the first resolution exclusively focused on women and peacekeeping and was promoted by the Indonesian government. The resolution, which was not approved under the umbrella of the women, peace and security agenda, calls on national governments, the United Nations and regional organisations to promote the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in the security forces and civilians in peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, it specifically demands that member states formulate strategies and take action to boost the deployment of female members of the security forces. The latest statistics available on female participation in peacekeeping forces indicated that women represented 7%, though if a distinction is made between police and military forces, there are notable differences, since women constitute 17.5% of the police forces deployed in UN peacekeeping missions and 5.7% of the military forces.

Peace Opportunities and Risk Scenarios for 2021

Chapter four of the report (Peace Opportunities for 2021) identifies and analyzes four scenarios that are favourable for positive steps to be taken in terms of peacebuilding for the future. The opportunities identified in 2020 refer to different regions and topics:

The Alert! report identifies and studies four contexts that are favourable in terms of peacebuilding

- **Sudan and South Sudan:** In the last decade, the region has gone from a significant political and security crisis to two transitional processes that, together with the signing of important peace agreements in each country, open a new path of hope for the consolidation of peace and stability in the region.

- **Papua New Guinea (Bougainville):** During 2020, the Government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Government of Bougainville laid the foundations for a negotiation process that could lead to a resolution on the political status of the island of Bougainville, implement the 2001 peace agreement and thus culminate a peace process started in the 1990s.

- **European Union and women, peace and security:** The new normative framework of the EU's women, peace and security agenda offers opportunities in conflict situations and peace processes to women's organizations demanding mechanisms for participation and effective dialogue, while there are still gaps in implementation and policy coherence.

- **Syria:** The country has become an emblematic case worldwide for the systematic violations of

human rights and international humanitarian law in a context of impunity, which sets a dangerous precedent. Faced with the blocking of other options to demand accountability, recent initiatives –some of which appeal to the principle of universal jurisdiction– foster an incipient hope for justice and reparation for victims of the conflict, including survivors of sexual violence.

The report identifies and analyzes four scenarios of armed conflict and socio-political crisis that, given their condition, may worsen

Chapter five of the report (Risk Scenarios for 2021), identifies and analyzes four scenarios of armed conflict and tension that, given their condition, may worsen and become sources of more severe instability and violence in 2021.

- **Pandemic and gender violence:** The intersecting dynamics of armed violence in conflict and socioeconomic crises and the COVID-19 pandemic increase the risk for women and girls of exposure to violence and gender inequalities, increasing difficulties of access to resources and the specific impacts of violence on their rights.

- **Peru:** Despite the large military and police deployment in the last two decades in the region where the Militarized Communist Party of Peru operates, this group increased its activity in 2020 and the Government recognized that it continues to pose a significant threat to national security.

- **North Africa and the Middle East:** A decade after the massive popular uprisings that shook the political landscape throughout the region, the area faces a series of challenges and risks linked to the persistence of grievances that motivated the uprisings in the past, to the reinforcement and reconfiguration of authoritarianism and repressive structures, and to the complexities derived from the evolution of serious armed conflicts in this region.

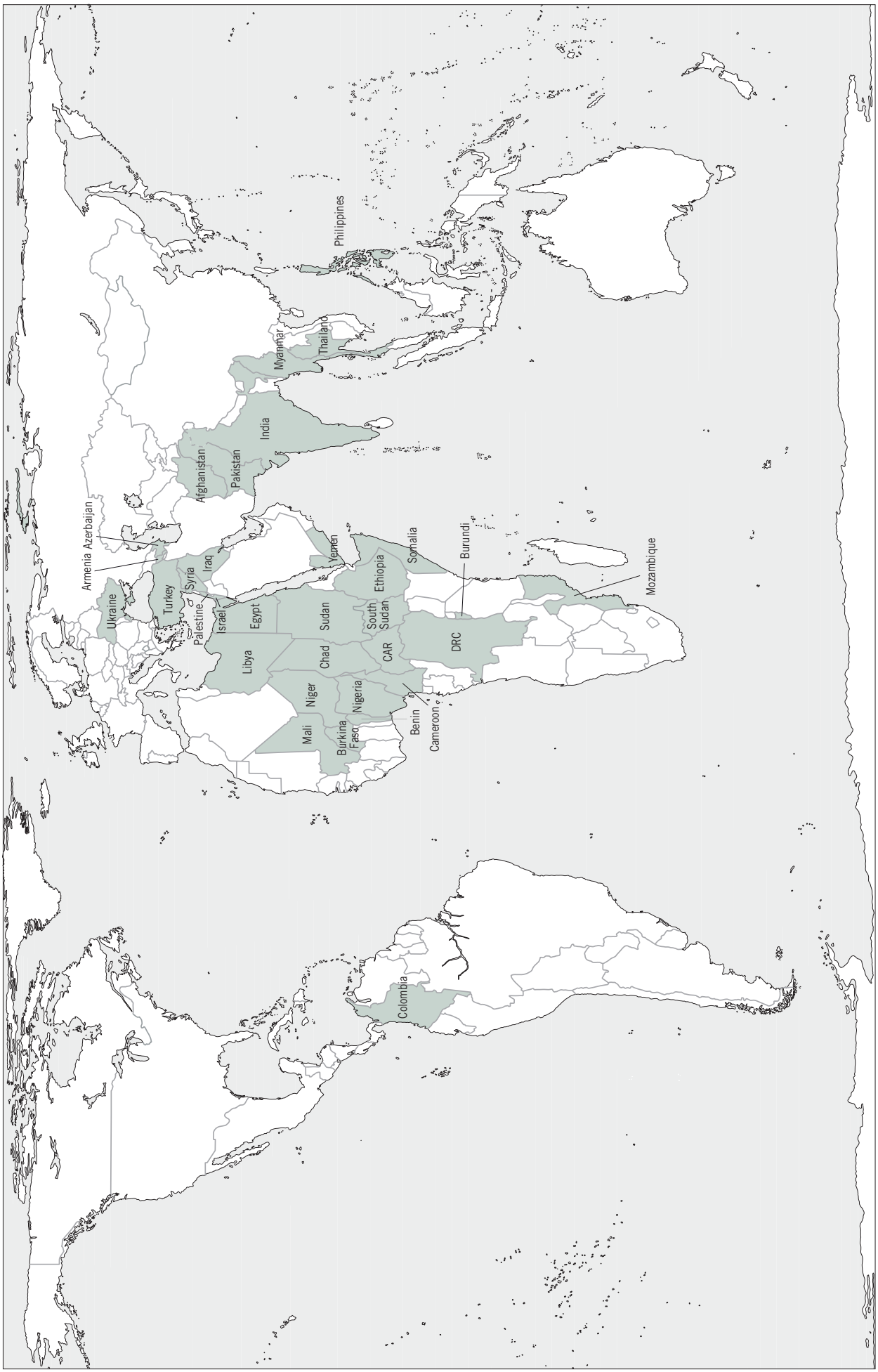
- **Egypt - Ethiopia - Sudan:** Progress in recent years and especially in 2020 in the building of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, started by Ethiopia in 2011 on the Blue Nile riverbed, a tributary of the Nile in Ethiopian territory, has caused an increase in tension between Ethiopia and Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Sudan.

Conflict overview 2020

Continent	Armed conflict			Socio-political crises			TOTAL
	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low	
Africa	*Cameroon (Ambazonia/ North West and South West)* *DR Congo (east)* DR Congo (east-ADF) Ethiopia (Tigray) Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) *Libya* *Mali* Mozambique (north) *Somalia* *South Sudan* West Sahel Region	*CAR* *Sudan (Darfur)*	*Burundi* *Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile)*	Chad Ethiopia Ethiopia (Oromia) Kenya Mali *Morocco–Western Sahara* Nigeria Rwanda–Burundi	Algeria (AQIM) Côte d'Ivoire *DR Congo* Eritrea Ethiopia–Egypt–Sudan Guinea Guinea-Bissau Rwanda Rwanda–Uganda Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland) *Sudan* Tanzania Uganda	Algeria Benin Central Africa (LRA) DR Congo–Rwanda DR Congo–Uganda Equatorial Guinea *Eritrea–Ethiopia* Gambia Madagascar Malawi *Mozambique* Nigeria (Delta Niger) Senegal (Casamance) *Sudan–South Sudan* Togo Tunisia Zimbabwe	
SUBTOTAL	**11**	**2**	**2**	**8**	**13**	**17**	**53**
America			*Colombia*	Mexico *Venezuela*	*Haiti* Peru	Bolivia Chile El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Nicaragua	
SUBTOTAL			**1**	**2**	**2**	**6**	**11**
Asia and Pacific	*Afghanistan*	India (Jammu and Kashmir) *Myanmar* Pakistan	India (CPI-M) Pakistan (Baluchistan) *Philippines (Mindanao)* *Philippines (NPA)* *Thailand (south)*	India–China India–Pakistan	India Indonesia (West Papua) *Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea* *Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea* Pakistan	Bangladesh China (Hong Kong) China (Tibet) China (Xinjiang) China-Japan China-Taiwan *India (Assam)* India (Manipur) *India (Nagaland)* Indonesia (Sulawesi) Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Lao, DPR South China Sea Sri Lanka Tajikistan Thailand Uzbekistan	
SUBTOTAL	**1**	**3**	**5**	**2**	**5**	**18**	**34**
Europe	*Armenia–Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)*	Turkey (southeast)	*Ukraine (east)*		Belarus Russia (North Caucasus) Turkey Turkey–Greece, Cyprus	Bosnia and Herzegovina *Georgia (Abkhasia)* *Georgia (South Ossetia)* *Moldova, Rep. of (Transdniestria)* *Serbia–Kosovo* Spain (Catalonia)	
SUBTOTAL	**1**	**1**	**1**		**4**	**6**	**13**
Middle East	Iraq *Syria* *Yemen (Houthis)*	Egypt (Sinai)	*Israel – Palestine* Yemen (AQAP)	Egypt *Iran–USA, Israel* Iraq Israel–Syria – Lebanon	Lebanon	Bahrein Iran Iran (northeast) Iran (Sistan Baluchistan) Iraq (Kurdistan) *Palestine* Saudi Arabia	
SUBTOTAL	**3**	**1**	**2**	**4**	**1**	**7**	**18**
TOTAL	**16**	**7**	**11**	**16**	**25**	**54**	**129**

Armed conflicts and socio-political crises with ongoing peace negotiations, whether exploratory or formal, are identified in italics.

Map 1.1. **Armed conflicts**



1. Armed conflicts

- 34 armed conflicts were reported in 2020. Most of the conflicts occurred in Africa (15), followed by Asia (nine), the Middle East (six), Europe (three) and America (one).
- 2020 saw a significant increase in high-intensity armed conflicts, which accounted for almost half of the cases, at 47% of the total.
- In November, armed conflict broke out between the Ethiopian government and the authorities in the northern Tigray region, reportedly resulting in hundreds of deaths and serious human rights violations.
- The escalation of violence by the ADF in eastern DRC as a result of a military operation by the Congolese Armed Forces launched in October 2019 continued throughout 2020, causing hundreds of civilian casualties.
- In northern Mozambique, in Cabo Delgado province, there was a severe escalation of violence due to the actions of groups with jihadist agendas and the response of the security forces.
- Burkina Faso became the world's fastest growing forced displacement crisis during 2020, due to violence in the Liptako-Gourma region.
- The security situation in the Western Sahel deteriorated due to increased armed actions by jihadist groups, community militias and military responses by the security forces of regional countries and external allies.
- Violence in Afghanistan was reduced after the agreement signed between the US and the Taliban due to the withdrawal of foreign troops and less offensives by the Armed Forces and ISIS, although the Taliban's armed activity did not decrease.
- In line with the trend of recent years, violence in southern Thailand declined again to its lowest levels since the beginning of the conflict in 2004.
- The Armenia-Azerbaijan war over Nagorno-Karabakh resumed, with several thousand killed and tens of thousands of people forcibly displaced, the partition of Nagorno-Karabakh territory and the transfer of adjacent districts to Baku.
- Yemen remained one of the countries most affected by armed violence in the world, with an estimate of 20,000 fatalities in 2020.

The present chapter analyses the armed conflicts that occurred in 2020. It is organised into three sections. The first section offers a definition of armed conflict and its characteristics. The second section provides an analysis of the trends of conflicts in 2020, including global and regional trends and other issues related to international conflicts. The third section is devoted to describing the development and key events of the year in the various contexts. Furthermore, a map is included at the start of chapter that indicates the conflicts active in 2020.

1.1. Armed conflicts: definition

An **armed conflict** is any confrontation between regular or irregular armed groups with objectives that are perceived as incompatible in which the continuous and organised use of violence a) causes a minimum of 100 battle-related deaths in a year and/or a serious impact on the territory (destruction of infrastructures or of natural resources) and human security (e.g. wounded or displaced population, sexual violence, food insecurity, impact on mental health and on the social fabric or disruption of basic services) and b) aims to achieve objectives that are different than those of common delinquency and are normally linked to:
- demands for self-determination and self-government or identity issues;
- the opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state or the internal or international policy of the government, which in both cases leads to fighting to seize or erode power;
- control over the resources or the territory.

Table 1.1. **Summary of armed conflicts in 2020**

Conflict[1] -beginning-	Type[2]	Main parties[3]	Intensity[4] / Trend[5]
AFRICA			
Burundi -2015-	Internationalised internal	Government, Imbonerakure Youth branch, political party CNDD-FDD, political party CNL, armed groups RED-TABARA, FPB (previously FOREBU), FNL	1
	Government		=
Cameroon (Ambazonia/ North West and South West) -2018-	Internationalised internal	Government, political-military secessionist movement including the opposition Ambazonia Coalition Team (ACT, including IG Sako, to which belong the armed groups Lebialem Red Dragons and SOCADEF) and the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC, including IG Sisiku, whose armed wing is the Ambazonia Defence Forces, ADF)	3
	Self-government, Identity		=
CAR -2006-	Internationalised internal	Government of CAR, rebel groups of the former coalition Séléka (FPRC, RPRC, MPC, UPC, MLCJ), anti-balaka militias, 3R militia, LRA armed Ugandan group, other local and foreign armed groups, Government of France, MINUSCA, EUFOR	2
	Government, Resources		↑
DRC (east) -1998-	Internationalised internal	Government of DRC, FDLR, factions of the FDLR, Mai-Mai militias, Nyatura, APCLS, NDC-R, Ituri armed groups, Burundian armed opposition group FNL, Government of Rwanda, MONUSCO	3
	Government, Identity, Resources		=
DRC (east – ADF) -2014-	Internationalised internal	Government of DRC, Government of Uganda, Mai-Mai militias, armed opposition group ADF, MONUSCO	3
	System, Resources		↑
Ethiopia (Tigray)-2020-	Internationalised internal	Government of Ethiopia, Government of Eritrea, Tigray State Regional Government, security forces and militias of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)	3
	Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) - 2011-	Internationalised internal	Government of Nigeria, Civilian Joint Task Force pro-government milita, Boko Haram factions (ISWAP, JAS-Abubakar Shekau, Ansaru, Bakura), civilian militias, Multinational Joint Task Force MNJTF (Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger)	3
	System		=
Libya -2011-	Internationalised internal	Government of National Accord with headquarters in Tripoli, government with headquarters in Tobruk/Bayda, numerous armed groups including the Libyan National Army (LNA, also called Arab Libyan Armed Forces, ALAF), militias from Misrata, Petroleum Facilities Guard, Bengasi Defence Brigades (BDB), ISIS, AQIM, mercenaries; USA, France, UK, Egypt, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Qatar, Russia, among other countries	3
	Government, Resources, System		=

1. This column includes the states in which armed conflicts are taking place, specifying in brackets the region within each state to which the crisis is confined or the name of the armed group involved in the conflict. This last option is used in cases involving more than one armed conflict in the same state or in the same territory within a state, for the purpose of distinguishing them.
2. This report classifies and analyses armed conflicts using two criteria: on the one hand, the causes or clashes of interests and, on the other hand, the convergence between the scenario of conflict and the actors involved. The following main causes can be distinguished: demands for self-determination and self-government (Self-government) or identity aspirations (Identity); opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state (System) or the internal or international policies of a government (Government), which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or the struggle for the control of resources (Resources) or territory (Territory). In respect of the second type, the armed conflicts may be of an internal, Internationalised internal or international nature. An internal armed conflict is defined as a conflict involving armed actors from the same state who operate exclusively within the territory of this state. Secondly, an internationalised internal armed conflict is defined as that in which at least one of the parties involved is foreign and/or in which the tension spills over into the territory of neighbouring countries. Another factor taken into account in order to consider an armed conflict as internationalised internal is the existence of military bases of armed groups in neighbouring countries (in connivance with these countries) from which attacks are launched. Finally, an international conflict is one in which state and non-state parties from two or more countries confront each other. It should also be taken into account that most current armed conflicts have a significant regional or international dimension and influence due, among other factors, to flows of refugees, the arms trade, economic or political interests (such as legal or illegal exploitation of resources) that the neighbouring countries have in the conflict, the participation of foreign combatants or the logistical and military support provided by other states.
3. This column shows the actors that intervene directly in the hostilities. The main actors who participate directly in the conflicts are made up of a mixture of regular or irregular armed parties. The conflicts usually involve the government, or its armed forces, fighting against one or several armed opposition groups, but can also involve other irregular groups such as clans, guerrillas, warlords, armed groups in opposition to each other or militias from ethnic or religious communities. Although they most frequently use conventional weapons, and more specifically small arms (which cause most deaths in conflicts), in many cases other methods are employed, such as suicide attacks, bombings and sexual violence and even hunger as a weapon of war. There are also other actors who do not directly participate in the armed activities but who nevertheless have a significant influence on the conflict.
4. The intensity of an armed conflict (high, medium or low) and its trend (escalation of violence, reduction of violence, unchanged) are evaluated mainly on the basis of how deadly it is (number of fatalities) and according to its impact on the population and the territory. Moreover, there are other aspects worthy of consideration, such as the systematisation and frequency of the violence or the complexity of the military struggle (complexity is normally related to the number and fragmentation of the actors involved, to the level of institutionalisation and capacity of the state, and to the degree of internationalisation of the conflict, as well as to the flexibility of objectives and to the political will of the parties to reach agreements). As such, high-intensity armed conflicts are usually defined as those that cause over 1,000 fatalities per year, as well as affecting a significant proportion of the territory and population, and involving several actors (who forge alliances, confront each other or establish a tactical coexistence). Medium and low intensity conflicts, with over 100 fatalities per year, have the aforementioned characteristics but with a more limited presence and scope. An armed conflict is considered ended when a significant and sustained reduction in armed hostilities occurs, whether due to a military victory, an agreement between the actors in conflict, demobilisation by one of the parties, or because one of the parties abandons or significantly scales down the armed struggle as a strategy to achieve certain objectives. None of these options necessarily mean that the underlying causes of the armed conflict have been overcome. Nor do they exclude the possibility of new outbreaks of violence. The temporary cessation of hostilities, whether formal or tacit, does not necessarily imply the end of the armed conflict.
5. This column compares the trend of the events of 2020 with those that of 2019. The escalation of violence symbol (↑) indicates that the general situation in 2020 has been more serious than in the previous year; the reduction of violence symbol (↓) indicates an improvement in the situation; and the unchanged (=) symbol indicates that no significant changes have taken place.

Conflict -beginning-	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
Mali -2012-	Internationalised internal	Government, CMA (MNLA, MAA faction, CPA, HCUA), Platform (GATIA, CMPFPR, MAA faction), MSA, Ansar Dine, MUJAO, AQIM, MRRA, al-Mourabitoun, JNIM/GSIM, Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP) –also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)-, Katiba Macina, MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane), G5-Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), USA, Takouba Task Force (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Holland, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom)	3
	System, Self-government, Identity		↑
Mozambique (North) -2019-	Internationalised internal	Government, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) -formerly Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ)-, al-Qaeda, South African private security company DAG (Dyck Advisory Group)	3
	System, Identity		↑
Somalia -1988-	Internationalised internal	Federal Government of Somalia, pro-government regional forces, Somaliland, Puntland, clan militias and warlords, Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a, USA, France, Ethiopia, AMISOM, EUNAVFOR Somalia, Operation Ocean Shield, al-Shabaab	3
	Government, System		=
South Sudan -2009-	Internationalised internal	Government (SPLM/A), SPLM/A-in Opposition armed group (faction of former vice president, Riek Machar), dissident factions of the SPLA-IO led by Peter Gatdet and Gathoth Gatkuoth, SPLM-FD, SSLA, SSDM/A, SSDM-CF, SSNLM, REMNASA, NAS, SSUF (Paul Malong), SSDA, communal militias (SSPPF, TFN, White Army, Shilluk Agwelek), Sudan Revolutionary Front armed coalition (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), Sudan, Uganda, UNMISS	3
	Government, Resources, Identity		↑
Sudan (Darfur) -2003-	Internationalised internal	Government, PDF pro-government militias, RSF paramilitary unit, pro-government militias *janjaweed*, Sudan Revolutionary Front armed coalition (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), several SLA factions, other groups, UNAMID	2
	Self-government, Resources, Identity		↑
Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile) -2011-	Internationalised internal	Government, armed group SPLM-N, Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) armed coalition, PDF pro-government militias, Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary unit, South Sudan	1
	Self-government, Resources, Identity		↓
Western Sahel Region -2018-	International	Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Ivory Coast, G5-Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), Joint Task Force for the Liptako-Gourma Region (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane), USA, Takouba Task Force (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and United Kingdom), Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the Province of West Africa (ISWAP) - also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)-, Macina Liberation Front (FML), Ansaroul Islam, other jihadist groups and community militias	3
	System, Resources, Identity		↑
AMERICA			
Colombia -1964-	Internationalised internal	Government, ELN, FARC (dissidents), EPL, paramilitary groups	1
	System		↑
ASIA			
Afghanistan -2001-	Internationalised internal	Government, international coalition (led by USA), NATO, Taliban militias, warlords, ISIS (ISIS-KP)	3
	System		↓
India (CPI-M) -1967-	Internal	Government, CPI-M (Naxalites)	1
	System		↓
India (Jammu and Kashmir) -1989-	Internationalised internal	Government, JKLF, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, United Jihad Council, All Parties Hurriyat Conference	2
	Self-government, Identity		=
Myanmar -1948-	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups (Ceasefire signatories: ABSDF, ALP, CNF, DKBA, KNU, KNU/KNLA-PC, PNLO, RCSS, NMSP, LDU; Non-signatories: KIA, NDAA, MNDAA, SSPP/SSA, TNLA, AA, UWSA, ARSA, KNPP)	2
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Pakistan -2001-	Internationalised internal	Government, Armed Forces, intelligence services, Taliban militias, international militias, USA	2
	System		↓
Pakistan (Balochistan) -2005-	Internal	Government, Armed Forces, intelligence services, BLA, BRP, BRA, BLF and BLT, civil society, LeJ, TTP, Afghan Taliban (Quetta Shura)	1
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		↓

Conflict -beginning-	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
ASIA			
Philippines (Mindanao) -1991-	Internationalised internal	Government, Abu Sayyaf, BIFF, Islamic State of Lanao/ Dawlay Islamiyah/ Maute Group, Ansarul Khilafah Mindanao, Toraife group, factions of MILF and MNLF	1
	Self-government, System, Identity		↓
Philippines (NPA) -1969--	Internal	Government, NPA	1
	System		=
Thailand (south) -2004-	Internal	Government, BRN and other separatist armed opposition groups	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
EUROPE			
Armenia–Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) -2020-	Internationalised	Armenia, Azerbaijan, self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh	3
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↑
Turkey (southeast) -1984-	Internationalised internal	Government, PKK, TAK, ISIS	2
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Ukraine (east) -2014-	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups in the eastern provinces, Russia	1
	Government, Identity, Self-government		↓
MIDDLE EAST			
Egypt (Sinai) -2014-	Internationalised internal	Government, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) or Sinai Province (branch of ISIS), other armed groups (Ajnad Misr, Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis, Katibat al-Rabat al-Jihadiya, Popular Resistance Movement, Liwaa al-Thawra, Hassam), Israel	2
	System		↓
Iraq -2003-	Internationalised internal	Government, Iraqi and Kurdish (peshmerga) military and security forces, Shia militias (Popular Mobilization Units, PMU), Sunni armed groups, Islamic State (ISIS), international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, USA, Iran, Turkey, Israel	3
	System, Government, Identity, Resources		=
Israel-Palestine -2000-	International	Israeli government, settler militias, PA, Fatah (Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), Hamas (Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades), Islamic Jihad, FPLP, FDLP, Popular Resistance Committees, Salafists groups	1
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↓
Syria -2011-	Internationalised internal	Government, pro-government militias, Free Syrian Army (FSA), Ahrar al-Sham, Syrian Democratic Forces (coalition that includes the YPG/YPJ militias of the PYD), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, Turkey, Hezbollah, Iran, Russia, among other armed parties	3
	System, Government, Self-government, Identity		=
Yemen (AQAP) - 2011-	Internationalised internal	Government, AL Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP/Ansar Sharia), ISIS, USA, international coalition led by Saudi Arabia, UAE, tribal militias, Houthi militias/Ansar Allah	1
	System		=
Yemen (Houthis) -2004-	Internationalised internal	Armed forces loyal to Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi's Government, followers of the cleric al-Houthi (al-Shabaab al-Mumen/Ansar Allah), armed factions loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, tribal militias linked to the al-Ahmar clan, Salafist militias, armed groups linked to the Islamist Islah party, international coalition led by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran	3
	System, Government, Identity		↑

1: low intensity; 2: medium intensity; 3: high intensity;
↑: escalation of violence; ↓: decrease of violence ; = : unchanged; End: no longer considered an armed conflict

1.2. Armed conflicts: analysis of trends in 2020

This section offers an analysis of the global and regional trends in armed conflicts in 2020. This includes an overview of conflicts as compared to that of previous years, the geographical distribution of conflicts and the main trends by region, the relationship between the actors involved and the scenario of the dispute, the main causes of the current armed conflicts, the general evolution of the contexts and the intensity of the conflicts according to their levels of violence and their impact. Likewise, this section analyses some of the main consequences of armed conflicts in the civilian population, including forced displacement due to situations of conflict and violence.

1.2.1 Global and regional trends

2020 offered no changes on the total number of armed conflicts worldwide. Following the trend of previous years, 34 cases were identified in 2020 –the same number as the previous year. In the five preceding years the figures were similar: 34 in 2019 and 2018, 33 in 2017 and 2016 and 35 in 2015. At the end of 2020, all cases remained active, unlike other years where a reduction in the levels of violence in some contexts led to these cases ceasing to be regarded as armed conflicts, i.e. Algeria (AQIM) and DRC (Kasai) in 2019. Nevertheless, there were two new additions to the list of armed conflicts. In Africa, tensions between the federal government and the government of Ethiopia's Tigray region led to a military confrontation with serious consequences. In Europe, the historical dispute around the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh –majority Armenian and formally part of Azerbaijan– escalated into a situation of open armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with severe impacts in terms of lethality and forced population displacement.

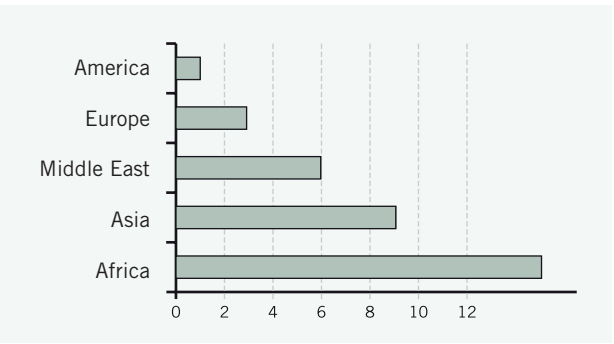
Regarding the geographical distribution of the armed conflict, as in previous years, most cases are concentrated in Africa (15) and Asia (9), followed by the Middle East (6), Europe (3) and the Americas (1). In percentage terms, therefore, the African continent accounted for 44% of total global conflicts.

44% of the armed conflicts took place in Africa, with a total of 15 cases, followed by Asia (9), Middle East (6), Europe (3) and Amercia (1)

The outlook for armed conflict in 2020 was also influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a climate of worldwide alarm as a result of the spread of this disease, on 23 March, the UN Secretary General appealed for a global ceasefire in order to create the conditions necessary to respond to the coronavirus threat and ensure access to humanitarian assistance and health services for the most vulnerable populations exposed to violence. After three months of debate, in July the UN Security Council approved Resolution 2532, which formalised its support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, and demanded a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all military contexts, while urging all parties involved in armed conflict to implement a humanitarian armistice for at least 90 consecutive days. In his speech to the UN General Assembly on the occasion of the organisation's 75th anniversary in September, António Guterres stressed that the situation created by the pandemic provided an opportunity to give new impetus to efforts for peace and reconciliation. He also reiterated his call for a global cessation of hostilities, which since March had received the backing of 180 states, regional organisations, civil society groups and peace activists.

In practice, however, **António Guterres' appeal for a global truce received a limited and uneven response from the armed groups involved in conflicts.** Some welcomed the call and decreed ceasefires unilaterally –among them, the ELN armed group in Colombia and the BRN in Thailand (south), as well as the NDF and the government of the Philippines–, but in other settings the disputing parties ignored the call and intensified or continued their armed actions despite the pandemic –in Libya, for example, armed groups stepped up their offensive after the call by Guterres, with actions that included attacks on hospitals and cuts to drinking water supplies to millions of people despite urgent health needs as a result of the pandemic. In general terms, ceasefires were short-lived and/or did not become entrenched and most of the actors involved in armed conflict continued to favour military methods.[6] In addition, COVID-19 created difficulties for peace processes, due to its impact on the dynamics of the negotiations –obstacles to the movement of negotiators, mediators and facilitators, delays in rounds of talks, technological difficulties in communications in certain settings– and in the implementation of agreements.[7] For example, the EU mission to CAR to support security sector reform, as part of the 2019 peace agreement, saw its deployment in the country delayed due to the pandemic.

Graph 1.1. **Regional distribution of the number of armed conflicts in 2020**



Many governments also took advantage of the COVID-19 situation to tighten restrictions on freedoms, curtail opposition actions and/or limit certain democratic guarantees. This was evident in cases such as Burundi, where the work of election observers was limited by appealing to the COVID-19 emergency, and in Cameroon (Ambazonia North West/South West), with human rights organisations denouncing abuses in the application of anti-terrorism legislation and pandemic-related restrictions on the right to assembly. In some contexts, the pandemic was also reported to have contributed to worsening human rights violations, as in the case of Colombia, where attacks on and killings of women human rights defenders increased. For the civilian population, meanwhile, the effects of the pandemic further compounded the usual impact of the violence and hostilities.[8]

6. For more information, see Escola de Cultura de Pau, "Altos el fuego en conflictos armados durante la pandemia del coronavirus" (Ceasefires in armed conflicts during the coronavirus pandemic) and Ceses de hostilidades en tiempos de COVID-19" (Cessations of hostilities in times of COVID-19), *Apuntes ECP de Conflictos y Paz*, No. 4 (April 2020) and No. 7 (July 2020).
7. For more information, see Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Analysis of Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.
8. See section 1.2.2 on the impact of armed conflict on civilians in this chapter.

With regard to the relationship between the actors involved in the conflict and its context, we identified internal, international and, for the most part, internationalised internal conflicts. Along similar lines to previous years, in 2020 9% of the contexts were internal in nature, i.e. conflicts in which the armed actors involved in the conflict operated exclusively within the borders of the same state. All three internal armed conflicts were concentrated in Asia: Philippines (NPA), India (CPI-M) and Thailand (South). Three other cases, also equivalent to 9% of armed conflicts, were international and occurred on three continents: the conflict in the Western Sahel Region in Africa, the Palestinian-Israeli case in the Middle East, and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in Europe. The vast majority of armed conflicts were internationalised internal conflicts (28 cases, or 82%). These cases are characterised by the fact that one of the disputing parties is foreign, the armed actors in the conflict have bases or launch attacks from abroad and/or the dispute spills over into neighbouring countries. In many conflicts this factor of internationalisation took the form of the involvement of third-party actors as disputing parties, including international missions, *ad-hoc* regional and international military coalitions, states and armed groups operating across borders, among others.

In terms of the role of international missions, UN initiatives continued to be prominent in 2020, particularly in Africa. UN peacekeeping forces continued to be deployed in CAR (MINUSCA), DRC (MONUSCO), Mali (MINUSMA), Sudan (Darfur) (UNAMID, a hybrid mission of the UN and the AU) and South Sudan (UNMISS). NATO maintained its Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. Regional organisations also continued to be involved in numerous armed conflicts in the form of military missions or operations, as in the case of the African Union (AU) –with the AMISOM mission in Somalia– or the European Union (EU) –EUFOR in CAR, EUNAVFOR in Somalia. Hybrid missions, involving regional organisations and states, also continued to operate, such as the maritime military operation in the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean –known as Ocean Shield–, led by the US but also involving the EU, NATO and countries such as Japan, India and Russia. The international coalition against the armed group ISIS, formed in September 2014 under the leadership of the US, which has since deployed actions in Iraq and Syria, is similar in nature. The coalition has 83 members, including states and organisations, including the Arab League and the EU. The involvement of states in armed conflicts through international coalitions in which one or two countries maintained a leading role continued to be observed during 2020. This was the case, for example, with the US-led coalition in Afghanistan or the coalition of Arab-majority countries led by Saudi Arabia –and with a prominent role also being played by the United Arab Emirates (UAE)– to intervene in Yemen.

Following the trend of previous years, the majority of armed conflicts in 2020 were internationalised internal conflicts

The internationalisation dimension and, in particular, the leading role of foreign actors in the dynamics of the conflict and the evolution of hostilities was particularly evident in contexts such as Syria and Libya. In the Syrian context, developments continued to be strongly determined by the positions, interests and actions of countries such as Russia and Turkey –backers of the regime and the opposition, respectively– which particularly influenced the course of the conflict on the battlefronts in northern Syria. In the Libyan case, the involvement of external actors in support of the warring sides increased during 2020, a trend that took the form of repeated breaches of the arms embargo; continued flows of fighters, mercenaries and military advisors; and explicit threats of more direct intervention by third-party countries if certain "red lines" were crossed. Thus, for the internationally recognised government based in Tripoli, Turkey's support was crucial; as was support from countries such as Egypt and Russia for General Khalifa Haftar's forces. The interests of these actors were projected onto the conflict, which was also influenced by economic and geopolitical considerations such as disputes over the control of energy-rich areas in the Eastern Mediterranean.[9] Cases such as Yemen and Iraq were also arenas onto which regional and international disputes were projected. Thus, the Yemeni case was directly influenced by the Saudi-Iranian standoff and also by the growing tension between Washington and Tehran. Iraq was another territory in which the growing confrontation between the US and Iran took centre stage, and in which Turkey also intervened, in the context of its dispute with the PKK.

The Western Sahel region was emblematic of the of international armed conflicts, as several military coalitions of countries in the region and external allies came together in this setting to confront the growing activity of armed jihadist groups operating across borders –organisations that, in turn, have formed conglomerates of entities linked to al-Qaeda or the Islamic state. In this sense, operations were conducted in the area by the G5 Sahel Joint Force (composed of Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), the Joint Force for the Liptako-Gourma Region (composed of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), and the Takouba Task Force (a European military mission created in 2020, led by France and composed of special forces from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom, in addition to Mali and Niger). Furthermore, French troops continued to be deployed in the region in the framework of Operation Barkhane as well as the UN forces of the aforementioned MINUSMA mission. The EU Military Assistance and Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) was also expected to extend its activities to other countries in the region involved in the conflict.

9. See the summary on Turkey – Greece, Cyprus in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).

With regard to the causes of the armed conflicts, the vast majority were mainly motivated by opposition to the domestic or international policies of the respective governments or to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a given state, resulting in struggles to gain power or erode it. One or the other element, or both, were present in 71% of cases in 2020 (24 out of 34 cases), in line with previous years (73% in 2019, 71% in 2018 and 73% in 2017). Among these 24 cases, 18 contexts involved armed actors aiming for system change, mostly organisations claiming a jihadist agenda and seeking to impose their particular interpretation of Islamic laws. These groups include organisations such as the self-styled Islamic State (ISIS) and its affiliates or related entities in different continents –the group was present in countries such as Algeria, Libya, Lake Chad Region, Western Sahel Region, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Philippines, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, among others; the various branches of al-Qaeda –including AQIM (Algeria, Sahel and Libya) and AQAP (Yemen)–; the Taliban operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the al-Shabaab group in Somalia, among others.

The Western Sahel Region was an emblematic case of international armed conflict, as several military coalitions of countries from the region, external allies and numerous jihadist armed groups operating across borders converged in this context

Another factor prominent among the main causes of armed conflicts were disputes over identity and self-governance claims, which were present in 59% of conflicts (20 cases), the same percentage as in the previous two years. In this regard, it is worth noting that the two armed conflicts that were triggered in 2020 were motivated by such claims. On the one hand, underlying the escalation of violence in Ethiopia's Tigray region were grievances and the Tigray community's perception of a loss of power and privilege in the face of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's policies to reform Ethiopia's federal system. The Tigray region's decision to hold elections in the region despite the federal government's movement to postpone the federal and regional elections due to the pandemic and to extend the mandate of the existing authorities, together with other issues that lie at the genesis of this conflict, led to a dispute of legitimacy that ended in armed confrontation at the end of the year. On the other hand, there is the dispute between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority enclave formally part of Azerbaijan but *de facto* independent. After several escalations of violence since the war in the 1990s, one of the most serious being in 2016, the hostilities sparked off again in 2020. The fighting subsided at the end of the year following a Russian-brokered agreement, which outlined a significant change in the territory's boundaries and ratified the partition of Nagorno-Karabakh, but left the enclave's status unresolved. Dispute over control of territory –as also illustrated by the Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) case– and resources was one of the main causes in 35% of conflicts (12 cases) in 2020, continuing the trend of previous years. The issue of resources was a cause that was mostly present in African contexts –in more than half of the armed conflicts in the region (eight out of 15 cases)– although it is a factor that was indirectly present in many contexts in other regions, with violence being perpetuated through war economies.

More than a third (35%) of the armed conflicts in 2020 saw a deterioration in the levels of violence and instability compared to the previous year

Additionally, it is worth noting that **20 of the 34 armed conflicts that took place during 2020 were in countries with severe gender inequalities**, with medium, high or very high levels of discrimination.[10] Gender inequalities manifested in aspects such as the gender-specific impacts of violence and the use of sexual violence by disputing parties in different armed conflicts, all within the international context of the COVID-19 pandemic that highlighted serious gender inequalities at international level.

In terms of the **evolution of armed conflicts** over the course of 2020, just over a third of the cases (12 out of 34, or 35%) saw a deterioration, with higher levels of violence and instability than in the previous year: Ethiopia (Tigray), Mali, Mozambique, Western Sahel Region, CAR, DRC (East-ADF), Sudan (Darfur), South Sudan, Myanmar, Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), Yemen (Houthis). The remaining cases were evenly split between those that exhibited similar levels of violence and hostilities to those recorded in 2019 and those that showed a reduction in fighting (11 cases in each category). Asia was the region that saw the largest decrease in hostilities. Two thirds of the armed conflicts in this area evolved towards lower levels of violence: Afghanistan, Philippines (Mindanao), India (CPI-M), Pakistan, Pakistan (Balochistan) and Thailand (South).

With regard to the intensity of violence in the different armed conflicts, it is possible to identify and highlight a particular feature in 2020: a significant prevalence of high-intensity cases, that is, contexts characterised by levels of lethality of over a thousand victims per year, in addition to serious impacts on the population, massive forced displacements and severe consequences in the territory. In contrast to previous years when high-intensity conflicts accounted for around a third of cases –32% in 2019 (11 cases), 27% in 2018 (nine cases)–, **in 2020 serious armed conflicts increased and accounted for almost half of the cases, at 47% of the total** (see Figure 1.2). So far, the highest figure of the decade had been recorded in

10. See Chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).

2016 and 2017, but with a lower percentage: 40% (see Figure 1.3). The highest prevalence of severe cases in 2020 was observed in Africa, where 11 of the 15 (73%) armed conflicts on the continent were high intensity. This is much higher than in the previous year, when less than half of the cases –seven out of 16 cases, or 44%– were high intensity. With regard to other regions, in the Middle East, half of the conflicts –three out of six– were considered serious in 2020, while Asia and Europe recorded one such case, respectively. The Americas, on the other hand, did not have high-intensity armed conflicts (see Figure 1.4). The 16 cases of serious armed conflict in 2020 were: Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), Ethiopia (Tigray), Libya, Mali, Mozambique (north), Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel Region, DRC (East), DRC (East-ADF), Somalia, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), Iraq, Syria and Yemen (Houthis).

2020 registered a significant increase in high-intensity armed conflicts, which accounted for almost half of the cases, at 47% of the total

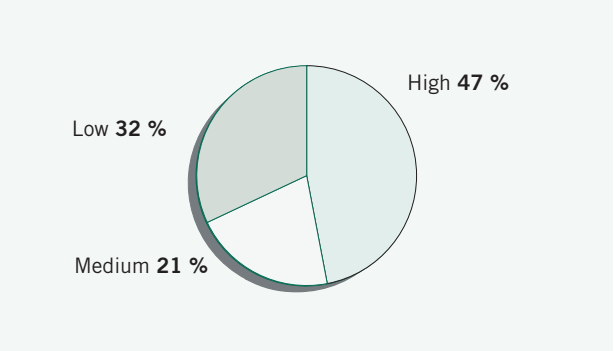
In some of these contexts, **fighting and other dynamics of violence resulted in levels of lethality that were well above the threshold of 1,000 fatalities per year**. In the Western Sahel region, for example, more than 4,250 deaths were recorded and 2020 was reported as the deadliest year since the start of the violence in 2012, due to the actions of various jihadist groups operating in the area. In Somalia, the violence, mostly al-Shabaab attacks, killed more than 3,000 people. The armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in more than 5,000 deaths. In the case of Syria, estimates suggest that hostilities would have caused at least 8,000 fatalities in 2020, a relative decline from the levels of lethality recorded in previous years (15,000 killed in 2019; 30,000 in 2018). By far the two bloodiest armed conflicts in 2020 were Yemen and Afghanistan. In the Yemeni case, an estimated 20,000 people were killed as a direct result of clashes and explosive attacks. In the case of Afghanistan, the armed conflict is said to have killed more than 21,000 people. Although the figure is high, it is significantly lower than the previous year's figure of 40,000 fatalities.

1.2.2. Impacts of conflicts on the civilian population

As in previous years, and as regularly denounced by the United Nations, international organisations and local entities, the civilian population continued to suffer very serious consequences as a result of armed conflicts. In 2020, the impacts of clashes between armed actors and the indiscriminate and deliberate use of violence against civilians were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which further aggravated the precariousness and lack of protection of many populations affected by armed conflict. The UN Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict published in May, a few months into the pandemic, already warned of the implications of the coronavirus and the exacerbation of vulnerabilities among the most fragile groups. It should be recalled that civilians have been identified by the UN as the main victims of armed conflict.

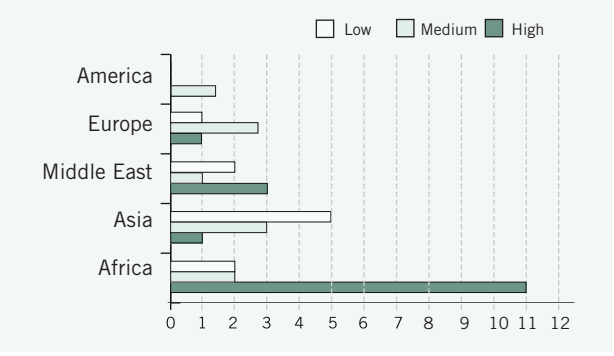
The different armed conflicts analysed in 2020 reveal the continuation of the pattern of abuse against civilians, in the form of lethal attacks against populations, offensives against civilian targets or infrastructure, executions, kidnappings, disappearances and torture, among other practices.

Graph 1.2. **Intensity of the armed conflicts in 2020**



Graph 1.3. **Percentage of high intensity armed conflicts in the last decade**

Graph 1.4. **Intensity of the armed conflicts by region**



Box 1.1. **Regional trends in armed conflict**

AFRICA	• As in previous years, the continent recorded the highest number of armed conflicts with 15 cases, representing 44% of the global total. This percentage is slightly lower than the previous year, when African cases accounted for 47%. If in 2019 two cases in the region were no longer considered active armed conflicts –Algeria (AQIM) and DRC (Kasai)– a new case was added in 2020, following the escalation of violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. • The most relevant trend on the continent in 2020 was the significant increase in high-intensity armed conflicts in the last five years. If in 2019 these cases accounted for 44% (seven out of 16 cases), in 2020 the percentage rose to 73% (11 out of 15 cases). • Half of the cases –eight out of 15, or 53%– showed a deterioration during 2020, with higher levels of violence compared to the previous year. Only in one case was a decrease in hostilities identified –Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile)– while in six other contexts the evolution was similar to the previous period. • The armed conflicts in Africa were characterised by internationalisation. In almost all cases –14 out of 15 (93%)– the involvement of disputing external actors or the expansion of the dynamics of violence to neighbouring countries was observed. The remaining case was international in nature –Western Sahel Region– and did not involve primarily internal armed conflict. • The armed conflicts in Africa had multiple causes, including aspirations to a change of government or system (80%) –one or both of these categories were present in 12 out of 15 of the cases– and demands for self-government or identity –detected in 60% of the cases. In half of the cases –eight, or 53%– resource control was identified as a motivation.
AMERICA	• The continent was home to only one armed conflict, that of Colombia, one of the world's longest-running. • Following the trend observed in the previous year, the Colombian armed conflict evolved negatively in 2020 and recorded higher levels of violence, mainly clashes involving the security forces, the ELN and dissident groups of the demobilised FARC guerrillas. • Although it only recorded one armed conflict, the region was the scene of other dynamics of violence and tension and was the region most affected by homicides.
ASIA	• As in previous periods, the continent ranked second in number of armed conflicts after Africa, being host to nine cases (26%). • Most of the armed conflicts in Asia were of low (five cases) or medium (three cases) intensity. Only one of the region's conflicts, Afghanistan, was of high intensity and for yet another year was the world's deadliest, with death tolls exceeding 20,000. • Most of the cases in Asia showed a decrease in hostilities –six out of nine cases or 67%– and a smaller percentage showed a similar evolution to the previous year –two cases, equivalent to 22%. Only one armed conflict, in Myanmar, evolved into a deteriorating situation in 2020. • Asia was the only region in the world where internal armed conflicts were identified. The three armed conflicts of this type –Philippines (NPA), India (CPI-M) and Thailand (South)– accounted for one third of the cases in the region. • In terms of the causes of the armed conflict in Asia, the most common were those involving system change –a motivation present in five of the nine conflicts (56%)– or those where demands for self-governance or identity were at stake (also in 56% of the cases).
EUROPE	• The continent was the scene of one more armed conflict than in the previous year. The cases of Turkey (southeast) and Ukraine (east) were joined by the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The three European cases accounted for 9% of all conflicts globally. • The three conflicts in the region presented different scales of intensity: Ukraine (east), low; Turkey (southeast), medium; and Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), high. While the first two cases saw a reduction in the intensity of violence compared to the previous year, the third was characterised by a significant escalation that led to its consideration as an armed conflict in 2020. • Europe continued to be a region characterised by conflicts with causes linked to issues of self-governance and identity –motivations present in all cases in the region– and to a lesser extent causes linked to disputes over political power or control of territories. • Two-thirds of the cases in Europe were of an internationalised internal nature and one was an international conflict.
MIDDLE EAST	• The region accounted for six of the armed conflicts, representing 18% of the total number of cases worldwide. After Africa, the Middle East was the area with the most high-intensity armed conflicts. Half of the cases in the region –three out of six– were of high intensity and two of them, Syria and Yemen (Houthis), were among the most severe cases in 2020, with the highest fatality levels after Afghanistan. • Half of the cases in the region evolved similarly to the previous year, with two cases showing a relative reduction in levels of violence –Egypt (Sinai) and Israel-Palestine– while one saw an escalation of violence: Yemen (Houthis). In this case, although lethality levels were similar to those of the previous year, the number of battlefronts increased and the severe humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict worsened. • The conflicts in the region were multi-causal, with a prominent presence of cases where the causes were linked to the struggle for a change of government or system –one or both of these categories were present in five of the six cases (83%)– or to demands regarding identity or self-government– in four of the six cases (67%). In two other cases (33%) the causes were linked to the control of resources and territories.

In the last year, several cases illustrated this reality. In DRC, for example, the armed group ADF intensified its operations against the civilian population, expanding its attacks beyond its traditional areas of action and applying particularly damaging tactics –attacks with heavy artillery, rifles and machetes, burning down entire villages, mass abductions, among others– which resulted in hundreds of casualties. In the Lake Chad region, Boko Haram continued to perpetrate massacres, mutilations and abductions of civilians. In Somalia, al-Shabaab persisted in its attacks on civilian targets, including restaurants, cafes and hotels, causing high numbers of casualties. In Mali, in the first half of 2020 alone, the escalation of violence had killed more than 600 civilians. In Afghanistan, although a relative decline in the number of civilian casualties from the conflict was identified, there were offensives during the year that caused particular international

In 2020, the impacts of armed conflict violence on the civilian population were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic

consternation, such as the attack on a maternity and children's hospital in which more than 20 people were killed. The armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, meanwhile, caused around 500 civilian casualties, including around 100 killed and 400 wounded. In Iraq, while the number of civilian fatalities was also lower than in previous years, the number of civilian deaths remained high at around 1,000. Syria recorded a similar number and the UN continued to denounce that the parties involved in the conflict remained in breach of the basic principles of international humanitarian law, including the necessary distinction between civilians and combatants.

Armed state actors were also prominently involved in killings and abuses against the civilian population. In Cameroon, for example, the army was implicated in the killing of some 20 civilians, although human rights organisations warned that the number of victims could be much higher. In the context of the conflict in the Western Sahel region, human rights organisations denounced that in their operations against insurgent groups, the armed forces of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso had committed war crimes with a particular impact on civilians, including extrajudicial executions and disappearances. According to local organisations, the Burkina Faso army alone is said to be responsible for the deaths of almost 600 civilians. Similar allegations of human rights violations and possible war crimes against Mozambican security forces in their counter-insurgency actions in Cabo Delgado province were also reported in Mozambique. The presence of explosive weapons in conflict territories also continued to affect the civilian population, as illustrated by the cases of Ukraine –where an increase in the number of civilians killed by mines was detected– and Egypt (Sinai) –where several deaths were caused by explosives following the return of displaced populations to an area previously controlled by ISIS. The deployment of booby traps by this ISIS affiliate in Egypt followed a pattern also seen in the group's actions in Syria and Iraq. In addition to civilian deaths as a direct result of hostilities, armed operations and explosives, the impact in terms of indirect deaths, deaths from lack of access to food or health services, must also be taken into account. For example, in cases such as Yemen, UN agencies have estimated that of the total number of people killed in the armed conflict over the last five years (some 233,000 people, according to estimates), more than half (131,000) died due to lack of access to medical care or food, among other factors.

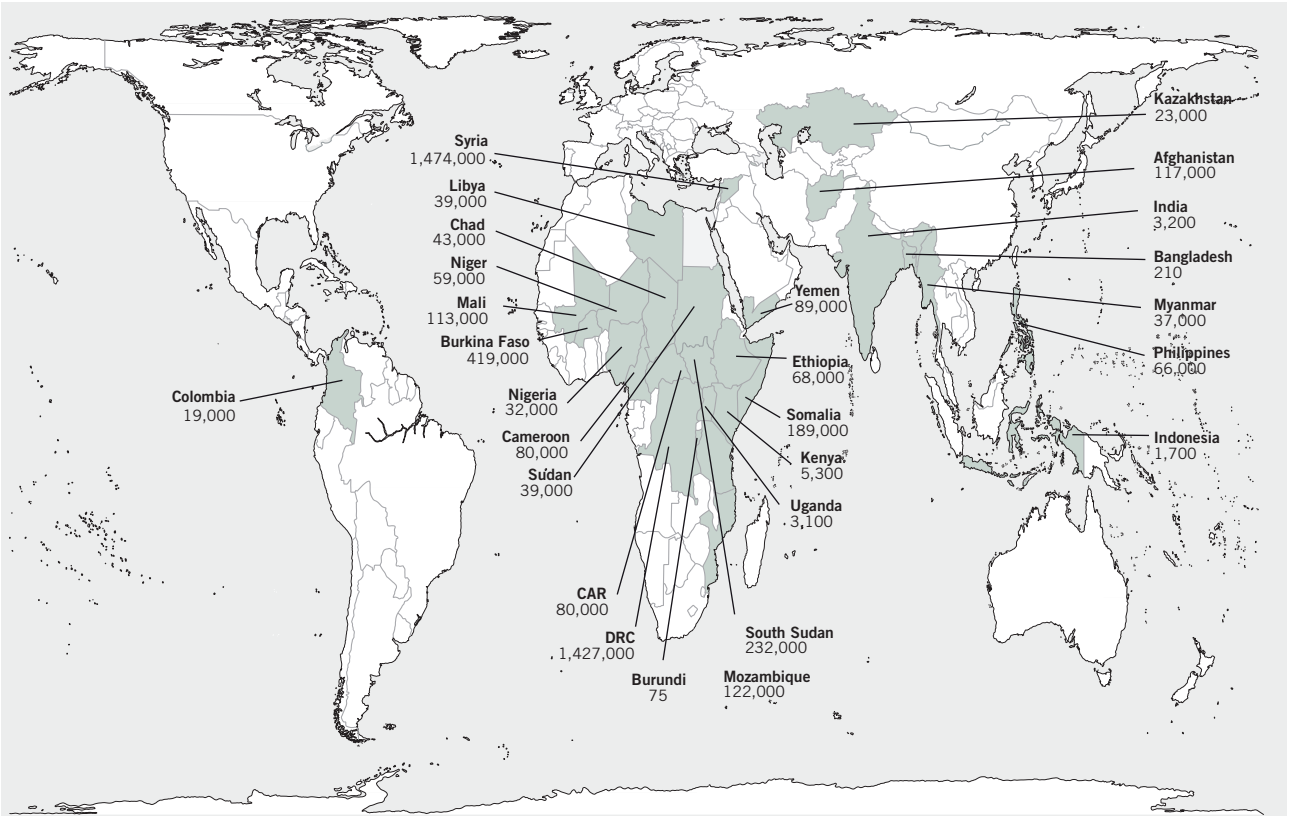
In this sense, it should be noted that **armed conflicts continued to trigger and/or aggravate humanitarian crises**. According to OCHA projections, a total of 235 million people required humanitarian assistance in 2021, an increase of 40% over the previous year's estimates and mostly attributable to COVID-19.[11] The previous forecast –168 million– had already been highlighted as the highest figure in decades. The socio-economic impact of the pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of populations already severely affected by conflict and violence, as illustrated by the cases of CAR, Ukraine (east), Syria and Yemen. In Ukraine (east), for example, humanitarian organisations warned that eight out of ten families in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions were suffering severe impacts on food security and livelihoods, and the UN warned that nine million people were at risk of sliding into poverty. In both Syria and Yemen, socio-economic indicators continued to plummet during 2020. In the Syrian case, the price of the basic food basket has multiplied by more than 200%. In addition, 9.3 million people were estimated to be food insecure and conflict dynamics hampered humanitarian access due to the closure of several border crossings. Yemen remained the world's largest humanitarian crisis: 24.3 million Yemenis were in need of some form of humanitarian assistance or protection, 14 million were in dire need and alarms were raised over the country's famine, the worst in the world in decades, according to the UN. Syria and Yemen also highlighted the added burden of the pandemic on health systems already severely damaged by years of violence and the saturation of their capacity due to caring for conflict victims, but also because hospitals and medical centres have been attacked by armed actors as part of war strategies, in open violation of international humanitarian law. Despite the difficulties in collecting reliable data on the actual impact of COVID-19 in armed conflict settings, reports suggested that, for example, in Yemen the coronavirus case fatality rate was five times the global average.

Cases such as Syria and Yemen highlighted the added burden of the pandemic on health systems severely damaged by years of violence and deliberate attacks on hospitals and health centres

In addition, **armed conflict continued to have specific impacts on particular population groups, such as children**. The UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict published in June 2020, analysing the situation between January and December 2019, again painted a picture of highly worrying trends. The UN verified more than 25,000 grave human rights violations against children in 19 contexts, more than half of them perpetrated by non-state actors and one third by government or international forces. Crossfire, the use of small arms, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the excessive use of force by state agents reportedly resulted in more than 10,000 child casualties, including 4,019 deaths and 6,154 children maimed. The deadliest armed conflict for children continued to be Afghanistan, which saw a 67% increase in suicide attacks and similar attacks involving children. He also highlighted the case of Mali, which recorded an unprecedented number of child casualties in 2019 –185 children killed and another

11. OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021*, 1 December 2020.

Map 1.2. **New internal forced displacements by conflict and violence – First semester of 2020**



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of the data provided in IMDC, *Internal displacement 2020: Mid-year update,* IMDC, 2020

111 maimed– the vast majority (91%) concentrated in the Mopti region. Another area of particular concern was Myanmar, where escalating violence in Rakhine state led to a three-fold increase in child casualties in the period under review. The report also found the forced recruitment of almost 8,000 children, some as young as six years old, the vast majority of them (90%) by non-state armed actors. The UN also sounded the alarm regarding the abduction of 1,683 children in conflict contexts –95% of them by non-state actors and especially in African contexts (Somalia, DRC and Nigeria)–, and reiterated its denunciation of the continuous attacks on schools while drawing attention to the problems arising from the denial of humanitarian access to children –mostly due to restrictions imposed by non-state actors, especially in cases such as Mali, CAR, Syria and Yemen.

The use of sexual and gender-based violence, including against LGBTI people, was denounced throughout the year in numerous conflicts, including Burundi, Libya, Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Somalia, Sudan (Darfur), Myanmar, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen

Beyond the conclusions of the UN Secretary-General's report, the analysis of active armed conflicts in 2020 confirms the pattern of violations against children, worsened by the COVID-19 emergency. The pandemic further limited access to certain rights such as education. For example, in the case of Jammu and Kashmir in Pakistan, the closure of schools due to the pandemic came on top of months of previous school closures due to the conflict. As part of the escalation of the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, 76 schools and pre-schools were damaged in just one month of hostilities, according to UNICEF. In Syria, armed attacks on schools continued and, according to data released at the end of the year, only 50% of the country's schools were operational. An estimated 2.1 million Syrian children were not receiving schooling. As the year drew to a close, UNICEF warned of the impact of the pandemic in increasing the risk of malnutrition for children in conflict settings and looked ahead to 2021 with particular concern for millions of children in DRC, Nigeria and the central region of Sahel, South Sudan and Yemen.[12]

State and non-state armed actors continued to perpetrate sexual and gender-based violence against civilians, especially women and girls, in contexts of armed conflict. The UN Secretary-General's annual report on the subject published in 2020, which analyses events in 2019, confirmed that sexual violence continued to be used as a tactic of war, torture and political repression, as well as an instrument of dehumanisation and to force

12. UNICEF, *COVID-19 and conflict: A deadly combination*, 30 December 2020.

population displacement.[13] The report provides verified information on the use of sexual and gender-based violence in 19 contexts and noted the responsibility of 54 armed actors, mostly non-state actors, although it also denounced the involvement of state security forces in several countries, including DRC, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Syria. The UN Secretary-General's assessment notes that sexual violence remains under-reported and that women and girls –who constitute the largest number of victims of this scourge– continue to face numerous gender-based obstacles to accessing justice and redress. In addition, the report highlights the specific vulnerabilities that affect displaced populations in this area, both at the time of transit and at their destination, and their link to the increase in forced child marriages and the withdrawal of women and girls from labour and educational activities in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Myanmar.

Despite the mobility restrictions of the pandemic, forced displacement due to conflict and violence continued in 2020 and UNHCR anticipated that by mid-year the figure of 80 million had already been surpassed

The analysis of armed conflict in 2020 corroborates the trends identified in the Secretary-General's report. Throughout the year, reports of the use of sexual and gender-based violence were identified in numerous contexts, including Burundi, Libya, Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Somalia, Sudan (Darfur), Myanmar, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen. LGTBI people were also victims of sexual and other violence in contexts of armed conflict, as illustrated by the cases of Pakistan or Syria.[14] During 2020, the impacts of COVID-19 were also identified in this area, as the pandemic increased levels of gender-based violence globally as well as in contexts of armed conflict. For example, in forced displacement camps in South Sudan, an increase in sexual violence was detected following the implementation of mobility restriction measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus.[15]

Forced population displacement continued to be one of the most visible and dramatic effects of armed conflict. UNHCR's annual report published in June 2020 confirmed the trend of exponential growth of this phenomenon over the last decade: by the end of 2019 there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people, up from 70.8 million at the end of the previous year. Of the total number of displaced persons, 26 million were refugees –20.4 million under UNHCR's mandate and 5.6 million Palestinians under UNRWA's mandate– and 45.7 million were in a situation of forced internal displacement. Another 4.2 million were asylum seekers, while 3.6 million were Venezuelans recognised by UNHCR as having special displacement status. The nearly 80 million displaced people represent 1% of the world's population and 40% of them were children. With the exception of Venezuela, the main countries of origin of refugees were all contexts affected by armed conflicts of high-intensity –Syria (6.6 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.2 million)–, or medium-intensity –Myanmar (1.1 million). Regarding the cases with the highest number of internally displaced people within the borders of their respective countries, most of the cases were high-intensity armed conflicts. According to data from the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) for 2019 –the latest annual data available– on displacement due to conflict and violence, the countries with the highest number of people in this situation were Syria (6.5 million), Colombia (5.6 million), DRC (5.5 million), Yemen (3.6 million), Afghanistan (3 million), Somalia (2.6 million), Nigeria (2.6 million), Sudan (2.1 million), Iraq (1.6 million) and Ethiopia (1.4 million).

In 2020, human mobility dynamics were severely affected by COVID-19. At the end of the year, both the UNHCR and IDMC published partial reports on the situation during the first half of the year in which they warned of the consequences of the pandemic on displaced populations, which aggravated their vulnerability and restricted access to international protection mechanisms and basic services.[16] According to UNHCR data, **168 countries totally or partially closed their borders during the first wave of the pandemic, 90 of which denied access to their territories without exceptions for asylum seekers**. Thus, during the first half of 2020, there was a 33% reduction in asylum applications compared to the same period in 2019. Restrictions on mobility increased the risk that people forced to flee their homes would turn to mafias or more dangerous routes in search of guarantees for their safety and that of their families. At the same time, COVID-19 led to a deterioration in the socio-economic conditions of displaced populations, many of them dependent on the informal economy. An increase in child labour and forced child marriages was also identified, as well as an increased risk of gender-based violence against displaced women and girls. The usually precarious living conditions of displaced populations also made it difficult to implement the most basic measures to contain the spread of the virus, such as physical distancing or frequent hand washing. In addition to the problems of overcrowded housing or camps and difficulties due to lack of information, there were also obstacles to accessing health care. According to UNHCR, 85% of the refugees were living in countries with collapsed health systems and limited capacities to respond to complications from the coronavirus. IDMC highlighted

13. UN Secretary General, *Report of the Secretary General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence*, 3 June 2020.
14. See Chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).
15. See "The COVID-19 pandemic and the worsening violence against women" in Chapter 5 (Risk scenarios for 2021).
16. UNHCR, *Mid-year trends 2020*, 30 November 2020; IDMC, UNHCR, *Report on UNHCR's Response to COVID-19*, September 2020; IDMC, *Internal Displacement 2020: Mid-year Update*, September 2020.

that measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 also limited the possibilities of obtaining information on the situation of displaced populations, especially those forced to flee within their country's borders.

Despite added mobility restrictions due to the pandemic, forced displacement as a result of conflict and violence continued in 2020, with UNHCR anticipating that by mid-year the figure of 80 million had already been surpassed. New mass population displacements occurred in the context of armed conflicts such as those in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, DRC, Mozambique, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. IDMC recorded 4.8 million new displacements due to conflict and violence in the first six months of 2020. In Syria and DRC alone, forced internal displacement in the first half of 2020 affected three million people –1,474,000 and 1,427,000 respectively. During the second half of the year, the escalation of violence in other contexts such as the Tigray region of Ethiopia or the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh led to further forced population displacements. By November, it was estimated that in less than a month of hostilities, more than 40,000 people from Tigray had sought refuge in Sudan. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, meanwhile, has displaced between 100,000 and 130,000 people, according to various estimates.

1.3. Armed conflicts: annual evolution

1.3.1. Africa

Great Lakes and Central Africa

Burundi	
Start:	2015
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Imbonerakure youth wing, political party CNDD-FDD, political party CNL, armed groups RED-TABARA, FPB (previously FOREBU), FNL
Intensity:	1
Trend:	=

Summary:
The process of political and institutional transition that got under way with the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement in 2000 was formally completed in 2005. The approval of a new constitution (that formalises the distribution of political and military power between the main two communities, the Hutu and Tutsi) and the holding of elections (leading to the formation of a new government), represent an attempted to lay the foundations for overcoming a conflict that began in 1993. This represented the principal opportunity for ending the ethnic-political violence that has plagued the country since its independence in 1962. However, the authoritarian evolution of the government after the 2010 elections, denounced as fraudulent by the opposition, has overshadowed the reconciliation process and led to the mobilization of political opposition. This situation has been aggravated by the plans to reform the Constitution by the Government. The deteriorating situation in the country is revealed by the institutional deterioration and reduction of the political space for the opposition, the controversial candidacy of Nkurunziza for a third term and his victory in a fraudulent presidential election (escalating political violence), the failed coup d'état in May 2015, violations of human rights and the emergence of new armed groups.

Violence and insecurity, sporadic attacks by armed actors and government counter-insurgency actions, and repression of political opposition by security forces and the Imbonerakure, the youth wing of the ruling Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces de Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD), continued during the year. Elections were also held under accusations of fraud and repression against the opposition, and on 8 June President Pierre Nkurunziza died, creating a brief power vacuum.

With regard to the armed conflict in the country, the climate of violence and insecurity persisted throughout the year as a result of the actions of the security forces, especially the Imbonerakure, who acted with total impunity, committing extrajudicial executions, attacks against the civilian population, arbitrary arrests, abuses and indiscriminate violence against the political opposition, which caused 317 deaths during the year, according to ACLED. The main target were the supporters of the Congrés National pour la Liberté party (CNL, a former armed group, and later the FNL party, but now the main opposition party), actions that increased as the election approached. In this regard, on 17 September a report by the UN Commission of Inquiry was made public in which it condemned the existence of summary executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, sexual violence, torture and ill-treatment and numerous cases of violations of civil liberties over the past few months, both before and after the elections, which was rejected by Ndayishimiye, who reiterated his demand for an end to the investigations into the human rights situation in the country. The report highlighted the shrinking political space in the country, the continued impunity and that the trend was not encouraging, and noted that Ndayishimiye had promoted senior military officers implicated in serious human rights abuses to senior civilian positions in the local administration. The UN Human Rights Council extended the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi for one year in October, and following the EU's renewal of sanctions on Burundi in September, on 9 October Foreign Minister Albert Shingiro summoned all foreign diplomats and demanded that their respective countries suspend the sanctions. On 17 November, the Government ordered the closure of the office of the UN special envoy in the country, despite the fact that the UN Secretary General had recommended on

3 November that its mandate be extended until the end of 2021. The Government argued that the office's presence created a climate of paranoia and an artificial crisis orchestrated by foreign actors. On the other hand, the Burundian Armed Forces carried out military operations in the country in pursuit of insurgent groups, the CNL political opposition and Tutsi civilians, and conducted raids in Uvira, in the Congolese province of South Kivu, in pursuit of members of the armed group RED-Tabara, at different times during the year, causing dozens of fatalities allegedly among members of the insurgency. RED-Tabara claimed responsibility in September for several attacks in various provinces of the country between August and September. The death toll according to the group is said to be at least 15 CNDD-FDD supporters and 28 members of the security forces, with at least 40 other members of the Imbonerakure and security forces injured, three members of the insurgency killed and another captured in the course of the operations.[17] In addition, there were a number of unprovoked attacks that increased rumours of the possible emergence of new armed groups in the country, according to one of the country's few independent media outlets, IWACU, in early September. Other analysts said that these actions are due to the insurgency's desire to make itself visible to the new President in order to force some kind of response. While it was stressed that it would not have the capacity to pose a real threat to the new Government, it would nonetheless have greater capacity for warlike actions than in recent years. Army sources confirmed the existence of these small armed groups in various provinces and the continuation of military operations to neutralise them. Radio Publique Africaine reported on 3 September that the security forces are said to have brought in members of the Imbonerakure to fight the insurgency and persecute political opposition. In December, in a joint report on human rights violations, 15 civil society organisations recorded 821 arbitrary detentions, 368 extrajudicial executions, 182 cases of torture and 59 forced disappearances in 2020. The report identified members of the CNL and members of the Tutsi community as the main victims, and the security forces and the Imbonerakure youth wing of the ruling CNDD-FDD party as the main perpetrators. Despite this, the Government achieved the diplomatic success of being removed from the UN Security Council agenda in December.

On 7 April, Vice-President Gaston Simdimwo confirmed the holding of elections on 20 May despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and on 15 April cancelled the diaspora's participation in the elections, arguing that the electoral commission did not have sufficient capacity to organise overseas voting as a result of the crisis. On 20 May, presidential and legislative elections were held in Burundi, following a campaign period marked by allegations by opposition and civil society actors of violence and harassment, as well as the arrests of candidates and hundreds of CNL supporters. The opposition also denounced that its representatives were excluded from several polling stations. On 25 May, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced that retired General Evariste Ndayishimiye, the candidate of the ruling CNDD-FDD party, had won the presidential election with 68% of the vote. In the legislative elections, CNDD-FDD won 72 of the 100 seats in the National Assembly. The presidential candidate and CNL leader, Agathon Rwasa, rejected the provisional results, alleging widespread fraud and irregularities, and filed an appeal with the constitutional court on 28 May. The appeal was dismissed on 4 June. The CNL announced on 28 May that the authorities had arrested 600 of its supporters during the campaign and on election day, limiting their presence as proxies and observers on the day. The authorities applied a 14-day quarantine linked to the COVID-19 pandemic to election observers from the regional organisation EAC, thus hindering their functions.

Elections were held in Burundi under accusations of fraud and repression against the opposition, and on 8 June President Pierre Nkurunziza died, creating a brief power vacuum

Furthermore, on 8 June, Pierre Nkurunziza died, allegedly from a heart attack, although various analysts point to the possibility that he may have died as a result of having contracted COVID-19. The death of the historic leader of the CNDD-FDD and Burundi's President since 2005 created a power vacuum that the Constitutional Court resolved by speeding up the inauguration of President-elect Ndayishimiye, who was sworn in on 18 June. In his inaugural speech, he stressed such issues as the need to engage in dialogue with the opposition in the country, to put an end to the abuses committed by the previous Government, and to ensure the return of refugees and other Burundians in exile. However, his actions in this regard were a continuation of those of the previous Government. On 30 June, a new cabinet headed by Alain Guillaume Bunyoni was sworn in as prime minister, composed of 15 ministers and dominated by representatives of the hard-line wing of the regime. It should be noted that international sanctions have been imposed against Bunyoni and Interior Minister Gervais Ndirakobuca for their involvement in acts of repression and violence against civilians since 2015. An opposition coalition in exile condemned the lack of representation of the Tutsi minority in the new government and among the regional governors –one minister and three governors.

17. AFP, "Burundi rebel group claims attacks in new offensive", *AFP*, 18 September 2020.

CAR	
Start:	2006
Type:	Government, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of CAR, armed groups of the former Séléka rebel coalition (FPRC, RPRC, MPC, UPC, MLCJ), anti-balaka militias, 3R militia, Ugandan armed group LRA, other local and foreign armed groups, Government of France, MINUSCA, EUFOR
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑

Summary:
Since independence in 1960, the situation in the Central African Republic has been characterised by continued political instability, which has resulted in several coups and military dictatorships. The keys to the situation are of an internal and external nature. Internal, because there is a confrontation between political elites from northern and southern ethnic groups who are competing for power and minorities that have been excluded from it. A number of leaders have attempted to establish a system of patronage to ensure their political survival. And external, due to the role played by its neighbours Chad and Libya; due to its natural resources (diamonds, uranium, gold, hardwoods) and the awarding of mining contracts in which these countries compete alongside China and the former colonial power, France, which controls uranium. Conflicts in the region have led to the accumulation of weaponry and combatants who have turned the country into regional sanctuary. This situation has been compounded by a religious dimension due to the fact that the Séléka coalition, which is a Muslim faith organisation formed by a number of historically marginalised groups from the north and which counts foreign fighters amongst its ranks, took power in March 2013 after toppling the former leader, François Bozizé, who for the past 10 years had fought these insurgencies in the north. The inability of the Séléka leader, Michel Djotodia, to control the rebel coalition, which has committed gross violations of human rights, looting and extrajudicial executions, has led to the emergence of Christian militias ("anti-balaka"). These militias and sectors of the army, as well as supporters of former President Bozizé, have rebelled against the government and Séléka, creating a climate of chaos and widespread impunity. France, the AU and the UN intervened militarily to reduce the clashes and facilitate the process of dialogue that would lead to a negotiated transition, forcing a transitional government that led to the 2015-2016 elections. After a brief period of reduced instability and various peace agreements, armed groups continued to control most of the country. Neither the reduced Central African security forces (which barely controlled Bangui) nor MINUSCA were able to reverse the situation, so new contacts were promoted by the AU and ECCAS, which contributed to reaching the peace agreement of February 2019.

The year saw an increase in the activities of some armed groups across the country, which abandoned the implementation of the 2019 peace agreement, causing hundreds of fatalities, many of them civilians. In addition, there was **an increase in violence in the wake of the general elections of 27 December**. According to ACLED, the death toll at the end of 2020 was 420, down from 594 in 2019, following the downward trend in previous years (1,187 recorded in 2018 and 2,011 in 2017).

The political climate was dominated by preparations for the general elections, the first round of which was scheduled for 27 December, with legislative and local elections and a possible second round of presidential elections in early 2021, and was characterised by tension and mistrust in a context of delays to the electoral calendar, as noted in the UN Secretary-General's report in October. In June, the Constitutional Court rejected the Government's proposed amendment to the Constitution to extend the terms of the incumbent President and legislature in the event of a force majeure event that would delay the holding of elections, noting that any delay with respect to constitutional deadlines should be the result of broad national consensus and consultation. Since then, certain political parties and civil society groups have called on the Government to hold national talks on the electoral calendar. In September, the President, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, organised a series of meetings on the electoral process with opposition parties, former heads of state and other political parties, civil society groups and religious leaders, among others. The Coalition de l'Opposition Démocratique 2020 (created in February and made up of 16 opposition political parties) refused to attend the meeting on 17 September and accused President Touadéra of imposing hasty and ill-prepared elections and demanded their postponement. On 23 September, the National Assembly passed a law amending the electoral code and extending the voter registration deadline by one month, owing to delays caused by insecurity and obstruction by various armed groups, including the 3R (Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation) group and various anti-Balaka groups. While this deadline extension did not affect the 27 December election date, several UN Security Council members expressed concern that the process could be in jeopardy if there were further delays. The National Assembly's 23 September amendments to the electoral code did not include a provision that would have allowed approximately 250,000 Central African refugees outside the country to vote in the elections, despite recommendations by the international community. President Touadéra said that allowing their participation presented insurmountable obstacles, without providing details.

The electoral commission registered 22 presidential candidates in early November, among them three women, including President Touadéra of the Mouvement des Coeurs Unis, former President François Bozizé of Kwa Na Kwa, former President Catherine Samba-Panza, as an independent, and former Prime Minister Anicet Georges Dologuélé. Regarding Bozizé's candidacy, there was controversy over his eligibility because there were doubts as to whether his return from exile complied with the electoral law that establishes a minimum of one year's residence in CAR for eligibility.

Finally, after months of uncertainty over former President Bozizé's candidacy, on December 3 the Constitutional Court rejected his application, citing an international arrest warrant and UN sanctions against him. On 15 December, a coalition of six armed groups, all signatories to the February 2019 peace agreement and some allied with Bozizé, announced a mobilisation against the government and the electoral process and in mid-December seized parts of Lobaye, Ouham, Ouham-Pendé, Nana Gribizi and Ombella M'Poko prefectures in the west, centre and south, blocking main supply routes to Bangui and conducting heavy fighting with the army and MINUSCA. The government accused this coalition of trying to perpetrate a coup d'état in favour of Bozizé.

The year saw increased activity by some armed groups throughout CAR and heightened political tensions in the wake of the 27 December general election

On the other hand, the implementation of the 2019 CAR Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation faced difficulties and delays, as various armed groups continued to violate the agreement and obstruct the restoration of government authority throughout the country.[18] In addition, there was a resurgence of violence in northern and northwestern CAR and violence continued in other parts of the country, although the situation in the northeast stabilised after a spike in violence earlier in the year. Attacks between armed groups, acts of reprisal and executions of civilians, operations by MINUSCA and the Central African Armed Forces remained constant and even increased. There are several reasons for the recommencement of fighting. According to the ICG, it is due to certain armed groups' disappointment with the outcome of the peace agreement, as well as the inability of the guarantors of the agreement and MINUSCA to enforce the pact.[19] In turn, it is also due, according to the organisation, to confrontations regarding the control of cross-border traffic and trade routes, as well as transhumance, territories and mining operations, which acquired an ethnic dimension due to the mobilisation of the respective communities.

On 25 April, seven armed groups that signed the February 2019 peace deal announced the suspension of their participation in the government and peace agreement implementation mechanisms, accusing President Touadéra of reneging on his commitments. Days earlier, President Touadéra and Prime Minister Firmin Ngrébada had met, respectively, with the leaders of the armed groups UPC and FPRC, without success. The 3R accused the government of reneging on its commitments regarding electoral preparations and threatened to interfere in the elections, and on 5 June suspended its participation in the monitoring mechanisms of the Political Agreement while stepping up actions against the security forces, MINUSCA and civilians. On 15 July, an anti-tank mine exploded as a MINUSCA vehicle passed, injuring two Blue Helmets. MINUSCA accused the armed group 3R of responsibility. This group allegedly received training and the supply of materials to install them from the Russian company Wagner, according to Central African military sources. Military sources confirmed that this was the first time that the presence of anti-personnel mines had been detected in the country. The UPC, in a statement on 1 August, also announced that it was abandoning its commitments to the agreement, following a meeting with the Prime Minister in Bangui. On 20 April, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions (travel ban and asset freeze) on FDPC leader Abdoulaye Miskine, accused of recruiting fighters, and on 5 August imposed sanctions on 3R leader Sidiki Abbas, accusing him of involvement in arms trafficking and executions of civilians. The UN Security Council extended the mandate of MINUSCA until 15 November 2021 and also the sanctions, including the arms embargo, until July 2021. In December 2019, the EU established the EU Advisory Mission in CAR (EUAM CAR), a civilian mission to support security sector reform. The start of the mission was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and entered into force in August 2020, in addition to the other existing EU mission in the country, the military EUTM CAR.[20]

At the same time, there was growing concern regarding Russia's role in the country. According to the agency The Africa Report,[21] in 2018 CAR reached mineral extraction agreements with the Russian company Lobaye Invest Sarlu, which by mid-2020 was already present in at least four cities. Russia began operating an airport and training Central African security forces. In March, 170 members of the Wagner Group private security company arrived in the country to help train the security forces, and another 500 turned up at the Sudanese border in July.[22] The Wagner group is suspected of being financed by Russian businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, an ally of President Vladimir Putin. This organisation is allegedly operating in total secrecy in the continent. In July 2018, the group was accused of executing three Russian journalists investigating the organisation's activities in the country. According to various sources, Russia plans to establish military bases in six African countries, including CAR and Sudan. Between 2015 and 2020, Russia has concluded military cooperation agreements with 21 African countries.

As for the humanitarian situation, it continued to be of concern, according to OCHA. Approximately 2.6 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance and 2.36 million people were suffering food insecurity. Inter-

18. See summary on CAR in Escola de Cultura de Pau; *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Report on Trends and Scenarios*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.
19. International Crisis Group, *Réduire les tensions électorales en République Centreafricaine*, ICG, No. 296, 10 December 2020
20. ZIF kompakt, New EU advisory mission operational in the Central African Republic (CAR), 27 August 2020.
21. Mathieu Olivier, "Russia's murky business dealings in the Central African Republic", *The Africa Report*, 23 August 2019.
22. ADF, Mine Attack Stokes Fear Of Russia Destabilizing CAR, 23 September 2020.

community tensions, attacks on civilians and a series of attacks on humanitarian workers hampered access. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the socio-economic situation in the country. While the total number of people infected with the coronavirus is low (as of 10 October, there were officially 4,850 cases), CAR has limited capacity to detect positives, potentially masking the true numbers. According to the WHO, CAR is one of the least prepared countries in the world to deal with the outbreak of COVID-19.

OCHA said the DRC was home to the largest number of internally displaced people in Africa, 5.5 million people, 3.2 million of whom were children

DRC (east)	
Start:	1998
Type:	Government, Identity, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of DRC, FDLR, factions of the FDLR, Mai-Mai militias, M23 (formerly CNDP), Nyatura, APCLS, NDC-R, Ituri armed groups, Burundian armed opposition group FNL, Government of Rwanda, MONUSCO
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:
The current conflict has its origins in the coup d'état carried out by Laurent Desiré Kabila in 1996 against Mobutu Sese Seko, which culminated with him handing over power in 1997. Later, in 1998, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, together with various armed groups, tried to overthrow Kabila, who received the support of Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan and Zimbabwe, in a war that has caused around five million fatalities. The control and exploitation of the natural resources has contributed to the perpetuation of the conflict and to the presence of foreign armed forces. The signing of a ceasefire in 1999, and of several peace agreements between 2002 and 2003, led to the withdrawal of foreign troops, the setting up of a transitional government and later an elected government, in 2006. However, did not mean the end of violence in this country, due to the role played by Rwanda and the presence of factions of non-demobilised groups and of the FDLR, responsible for the Rwandan genocide of 1994. The breach of the 2009 peace accords led to the 2012 desertion of soldiers of the former armed group CNDP, forming part of the Congolese army, who organised a new rebellion, known as the M23, supported by Rwanda. In December 2013 the said rebellion was defeated. In spite of this, the climate of instability and violence persists.

The DRC continued to be immersed in a climate of violence and political instability resulting from tensions within the ruling coalition, which fractured in December.[23] This was compounded by continuing violence due to the presence of numerous armed groups in the east of the country. These groups continued to carry out armed actions against each other for control of territory, communication routes and access to natural resources, engaging in clashes with the FARDC, and committing serious abuses against the civilian population. The situation in the provinces of North and South Kivu (east) continued to be marked by the presence and activities of the various Mai Mai militias, CODECO, the FDLR and its splinter groups, as well as by the extension of the Burundian armed conflict into the DRC owing to the presence of Burundian armed actors. It is worth noting the escalation of the armed conflict resulting from the activities of the Ugandan-born group ADF, which operates especially in the northern part of the province of North Kivu, although it expanded its attacks to the province of Ituri.[24] In addition, the province suffered an escalation of violence as a result of attacks by the CODECO group, whose fighters are mostly from the Lendu ethnic group and are in conflict with members of the Hema ethnic group over natural resources and land ownership. This occurred despite concerted action by Congolese ex-combatants to promote disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. Some CODECO combatants have signed a peace agreement with the Government, but several factions continue to fight.

In October, OHCHR's Michelle Bachelet presented the report on the human rights situation in the DRC, noting several episodes that could constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, as well as noting that threats against human rights defenders, members of civil society and journalists, arbitrary detention and harassment continued. The report documented 857 human rights violations and abuses during the 12-month period beginning in May 2019. The UN Human Rights Office in the country announced on 5 August that there had been an increase in the number of fatalities by armed groups in the east of the country during the first six months of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. In March 2020, according to OCHA, DRC was home to the largest number of internally displaced people in Africa, 5.5 million people, of whom 3.2 million were children. In areas where armed groups were active and military operations were ongoing, humanitarian access was severely hampered. Access problems, such as security-related incidents experienced by humanitarian personnel and illegal tax collection, continued to affect the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The debate surrounding the phasing out of MONUSCO and its mandated tasks also continued. Resolution 2502 of 2019 called for this strategy in preparation for the eventual phased withdrawal of MONUSCO, which envisages a concentration of the mission's activities in the provinces where the conflict continues: North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri.

23. See the summary of DRC in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
24. See the summary of DRC (east-ADF) in this chapter.

DRC (east - ADF)	
Start:	2014
Type:	System, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of DRC, Government of Uganda, Mai-Mai militias, ADF armed opposition group, MONUSCO
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) is an Islamist rebel group operating in the northwest of the Rwenzori massif (North Kivu, between DR Congo and Uganda) with between 1,200 and 1,500 Ugandan and Congolese militiamen recruited mainly in both countries as well as in Tanzania, Kenya and Burundi. It is the only group in the area considered a terrorist organisation and is included on the US list of terrorist groups. It was created in 1995 from the merger of other Ugandan armed groups taking refuge in DR Congo (Rwenzururu, ADF), later adopted the name ADF and follows the ideology of the former ADF, which originated in marginalised Islamist movements in Uganda linked to the conservative Islamist movement Salaf Tabliq. In its early years it was used by Zaire under Mobutu (and later by DR Congo under Kabila) to pressure Uganda, but it also received backing from Kenya and Sudan and strong underground support in Uganda. At first it wanted to establish an Islamic state in Uganda, but in the 2000s it entrenched in the communities that welcomed it in DR Congo and became a local threat to the administration and the Congolese population, though its activity was limited. In early 2013 the group began a wave of recruitment and kidnappings and an escalation of attacks against the civilian population.

The year saw intensive military operations by the Armed Forces (FARDC) in the east of the country in an effort to dislodge armed groups from the area, in particular the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Since 30 October 2019, the FARDC has been leading a new and escalating offensive against the ADF, intensifying fighting that had a heavy impact on the civilian population, especially due to ADF counter-offensives. The armed movement split into small groups, some of which expanded into other areas, particularly the Irumu and Mambasa territories in neighbouring Ituri province, where the violence escalated. In December 2019, the ADF executed 97 civilians in retaliation for operations launched in October. The year began with advances by the FARDC, which managed to capture the ADF stronghold of Madina on 9 January, at the cost of the deaths of 40 FARDC militants and 30 soldiers, and increased reprisals by the group against the civilian population days later with the execution of dozens of civilians in Beni territory. Offensive and retaliatory actions by the ADF, as well as Army military operations, continued throughout the year.

In July, the UN noted that the ADF had intensified its attacks on civilians over the past 18 months since January 2019, expanding its attacks beyond its traditional areas of action. These actions have allegedly caused more than 1,000 fatalities between January 2019 and June 2020, and could be classified as war crimes and crimes against humanity, as highlighted by the report of the UN Human Rights Office in DRC.[25] The impacts of the abuses committed by the ADF were systematic and brutal. The assailants used heavy artillery in their attacks on villages, including mortars, as well as AK-47s and machetes; they often burned down entire villages, health centres and schools, and abducted men, women and minors. The usual modus operandi of their attacks indicated that there was a clear intention to leave no survivors. According to the report, in addition to the fatalities, the ADF reportedly wounded 176 others, kidnapped 717 people, recruited 59 minors, and a school, seven health centres and dozens of houses were attacked and looted, causing the forced displacement of thousands of people. In addition, the FARDC is also alleged to have committed serious human rights violations, particularly since the start of operations in October 2019. Specifically, the security forces are alleged to have executed 14 civilians, injured 49 others, as well as arbitrarily arresting and detaining 297 civilians. These violations are said to have reinforced the population's distrust of the security forces. Finally, it should be noted that hundreds of prisoners escaped during an attack that the police attributed to the ADF on 21 October in Beni. The armed group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) claimed responsibility for several of the attacks committed by the ADF, but MONUSCO has yet to find any evidence of a direct connection between ISIS and the ADF.

South Sudan	
Start:	2009
Type:	Self-government, Resources, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government (SPLM/A), SPLM/A-in Opposition armed group (faction of former vice president, Riek Machar), dissident factions of the SPLA-IO led by Peter Gatdet and Gathoth Gatkuoth, SSLA, SSDM/A, SSDM-CF, SSNLM, REMNASA, communal militias (SSPPF, TFN), Sudan Revolutionary Front armed coalition (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), Sudan, Uganda, UNMISS
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

25. MONUSCO and OHCHR, *Report on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the Allied Democratic Forces armed group and by members of the defence and security forces in Beni territory, North Kivu province and Irumu and Mambasa territories, Ituri province, between 1 January 2019 and 31 January 2020*, UN, July 2020.

Summary:
The peace agreement reached in 2005, which put an end to the Sudanese conflict, recognised the right to self-determination of the south through a referendum. However, the end of the war with the North and the later independence for South Sudan in 2011 did not manage to offer stability to the southern region. The disputes for the control of the territory, livestock and political power increased between the multiple communities that inhabit South Sudan, increasing the number, the gravity and the intensity of the confrontations between them. The situation became even worse after the general elections in April 2010, when several military officials who had presented their candidature or had supported political opponents to the incumbent party, the SPLM, did not win the elections. These military officers refused to recognise the results of the elections and decided to take up arms to vindicate their access to the institutions, condemn the Dinka dominance over the institutions and the under representation of other communities within them while branding the South Sudan government as corrupt. Juba's offerings of amnesty did not manage to put an end to insurgence groups, accused of receiving funding and logistical support from Sudan. In parallel, there was an escalation of violence in late 2013 between supporters of the government of Salva Kiir and those of former Vice President Riek Machar (SPLA-IO),unleashing a new round of violence that continues to this day. In 2015, a peace agreement was signed between the government and the SPLA-IO, which was ratified in 2018. However, the signatory parties' reluctance to implement it, as well as the emergence of other armed groups and community militias, have kept the war raging in the country.

During the year, the country suffered a dynamic of increasing violence compared to the previous year, due to the difficulty in implementing some clauses of the 2018 peace agreement, with multiple armed incidents related to inter-community disputes in the central region of the country taking place, as well as clashes between government troops and non-signatory groups to the Peace Agreement, mainly in the southern region of Central Equatoria. According to ACLED data, during 2020, a total of 748 episodes of armed violence were recorded in the country that cost the lives of 2,252 people, indicating a significant increase in the number of fatalities compared to the 1,499 deaths recorded in 2019. At the same time, the humanitarian emergency in the country continued. According to data provided by UNHCR in its report covering the period up to mid-2020, the country recorded 2,278,000 people fleeing violence and taking refuge in neighbouring countries (mainly Uganda and Sudan). This data ranks South Sudan as the largest refugee crisis in Africa and the fourth largest in the world, behind Syria, Venezuela and Afghanistan. In turn, the number of IDPs by mid-2020 stood at 1.6 million, of which 125,300 had occurred between January and June 2020, a period in which 107,000 IDPs also returned home.[26]

While the signing of the *Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan*(R-ARCSS) **peace agreement in September 2018 put an end to armed clashes** between the Armed Forces and the main rebel group, the SPLA-IO led by Riek Machar, new armed fronts and organisations continued to destabilise the country, mainly in the southern and central regions. During 2020, peace talks began between the Government and non-signatory groups to the Peace Agreement organised through the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOMA) –which includes the rebel organisations NAS, SSUF/A, Real-SPLM, NDM-PF, UDRM/A, SSNMC. On 12 January, these negotiations, which are taking place in Rome (Italy) under the mediation of the Community of Sant'Egidio and the IGAD, achieved the signing of the **Rome Declaration on the Peace Process in South Sudan** where the parties committed to a ceasefire, to guarantee humanitarian access and to maintain an open dialogue.[27] However, the stalemate in the negotiations in April led to the breaking of the military truce, triggering military hostilities between government forces and the NAS commanded by Thomas Cirillo, who accused the armed forces of the SPLA-IO of attacking in the region of Central Equatoria. Military hostilities continued throughout the year, extending to the Western Equatoria region in the south of the country. In response, on 29 May the UN Security Council extended the arms embargo on South Sudan and the targeted sanctions against specific individuals until May 2021. At the beginning of June, the UN mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the EU unsuccessfully requested the government of Salva Kiir and the NAS to put an end to the hostilities and respect the truce negotiated in January. Armed clashes between the NAS and the SPLA (renamed the South Sudan People's Defence Forces – SSPDF) and the SPLA-IO continued during the third quarter of the year in Central Equatoria State. In early September, UNMISS deployed troops to establish a temporary base in Lobonok County following an increase in attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers, denouncing the Government's blockade. Subsequently, the rebel group South Sudan United Front/Army (SSUF/A) led by Paul Malong expanded its military hostilities to the north of the country, in Unity State.

On the other hand, armed clashes continued in the centre and east of the country, motivated by various **inter-community disputes in the context of the difficulties of governance in the country due to the weakness and internal struggles in the new Unity Government** created in February. These clashes occurred mainly in the Lakes State, Warrap State, Jonglei State and the Greater Pibor administrative area. The increase in violence in Jonglei State was interpreted by various South Sudanese organisations as a result of the ungovernable situation in the state due to the lack of agreement between the signatories to the peace agreement to establish the governor in that state. In mid-June, the Government formed a committee to ease tensions between the Dinka,

26. UNHCR, *Mid-year trends 2020*, 30 November 2020.
27. See the summary on South Sudan in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020: Report on Trends and Scenarios*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.

Lou Nuer and Murle communities, and subsequently launched a nationwide disarmament programme, as well as inter-community talks initiatives to address escalating inter-community violence. However, the start of the disarmament campaign in the central region of the country in August led to heavy clashes between security forces and community militia members who refused to disarm, leaving at least 148 people dead in Tonj East County, Jonglei State. UNMISS, in response to the increased violence, sent a peacekeeping patrol to the area on 11 August and established a temporary base in the town of Tonj. The failure to contain the violence forced the Government to declare a state of emergency in Jonglei State and the Greater Pibor administrative area on 13 August. According to data provided by UNMISS, inter-community violence has left at least 800 people dead between April and June alone, constituting the main focus of violence in the country and a serious risk to the implementation of the peace agreement.

The increase in violence in several parts of the country did not prevent UNMISS from withdrawing its forces from several peacekeeping bases in the country at the beginning of September, while maintaining the humanitarian aid service. The initiation of the withdrawal plan prompted thousands of internally displaced persons to demonstrate in Juba, Jonglei and Unity, asking the agency to reconsider the withdrawal due to the violence. UNMISS subsequently announced the development of new plans to establish temporary peacekeeping bases and the deployment of patrols to stop inter-community fighting in the Jonglei region.

Inter-community violence in the central region of South Sudan became the main source of instability in the country and a serious risk to the implementation of the Peace Agreement

Sudan (Darfur)	
Start:	2003
Type:	Self-government, Resources, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, PDF pro-government militias, RSF paramilitary unit,pro-government militias *janjaweed*, Sudan Revolutionary Front armed coalition (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), several SLA factions, other groups, UNAMID
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The conflict in Darfur arose in 2003 around the demands for greater decentralization and development settled by several armed groups, mainly the SLA and the JEM. The government responded to the uprising by sending its armed forces and forming Arab militias, known as *janjaweed*. The magnitude of the violence against civilians carried out by all the armed actors led to claims that genocide was ongoing in the region. 300,000 people have already died in relation to the conflict since the beginning of the hostilities, according to the United Nations. After the signing of a peace agreement between the government and a faction of the SLA in May 2006, the violence intensified, the opposition-armed groups started a process of fragmentation and a serious displacement crisis with a regional outreach developed in the region due to the proxy-war between Chad and Sudan. This dimension is compounded by inter-community tension over the control of resources (land, water, livestock, mining), in some cases instigated by the government itself. The observation mission of the African Union –AMIS– created in 2004, was integrated into a joint AU/UN mission in 2007, the UNAMID. This mission has been the object of multiple attacks and proven incapable of complying with its mandate to protect civilians and humanitarian staff on the field.

The Darfur region remained the epicentre of the armed violence in the country, although armed incidents were also recorded in the South Kordofan region and in the east of the country during the year. The armed conflict in the Darfur region experienced a deterioration in the security situation compared to the previous year. According to data provided by ACLED, there were 555 deaths in the region during the year as a result of clashes, attacks on civilians and remote violence. This is an increase of almost double the number of deaths compared to those recorded in 2019 (268), although the data still shows a de-escalation when compared to the 859 violent deaths recorded during 2018, the 996 deaths in 2017 or the 2,286 deaths in 2016. The violence in Darfur continues to be much higher than the other armed conflict in the country, located in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan, where a total of 122 fatalities were recorded during the year, according to data provided by ACLED. In turn, according to UNHCR data from mid-2020, 772,000 people in Sudan fled their homes and took refuge outside national borders, mainly due to the armed conflict in Darfur. The number of internally displaced persons in mid-2020 stood at 1.9 million. These figures place the country in eighth place globally and fourth in Africa in terms of the number of people displaced by violence. At the same time, Sudan is hosting 1,058,800 refugees from the ongoing crises in neighbouring countries –to which must be added the new unaccounted refugees from the crisis in Ethiopia at the end of the year– placing the country in sixth place globally in terms of host countries, and in second place in Africa after Uganda.[28]

Although the Government's year-long peace negotiation process with different armed groups in the Darfur region, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile in Juba, capital of South Sudan, concluded with a historic peace agreement signed in August,[29] it failed to stop the violence in Darfur. This was due, in part, to the **refusal**

28. UNHCR, *Mid-year trends 2020*, 30 November 2020.
29. See the summary on Sudan in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020: Report on Trends and Scenarios.* Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.

of the SLM/A-AW faction led by Abdel Wahid al-Nur to join the peace negotiations, as well as continuing inter-community disputes and clashes in the area. With regard to the former, although the SLM/A-AW announced on 30 March that it had ceased its violent actions in Darfur following the international appeal by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for a ceasefire to allow for the implementation of health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it reiterated its refusal to join the peace process. Armed clashes between the al-Nur-led faction and security forces subsided for a time but resumed between October and November, mainly in the Jebel Marra area.

On the other hand, in relation to **inter-community confrontations and disputes**, various violent episodes continued to be recorded in various parts of Darfur during the year. The year began with the visit of a Government delegation, including the Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok, and the Vice-President of the Sovereign Council of Sudan and leader of the Rapid Support Force, Mohamed Dagalo –known as Hemedti– to El-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur. The visit took place in the context of resolving the conflict between members of Arab groups and the Masalit tribe that left more than 60 people dead at the end of 2019. The mediation, however, did not stop violent clashes between different groups, which continued throughout the year in North Darfur, West Darfur and South Darfur. Some of these attacks were aimed at stopping the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to land taken by force under President Omar al-Bashir.

In relation to the **UN-AU hybrid mission in Darfur (UNAMID)**, the UN Security Council continued with the roadmap for the reduction and completion of the mission in the country, as agreed by the body in its resolutions 2363 (2017) and 2429 (2018). During the year, in resolution 2525 (2020), the Council extended the mandate of UNAMID for two months, until 31 December 2020, the closing date of the mission. In the same resolution, the Council approved a new UN assistance mission in Sudan, the **United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS)**, which will be operational in early 2021, and whose functions will be to support the transition in the country, the consolidation of peace and the protection of civilians, especially in Darfur. The Transitional Government of Sudan made its position clear on the termination of UNAMID on 31 December, stating that it will assume full responsibility for the protection of civilians. The announcement of the end of UNAMID, deployed since 2007, led to multiple protests against its termination by people displaced by the conflict in Darfur, who requested its continuation to ensure their protection until the peace process is completed.

In parallel, throughout the year the UN Security Council continued to support efforts to increase women's participation in mediation and conflict prevention activities, in particular through the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation. UN Women continued to provide support to the Network, including the deployment of network members to Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan. On the other hand, the Kampala-based women's organisation, Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA), reported that cases of sexual violence in Darfur, mainly in the IDP camps in the north, had increased by 50% between March and June since the implementation of the anti-COVID-19 measures. The organisation called on the transitional government to establish mechanisms for prevention, justice and protection of civilians, especially women.

Finally, in another significant event during the year, in June the International Criminal Court reported that the former leader of the Popular Defence Forces and Janjaweed militia, Ali Kushayb, wanted for alleged war crimes in Darfur between 2003-2004, had been arrested and handed over by the Central African Republic on 7 June and transferred to The Hague.

Horn of Africa

Ethiopia (Tigray)	
Start:	2020
Type:	Government, Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of Ethiopia, Government of Eritrea, Tigray State Regional Government, security forces and militias of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The appointment of Abiy Ahmed as Ethiopia's new prime minister in early 2018 brought about important and positive changes domestically and regionally in Ethiopia. However, Abiy's actions to reform the Ethiopian state led to its weakening. They gave a new impetus to the ethnic-based nationalist movements that had re-emerged during the mass mobilisations initiated in 2015 by the Oromo community that eventually brought Abiy Ahmed to power, as well as strong resistance from key actors such as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party, formerly the leading party of the coalition that has ruled Ethiopia since 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which established the system of ethnic federalism after he came to power. The Tigray community leadership perceived a loss of power and privilege in the changes enacted by Abiy Ahmed. The TPLF is resisting the loss of power resulting from its non-participation in the new party forged from the ashes of the EPRDF coalition, the Prosperity Party (PP), which if it joined, would lead to the dilution of its power within a new party. These tensions intensified under Abiy Ahmed's liberalising reforms. As the EPRDF tightened its grip, new opportunities, grievances and discourses emerged from regional leaders and civil society actors. This triggered an escalation of political violence throughout the country and increased tension between the federal Government and the TPLF, culminating in the outbreak of armed conflict between the Ethiopian security forces and the security forces in the Tigray region.

The Tigray region of Ethiopia was affected by an escalation of tension with the federal Government that led to a warlike confrontation with serious consequences. On 4 November, the Ethiopian Prime Minister ordered the launch of a military operation against the authorities ruled by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the northern Tigray region bordering Eritrea in response to an attack by forces in the Tigray region on two military bases of the Ethiopian Federal Armed Forces (EDF) and, as a result, the federal Government declared a six-month state of emergency in the region. The offensive was followed by heavy fighting and an escalation of the conflict, causing the displacement of thousands of civilians fleeing the fighting and violence. The UN warned that a large-scale humanitarian crisis was developing. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Michelle Bachelet, said on 24 November that the refugee population in Sudan from Tigray had risen to 40,000 people since 7 November.[30] Investigations revealed mass executions of civilians in Mai-Kadra, southwest Tigray region, which may be the responsibility of the TPLF, according to witness reports gathered by Amnesty International.[31] OHCHR warned that the facts could be considered war crimes if confirmed, and also highlighted reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions, executions, discrimination and stigmatisation of members of the Tigray community. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed blamed the massacres on forces loyal to the Tigray authorities. Numerous regional and international voices called for a halt to the spiral of violence and the promotion of talks that had been rejected by the Ethiopian prime minister at the end of the year. In turn, on 22 November, Abiy Ahmed issued an ultimatum to the Tigray authorities and to the TPLF to lay down their arms unconditionally before carrying out the offensive on the capital, Mekelle, which could lead to an escalation of violence with serious consequences for the civilian population. However, Tigray's President, Debretsion Gebremichael, rejected the surrender. Following the ultimatum, the EDF carried out the offensive on Mekelle, which resulted in numerous fatalities and hundreds of injuries, although the humanitarian consequences were minor due to the withdrawal of TPLF troops from the town to avoid confrontation in the urban centre. ACLED estimated that more than 1,400 people were killed as a result of the conflict. In the midst of the Ethiopian offensive, the TPLF bombed the airport in Asmara, the capital of neighbouring Eritrea, on 15 November. TPLF accused Eritrea of collaborating with the EDF by ceding its airport to carry out air offensives over Tigray. In turn, the TPLF carried out simultaneous air raids on 13 November in Bahir Dar and Gondar in the neighbouring Amhara region (a region disputed by Tigray). Subsequently, humanitarian organisations, the UN and the EU have highlighted the presence of Eritrean troops in Mekelle and their active participation in the hostilities in support of the federal Government. Although the federal Government declared victory in November, fighting continued between federal and Tigrayan forces.

Numerous voices remarked on the military might and experience of Tigray's security forces and bodies, demonstrated in the war against Eritrea and in the war to overthrow the Derg regime in 1991, while also being heavily equipped during the years in which the TPLF has held power in Ethiopia's coalition government. In addition, a confidential UN report noted that the EDF was allegedly encountering strong resistance in Tigray and faced a protracted "war of attrition" in the region that could have regional consequences.[32]

A UN report said the Ethiopian Army is facing stiff resistance in Tigray and a protracted "war of attrition" in the region that could have regional consequences

The decisive turning point in the deterioration of relations between the two entities that led to the outbreak of violence came in June following the federal Government's announcement that regional and federal elections due to be held in August would be postponed because of the pandemic. From that moment on, a cascade of events took place and a narrative was constructed to justify the evolution of events and the clash of authorities. In June, the federal Parliament extended the mandate of the federal Government and the mandate of the regional governments, which were due to expire in October, while the Tigray regional Parliament announced elections in September, which were deemed unconstitutional by the federal authorities. Tigray held the elections on 9 September in clear defiance of the federal Government, accompanied by threats from the TPLF, stating that any attempt by the federal Government to boycott the elections would be considered a "declaration of war". The Tigray government also pointed out that the perpetuation of the federal Government in power beyond 5 October (the date on which the Government's mandate was due to expire but was postponed in June) was unconstitutional and after that date Tigray might not accept any of the federal laws. From that moment on, a narrative took root that defended the supposed legality of one's own actions and the illegality of the adversary's. On 5 October, the TPLF withdrew its parliamentarians from the federal Government, considering its mandate to have expired. On 6 and 7 October, the federal Parliament asked the Government to sever relations with the Tigray authorities and approved the cessation of federal funding to the Tigray Executive. Despite an appeal on 9 October to both sides by Ethiopian Peace Minister Muferiat Kamil,[33]

30. OHCHR, *Ethiopia: Threat of major hostilities in Mekelle seriously imperils civilian lives – Bachelet,* OHCHR, 24 November 2020..
31. Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state,* 12 November 2020.
32. Jason Burke, "Secret UN report reveals fears of long and bitter war in Ethiopia", *The Guardian*, 21 November 2020.
33. News: Minister of Peace Muferiat Kamil cautions federal, Tigray region governments to deescalate tension, engage in peaceful dialogue, *EthioExplorer*, 10 October 2020.

to commit to dialogue and de-escalate tensions, on 24 October the TPLF claimed that the federal Government was expelling Tigray from the federation and that the diversion of federal funds due to take effect on 4 November would be considered tantamount to a declaration of war.

Somalia	
Start:	1988
Type:	Government, System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Federal government, regional pro-government forces, Somaliland, Puntland, clan and warlord militias, Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a, USA, France, Ethiopia, AMISOM, EUNAVFOR Somalia, Operation Ocean Shield, al-Shabaab
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:
The armed conflict and the absence of effective central authority in the country have their origins in 1988, when a coalition of opposing groups rebelled against the dictatorial power of Siad Barre and three years later managed to overthrow him. This situation led to a new fight within this coalition to occupy the power vacuum, which had led to the destruction of the country and the death of more than 300,000 people since 1991, despite the failed international intervention at the beginning of the 1990s. The diverse peace processes to try and establish a central authority came across numerous difficulties, including the affronts between the different clans and sub clans of which the Somalia and social structure was made up, the interference of Ethiopia and Eritrea and the power of the various warlords. The last peace initiative was in 2004 by the GFT, which found support in Ethiopia to try to recover control of the country, partially in the hands of the ICU (Islamic Courts Union) The moderate faction of the ICU has joined the GFT and together they confront the militias of the radical faction of the ICU which control part of the southern area of the country. In 2012 the transition that began in 2004 was completed and a new Parliament was formed which elected its first president since 1967. The AU mission, AMISOM (which included the Ethiopian and Kenyan troops present in the country) and government troops are combating al-Shabaab, a group that has suffered internal divisions.

During the year, the actions of the armed group al-Shabaab continued, as did AMISOM and US operations against the armed group, causing hundreds of deaths. On the other hand, despite the electoral agreement reached in September, tensions between the Federal Government and the federated states regarding the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections between December 2020 and February 2021 increased, in parallel with the delay in preparations for the elections and their possible postponement. Al-Shabaab remained the main threat to security and stability in a country beset by a triple crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic, desert locusts and floods.

From 2017 onwards, the UN highlighted that a further increase in al-Shabaab activity has been observed, which continued throughout 2020. The group continued to exercise effective control over large parts of rural central and southern Somalia, but none of the major urban centres. Al-Shabaab continued to carry out suicide, IED and mortar attacks, mainly targeting AMISOM and the Somali Armed Forces, military installations or heavily guarded Government buildings, but also civilian facilities such as hotels, restaurants and cafés, resulting in many civilian casualties. During the year, there were an average of 270 incidents per month, according to the UN, most of them attacks perpetrated by al-Shabaab. ACLED noted that there were 3,117 fatalities in 2020. According to the UN's office in the country (UNSOM), between November 2019 and November 2020, there were more than 600 civilian fatalities and another 700 people were injured, of which approximately one-third to one-half were the responsibility of al-Shabaab, and the rest were the responsibility of clan militias and state security forces. Large-scale AMISOM and Somali Armed Forces operations against al-Shabaab also continued. Beginning in late 2017, there was an increase in airstrikes by international forces, primarily from the US, in response to increased al-Shabaab activity. In parallel, despite international military operations against ISIS, the rivalry between al-Shabaab and ISIS and the losses suffered, the Islamic State-affiliated group in Somalia increased the number of bombings and assassinations of prominent persons. These occurred mainly in Mogadishu, Puntland and southern Somalia, where ISIS maintains a network of troops, sympathisers and training bases. Despite military advances in Operation Badbaabo (Survival), al-Shabaab has continued to attack the Somali Armed Forces and AMISOM forces in areas recaptured by the latter. As of November, the total number of airstrikes in 2020 stood at 55. On the other hand, there were no incidents of piracy off the coast of Somalia during the year, a reduction linked to maritime operations by the international community, but mainly to the reduction in global demand for goods as a result of the pandemic, which reduced the volume of cargo transported through the western Indian Ocean.

With regard to AMISOM, a plan was developed in 2018 to guide the mission's transition process, which entailed a gradual handover of its functions to the Somali security forces, with the aim of the latter assuming full responsibility for the security of Somalia by 2021 in parallel with the announcement of the withdrawal of the African mission at the end of 2021. However, experts and analysts have said the Somali Government would have serious difficulties in carrying out its duties without AMISOM's support, and the Government called on the US to rethink the decision announced by President Donald Trump to begin withdrawing its 650-800 troops from the country.[34] However, Trump's exit from

34. Most of these special forces, dedicated to training the Somali Army as well as clandestine counter-insurgency operations, were established in Somalia during Trump's tenure. This announcement could be conditioned by the holding of elections in the country in November, according to analysts. See Nick Wadhams and Jennifer Jacobs, "Trump Demands a Plan to Withdraw US Troops From Somalia", *Bloomberg*, 13 October 2020.

the White House in 2021 could change this decision. Numerous voices pointed out that this decision, together with the withdrawal of troops by Kenya and Ethiopia, could create a security vacuum that could be exploited by al-Shabaab. In view of the seriousness of the internal situation in Tigray, Ethiopia withdrew 3,000 of its troops stationed in Somalia, although they were not part of the 5,000 troops under the AMISOM mandate.[35]

Kenya announced that it would make the future withdrawal of its troops contingent on improved stability in Somalia. In this sense, members of the Kenyan Armed Forces who have participated in AMISOM pointed out that a change of strategy in the war in Somalia was necessary, as military actions were proving ineffective in the face of a group that bases its strength on faith in Islam. A report by the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia noted that al-Shabaab, despite sanctions on the group, had generated around $13 million in income between December 2019 and August 2020 via extortion and taxation in areas under its control and investments made by the group.[36]

A number of analysts have noted that the counter-terrorism strategy of the United States and the international community as a whole, with the blessing of the Somali Government, which has focused on the securitisation of responses to threats to international peace and security, has proved to be a failure because it has not reduced the impact of al-Shabaab's activities and has resulted in numerous civilian casualties. In this regard, several voices have emerged calling for a rapprochement with al-Shabaab to promote a negotiation process similar to the one that has been held in Afghanistan with the Taliban.

Finally, regarding the impact of the crisis on civilian populations, the number of internally displaced persons increased from 1.1 million people in August 2016 to 2.6 million people by December 2019, of whom almost two thirds were minors, threatened by forced recruitment by al-Shabaab and sexual violence by all actors involved in the conflict. The main drivers of the internal displacement were conflict and insecurity, as well as drought and floods. Many internally displaced persons moved from rural to urban areas. Mogadishu and Baidoa, the capital of southwestern State, where large swathes of territory are held by al-Shabaab, hosted the largest number of internally displaced persons in the country. On the other hand, activists and journalists continued to face threats in their work. In this regard, in late 2019, women's rights activist and humanitarian worker, Almaas Elman, was shot dead in Mogadishu, a few hours after posting on social media her sister's speech at the United Nations about the importance of reconciliation.

Maghreb - North Africa

Libya	
Start:	2011
Type:	Government, Resources, System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of National Accord with headquarters in Tripoli, government with headquarters in Tobruk/Bayda, several armed groups including the Libyan National Army (LNA, also called Arab Libyan Armed Forces, ALAF), militias from Misrata, Petroleum Facilities Guard, Bengazi Defence Brigades, ISIS, AQIM, mercenaries; USA, France, UK, Egypt, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Qatar, Russia, among other countries
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:
In the context of the uprisings in North Africa, popular protests against the government of Muammar Gaddafi began in February 2011. In power since 1969, his regime was characterized by an authoritarian stance repression of dissent, corruption and serious shortcomings at the institutional level. Internal conflict degenerated into an escalation of violence leading to a civil war and an international military intervention by NATO forces. After months of fighting and the capture and execution of Gaddafi in late October, the rebels announced the liberation of Libya. However, the country remains affected by high levels of violence derived from multiple factors, including the inability of the new authorities to control the country and ensure a secure environment; the high presence of militias unwilling to surrender their weapons; and disputes over resources and trafficking routes. The situation in the country deteriorated from mid-2014 onward, with higher levels of violence and persistent polítical fragmentation. Efforts to solve the situation have been hampered by this scene of fragmentation and a climate of instability has assisted the expansion of ISIS in the North African country. The dynamics of violence have been accentuated by the involvement of foreign actors in support of the various opposing sides, motivated by geopolitical and economic interests, given Libya's strategic location in the Mediterranean basin and its great oil wealth.

The armed conflict in Libya was similar in intensity to the previous year, although at year's end the signing of a comprehensive ceasefire between the main conflicting parties raised tentative hopes of a possible decrease in violence. According to the ACLED think-tank, hostilities killed at least 1,492 people in 2020, slightly less than the 2,064 people killed in 2019, but more than the 1,188 killed in 2018. With regard to civilian casualties, during the first half of the year the UN mission in the country, UNSMIL, had counted a total of 489 victims, including 170 killed and 319 wounded, mainly due to fighting, detonation of explosive remnants and

35. Simon Marks, "Ethiopia Withdraws Thousands of Troops From Neighboring Somalia", Bloomberg, 13 November 2020.
36. Letter from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee pursuant to Resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council, S/2020/949 of 28 October 2020.

airstrikes. In 2019, 287 civilians were killed and 371 injured, respectively. According to data compiled by UNSMIL, forces affiliated with Khalifa Haftar's LNA –a group that has been renamed the Arab Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF) but is often referred to interchangeably as ALAF or the LNA– were reportedly responsible for most of the attacks on civilians (around 80%). Some actions were also attributed to GNA forces, the internationally recognised government based in Tripoli. In the face of this and other continuing evidence of human rights and international humanitarian law violations in the conflict, the UN Human Rights Council decided in June 2020 to launch a year-long independent fact-finding mission to investigate abuses perpetrated by all parties to the armed conflict in Libya since the beginning of 2016, with the intention of preventing a worsening of the situation and ensuring accountability.

With regard to the evolution and dynamics of the conflict, **during 2020, the trend observed the previous year regarding the growing involvement of foreign actors in support of the main sides in the conflict continued and even increased**. This drift resulted in repeated violations of the arms embargo, the continued arrival to the country of combatants, mercenaries and military advisers, and explicit warnings of more direct intervention depending on the course of events and the interests involved. Their arrival was also felt on the battlefronts, which in 2020 were mainly concentrated in Tripoli, Sirte and other locations in western Libya. During the first half of the year, the hostilities focused on the Libyan capital and persisted despite some initiatives aimed at promoting a truce. Earlier this year, Turkey (which in January approved sending troops to Libya to support the GNA and facilitated the arrival of Syrian militiamen in the North African country) and Russia (which backs the forces of Haftar, a strongman in the east of the country) failed to encourage a ceasefire. The Berlin Conference on Libya –postponed several times in 2019 and finally held in January– also failed to lead to a reduction in violence.[37] ALAF maintained the siege of Tripoli, and tribes allied to Haftar also began a blockade of oil exports in January. Violence escalated from March onwards, despite the call for the parties to call a humanitarian truce to focus efforts on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the UN Secretary-General's call for a comprehensive ceasefire. In the midst of the pandemic, there were reports of attacks on civilians, hospitals and the cutting off of drinking water supplies affecting two million people in Tripoli, attributed to ALAF. Beginning in April and with Turkish assistance, GNA-affiliated forces began to advance their positions in western Libya. After what was described as a "tactical withdrawal" of ALAF from Tripoli in May, the GNA consolidated its control over the capital in June and denounced the discovery of more than 20 mass graves in Tarhuna, until then a stronghold of militias loyal to Haftar. By the end of the year (November), 112 bodies had been exhumed in the town, located about 100 kilometres northeast of Tripoli.

From the middle of the year, the epicentre of the fighting shifted eastwards to the vicinity of Sirte. Turkey and Russia again tried unsuccessfully to reach an agreement to stop the escalation around the city, while Egypt –another of Haftar's supporters– announced that Sirte was a "red line" that could lead to its direct intervention in the conflict. In fact, Cairo issued warnings against actions that it would consider a threat to its national security and authorised the dispatch of troops. In this context, and in response to alarm signals from UNSMIL about the destabilising potential of the events in Sirte, various initiatives were launched to try to create a demilitarised zone around the city, resume political negotiations and reactivate oil exports to alleviate the socio-economic conditions of the population, severely affected by the conflict, the pandemic and the blocking of oil revenues –a situation that led to protests against the rival authorities in Tripoli and Sirte in the middle of the year. In August, the GNA declared a unilateral ceasefire and called for the reactivation of oil production and elections in 2021. Simultaneously, the speaker of the Tobruk-based House of Representatives, Aghela Saleh –Haftar's ally, but not always aligned with his agenda– also announced a truce. Weeks later Haftar agreed to the reactivation of oil exports, although he maintained attacks on GNA positions near Sirte. **It was not until the end of October that GNA and ALAF representatives officially signed a nationwide "permanent" ceasefire agreement in Geneva**, allowing new political contacts to commence under the auspices of the UN.[38]

Until the end of the year, the political process was moving slowly, although a roadmap was reportedly being drawn up that would include presidential and parliamentary elections on 24 December 2021, coinciding with the 70th anniversary of Libya's independence. At the same time, doubts and obstacles persisted regarding the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, which among other measures includes the withdrawal of both sides to the front lines, the expulsion of foreign fighters from the country and the suspension of foreign military training programmes until the formation of the new government. Contrary to what was stipulated, in the final months of the year there were reports of continued weapon flows, the non-withdrawal of forces from both sides, conflicting interpretations of certain provisions due to ambiguities in the text of the agreement and armed incidents that challenged the ceasefire. In December, mutual accusations continued regarding violations of the truce and the interception by ALAF of a Turkish ship that led Ankara to warn of serious consequences for those who attack Turkish interests in Libya. The Turkish Parliament also approved

37. See the summary on Libya in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Report on Trends and Scenarios.* Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.
38. Ibid.

the extension of military support to the GNA for another 18 months. In this context, the leader of UNSMIL and acting special envoy, Stephanie Williams –in office following the resignation of Ghassam Salamé in March– warned of the risk posed to the country by the presence of 20,000 foreign fighters.

The ceasefire agreement did not stop attacks on activists and human rights defenders. Among them Hannan Elbarassi, a lawyer, women's rights activist and critic of armed groups operating in the east of the country, was killed in November in Benghazi. At the same time, it should be noted that **the armed conflict continued to favour very serious abuses of migrant and refugee populations** trapped in Libya and/or who had returned to the North African country after failed attempts to reach European coasts. In line with other reports by various organisations in previous years, Amnesty International denounced the wide range of abuses suffered by migrants and refugees in Libya in a climate of total impunity –executions, forced disappearances, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, arbitrary detention and forced labour and exploitation by state and non-state actors.[39] In this context, several voices called on the EU to rethink its policies of cooperation with the Libyan authorities on migration, which ignore the abuses repeatedly denounced by the UN and civil society.

Southern Africa

Mozambique (north)	
Start:	2019
Type:	System, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) -formerly Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ)-, al-Qaeda, South African private security company DAG (Dyck Advisory Group)
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
Since late 2017, the province of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique has suffered an armed conflict led by Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jamo (ASWJ). The armed jihadist organisation made its first appearance in October 2017 when it attacked three police posts in the Mocímboa da Praia district in Cabo Delgado province. Since that time, Cabo Delgado has been the epicentre of rising violent activity in the country. While some reports claim that ASWJ fighters have received training in Tanzania and Somalia, which has led locals to call them al-Shabaab, alluding to the Somali jihadist group, no significant links to international jihadist networks have been established. The causes of the outbreak of violence refer rather to factors linked to the grievances and marginalisation of the Muslim minority in Mozambique (22% of the population), as well as to the extreme poverty of what is the most underdeveloped province in the country. Poverty rates in Cabo Delgado contrast with its enormous economic potential due to its significant natural gas reserves, which have generated significant investment in the area, but this has not helped to reduce inequality and poverty among its population. Since the end of 2017, the Mozambican security forces have developed a security policy that has increased repression and retaliation in the area, influencing new factors that trigger violence. In 2018, the group intensified its use of violence against civilians and expanded the scope of its operations.

Armed violence in the northern province of Cabo Delgado escalated significantly during the year due to the actions of groups with jihadist agendas and the response of the security forces. The data provided by ACLED shows the deterioration of the security situation, which recorded the highest homicide rate in the last ten years in the country, directly related, according to analysts, to the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado. During 2020, ACLED recorded **1,639 violent deaths in Cabo Delgado,** affecting 10 of its 17 districts, which is more than double the number of deaths in the previous year –when 689 deaths were recorded– and far higher than the 126 deaths recorded in 2018, or the 119 deaths in 2017, the year insurgent activities began. Estimates by the United Nations at the end of the year indicated that violence in the region has displaced at least 424,000 people since 2017. In the first six months of 2020 alone, UNHCR recorded 125,300 internally displaced persons in the country.[40]

While June 2019 saw the first **attacks in Cabo Delgado claimed by the armed group Islamic State (ISIS),** its presence in the country was denied by the Mozambican authorities until April 2020. After the massacre of 52 people who had refused to be recruited by the insurgency, the government led by Filipe Nyussi acknowledged the presence of ISIS militants for the first time. The northern insurgency itself, known locally as "al-Shabaad", renamed itself the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP), proclaiming its goal to be the creation of a caliphate in the region. On 22 May, al-Qaeda also claimed to have carried out attacks in the country for the first time by conducting armed actions in the district of Mocimboa da Praia. Violence was not only concentrated in northern Mozambique, but there were also several armed incidents in southern Tanzania, bordering Cabo Delgado, during the year. During October, ISIS claimed its first attack on Tanzanian soil[41].

Among the acts of violence recorded during the year, the commencement of armed actions against urban centres in March was particularly noteworthy. An example of this was **the seizure of the city of Mocímboa da Praia on three occasions in March, June and August**. On the other hand, there were multiple attacks with a high fatality rate, including two massacres perpetrated by the insurgency in Muidumbe district. In the first, on 7 April, at least 52 people were beheaded in an attack in the

39. Amnesty International, *Between life and death: Refugees and migrants trapped in Libya's cycle of abuse*, 24 September 2020.
40. UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends - 2020*, 30 November 2020.
41. See the summary on Tanzania in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).

community of Xitaxi; in the second, in October, another 50 people were beheaded on the football pitch in the community of Muatide, with many others kidnapped. According to various analysts, one of the reasons that helps to explain the violence against the people of Muidumbe relates to the formation of community militias to fight on the side of the Government. UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the massacres and urged the country's authorities to conduct an investigation into the incidents. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, warned that the population is in a desperate situation, calling on the Mozambican government to ensure unhindered access for humanitarian agencies.

Instability and the humanitarian crisis increased in the Cabo Delgado region, northern Mozambique

Amid the worsening humanitarian situation, the media reported the emergence of community militias made up of army veterans who are fighting the jihadist insurgency. In turn, members of the Mozambican security forces were charged on several occasions for their alleged involvement in **human rights violations, torture, indiscriminate and extrajudicial killings**, which contributed to exacerbating the rebellion's anti-government stance. Several human rights bodies, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the National Human Rights Commission, called on the Government to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into torture and other serious human rights violations allegedly committed by state security forces in Cabo Delgado.[42] Even the European Parliament condemned the disproportionate use of force on 18 September, after a video went viral showing the murder of a woman by alleged members of the Mozambican Armed Forces and Rapid Intervention Police, which the government denied, while denouncing a campaign of "disinformation" by the insurgents.

Increasing violence and instability in the region prompted a reaction from the **regional body** Southern African Development Community (SADC). In mid-May, the Governments of Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe urged SADC member countries to support the Government of Mozambique in the face of the insurgency. Subsequently, on 17 August, the SADC declared at its annual summit its "commitment to support Mozambique in the fight against terrorism and violent attacks". Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party stated its intention to offer assistance to Mozambique in Cabo Delgado in exchange for the US government easing sanctions on the country. In late November, the SADC held an extraordinary summit in Botswana, focusing on security issues, where it agreed to a "comprehensive regional response" to address insecurity in northern Mozambique, without elaborating on the type of response. In parallel, a week before the summit, Tanzania and Mozambique signed an agreement to join forces to fight the insurgency. At the same time, in September, the Mozambican government asked the EU for assistance in dealing with the insurgency, and on 9 October the EU announced a programme of training, logistical support and medical services for the Mozambican forces. It should also be noted that, during the year, the South African private security company DAG (Dyck Advisory Group) replaced the Russian security company Wagner and began to operate in the war against the counter-insurgency in Cabo Delgado, mainly by training troops, deploying air operations and supplying mercenaries on the ground.

West Africa

Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West)	
Start:	2018
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	The Government of Cameroon, a political-military secessionist movement including the opposition Ambazonia Coalition Team (ACT, including IG Sako, to which belong the armed groups Lebialem Red Dragons and SOCADEF) and the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC, including IG Sisiku, whose armed wing is the Ambazonia Defence Forces, ADF)
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:
After Germany's defeat in the First World War, Cameroon came under the mandate of the League of Nations and was divided between French Cameroon and British Cameroon. In 1961, the two territories that made up British Cameroon held a referendum limiting their self-determination to union with the already independent Republic of Cameroon (formerly French Cameroon) or union with Nigeria. The southern part of British Cameroon (a region currently corresponding to the provinces of North West and South West) decided to join the Republic of Cameroon, whereas the north preferred to join Nigeria. A poorly conducted re-unification in the 1960s based on centralisation and assimilation has led the English-speaking minority of what was once southern British Cameroon (20% of the country's population) to feel politically and economically marginalised by state institutions, which are controlled by the French-speaking majority. Their frustrations rose in late 2016, when a series of sector-specific grievances were transformed into political demands, which caused strikes, riots and a growing escalation of tension and government repression. This climate has led a majority of the population in the region demanding a new federal political status without ruling out secession and has prompted the resurgence of identity movements dating back to the 1970s. These movements demand a return to the federal model that existed between 1961 and 1972. Trust between English-speaking activists and the government was shaken by the arrest of the main

42. Amnesty International, *Mozambique: Torture by security forces in gruesome videos must be investigated,* Amnesty International, 9 September 2020.

figures of the federalist movement in January 2017, which has given a boost to groups supporting armed struggle as the only way to achieve independence. Since then, both English-speaking regions have experienced general strikes, school boycotts and sporadic violence. Insurgent activity has escalated since the secessionist movement's declaration of independence on 1 October and the subsequent government repression to quell it.

The two English-speaking regions in the west of the country continued to be affected by severe violence as a result of the actions of armed secessionist actors, as well as excessive use of force and counter-insurgency operations by the Armed Forces and local militias, including some attacks by armed groups outside the two provinces. The conflict has already claimed more than 3,000 lives and displaced more than 900,000 people in less than three years, and has left some 800,000 children without schooling. Hundreds of insurgents, members of the security forces and self-defence militias were killed in clashes and ambushes, dozens of towns and houses were burned by the security forces and several insurgent leaders were executed at different times during the year, including General Aladji (May), General Okoro (July), General Mad Dog (September) and General Mendo Ze (October). Regarding the climate of violence, the security forces and, to a lesser extent, armed separatist actors, have been accused of serious human rights abuses. In April, the Government acknowledged for the first time that the army had been involved in a massacre of civilians (three women and 10 minors according to the Government, 23 civilians, including 15 minors, according to the UN) committed in mid-February in an attack on the town of Ngarbuh. The Government eventually brought those responsible before a military tribunal. At first the Government denied the facts but the evidence and pressure from the international community (UN, USA and EU) changed the Government's position. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Michelle Bachelet, and Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the acknowledgement was a positive but insufficient step, while a coalition of 26 local NGOs said the truth about the facts and figures had not yet come to light, with 31 bodies (including 14 minors) having been discovered, and that at least 10 to 15 soldiers and 30 other militiamen had been involved in the attack, a figure far higher than that claimed by the Government. The leader Ayaba Cho Lucas of the secessionist group AGovC demanded an independent commission to determine responsibility. Despite this, attacks and abuses against civilians and deaths in custody (such as that of journalist Samuel Wazizi) by security forces persisted during the year, as did the abduction of students and teachers and executions of alleged spies by secessionist groups. HRW reported on 27 July that at least 285 civilians had been killed in both provinces since January 2020. On 24 October, an unidentified armed group attacked and executed six students at a school in the town of Kumba, an act condemned by the Government and OHCHR, although secessionist groups denied participation in the incident.

Despite the continuing serious climate of violence in the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon, contacts were held between representatives of the Government and the secessionist movement

On the other hand, municipal and legislative elections were held on 9 February after seven years and after having been postponed twice. Despite the delays, the election campaign was marred by multiple acts of violence and clashes, according to human rights organisations such as Amnesty International. Armed separatist groups had called for a boycott of the elections and even threatened citizens not to vote in the two regions. The main opposition parties did not have a common position on participation in the elections, and while both the MRC and the SDF criticised the electoral law and the Government's control of electoral processes, the MRC announced an election boycott and the SDF rejected it. Nevertheless, election day passed almost without incident but with a low turnout, which favoured the ruling party, according to various analysts. According to various reports, President Paul Biya continued to use state machinery to ensure his one-party rule.[43] By-elections in the English-speaking regions were held again at the end of March following a decision by the Constitutional Court. The ruling party, Biya's RDPC, won all 13 seats up for election in the 11 constituencies contesting the elections. The victory further strengthened the RDPC's parliamentary majority, holding 152 of the 180 seats. The opposition SDF party, representing the English-speaking community, challenged the by-election results, but the constitutional court rejected its demand for a re-run.

Notably, on 2 July, a round of contacts was held between representatives of the Government and the secessionist movement led by the imprisoned leader Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe.[44] This announcement was welcomed by many social and political actors in the country, as well as by part of the international community, although the Government's silence and subsequent denials revealed an internal struggle between sectors in favour of a negotiated solution to the conflict and others seeking a military solution. This struggle is linked to the succession of Paul Biya as head of the country after 37 years in power, according to different sources.[45] In an attempt to unify the armed secessionist groups, on 15 October

43. Paul-Simon Handy and Fonteh Akum, "Cameroon holds elections in a time of crisis", *ISS*, 5 February 2020.
44. See the summary on Cameroon in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Report on Trends and Scenarios*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.
45. R. Maxwell Bone, "Political Infighting Could Obstruct a Nascent Peace Process in Cameroon", *WPR*, 22 September 2020.

Ayuk Tabe appealed to the different insurgent leaders to collaborate with the AGovC.

Decisions taken in September by the Government showed the prevalence of the militarist line. All demonstrations were banned, with the decision being justified on the grounds of the Covid-19 pandemic and in application of the 2014 law against acts of terrorism, to which HRW replied that the Government was using the pandemic and the counter-terrorism law as a pretext to ban the right to assembly. In response to the killing of a police officer in Bamenda, the capital of the North West region, the army banned the use of motorcycles and launched an unprecedented military operation in the town on 8 September to capture possible members of armed groups.

The operation included indiscriminate arrests, shootings and deaths of civilians, an action justified by the army as a response to various attacks, lootings and robberies of banks and stores committed by armed groups. In addition, on 17 September, an appeals court in Yaoundé upheld Sisiku's life sentence on terrorism and secession charges. The day after this decision, Maurice Kamto, leader of the MRC, called for social mobilisation to demand a ceasefire with the secessionist insurgency and electoral reforms following the government's decision to hold regional elections in December. The MRC announced that hundreds of people had been arrested in Douala and Yaoundé during the mobilisations and in the days leading up to them, including party members and activists from the group Stand Up for Cameroon. Following the protests, Kamto's home was guarded by security forces, placing him under *de facto* house arrest, according to statements made by Kamto himself to RFI on 29 September. The house arrest was still in place at the end of the year.

This situation was compounded by the growing climate of political tensions between supporters of the current President, who was ratified in the 2018 elections, and supporters of the opposition politician Maurice Kamto, as noted by the International Crisis Group (ICG) in December. Kamto continued to question the results of the 2018 presidential election and supporters of both sides fuelled the climate of hatred and violence on social networks, which has now taken on an ethnic dimension, posing a new threat to the country's fragile stability, already affected by the severe violence in the English-speaking provinces, as well as the continued attacks by Boko Haram in Far North province. The ICG proposed that the Government should correct the shortcomings in the electoral system that undermined the credibility of the 2018 elections and combat ethnically-motivated persecution on social media. In this regard, the MRC and SDF parties announced a boycott of the regional elections held on 6 December, in which Paul Biya's RDPC swept to victory in 9 of the 10 regional councils.

Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram)	
Start:	2011
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of Nigeria,, Civilian Joint Task Force pro-government milita, Boko Haram factions (ISWAP, JAS-Abubakar Shekau, Ansaru, Bakura), civilian militias, MNJTF (Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger)
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:
The Islamist sect Boko Haram demands the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria and considers that Nigeria's public institutions are "westernised" and, therefore, decadent. The group forms part of the fundamentalist branch initiated by other groups in Nigeria following independence in 1960 and which, invariably, triggered outbreaks of violence of varying intensity. Despite the heavy repression to which its followers have been subjected —in 2009, at least 800 of its members died in confrontations with the army and the police in Bauchi State— the armed group remains active. The scope of its attacks has widened, aggravating insecurity in the country as the government proves incapable of offering an effective response to put an end to the violence. International human rights organizations have warned of the crimes committed by the group, but also on government abuses in its campaign against the organization. In 2015 the conflict was regionalized, also affecting the countries bordering Lake Chad: Chad, Niger and Cameroon. Since mid-2016 Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon have developed a regional strategy of military pressure on BH through the implementation of a regional joint military force (MNJTF), which has highlighted the group's resilience and also the unwillingness of the Nigerian political and military authorities to deal with the situation, in addition to the shortcomings of the Nigerian Armed Forces, which have serious internal corruption problems. BH has split into four factions: The Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (JAS) faction, led by Abubakar Shekau, leader of BH since 2009; Ansaru, which aligned with al-Qaeda in 2012 and had not committed any military actions since 2013 until early 2020; Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which split from JAS in 2016; and finally Bakura, an ISWAP splinter group that emerged in 2018 and subsequently moved closer to Shekau in opposition to ISWAP.

The security situation was characterised by the continued activities of Boko Haram (BH), despite counter-insurgency operations, causing further population displacement and compounding the existing humanitarian crisis. Ongoing military operations by the Nigerian security forces, pro-Government militias and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), mainly against the two BH factions – Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (JAS) led by Abubakar Shekau– did not affect the evolution of the two groups' activities. They continued to pose a serious threat, resulting in a protracted humanitarian crisis and widespread human rights violations, including massacres of civilians, the maiming and abduction of children and sexual violence against them. BH also continued its campaign of abductions and summary executions of humanitarian

workers, as well as suicide attacks against the population. Of particular note is the resurgence of the armed group Ansaru, which in January claimed responsibility for its first action since 2013. Military sources pointed to evidence of the resumption of the group's activities, which increased its actions mainly in Kaduna State. Regions in countries bordering northeastern Nigeria, namely, Extrème Nord in Cameroon, Diffa in Niger and the Lac province of Chad, were also affected by persistent armed attacks by different factions of the group. The death toll of BH's actions and the clashes between BH factions and security forces since the start of the conflict in 2011 sits at 39,708 fatalities, according to the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) database. The death toll in the Nigerian states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa was very similar to the previous year (2,603 in 2020 compared to 2,607 in 2019), compared to 2,243 in 2018 and 1,907 in 2017, with the increasing trend in previous years beginning to stabilise. If we add to this figure the fatalities from the conflict in the surrounding areas of the Lake Chad region, the total rises to 3,770. Borno and Lac, with 2,335 and 1,088 fatalities respectively, were the worst affected regions.

Moreover, since its emergence in 2016, the ISWAP BH faction has launched more attacks and caused more security force fatalities than the JAS BH faction, both of which are allied to the armed group Islamic State (ISIS), ICG noted in October.[46] In this sense, and as the think-tank highlighted on the basis of interviews with BH defectors, the relationship with ISIS has been beneficial for both parties, since on the one hand it has helped to keep the armed group's brand alive, despite losses in Syria and Iraq, while on the other the BH factions have received ideological, technological, military and logistical training and resources that have served to strengthen the group's discipline and effectiveness. In addition, ISIS is attempting to exert greater control over ISWAP, which has led to internal tensions and even to the purge and execution of some ISWAP figures, such as Mamman Nur in 2018, and Idris al-Barnawi (Ba Idrissa, who had replaced Abu Musab al-Barnawi in March 2019) and two of his commanders –Abu Maryam and Abu Zainab– in February 2020, which has allegedly led to ISIS exerting authority more directly over the group. According to local sources, these latest executions were also the result of their fighters allegedly questioning their leaders over decisions not to execute retreating or captured soldiers.[47] In parallel, notable was the killing by the MNJTF of the leader of the Bakura faction of BH, Malam Bakura, a faction that broke away from ISWAP in 2018, whose group was active in southern Niger and on certain Lake Chad islands. The emergency situation caused by the conflict is affecting 17 million people in the four countries, and has led to the forced displacement of 2.87 million people, according to OCHA. In the Lake Chad region, one in three families is food insecure and one in two people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

In December, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Fatou Bensouda, submitted his conclusions ten years after the opening of the preliminary investigation of the human rights violations in Nigeria and possible crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the Niger Delta, in the states of the Middle Belt and in the context of the conflict between BH and the Nigerian security forces. The conclusions state that there are reasonable grounds to believe that members of the BH insurgency and its splinter groups, as well as members of the security forces committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. While the prosecution argued that the vast majority of the crimes are attributable to non-state actors, the addition of ICC investigations into the actions of the security forces is a positive step forward in the quest for justice and an end to impunity. The prosecution will investigate both parties for crimes including murder, rape, torture and cruel treatment; attacks against personal dignity; intentional attacks against the civilian population and against individual civilians not directly involved in the hostilities; unlawful imprisonment; conscripting and enlisting children under the age of fifteen into the Armed Forces and using them for active participation in hostilities; political and gender-based persecution; and other inhumane acts. In addition, in the case of the insurgents it also adds: sexual slavery, including forced pregnancy and forced marriage; slavery; hostage-taking; intentional attacks against personnel, facilities, material, units or vehicles involved in humanitarian assistance; intentional attacks against buildings dedicated to education and places of worship and similar institutions. And in the case of investigations against the security forces, accusations of forced disappearances and forced population displacement are also included.

Mali	
Start:	2012
Type:	System, Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, CMA (MNLA, MAA faction, CPA, HCUA), Platform (GATIA, CMPFPR, MAA faction), MSA, Ansar Dine, MUJAO, AQIM, MRRA, al-Mourabitoun, JNIM/GSIM, Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP) –also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)–, Katiba Macina, MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane), G5-Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), USA, Takouba Task Force (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Holland, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom)
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

46. Vicent Foucher, *The Islamic State Franchises in Africa: Lessons from Lake Chad,* International Crisis Group, Commentary / Africa, 29 October 2020.
47. Timileyin Omilana, "ISWAP kill own leaders as Borno fasts, prays", *Guardian (Nigeria)*, 24 February 2020.

Summary:
The Tuareg community that inhabits northern Mali has lived in a situation of marginalisation and underdevelopment since colonial times which has fuelled revolts and led to the establishment of armed fronts against the central government. In the nineties, after a brief armed conflict, a peace agreement was reached that promised investment and development for the north. The failure to implement the agreement made it impossible to halt the creation of new armed groups demanding greater autonomy for the area. The fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, which for a number of years had been sheltering the Malian Tuareg insurgency and had absorbed a number of its members into its security forces, created conditions that favoured the resurgence of Tuareg rebels in the north of the country, who demand the independence of Azawad (the name which the Tuareg give to the northern region of Mali). After making progress in gaining control of the area by taking advantage of the political instability in Mali in early 2012, the Tuareg armed group, National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), was increasingly displaced by radical Islamist groups operating in the region which had made gains in the north of Mali. The internationalisation of the conflict intensified in 2013, following the military intervention of France and the deployment of a peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) in the country. Although a peace agreement was signed in 2015 in the north of the country between the Arab-Tuareg groups (CMA and Platform), the exclusion of groups with jihadist agendas from the peace negotiations has kept the war going and extended the dynamics of the war to the central region of the country (Mopti).

For yet another year, there was an increase in violence in much of Malian territory, due to armed actions by jihadist groups in the north and centre of the country, clashes between militias of the Fulani, Dogon and Bambara communities in the central region of Mopti and parts of the southern region of the country, armed clashes between the two coalitions of jihadist groups in the region, as well as the responses of the security forces. According to data from the ACLED research centre, 2020 was the year with the most deaths recorded in the country since the last wave of violence broke out, with around a thousand violent events concentrated in the northern, central and southern regions, which have left a toll of at least 2,731 deaths. This is a significant increase from the 1,702 deaths recorded in 2019. The reason for this is the increase in violence in the central region of the country, as well as the struggle for expansion by jihadist coalitions linked to al-Qaeda –Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), otherwise known as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)– and to Islamic State –Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) or Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP). Similarly, with regard to forced displacement, according to UNHCR data, at the end of the year 138,659 persons were refugees in neighbouring countries, while another 201,429 had been internally displaced.

The outbreak of open warfare between the armed jihadist coalitions that make up JNIM and ISWAP has led to an increase in violence in Mali

In the centre of the country, the main focus of the violence, multiple clashes and attacks between community militias made up of members of the Fulani, Dogon (Dozos) and Bambara communities were reported throughout the year in the Mopti region. Violence also escalated due to the new offensive strategy adopted by the Malian Government to expand military operations against jihadist organisations in Mopti. This strategy was also accompanied by an increase in counter-insurgency actions by the French operation Barkhane, which expanded its military presence in Sahelian territory and increased the number of troops deployed from 4,500 to 5,100. While protests against the French military presence in the country were registered in Bamako earlier this year, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, at a meeting in France between the heads of state that make up the G5 Sahel counter-terrorism operation and French President Emmanuel Macron, agreed to intensify military cooperation with France to counter the jihadist threat in the Sahel. On 29 January, Mali's Prime Minister Boubou Cissé pledged to increase the size of the country's armed forces by 50% by 2020.[48] The increased militarisation and counter-terrorism strategy in the area also produced a number of allegations of human rights violations directed against the security forces. In one of them, on 30 April, the UN mission in the country (MINUSMA) released a report claiming that Malian and Niger security forces carried out 135 extrajudicial executions between 1 January and 31 March in Mopti. MINUSMA maintained that the data are documented and that the Malian authorities have opened an investigation. **Between January and June, according to UN figures, the intensification of violence resulted in the killing of around 600 civilians**. In June, the UN Security Council extended MINUSMA's mandate for another 12 months, maintaining the number of troops deployed at 13,289 soldiers and 1,920 police officers.

At the same time, at the beginning of the year the Malian government announced its intention to open channels for dialogue with the jihadist leaders Amadou Kouffa (Macina Liberation Front) and Iyad ag Ghaly (JNIM). Iyad ag Ghaly announced that he was open to exploring negotiations provided that the French forces from Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA withdrew from the country. JNIM's stance led to internal divisions in the organisation and defections of some members who joined the ranks of ISWAP. This scenario also gave way to an **open war between the armed coalitions comprising JNIM and the ISWAP** that raged throughout the year in northern and central Mali, as well as in the border triangle formed by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. According to ACLED data, these clashes left an estimated 415 people dead during the year. In turn, the French forces of the Barkhane operation announced multiple counter-terrorism actions against

48. See the summary on the Western Sahel Region in this chapter.

jihadist organisations throughout the year, which, among other results, cost the life of the veteran AQIM leader,Abdelmalek Droukdel, in an operation carried out on 3 June in Talhandak, Kidal;[49] as well as the senior JNIM commander, Bah ag Moussa, in another operation carried out on 13 November in Ménaka.

Finally, the deterioration of the security situation in the country was exacerbated by the **political crisis in which the country was immersed throughout 2020**. After months of demonstrations and protests, a coup d'état took place in August that led to the fall of the government, ushering in a new executive led by the military junta known as the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP). From the outset, the CNSP stated that all past security arrangements, which included support for MINUSMA, Operation Barkhane, the G5 Sahel force, as well as the European special forces of the Takuba initiative, would be respected.[50] Although the military coup caused many states involved in military actions in the country to freeze their support until constitutional order was restored, in October, following the formation of the transitional government with civilian participation, the EU announced the resumption of its military training and capacity building activities in Mali through EUTUM. The new interim Government announced on 8 October the release of 200 prisoners, including leading JNIM figures, in exchange for the release by JNIM of four hostages, including opposition leader Soumaïla Cissé.

Western Sahel Region	
Start:	2018
Type:	System, Resources, Identity Internacional
Main parties:	Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Ivory Coast, G5-Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), Joint Task Force for the Liptako-Gourma Region (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane), USA, Takouba Task Force (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and United Kingdom), Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the Province of West Africa (ISWAP) - also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)-, Macina Liberation Front (FML), Ansaroul Islam, other jihadist groups and community militias
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
La región occidental del Sahel (norte de Malí, norte de Burkina Faso y noroeste de Níger) se ve afectada por una situación de inestabilidad creciente que tiene un origen multicausal. Se combina la existencia de redes de criminalidad transfronteriza en el Sahel y la marginación y subdesarrollo de las comunidades nómadas tuareg en la región, entre otros factores. Esta marginación se manifestó en las rebeliones tuareg que tuvieron lugar en los años sesenta, en los años noventa y, más recientemente, entre 2007 y 2009, cuando se configuraron sendas rebeliones contra los respectivos Gobiernos de Níger y Malí que pretendían alcanzar un mayor grado de autonomía en ambos países y revertir la pobreza y el subdesarrollo de la región. En el caso de Malí se produjo un resurgimiento de estas demandas en 2012, espoleadas por la caída del régimen de Gaddafi en Libia en 2011[51]. A todo esto se une la expansión de las actividades de los grupos armados de Malí a la región fronteriza con Níger y Burkina faso conocida como Liptako-Gourma, relacionada con la situación de inestabilidad derivada de la presencia y expansión de la insurgencia yihadista de origen argelino AQMI, su fragmentación y configuración en otros grupos armados de corte similar, algunos alineados a al-Qaeda y otros a ISIS, que en la actualidad operan y se han expandido por la región. Esta expansión ha contribuido a una mayor desestabilización de la zona y a la configuración de diferentes iniciativas militares transfronterizas regionales e internacionales para intentar controlar esta situación, que también han contribuido a internacionalizarla. A todo este panorama se suman las vinculaciones del conflicto que afecta a la región del Lago Chad como consecuencia de la expansión de las actividades del grupo Boko Haram a raíz de la intervención militar transfronteriza.

The security situation in the Western Sahel deteriorated further due to increased armed actions by different groups with jihadist agendas, community militias and military responses by the security forces of countries in the region and external allies. According to the African Centre for Strategic Studies (ACSS), 2020 was the deadliest year for jihadist groups in the Sahel, which reportedly caused some 4,250 deaths, an increase of 60% compared to 2019. This increase is mainly the result of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) –also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)– and, to a lesser extent, the coalition of the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims – Jama'at Nusrat al Islam walMuslimin (JNIM or GSIM).[52] **While violence continued to affect all border areas of the Liptako-Gourma region –eastern Mali, northern Burkina Faso and southwestern Niger– its impacts were different in each country.** According to data provided by ACLED, between January and mid-December, in Burkina Faso 620 episodes of violence were recorded, leaving a total of 2,263 fatalities; in Mali there were about 900 violent events concentrated in the region of action of jihadist groups (Gao, Mopti, Segou, Sakasoo and southeast of Timbuktu) that have cost the lives of 2,669 people; while in Niger, in the southwest of the country, in the regions of Tillaberi –the main area affected by violence–

49. See the summary on Algeria in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
50. See the summary on Mali in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises)..
51. See the summary on Mali in this chapter.
52. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Islamic State in the Greater Sahara Expanding Its Threat and Reach in the Sahel*, 18 December 2020.

Dosso and Tahoua, 176 violent events were reported, causing at least 685 deaths.

In turn, the violence continued to worsen the humanitarian crisis and **forced population displacement** UNHCR, in its report on forced displacement that collects data up to mid-year, highlighted the Western Sahel region as the most affected area globally.[53] By mid-2020, around two million people were forcibly displaced across the region, an increase of 43% since the end of 2019. Of these, 574,600 were internally displaced persons in the first half of the year alone. Nearly two-thirds of the new internally-displaced persons were registered in **Burkina Faso** (361,400), making the country the **fastest growing population displacement crisis in the world, with more than one million people displaced within the country**. According to the UN agency, the number of people facing acute levels of hunger in Burkina Faso alone has tripled in the last year to 7.4 million. The scale of the crisis during the year prompted affected countries to seek ways to strengthen regional response capacities. Among them, the Governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in October 2020 launched the so-called Bamako Process, an intergovernmental platform to promote rapid action, strengthen coordination among humanitarian and security actors and ensure humanitarian access, protection and assistance to affected populations. In turn, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, called on the international community to take urgent and sustained action to meet the growing humanitarian needs in the region, pointing to the need for more funding and international cooperation, and calling for a more strategic approach and the need for a "Marshall Plan", urging the EU to take the lead.

Burkina Faso became the fastest growing forced displacement crisis in the world during 2020, due to the impact of continued violence in the Liptako-Gourma region

As for the most significant episodes of violence recorded during the year, the start of armed clashes in the Sahel region between the jihadist coalitions represented by the JNIM and the ISGS should be highlighted. These clashes are reported to have occurred mainly in Mali and Burkina Faso. In **Niger,** in early January, suspected ISGS militants attacked a military base in Chinégodar, Tillabéri region, killing at least 89 soldiers, the deadliest attack on security forces in the country's history, and coming just four weeks after an attack that killed 71 other Nigerien soldiers in the same region. On the other hand, the year also saw the first jihadist attack on **Ivorian** soil since March 2016. The attack, attributed to JNIM, occurred on 10 June against a border post in Kafolo, Côte d'Ivoire, on the border with Burkina Faso, killing 14 people. In response, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire announced on 13 July the creation of a special military zone in the north of the country.

On the other hand, regarding the **security measures** implemented in the region, the year began with the meeting on January 13 between the governments of the G5 Sahel Joint Force (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) and the French President, Emmanuel Macron, in France. It was decided to concentrate all the forces in the region of the three borders under a single command structure for the regional and French troops, prioritising the fight against the ISGS. The French Government pledged to increase its military presence in the Sahel from 4,500 troops to 5,100 under Operation Barkhane. In February, the African Union (AU) announced the temporary deployment of 3,000 additional troops to improve security in the Sahel, while in June the UN Security Council extended MINUSMA's mandate for another 12 months, maintaining the number of troops deployed at 13,289 soldiers and 1.920 police officers. The EU also extended its role in the area and a new military mission called Takouba Task Force –"blade" in the Tuareg language– comprised of special forces from Mali and Niger and 11 European countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Holland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom) joined the counter-terrorism actions in the Liptako-Gourma region. On the other hand, the EU Military Training and Assistance Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) reported that it will extend its work to neighbouring countries, while the so-called Alliance for the Sahel, led by Spain, will continue to work on improving social and economic aspects in the area.

At the same time, **several reports were published accusing the security forces of the three countries of committing human rights violations in the context of the war on terror**. In January, Burkina Faso's Parliament passed controversial legislation, the "Law on Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland", which allows the army to use civilian volunteers in the fight against armed groups. The measure was questioned by a large number of Burkinabé civil society organisations, as well as by international organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), due to the various allegations against the Burkinabé army in terms of abuses and human rights violations in the context of the war against jihadist groups. After the approval of the law, there were different episodes of violence perpetrated by "vigilantes" –known locally as "koglweogos" ("guardians of the jungle" in the Moore language)– who were denounced by human rights organisations for alleged killings and executions. Burkinabé security forces were also denounced by HRW for an alleged execution of 31 detainees in the northern town of Djibo on 20 April. They were also accused in June of the extrajudicial execution of 180 people found in a mass grave in northern Burkina Faso.[54] **The Observatory**

53. UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trend, 2020*, November 2020.
54. Human Rights Watch, "Burkina Faso: Security Forces Allegedly Execute 31 Detainees", 20 April 2020; Human Rights Watch, "Burkina Faso: Residents' Accounts Point to Mass Executions", 8 June 2020.

for Democracy and Human Rights (ODDH) in Burkina Faso said in June that the armed forces had been responsible for the deaths of 588 civilians. Separately, MINUSMA said it had evidence that Malian and Nigerian security forces allegedly carried out 135 extrajudicial executions in Mopti, central Mali, between 1 January and 31 March. On 4 September, Niger's independent National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) accused "uncontrolled" elements of the Niger Army of the forced disappearance of more than 100 people in the Inates and Ayorou areas of the Tillabéri region between March and April. In June, Amnesty International published a report accusing the armies of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso of committing war crimes during their operations, particularly against civilians. The report states that the violations included at least 57 cases of extrajudicial executions and 142 cases of forced disappearances.[55]

1.3.2. America

Colombia	
Start:	1964
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	ELN, FARC (dissidents), paramilitary groups
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑

Summary:
In 1964, in the context of an agreement for the alternation of power between the Liberal party and the Conservative party (National Front), which excluded other political options, two armed opposition movements emerged with the goal of taking power: the ELN (made up of university students and workers, inspired by Guevara) and the FARC (a communist-oriented organisation that advocates agrarian reform). In the 1970s, various groups were created, such as the M-19 and the EPL, which ended up negotiating with the government and pushing through a new Constitution (1991) that established the foundations of a welfare state. At the end of the 1980s, several paramilitary groups emerged, instigated by sectors of the armed forces, landowners, drug traffickers and traditional politicians, aimed at defending the status quo through a strategy of terror. Drug trafficking activity influenced the economic, political and social spheres and contributed to the increase in violence. In 2016, the signing of a peace agreement with the FARC led to its demobilisation and transformation into a political party.

The conflict in Colombia remained active during the year, with armed clashes between ELN guerrillas, state security forces and various paramilitary groups, as well as dissident groups of the demobilised FARC guerrillas. The pandemic led the ELN to declare a one-month ceasefire in April, which was not extended in the face of the Government's refusal to respond positively.[56] Numerous voices expressed concern over the escalation of violence in the country. An analysis by Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) noted that this escalation of violence had certain characteristics such as the decentralisation and fragmentation of armed groups, the multiplication of conflicts at the local level while at the same time communities' capacity to de-escalate the violence had been reduced.[57] The FIP noted that in the fourth year after the signing of the peace agreement with the FARC, clashes between the security forces and armed groups tripled, while those between the armed groups themselves increased sixfold. Most of these clashes took place between the ELN and the Clan del Golfo. According to figures compiled by the CERAC research centre, 46 people were killed in the country as a result of armed clashes involving the ELN, the security forces or other armed groups.[58] In addition, 173 people were killed in the country as a result of political violence, especially against social leaders and human rights defenders.[59] The Indepaz research centre, in its report, stated that 340 people were killed in 79 massacres during 2020.[60] The United Nations also echoed the violence in the country and in December the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that 255 people had been documented to have been killed in the country in 66 massacres, highlighting the seriousness of the situation of the Nasa indigenous people, with 66 people being killed during 2020. In addition, the UN verification mission in the country noted that since the signing of the peace agreement, 244 former FARC fighters have been killed. This prompted protests in November in Bogotá by former combatants.

Armed clashes between the different armed groups and with the security forces led to the forced displacement of thousands of people. According to a report submitted by members of Congress from the Alianza Verde, Polo Democrático, Cambio Radical, Liberal, Colombia Humana and 'la U' parties, during the first six months of 2020 more than 16,000 people were displaced as a result of the violence, an increase of nearly 97%, despite the restrictions on mobility imposed by the pandemic. In the department of Cauca, disputes over control of territory between the ELN and FARC dissidents such as the Carlos Patiño or "Segunda Marquetalia" Front, caused numerous deaths and forced the displacement of thousands of people. With regard to the gender impacts of the conflict, the organisation Sisma Mujer highlighted that the pandemic worsened the situation for women human rights defenders, with violence increasing against them through attacks and murders.[61]

55. Amnesty International, *They Executed Some and Brought the Rest with Them: Civilian Lives at risk in the Sahel*, 10 June 2020.
56. For further information please see the summary on the peace process with the ELN in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2021. Report on Trends and Scenarios,* Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.
57. Fundación Ideas para la Paz, Un nuevo ciclo de violencia organizada a cuatro años de la firma del Acuerdo de Paz, 24 November 2020.
58. CERAC, *Reporte del conflicto con el ELN,* Monthly report number 8, 29 January 2021.
59. CERAC, *Monitor de Violencia Política en Colombia,* Monthly Report number 18, 11 December 2020.
60. Indepaz, *Informe de Masacres en Colombia durante el 2020,* 06 de diciembre de 2020.
61. Sisma Mujer, Lideresas y defensoras durante la pandemia: entre la violencia sociopolítica de género y el COVID-19 (*Sisma Mujer, female leaders and defenders during the pandemic: between socio-political gender violence and COVID-19*) Bulletin No. 24, 29 November 2020.

1.3.3. Asia and the Pacific

South Asia

Afghanistan	
Start:	2001
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, international coalition (led by USA), NATO, Taliban militias, warlords, ISIS (ISIS-KP)
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The country has lived with almost uninterrupted armed conflict since the invasion by Soviet troops in 1979, beginning a civil war between the armed forces (with Soviet support) and anti-Communist, Islamist guerrillas (Mujahideen). The withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 and the rise of the Mujahideen to power in 1992 in a context of chaos and internal confrontations between the different anti-Communist factions led to the emergence of the Taliban movement, which, at the end of the nineties, controlled almost all Afghan territory. In November 2001, after the Al-Qaeda attacks of 11 September, and the refusal of the Taliban government to hand over Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders (on Afghan territory) the US attacked the country aided by a contingent of British forces. After the signing of the Bonn agreements, an interim government was established, led by Hamid Karzai and subsequently ratified at the polls. Since 2006 there has been an escalation of violence, motivated by the rebuilding of the Taliban militias. Following the 2014 presidential and provincial elections, the country was plunged into a crisis sparked by allegations of electoral fraud after the second round in which the two most voted leaders, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, kept the results in the air for months. In September, an agreement was reached to create a two-headed government with Ghani as president and Abdullah as chief executive. In 2011, the international troops began their withdrawal, which was completed at the end of 2014, although the mission "Resolute Support" was deployed on the ground, with a NATO mandate to train Afghan forces and another force to carry out training and counterterrorism operations, made up of US soldiers, "Freedom Sentinel" mission.

The armed conflict in Afghanistan saw a decline in levels of violence as a result of progress in the country's peace process, although violence remained high throughout the year. Regarding the impact on civilians, the records of the UNAMA show that during 2020, a number of 3,035 civilian victims was registered, the lowest figure since 2013 and a reduction of 15% compared to 2019. The ACLED research centre's database reported 21,067 deaths as a result of violence, half the number of the previous year. Despite the peace agreement between the US government and the Taliban insurgency and the start of the intra-Afghan talks process between the US government and the Taliban insurgency, armed clashes and serious attacks took place throughout the year, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries. These skirmishes and attacks were used as a form of pressure to condition the various talks processes and to define positions at the negotiating table. In parallel, important turning points in the peace process were also accompanied by significant reductions in violence, in some cases as a consequence of the agreement and in others as a sign of political will and trust-building measures. This was the case during the week prior to the signing of the agreement between the Taliban and the US on 29 February in Doha. A seven-day de-escalation period began on 22 February, a prerequisite for signing the agreement. In May, during the Eid al-Fitr holiday, a brief three-day ceasefire was announced by the Taliban and followed by the government. In August, coinciding with the Eid al-Adha holiday, there was a further announcement of a three-day ceasefire, which also received a positive government response. In addition, there was a more significant reduction in violence in cities during the year, while rural areas were the scene of more constant armed clashes. Prior to the signing of the peace agreement between the US and the Taliban, there were several US airstrikes that caused fatalities, some of them civilians. According to the Afghanistan Analysts Network, the main cause of the reduction in civilian deaths was less involvement in the conflict by ISIS, as well as the beginning of the withdrawal of US forces and fewer offensives by Afghan security forces, rather than a reduction in armed actions by the Taliban.[62]

The reduction of violence in the country was due, according to Afghanistan Analysts Network, to a lower involvement by ISIS, the beginning of the US withdrawal and fewer offensives by Afghan forces, rather than to a reduction in armed actions by the Taliban

May saw one of the most serious attacks of the year, with the raid on a maternity hospital run by the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières, in which 24 people died, including several mothers, some of whom were about to give birth. In November there was another serious attack at Kabul University claimed by ISIS, in which 22 people were killed, most of them students. The attack coincided with a visit to the university by Iran's ambassador to the country and took place a day before the US presidential election. Days later, at least 30 members of the security forces were killed in a car bomb explosion in Ghazni province. Shortly afterwards, security forces announced that they had carried out an air operation against those responsible for the attack in which seven people were killed, including the Taliban leader and alleged mastermind, Hamza Waziristani. On 22 December, an attack in Kabul killed five people, four of whom were doctors.

Deborah Lyons, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, noted in December that despite significant progress in the peace process, the months of October and November had seen a significant increase in violence, with 60% more civilian casualties

62. Kate Clark, "Behind the Statistics: Drop in civilian casualties masks increased Taleban violence", *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 27 October 2020.

as a result of improvised explosive devices, as well as a 25% increase in child casualties during the third quarter of 2020, with a severe increase in attacks on schools.

In parallel with the armed conflict, there were months of political crisis following the presidential elections held in September 2019. In February the Independent Electoral Commission proclaimed President Ashraf Ghani the winner with 50.64% of the vote, with Abdullah Abdullah, his main rival, obtaining 39.52%. The result was rejected by Abdullah and two parallel inauguration ceremonies took place in March, although Ghani received majority international backing. The crisis was finally resolved in May, when Abdullah agreed to lead the peace negotiations with the Taliban and appoint half of the ministers, with Ghani assuming the presidency.

India (Jammu and Kashmir)	
Start:	1989
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Governments, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad, United Jihad Council, JKLF
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=

Summary:
The armed conflict in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has its origin in the dispute over the region of Kashmir which, since the independence and division of India and Pakistan, has confronted both states. On three occasions (1947 to 1948; 1965 and 1971) these countries had suffered from armed conflicts, with both of them claiming sovereignty over the region, divided between India, Pakistan and China. The armed conflict between India and Pakistan in 1947 gave rise to the current division and creation of a de facto border between both countries. Since 1989, the armed conflict has been moved to the interior of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where a whole host of rebel groups, in favour of the complete independence of the state or unconditional adhesion to Pakistan, confront the Indian security forces. Since the beginning of the peace process between India and Pakistan in 2004, there has been a considerable reduction in the violence, although the armed groups remain active.

Armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir remained active throughout the year. According to figures on deaths linked to armed violence compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, 320 people were killed during 2020, which was a slight increase from 2019, but the death tolls of previous years were not revisited. On the other hand, the ACLED research centre pointed to a higher number of fatalities, with 455 deaths during 2020. For its part, the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society stated that during the first six months of 2020, 229 people died as a result of the conflict, and they denounced the extrajudicial execution of 32 civilians. Throughout the year there were armed clashes between Indian security forces and armed insurgent groups, in parallel with the impact of the tensions with Pakistan in the border area between the two countries. In addition, civil society human rights organisations denounced serious human rights violations –such as extrajudicial executions and the simulation of armed confrontations with alleged insurgents who were in fact civilians–, arbitrary detentions of social and political activists, and significant restrictions on the use of the internet in the state. With the closure of schools due to the coronavirus pandemic, restrictions on internet access had a serious impact, impeding children's right to education. Prior to the pandemic, schools had been closed for seven months after the withdrawal of autonomy. Among the reported arrests were those of former state chief ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti under the Public Security Act, which allows for detention for two years without charge or trial.

On the other hand, during the year there were several episodes related to the climate of violence in the area. In February, the armed opposition group JKLF called for a strike, which led to a total shutdown of the Kashmir Valley and parts of Jammu. **In April, legislation was passed easing the requirements for the establishment of permanent residency in Jammu and Kashmir, which was described by Kashmiri sectors and the Government of Pakistan as an attempt to alter the demographic composition of the state.** In June, Indian security forces escalated military operations against the insurgency. Eight members of the armed groups were killed in separate gun battles during joint operations by the police and the Armed Forces on the same day in the Shopian and Pampore areas. As violence in the state and armed clashes intensified, security forces were reported to be using civilians as human shields during counter-insurgency operations and clashes with armed groups. Several members of the ruling BJP were shot dead in attacks by Kashmiri armed groups. In August, coinciding with the anniversary of the withdrawal of autonomy and statehood from Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian government imposed a curfew and appointed BJP leader Manoj Sinha as commanding governor. In addition, he ordered the withdrawal of 10,000 members of the security forces because of the improved security situation in the territory. The major Kashmiri parties issued a joint statement calling for the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's constitutionally guaranteed status. December saw the holding of the first elections since the end of autonomy in 2019 and its loss of status as a state, instead becoming a Union Territory. The local polls were held amid allegations of a lack of democracy and were reportedly won by the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration coalition, which brought together several Kashmiri parties under a joint demand for the restoration of autonomy and statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

India (CPI-M)	
Start:	1967
Type:	System Interno
Main parties:	Government, CPI-M (naxalites)
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The armed conflict in which the Indian government confronts the armed Maoist group the CPI-M (known as the Naxalites, in honour of the town where the movement was created) affects many states in India. The CPI-M emerged in West Bengal at the end of the sixties with demands relating to the eradication of the land ownership system, as well as strong criticism of the system of parliamentary democracy, which is considered as a colonial legacy. Since then, armed activity has been constant and it has been accompanied by the establishment of parallel systems of government in the areas under its control, which are basically rural ones. Military operations against this group, considered by the Indian government as terrorists, have been constant. In 2004, a negotiation process began which ended in failure. In the following years there was an escalation of violence that led the government to label the conflict as the main threat to national security. Since 2011 there has been a significant reduction in hostilities.

Armed conflict with the Naxalite insurgency remained active throughout the year, although the number of people killed as a result of armed violence and clashes between security forces and the insurgency declined slightly. According to figures compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal a total of 239 people were killed in the conflict, including 61 civilians, 44 members of the security forces and 134 members of the armed opposition group CPI-M, the lowest death toll in the conflict since 2015. According to information released by the Ministry of the Interior, the Government considers 90 districts in 11 states to be affected by the presence of the Naxalite insurgency, although violence was reported in only 46 of these districts during the first half of 2020, down from 61 in 2019. The interior minister noted that between 2015 and August 2020, 350 members of the security forces, 963 civilians and 871 insurgents had died as a result of the armed conflict. The Ministry also highlighted the joint operations that had been carried out in the border area between the states of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha by the security forces of the two states in a coordinated manner, which had resulted in numerous arrests of insurgents. **The most serious clash of the year took place in March, when at least 17 security forces personnel were initially reported killed in clashes with the Naxalite insurgency in Chhattisgarh and 14 others were injured during an operation involving 600 police personnel, who were attacked by some 200 insurgents. However, in September, the police updated the casualty figures, stating that 23 insurgents and 17 members of the security forces had been killed.** In August, four CPI-M members were killed in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh state, in clashes with police during an operation by Indian security forces. Furthermore, CPI-M denounced that the security forces continued to carry out extrajudicial executions, noting that the deaths of several insurgents were not the result of armed clashes, but rather that they had been executed. According to the armed group, two of its members were killed in this way in December in Odisha. CPI-M also complained that security forces are setting up camps in tribal areas, with very negative consequences for the Adivasi population. In terms of the gender impact of the armed conflict, notable was the arrest of activist VS Krishna, active in seeking justice for 11 Adivasi women who were victims of sexual violence by the police in Andhra Pradesh in 2007 and who was due to participate in the trial against these acts. The activist was accused of forcing the survivors to give false testimony against the police and her arrest was allegedly to prevent her participation in the trial.

Pakistan	
Start:	2001
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Pakistani Armed Forces, intelligence services, Taliban militias, foreign insurgents, USA
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The armed conflict affecting the country is a result of the intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Initially, the conflict played out in the area including the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province (formerly called the North-West Frontier Province). After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, members of its Government and militias, as well as several insurgent groups of different nationalities, including Al-Qaeda, found refuge in Pakistan, mainly in several tribal agencies, although the leadership was spread out over several towns (Quetta, Lahore or Karachi). While Pakistan initially collaborated with the US in the search for foreign insurgents (Chechens, Uzbeks) and members of al-Qaeda, it did not offer the same cooperation when it came to the Taliban leadership. The dissatisfaction of various groups of Pakistani origin who were part of the Taliban insurgency led to the creation in December 2007 of the Pakistani Taliban movement (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, TTP), which began to commit attacks in the rest of Pakistan against both state institutions and civilians. With violence rising to previously unknown levels, and after a series of attacks that specifically targeted the Shiite, Ahmadiyya and Christian minorities, and to a lesser extent Sufis and Barelvis, public opinion turned in favour of eliminating the terrorist sanctuaries. In June 2014 the Army launched operation Zarb-e Azb to eradicate insurgents from the agencies of North and South Waziristan.

The armed conflict in Pakistan remained active throughout the year, but the declining trend in the violence stabilised and the intensity was once again at lower levels than in the previous year. According to violence-related mortality figures compiled by the Centre for Research and Security Studies in Pakistan, there were 600 deaths in the country as a whole during the year. However, according to figures

recorded by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, there was a slight increase from the figures compiled by the same centre the previous year, with 506 fatalities. **Khyber Pakhtunkwa province was the most affected by violence as a result of security operations against the Pakistani Taliban insurgency, as well as armed clashes and attacks that resulted in multiple fatalities.**

There were also attacks on healthcare workers administering the polio vaccine, which the Taliban oppose. Several operations by security forces in January and February against the Taliban insurgency in Dera Ismail Khan and Bajaur districts and near Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkwa resulted in the deaths of several Taliban fighters. In March, seven insurgents and four soldiers were killed in gun battles in North Waziristan district, according to official sources. Another similar episode occurred in late April, when nine insurgents and two soldiers were killed in gun battles in the same district, the district most severely affected by violence in the province. In July, a bomb attack in a commercial area in Parachinar in Kurram district left 20 people injured, including a minor. Another extremely serious attack took place in October in the city of Peshawar in which an explosion at a religious seminary killed at least eight people and injured 136 others. Many of those gathered were students from Khyber Pakhtunkwa and Balochistan who were attending a lecture by Afghan cleric Rahimullah Haqqani, the alleged target of the attack. A few days earlier, six members of the Armed Forces had been killed in the North Waziristan district as a result of an explosion in the military convoy in which they were travelling. In November and December, several attacks were carried out against elderly tribal leaders in Bajaur and North Waziristan districts, killing at least five. These types of attacks are repeated as a consequence of the different agreements reached with the Pakistani authorities to prevent Taliban action. In terms of the gendered impacts of the conflict, the TransAction Alliance Khyber Pakhtunkhwa denounced the shooting death of trans activist Gul Panra in Peshawar, noting that in the last five years 1,500 trans people have been victims of sexual violence and 68 have been killed. Human Rights Watch reported that there were 479 attacks against trans women in 2018. In addition, threats against women and girls by the Taliban insurgency for accessing formal education continued.

Pakistan (Balochistan)	
Start:	2005
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Pakistani Armed Forces, intelligence services, BLA, BRP, BRA, BLF and BLT, civil society, LeJ, TTP, Afghan Taliban (Quetta Shura), ISIS
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
Since the creation of the state of Pakistan in 1947, Balochistan, the richest province in terms of natural resources, but with some of the highest levels of poverty in the country, has suffered from four periods of armed violence (1948, 1958, 1963-69 and 1973-77) in which the rebel forces stated their objective of obtaining greater autonomy and even independence. In 2005, the armed rebel forces reappeared on the scene, basically attacking infrastructures linked to the extraction of gas. The opposition armed group, BLA, became the main opposing force to the presence of the central government, which it accused of making the most of the wealth of the province without giving any of it back to the local population. As a result of the resurgence of the armed opposition, a military operation was started in 2005 in the province, causing displacement of the civilian population and armed confrontation. In parallel, a movement of the civilian population calls clarifying the disappearance of hundreds, if not thousands, of Baluchi at the hands of the security forces of the State.

The armed conflict in Balochistan remained active throughout the year, but there was a marked decrease in armed violence and associated fatalities. According to figures compiled by the Centre for Research and Security Studies in Pakistan, 138 deaths were recorded in the province during the year and, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, the death toll was 215. **However, Baloch nationalist armed groups and other armed organisations such as the Taliban and ISIS continued to be active and carried out various violent actions and clashes with Pakistani security forces. There were also attacks on infrastructure.** In January a suicide bombing claimed by ISIS against a mosque in Quetta during Friday prayers killed at least 15 people and wounded 20 others. Security forces said the mosque was run by the Afghan Taliban. In the days prior to this attack, two people had been killed and four others injured in a market attack by a dissident TTP faction called Hizbul Ahrar. Another major attack occurred in February, when an explosion near the Quetta press club killed 10 people and injured 35 others. The attack targeted members of the outlawed anti-Shia Ahlesunnat Wal Jamat organisation and may have been carried out by ISIS. Days later, the Baloch armed group BLT claimed responsibility for an attack on security forces in Singsila, Dera Bugti district, in which 16 members of the Pakistani security forces were reportedly killed. In July, an attack by BRAS (an alliance of four Baloch armed groups, BLF, BLA, BRA and BRG) in Kech district killed five soldiers. A few days later, four more soldiers were killed in a BLF attack in Awaran district. The same group claimed to have killed 190 members of the Pakistani security forces in a series of bombings and armed attacks during the first nine months of the year, although the figures could not be independently corroborated. In September, prominent journalist and women's rights advocate Shaheena Shaheen Baloch was shot dead in Kech district. Although the armed group BLA was initially accused of being behind the murder, subsequent investigations pointed to gender-based violence, highlighting the significant impact on women

in this province of what are known as "honour killings". Another BRAS attack in October killed seven members of the security forces and seven private security guards in an attack on an Oil and Gas Development Company convoy in Gwadar district. On the other hand, human rights organisations continued to denounce the ongoing disappearances at the hands of Pakistani security forces, especially of young social activists and students.

South-east Asia and Oceania

Myanmar	
Start:	1948
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups (Ceasefire signatories: ABSDF, ALP, CNF, DKBA, KNU, KNU/KNLA-PC, PNLO, RCSS, NMSP, LDU; Non-signatories: KIA, NDAA, MNDAA, SSPP/SSA, TNLA, AA, UWSA, ARSA, KNPP)
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑

Summary:
Since 1948, dozens of armed insurgent groups of ethnic origin have confronted the government of Myanmar, demanding recognition of their particular ethnic and cultural features and calling for reforms in the territorial structure of the State or simply for independence. Since the start of the military dictatorship in 1962, the armed forces have been fighting armed groups in the ethnic states. These groups combined demands for self-determination for minorities with calls for democratisation shared with the political opposition. In 1988, the government began a process of ceasefire agreements with some of the insurgent groups, allowing them to pursue their economic activities (basically trafficking in drugs and precious stones). However, the military operations have been constant during these decades, particularly directed against the civil population in order to do away with the armed groups' bases, leading to the displacement of thousands of people. In 2011 the Government began to approach the insurgency and since then there has been a ceasefire agreements with almost all of the armed groups.

The armed conflict remained active throughout the year and, as was the case throughout 2019, the epicentre remained in Rakhine State, with constant clashes between government security forces and the armed opposition group Arakan Army (AA). According to figures compiled by ACLED, 646 people were killed during 2020 as a result of armed clashes between the security forces and the various armed opposition groups operating in the country. Most of the clashes and violence resulting in deaths took place in Rakhine State, which experienced the most intense violence. Violence also occurred in Chin, Shan and Kachin States. The Chinese government denied that it was providing weapons to armed groups operating in the border area between the two countries, in response to accusations that it was arming insurgent groups to increase their ability to exert pressure on the country. One of the most serious episodes took place in February, when an attack on a school in Rakhine State injured 21 students. In March, 21 people were killed and more than 20 injured as a result of airstrikes by the Armed Forces in Chin State, which were trying to prevent the seizure by the AA of a military base. Thousands of people were displaced as a result of the violence, which had a particularly severe impact on the civilian population. In addition, the Government declared the AA a terrorist organisation. In May the government decreed a unilateral ceasefire that was to be extended until August (in response to the UN secretary general's call for worldwide ceasefires during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic) but which excluded the areas that served as a base for terrorist organisations and therefore left out the areas affected by the armed conflict with the AA. In July, the United Nations, four diplomatic missions in the country and 21 international humanitarian organisations (including Oxfam, the Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children) called for a ceasefire in Rakhine State to end the escalating violence in the north of the state and protect civilians. Between August and October, more than 36,000 people were forcibly displaced, according to the Rakhine Ethnic Congress, and in October joint air, land and sea military operations by the Armed Forces against the AA took place. In addition to clashes with the armed group AA, there were also clashes with ARSA. In June, two members of the group were killed in clashes with security forces near the border with Bangladesh. In Shan State, there was renewed fighting between the Myanmar Army and the armed opposition group RCSS. In July, the civilian population reported that civilian deaths were occurring as a result of military operations against the RCSS, which had led to hundreds of people being forcibly displaced to flee the violence. There were also clashes between the Armed Forces and the SSA-N, forcing the displacement of more than 200 people.

In November, Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the NLD, won the country's general election and obtained a parliamentary majority sufficient to form a government. International observers such as the Carter Centre certified that the elections were generally free and transparent, although they were preceded by a climate of violence that led to their cancellation in much of Rakhine state, as well as in parts of Shan and Kachin states that had been the scene of violence in the previous weeks. In October, armed clashes between the AA and security forces had escalated, resulting in dozens of casualties, according to the International Crisis Group. Following the elections and the release of the results, although the AA was in favour of allowing elections to take place in Rakhine State during December and an informal ceasefire was announced to facilitate this, they did not take place.

In terms of the gendered impacts of the armed conflict, the complaint of a woman in Rakhine State against sexual violence by three soldiers brought the use of

sexual violence in the conflict back to the agenda, which has been noted and denounced by multiple human rights organisations. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that impunity for sexual and gender-based violence remained widespread.

Philippines (NPA)	
Start:	1969
Type:	System Internal
Main parties:	Government, NPA
Intensity:	1
Trend:	=

Summary:
The NPA, the armed branch of the Communist party of the Philippines, started the armed fight in 1969 which reached its zenith during the 1980s under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Although the internal purges, the democratisation of the country and the offers of amnesty weakened the support and the legitimacy of the NPA at the beginning of the 1990s, it is currently calculated that it is operational in most of the provinces in the country. After the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001, its inclusion in the list of terrorist organisations of the USA and the EU greatly eroded confidence between the parties and, to a good degree, caused the interruption of the peace conversations with Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's government. The NPA, whose main objective is to access power and the transformation of the political system and the socio-economic model, has as its political references the Communist Party of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front (NDF), which bring together various Communist organisations. The NDF has been holding peace talks with the government since the early 1990s.

Although the Armed Forces did not provide fatalities data associated with the armed conflict between the Government and the NPA, **the levels of violence were similar to those of the previous year**. However, the dynamics of the conflict ran alongside a clear deterioration of trust between the Duterte government and the NDF and the complete paralysis of the peace process, especially from May onwards. As it is, at the end of the year, Duterte himself said that under his term there would be no resumption of negotiations with the NDF and there would be no further ceasefire with the NPA, including the ceasefire traditionally declared by the two sides for the Christmas holidays. For its part, the NDF also closed any option of dialogue with the current government and stated its intention to engage in talks with the opposition to discuss the possible resumption of negotiations in a post-Duterte scenario. In these circumstances, both the Government and the Armed Forces declared that the State's counter-insurgency strategy involved an intensification of military operations against the NPA and an increase in so-called direct local peace negotiations with NPA combatants and violence-affected communities. Under Executive Order No. 70 and the implementation of the so-called Whole-of-Nation Approach, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (a body made up of several state agencies) has conducted hundreds of direct talks with NPA fighters in the provinces where the group operates (more than 30, according to the NPA itself). According to the government, such direct negotiations with the fighters are based on the idea that there is a growing disconnect between the NPA fighters and the leadership of the communist movement (mainly with the NDF negotiating panel, which has been resident in the Netherlands for decades). According to Duterte himself, these local talks, which also include local governments and address the demands of communities in conflict areas, are leading to a high number of combatants turning themselves in and deciding to enter a process of disarmament and reintegration into civil society. **The Armed Forces believe that at the current rate of NPA surrenders and defections, the NPA will become an irrelevant group in the near future**. For its part, the NDF criticised these direct negotiations at the local level as a counter-insurgency strategy that seeks more to demobilise the insurgency than to resolve the armed conflict and address its structural causes. According to the NDF, this strategy of offering housing and jobs to combatants has been practised since the time of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, without succeeding in dismantling or eroding the communist movement.

In terms of the dynamics of the armed conflict, it is worth noting that the unilateral truce that both the Government and the NPA had decreed at the end of 2019 on the occasion of the Christmas holidays, which ended on 7 January, opened the door to the resumption of peace negotiations at the end of that same month with the facilitation of the Norwegian government, but in the end no new round of negotiations took place. **Shortly after the spread of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 in March, both the government and the NDF unilaterally declared the suspension of offensives** (the government, between 19 March and 15 April, arguing the need to concentrate the efforts of state security forces on containing the coronavirus; and the NDF, between 26 March and 15 April, in response to the call for a global ceasefire by UN Secretary-General António Guterres). On 15 April, the NDF extended the ceasefire until 30 April, but the Government decided not to do so, citing numerous ceasefire violations by the NPA (according to Manila, 26 soldiers were killed between 15 March and 23 April in 36 NPA attacks in 23 provinces). Similarly, the Communist Party of the Philippines stated that 18 NPA combatants and 31 soldiers were killed in the 36 days of their ceasefire. Following the end of the cessation of hostilities, the Government announced its intention to increase its counter-insurgency operations against the NPA, threatening to impose martial law if the NPA continued to obstruct the delivery of emergency aid and its attacks on military personnel engaged in humanitarian tasks, and publicly stated that it would not meet with the NDF again. As a result of the intensified violence, in the first 10 days of May, 17 NPA combatants were killed in clashes with State security forces and agencies, while

at least 26 other combatants were killed between 13 and 19 May in clashes in the provinces of Agusan del Norte and Surigao del Sur. The levels of violence during the following months until the end of the year were relatively stable. It is worth noting that in October the PCF ordered the NPA to step up its attacks on Chinese companies involved in infrastructure projects, which it accuses of polluting the environment and damaging the ancestral territories of several national minorities in the country of militarising the regions in which they operate, including those historically inhabited by indigenous peoples (Lumad); or even of eroding the marine resources of the East Philippine (or South China) Sea, in violation of Philippine sovereignty. In December, after the Armed Forces advised Duterte not to call the traditional Christmas ceasefire, the President declared that there would be no more ceasefires under his rule.

While Duterte stated his intention to weaken the NPA by encouraging surrenders and defections, during the year he also acknowledged that terrorism remains the country's main threat, identifying the NPA as the actor with the greatest capacity to destabilise the country (ahead of the armed opposition group Abu Sayyaf). According to data made public by the Government in July, **the number of military personnel killed in clashes with (or attacks by) the NPA from 1975 to mid-2020 was more than 13,300, more than four times the number of military casualties inflicted by the MNLF and MILF.** Some media estimated the number of people who may have died in the armed conflict to be around 53,000.

Philippines (Mindanao)	
Start:	1991
Type:	Self-government, Identity, System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Abu Sayyaf, BIFF, Islamic State of Lanao/ Dawlah Islamiyah/ Maute Group, Ansarul Khilafah Mindanao, Toraife group, factions of MILF and MNLF
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The current situation of violence in Mindanao, where several armed groups are confronting the Government and, occasionally each other, is closely linked to the long-lasting armed conflict between Manila and the MNFL, and later the MILF, two organizations fighting for the self-determination of the Moro people. The failure to implement the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF meant that some factions of this group have not fully demobilized and sporadically take part in episodes of violence, while the difficulties that emerged during the negotiation process between the MILF and the Government encouraged the creation of the BIFF, a faction of the group that opposes this process and was created in 2010 by the former commander of the MILF, Ameril Umbra Kato. On another front, since the 90s, the group Abu Sayyaf has been fighting to create an independent Islamic state in the Sulu archipelago and the western regions of Mindanao (south). Initially this group recruited disaffected members of other armed groups like the MILF or the MNLF, but then moved away ideologically from both of these organizations and resorted more and more systematically to kidnappings, extortion and bomb attacks, which lead the group to be included on the USA and EU lists of terrorist organizations. Finally, it is important to note that the emergence of ISIS on the international scene lead to the emergence of many groups in Mindanao that swore allegiance and obedience to ISIS. In 2016, this group claimed authorship for the first large attack in Mindanao and announced its intentions to strengthen its structure and increase its attacks in the region.

of the peace agreement between the government and the MILF and the institutional deployment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the levels of violence in certain regions of Mindanao experienced a certain reduction from previous years. **In 2020, as in previous years, there were clashes between the Armed Forces and several groups operating in Mindanao that have pledged allegiance to ISIS (such as the Abu Sayyaf, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, the Maute Group or Ansar Khilafa), but there were also episodes of community and clan violence (known locally as rido), mainly over land issues; as well as skirmishes between factions of the MILF (which is in the process of demobilisation and reintegration), between factions of the MNLF, or between these groups and local militias.** While dozens of people were killed in communal clashes or by MILF or MNLF factions, most of the violence in the south of the country was part of counter-insurgency operations against armed groups close to ISIS, in which the Armed Forces used airstrikes on a recurrent basis. In October, the Armed Forces stated that between January and September more than 100 ISIS-linked fighters had been killed, 227 had surrendered and around 30 had been arrested. Most of the fatalities were from the Abu Sayyaf (55), while the rest were from the BIFF (28) or the Maute Group (24).

In February, a spokesman for the Armed Forces stated that they expected to defeat the Abu Sayyaf militarily –in recent years the main armed group in Mindanao– by the end of March. However, the dynamics of the conflict in the months that followed seemed to belie this assertion. In fact, **the US Department of Defense released a report in August noting that despite Washington's uninterrupted support for the Armed Forces and Police of the Philippines, increased counter-insurgency operations from Manila, and the declaration of martial law in Mindanao between May 2017 and 31 December 2019, both the operational and warfare capabilities of armed groups in the south of the country and their recruitment capacity had remained relatively unchanged since the end of the siege of Marawi City in late 2017**. It should be recalled that in that siege, in which the city was practically destroyed after five months of high-intensity fighting and 98% of its population had to be forcibly displaced, a large part of the structure of the armed groups that participated in it was decimated

and most of their leaders were killed. The Government stated that it expected the reconstruction of the city to be completed by 2021 or the first quarter of 2022, but by the end of the year some 127,000 people had still not been able to return to their homes. According to some analysts, this offers several armed groups (especially the Maute Group) strong recruitment capacity.

As for the Abu Sayyaf, the group was at the centre of some of the major violence during the year. These include, for example, an attack in Patikul (Sulu province) in mid-April in which 11 soldiers were killed and 14 others injured, or the attack in the town of Jolo in late August in which two people blew themselves up with explosive devices that detonated consecutively, killing 15 people and injuring 74 others. According to the Government, this attack was in retaliation for the killing in a battle in July of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, leader of one of the most active Abu Sayyaf factions. According to some sources, Sawadjaan took control of the group after the 2017 death of Isnilon Hapilon, recognised as the ISIS emir in the southern Philippines. According to some sources, Sawadjaan was considered the *de facto* leader of ISIS in Mindanao, and had promoted new forms of action such as suicide bombings, a practice that had not been used in Mindanao since the beginning of the conflict in the 1970s. Shortly after the attack in Jolo, the government stated that since the consolidation of ISIS in the region, and most especially since the aforementioned siege of the city of Marawi, there have been five such attacks, the largest in January 2019 (23 people were killed and 109 injured after the explosion of two devices in the cathedral of Jolo), orchestrated by Sawadjaan himself. Following Sawadjaan's death, the faction he commanded in Sulu (also known as Ajang-Ajang, and operating in Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and even the Malaysian state of Sabah) is believed to have been led by his nephew, Mudzimar "Mundi" Sawadjaan (several of his family members were killed in combat during the year). The Abu Sayyaf is a group with little hierarchical structure in recent years and with an internal organisation very much determined by the insular nature of the area in which it operates, with the other two factions of the group being led by Furuji Indama in Basilan and by Radullan Sahiron in Sulu. The Sawadjaan and Indama factions declared their allegiance to ISIS, while the Sahiron factions (who fought with group founder Abdurajak Janjalani and received Abu Sayyaf leadership from Khadaffy Janjalani after his death in 2006) preferred to keep their distance from the growing ISIS-driven articulation of armed groups in Mindanao.

During the year the government declared that the group was being seriously degraded by counter-insurgency operations, the neutralisation of some of its leaders (such as Sawadjaan himself or Abduljihad Susukan in Davao in mid-August) and the surrender of its fighters (in October alone the government declared that a hundred members of the Abu Sayyaf entered a demobilisation and reintegration programme), but at the same time acknowledged that it remains one of the main threats to national security. According to Manila, 83 people have been killed (20 soldiers and 63 civilians) and more than 500 people (70 police or military personnel and 435 civilians) have been injured since 2009 in the 47 bombings carried out by the Abu Sayyaf in the provinces of Sulu, Basilan and Zamboanga. Similarly, the Government highlighted the group's increased piracy activities in the Sulu Sea and in the waters near the Malaysian state of Sabah. While the group has focused its activities on kidnapping (it has abducted 39 Indonesian nationals between 2016 and 2019 alone) and attacking small vessels, it has also on occasion carried out attacks on larger merchant vessels sailing between China and Australia. In this regard, in view of the increase in these types of activities during the year, the Governments of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines reiterated their intention to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation in the region. In addition, the Government also highlighted the group's ability to recruit foreign fighters. Several analysts pointed out that many of the suicide attacks in recent years were carried out by foreign nationals (Egypt, Indonesia or Morocco). Thirty-nine non-Filipino fighters were killed in the siege of Marawi City, and in 2018 the government identified around 100 foreign fighters in the region, mostly from Indonesia and Malaysia, but also from Arab countries, Europe and China's Xinjiang region.

In addition to the fighting between the Armed Forces and the Abu Sayyaf in the Sulu Archipelago and the Zamboanga Peninsula, other groups were also very active in other regions of Mindanao. In the Maguindanao and North Cotobato region, the BIFF faction known as the Toraife Group (led by Esmael Abdulmalik, alias Commander Toraife) saw some significant violence during the year (in March, for example, 14 BIFF fighters and four soldiers were killed in a clash in Maguindanao), but the other two factions of the group (led respectively by Imam Minimbang, alias Major Karialan, and Esmael Abubakar, alias Major Bungos) also carried out several armed actions in the region. In Lanao del Sur province, and especially in Marawi City, the so-called Maute Group also staged several episodes of violence and, according to the Government, continued to recruit fighters from among the tens of thousands of people still displaced by the 2017 battle for Marawi. Following the death of the Maute brothers and their successor, Abu Dar, the group is now led by Ker Mimbantas (alias Commander Zacarias). Finally, it is worth noting that in the regions of South Cotobato, Sarangani or General Santos, the most active insurgency was Ansar Khilafa, even though a military operation in September led to the death of its leader Jeoffrey Nilong (alias commander Momoy), while in the central areas of Mindanao the armed group led by Salahuddin Hassan (who was among the first to pledge allegiance to the new ISIS caliph, Al-Qurashi) was also operational.

Thailand (south)	
Start:	2004
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internal
Main parties:	Government, secessionist armed opposition groups
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The conflict in the south of Thailand dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, when the then Kingdom of Siam and the British colonial power on the Malaysian peninsula decided to split the Sultanate of Pattani, leaving some territories under the sovereignty of what is currently Malaysia and others (the southern provinces of Songkhla, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) under Thai sovereignty. During the entire 20th century, there had been groups that had fought to resist the policies of political, cultural and religious homogenisation promoted by Bangkok or to demand the independence of these provinces, of Malay-Muslim majority. The conflict reached its moment of culmination in the 1960s and 70s and decreased in the following decades, thanks to the democratisation of the country. However, the coming into power of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001, involved a drastic turn in the counterinsurgency policy and preceded a breakout of armed conflict from which the region has been suffering since 2004. The civil population, whether Buddhist or Muslim, is the main victim of the violence, which is not normally vindicated by any group.

Levels of violence in the south of the country fell substantially from previous years and reached an all-time low in recent decades. According to sources at the Deep South Watch research centre, 110 people were killed and 160 injured in the southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla in 2020. These fatality figures are a clear decrease from the 180 fatalities recorded in 2019 and previous years (218 in 2018, 235 in 2017, 307 in 2016, 246 in 2015, 341 in 2014, while in the previous four years fatalities were always above 450). According to some analysts, this decline in conflict-related mortality is mainly due to the effects of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 and, in particular, to the decision of the BRN, the armed group with the largest territorial presence and war capacity, to begin direct peace talks with the Government in January. On several occasions during the year, the Government stressed the need for a reduction in the levels of violence in order to create an atmosphere conducive to addressing the substantive aspects of the negotiations between the two sides. In this connection, it should be noted that **on 3 April the BRN declared a cessation of all its offensive armed actions, citing humanitarian reasons and emphasising the need to prioritise the containment of the COVID-19 pandemic.** BRN's statement came on the same day that the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, made a new appeal to all parties involved in conflicts around the world to declare a ceasefire. However, the communiqué issued by the BRN stated that the cessation of hostilities would be in force as long as there were no armed actions against them by the State security forces. Shortly after the BRN communiqué was made public, the Armed Forces announced their intention to continue their actions to preserve legality and stability in the south of the country. During the month of April there was a substantial reduction in military hostilities between the parties, although at the end of the month tensions between the government and the BRN increased again after the armed forces killed three alleged insurgents accused of organising attacks during Ramadan. Two days later, two soldiers were killed in the district of Nong Chik (Pattani province), an episode that was considered an act of revenge by the Armed Forces and, according to some media, symbolised the end of the truce by the BRN. According to some media reports, civil society organisations such as The Patani and the Islamic Medical Association were instrumental in the BRN's decision to declare a cessation of hostilities on humanitarian grounds. The head of the Government's negotiating panel, Wanlop Rugsanaoh, welcomed the BRN ceasefire, but also indicated that the reduction in mortality during the ceasefire period could also be due to other factors. Another aspect that could denote BRN's increased commitment to the negotiated conflict resolution process was its decision to sign a Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict with the Swiss NGO Geneva Call. After several years of joint work with Geneva Call, the signing of this commitment took place in mid-February, shortly after the start of negotiations with the Government. BRN pledged to continue to work for better compliance with international humanitarian law and international child protection and education standards. It should be recalled that historically in southern Thailand there have been attacks on schools and teachers.

Despite the reduction in violence and the start of direct talks between the Government and BRN (which held two rounds of negotiations in January and March, but maintained remote communication throughout the year), **the Government again extended the emergency decree that has been in place in southern Thailand for 15 years and has been extended more than 60 times**. As in previous years, this decision was criticised by congressmen and national and international human rights organisations for encouraging impunity for the Armed Forces in containing the insurgency. In August, however, the Army recommended that the Government withdraw emergency measures from four districts in the southern provinces on the grounds that the security situation had improved markedly in recent years. According to data from the Armed Forces made public in that month, the number of fatalities compared to the previous year had decreased by 70%. In terms of conflict dynamics, some of the most notable violence of the year occurred in February, when six combatants were killed in Narathiwat in clashes with the army; in mid-March, when 30 people were injured after an explosive device exploded in front of the headquarters of the Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre; in late April, when a military

operation killed three combatants and triggered the end of the BRN truce; in mid-July, when two bombs exploded in Pattani, in which 10 people were injured; and in mid-September, when clashes took place between the Armed Forces and a group of insurgents that ended with the death of six of the latter in Pattani province.

1.3.4. Europe

Eastern Europe

Ukraine (east)	
Start:	2014
Type:	Government, Identity, Self-government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed actors in the eastern provinces, Russia
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
Considered in transition since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and a country of great geostrategic importance, Ukraine is undergoing a major socio-political crisis and armed conflict in its eastern regions as the scenario of the most serious crisis between the West and Russia since the Cold War. Preceded by a cluster of hotspots across the country (mass pro-European and anti-government demonstrations, the fall of President Viktor Yanukovich and his regime, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, anti-Maidan protests and the emergence of armed groups in the east), the situation in eastern Ukraine degenerated into armed conflict in the second quarter of 2014, pitting pro-Russian separatist militias, supported by Moscow, against state forces under the new pro-European authorities. Over time, issues such as the status of the eastern provinces were added to the international geostrategic dimension (political, economic and military rivalry between Russia and the West in Eastern Europe and Russia's demonstration of force for the benefit of its own public opinion, among other issues). Affecting the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, the war has had great impact on the civilian population, especially in terms of forced displacement. The war runs parallel to a peace process with negotiations at various levels and formats.

Violence in eastern Ukraine declined, especially in the second half of the year, with the renewal of the ceasefire at the end of July. However, the conflict continued to have human security impacts, some of them exacerbated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Around one hundred people died in 2020, according to the ACLED research centre's database, compared with about 400 in 2019. In the first half of the year, the OSCE Special Monitor Mission identified numerous ceasefire violations, with periods of both increases and decreases in incidents in various areas of the conflict zone. Of the three areas designated in previous years as areas for the withdrawal of forces (Stanytsia Luhanksa, Zolote and Petrivske), ceasefire violations were recorded in Petrivske and, more occasionally, also in Zolote. Ceasefire violations intensified in February and early May, as well as during periods in May and June. Incidents in early May, with air raids in several locations amid the pandemic and confinement measures, resulted in six minors being injured –in addition to adult civilian casualties– prompting UN demands for compliance with international humanitarian law and support for the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. UNICEF gave a balance of nine attacks on schools between the beginning of the year and May, five of them in April, despite Ukraine's 2019 accession to the Safe Schools Declaration, which commits to the protection of education in conflicts. The OSCE mission also observed throughout the year the presence of weapons in violation of withdrawal line restrictions, including next to populated areas and civilian crossing points, as well as the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance, which caused a number of casualties. According to OSCE, more civilians were killed by mines than in the previous year. **Within the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group, the parties to the conflict reached an agreement on 23 July on measures to strengthen the ceasefire, which entered into force on 27 July**. Following the agreement, the levels of violence and ceasefire violations were significantly reduced. The ceasefire was generally respected, despite incidents. Among them, in November the OSCE reported that 44% of ceasefire violations since the agreement occurred in areas around the Donetsk water filtering station. December saw a spike in ceasefire violations.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the security of the population affected by the conflict. There were closures of the crossing points of the Line of Contact (line of separation of forces established by the 2015 Minsk Agreement), which impacted elderly people in particular, who were unable to cross to receive their pensions and allowances. Between mid-March and June all crossings were closed, in June two were partially reopened, and in December only two were still open. In 2020, 3 million individual crossings were recorded at the crossing points (only 22% of the 2019 total). Disagreements and the pandemic blocked discussions on taking additional steps. The Norwegian Refugee Council warned in September that **the economic consequences of the pandemic negatively impacted eight out of ten families in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in terms of food security and** livelihoods through increased prices of food and hygiene products, additional transport costs and loss of household income in the quarantine months. OHCHR also warned that the pandemic had exacerbated the difficulties faced by the conflict-affected population in eastern Ukraine, especially the impact of freedom of movement restrictions on economic and social rights, including loss of access to health care, education, pensions and livelihoods.[63] The pandemic led Ukraine into the worst recession in decades, according to another study by several UN agencies, which warned of the risk of nine million people sliding into poverty.[64] Although it did not include separate data for

63. ACNUDH, *Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in Ukraine*, December 2020.
64. UN WOMEN, FAO, UNDP, *Analytical report COVID-19 in Ukraine: Impact on Households and Businesses*, October 2020.

the eastern areas, OCHA warned that the consequences would be devastating for the population in the conflict zones. Some analysts also warned of the risk of a serious humanitarian crisis in the eastern regions and that this could affect the course of the conflict. By the end of the year, 3.4 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance because of the conflict. Civil society organisations and international agencies also warned of the increase in domestic violence against women in the country as a whole.

Russia and the Caucasus

Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	
Start:	2020
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory International
Main parties:	Azerbaijan, Armenia, self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh,
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The conflict between the two countries regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh region, an enclave with an Armenian majority which is formally part of Azerbaijan but which enjoys de facto independence, lies in the failure to resolve the underlying issues of the armed conflict that took place between December 1991 and 1994. This began as an internal conflict between the region's self-defence militias and the Azerbaijan security forces over the sovereignty and control of Nagorno-Karabakh and gradually escalated into an inter-state war between Azerbaijan and neighbouring Armenia. The armed conflict, which claimed 20,000 lives and forced the displacement of 200,000 people, as well as enforcing the ethnic homogenisation of the population on either side of the ceasefire line, gave way to a situation of unresolved conflict in which the central issues are the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the return of the population, and which involved sporadic violations of the ceasefire. Since the 1994 ceasefire there have been several escalations of violence, such as the one in 2016 which led to several hundred fatalities. In 2020, armed conflict broke out again.

The war over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces resumed in September, with more than 5,000 people being killed, mostly military personnel, and tens of thousands of displaced persons, mostly Armenians. The war ended in November with a tripartite agreement between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia –brokered by the latter– that marked a complete reversal of the pre-war status quo: it ratified the partition of Nagorno-Karabakh, assigning to Azerbaijan the areas within Nagorno-Karabakh seized by Baku since September and declared the recovery by Azerbaijan of all areas adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh, while leaving the status of the region unresolved. The agreement was welcomed in Azerbaijan as a victory for the country and Armenia's capitulation, while the Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh authorities presented it to their populations as inevitable and a means to avoid the loss of the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. **The war was preceded by a military escalation of several days in July on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with the use of heavy weapons and more than a dozen deaths**.

The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh resumed, with several thousand casualties and a complete shake-up of the status quo in the region

The armed conflict between Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijani forces started on 27 September, with mutual accusations regarding its initiation. The Government of Azerbaijan launched a large-scale offensive that day, according to Baku, in response to attacks by Armenia on its armed forces and civilian settlements. Meanwhile, Armenia accused Azerbaijan of starting the war with its offensive. In the background, among other elements, analysts pointed to Azerbaijan's weariness with the status quo –due to the fact that the seven districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh and from which its Azerbaijani population was forcibly displaced by the 1990s war had remained under Armenian control ever since. With the outbreak of war both states declared martial law and military mobilisation. Hostilities took place in various areas around the Line of Contact, which was broken by Azerbaijani military forces, extending to districts around Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as to the Nagorno-Karabakh region itself, including frequent air raids on the capital, Stepanakert. Some towns in Armenia and Azerbaijan close to the conflict zone were also affected by attacks, such as the Azerbaijani towns of Ganja (12 killed and 40 wounded in air raids in mid-October according to Azerbaijan) and Mingachevir and Barda (with some 30 killed and more than 80 wounded in air raids between 27 and 28 October), as well as areas around the town of Vardenis in Armenia.

The resumption of the war triggered international calls for a ceasefire. Turkey, for its part, expressed its support for Azerbaijan and pledged to support it in every way, opening the door to military resources. Armenia accused Turkey of involvement in the conflict, including the sending by Turkey of fighters from Syria to fight alongside the Azerbaijani forces. Media reported the presence of fighters from the Syrian war in Azerbaijan in support of Baku. Turkey and Azerbaijan denied the allegations. Turkey provided military support through training and the supply of weaponry, including armed drones. There were several attempts at a truce that failed. Two days after the announcement of the military seizure by Azerbaijan of the city of Shusha/Shushi –the second largest city in Nagorno-Karabakh and of great symbolic and geostrategic importance, from which the seizure of Stepanakert could be undertaken at any moment– **the parties announced an agreement, which entered into force on 10 November and contained**

nine points, including a full ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, the division of Nagorno-Karabakh, the deployment of Russian peacekeepers, Azerbaijani control of all adjacent districts –except the Lachin corridor connecting Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, which was to be taken over by Russian forces– the return of the displaced population to Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent areas, and the unblocking of transport links, among others.[65] The truce mostly remained in force, although some ceasefire violations were reported on several days in December in the Hadrut region in mid-December. The handover of the Kelbajar district to Azerbaijan was delayed to 25 November, while those of Agdam and Lachin took place on the scheduled dates of 20 November and 1 December. In December, in turn, several prisoner exchanges took place.

The war resulted in more than 5,000 military fatalities and more than one hundred civilian fatalities. Azerbaijan reported 2,783 military and 94 civilian fatalities, as well as 1,245 military casualties and more than 400 civilian injuries. For their part, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh put the number of military deaths in their ranks at 2,718, with 54 civilian fatalities. The civilian casualties included minors. Several hundred servicemen were missing –one hundred from Azerbaijan, and several hundred from Armenia. **Several tens of thousands of Armenians –100,000 according to some media figures, 130,000 according to UNICEF– were displaced by the war**. Amnesty International verified and denounced the use of cluster bombs by Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as other types of projectiles against densely populated areas. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet denounced indiscriminate attacks in populated areas in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and called for investigations into possible war crimes. HRW noted and reported ill-treatment by Azerbaijani forces of Armenian military prisoners. The war resulted in damage to civilian infrastructure, including extensive damage to residential buildings, as well as to cultural and religious heritage. According to UNICEF, 76 schools and kindergartens were damaged between the end of September and the end of October. As of mid-December, the main humanitarian issues according to the ICRC included locating missing persons, access to all prisoners of war, food supplies and winter items for the displaced or returning population, shelter support, mental health and psychosocial support, civilian infrastructure repairs, addressing the increase in coronavirus cases, among others.

The November ceasefire agreement created a political and social crisis in Armenia, with a strong rejection of the pact, protest demonstrations and the storming of government buildings by demonstrators. The mobilisations continued in the weeks that followed. Opposition sectors issued an ultimatum to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian to resign, and activists launched a campaign of civil disobedience and street blockades following Pashinian's rejection of the ultimatum. Several ministers (Defence, Foreign Affairs, Economy) left their posts in the weeks following the agreement.

South-east Europe

Turkey (southeast)	
Start:	1984
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, PKK, TAK, ISIS
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The PKK, created in 1978 as a political party of a Marxist-Leninist nature and led by Abdullah Öcalan, announced in 1984, an armed offensive against the government, undertaking a campaign of military rebellion to reclaim the independence of Kurdistan, which was heavily responded to by the government in defence of territorial integrity. The war that was unleashed between the PKK and the government particularly affected the Kurdish civil population in the southeast of Turkey, caught in the crossfire and the victims of the persecutions and campaigns of forced evacuations carried out by the government. In 1999, the conflict took a turn, with the arrest of Öcalan and the later communication by the PKK of giving up the armed fight and the transformation of their objectives, leaving behind their demand for independence to centre on claiming the recognition of the Kurdish identity within Turkey. Since then, the conflict has shifted between periods of ceasefire (mainly between 2000 and 2004) and violence, coexisting alongside democratisation measures and attempts at dialogue (Democratization Initiative in 2008, Oslo Dialogue in 2009-2011 and the Imrali process in 2013-2015). In 2015 the war was restarted. The armed conflict has caused around 40,000 fatalities since the 80s. The war in Syria once again laid bare the regional dimension of the Kurdish issue and the cross-border scope of the PKK issue, whose Syrian branch took control of the predominantly Kurdish areas in the country.

The conflict continued to be active in southeastern Turkey and especially in northern Iraq, where Turkey stepped up its attacks against the PKK at various times during the year in a regional scenario in which tensions between Kurdish actors increased. **The death toll fell.** According to International Crisis Group, 292 people died in 2020 (compared to 468 in 2019), of which the majority (217 people) were PKK members. ACLED counted 538 fatalities in 2020 (up from more than 970 fatalities in 2019).

Turkish Army operations continued in areas of eastern and southeastern Turkey, including parts of the provinces of Agri, Van, Bitlis, Hakkari and Sirnak. However, in 2020, the bulk of the conflict-related fatalities occurred

65. See the summary on Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2021. Report on Trends and Scenarios*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.

in northern Iraq. In March, Turkey announced the death of one of the members of the PKK Executive Committee and co-founder of the women's branch of the guerrilla army, Nazife Bilen (alias Hacer Hilal), in an intelligence operation in the Qandil region. Turkey launched Operation Eagle Claw against the group in June around the Qandil Mountains, Sinjar and the Makhmur district, all in northern Iraq and strategic areas for the PKK. This was followed by Operation Tiger Claw –ground, with air support– in Duhok province (northern Iraq). Turkey claimed its right to attack those who attacked it. For its part, the PKK claimed responsibility for numerous guerrilla attacks against the Turkish army in the area of Haftanin (Dohuk), claiming to have caused more than 200 military casualties between the end of June and July alone. Murat Karayilan, a member of the PKK Executive Committee, stated that the situation in Haftanin showed that the PKK could cope with Turkey's modern military technology. He further stated that **the group demanded recognition of Kurdish identity and rights relating to culture and language and self-rule, with a solution within Turkey**.

On the regional level, tensions increased between the PKK and the KDP, the ruling Kurdish party in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, and between the PKK and the Iraqi government. The KDP deployed forces in April west of the Qandil Mountains, as well as in October northeast of Dohuk, and established checkpoints around localities surrounding Gare Mountain –an area with PKK camps. The armed group warned that deployments of Kurdish forces linked to the KDP in areas where PKK bases are located resembled preparations for war. Furthermore, in October the Iraqi government and the KRG reached an agreement on the status of Sinjar (Nineveh governorate), which shared jurisdiction between them in administrative, security and reconstruction matters, among other aspects, and which included the expulsion of PKK forces. The PKK criticised the agreement. As part of that agreement, Iraqi troops were deployed in November to the Sinjar district. In mid-December, there were clashes between Kurdish forces linked to the KDP and the PKK in the area of Amedi (Dohuk province), resulting in two deaths and several injuries. Two days later there were clashes between members of the PKK and YPG (Syrian Kurdish guerrillas linked to the PKK) forces on the one hand, and the Peshmerga on the other, around the Fish Khabur border crossing (Dohuk, bordering with Syria), sending alarm bells ringing on the risk of intra-Kurdish conflict.

In the political and social arena in Turkey, **mass arrests of Kurdish political representatives and civil activists continued, as well as the dismissal of elected Kurdish mayors**. Of the 65 municipalities in which the pro-Kurdish HDP party won the mayoralty in the 2019 elections, it was ruling in only five of them in October 2020, due to their forced ouster by the Turkish authorities. Several dozen co-mayors remained in prison. The HDP called on the Council of Europe and the EU Committee of the Regions to take action. The new Deva Parti party, led by former AKP economy minister Ali Babacan, described the arrests of the HDP mayors in May as arbitrary. Some press reports indicated that Babacan would be in favour of greater linguistic freedom and autonomy for the Kurdish population. On the other hand, Mithat Sancar was appointed new co-leader of the HDP, while his co-leader, Pervin Buldan, saw his post renewed and called for a new constitution with guarantees for all identities and beliefs. **In March, the government also authorised a visit to imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan by his brother, Mehmet Ocalan**, in the context of tensions following a forest fire on the island where the prison is located. It was the first visit from a family member for seven months, while his lawyers continued to be denied visitation rights (the last was in 2019, after eight years without a visit).

1.3.5. Middle East

Mashreq

Egypt (Sinai)	
Start:	2014
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) or Sinai Province (branch of ISIS), other armed groups (Ajnad Misr, Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis, Katibat al-Rabat al-Jihadiya, Popular Resistance Movement, Liwaa al-Thawra Hassam), Israel
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The Sinai Peninsula has become a growing source of instability. Since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the area has reported increasing insurgent activity that initially directed its attacks against Israeli interests. This trend raised many questions about maintaining security commitments between Egypt and Israel after the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1979, which led to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the peninsula. However, alongside the bumpy evolution of the Egyptian transition, jihadist groups based in the Sinai have shifted the focus of their actions to the Egyptian security forces, especially after the coup d'état against the Islamist government of Mohamed Mursi (2013). The armed groups, especially Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), have gradually demonstrated their ability to act beyond the peninsula, displayed the use of more sophisticated weapons and broadened their targets to attack tourists as well. ABM's decision to pledge loyalty to the organisation Islamic State (ISIS) in late 2014 marked a new turning point in the evolution of the conflict. Its complexity is determined by the influence of multiple factors, including the historical political and economic marginalisation that has stoked the grievances of the Bedouins, the majority population in the Sinai; the dynamics of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; and regional turmoil, which has facilitated the movement of weapons and fighters to the area.

The armed conflict between the Egyptian security forces and the affiliate of the armed group ISIS, which operates mainly in the North Sinai area, continued to produce periodic acts of violence throughout 2020, although at a lower intensity than in previous years. Although the death tolls were difficult to determine due to difficulties in accessing independent sources and the disparate data provided by the parties, informal counts based on press reports suggest that at least 150 to 200 people died as a result of the hostilities during the year, lower than in 2019, when at least 500 people were estimated to have lost their lives.

The data provided by the think-tank ACLED differ in the totals, but confirm the downward trend in the lethality of the conflict. According to the research centre, the conflict caused 626 fatalities in 2020, compared to 1,000 in the previous year. As in previous years, the violence took the form of direct confrontations, ambushes, sniper actions, attacks with explosives, offensives against gas pipelines and aggressions against civilians –including assassinations and kidnappings.

With respect to the evolution of the conflict, it should be stressed that **the most significant events took place during the summer, in July and August, and that the main scene of confrontation was the town of Bir al-Abd, in the northeast of North Sinai province, where ISIS managed to temporarily occupy several localities**. In the first half of the year, the most serious incidents occurred at the end of April in this same area. The armed group ISIS –also calling itself Sinai Province– claimed responsibility for the attack on a military vehicle that killed 10 soldiers. Egyptian authorities announced in early May that operations against the armed group killed 18 suspected ISIS militiamen, while another 21 were reportedly killed in clashes in Bir al-Abd at the end of the month. From the second half of July, this area –80 kilometres from the North Sinai capital, al-Arish– was again the scene of clashes after ISIS fighters launched an attack on military installations. Within the framework of these hostilities, the ISIS affiliate managed to take control of four localities in the area –Qatiya, Iqtiya, Ganayen and Merih– leading to the forced displacement of their inhabitants.

According to the balance offered by the Egyptian authorities, between 22 July and the end of August, the violence in the area caused the death of 70 alleged ISIS militiamen and seven military personnel. In August, ISIS was also reported to have executed four civilians in Bir al-Abd for allegedly collaborating with the army. Egyptian security forces reportedly managed to regain control of the area in September, but skirmishes and incidents continued in the following months. The violence also affected the towns of al-Arish, the largest city in North Sinai province, and Rafah, on the Gaza border. At least 40 suspected ISIS militants and eight Egyptian soldiers had been killed in various incidents between September and early December. Abdel Qader Sweilam was reportedly among the militants killed in al-Arish, one of the leaders of the armed group involved in the attack on a mosque that killed more than 300 people in 2017.

It should be noted that at least 15 civilians had been killed in localities around Bir al-Abd by explosives left in the area and detonated during the return of displaced persons to the area since October. Authorities reported that in the last quarter of the year they had destroyed 437 weapons caches and some 30 vehicles, deactivated 159 explosive devices and confiscated several dozen weapons as part of their campaign against the group. **Some expert voices stressed that the deployment of booby traps by ISIS in Sinai follows the precedent of similar actions by the group in Iraq and Syria**. The Sinai dispute coexisted with other tensions that had a greater media presence and visibility on the Egyptian security and diplomatic agenda.

The armed conflict between Egyptian security forces and the ISIS affiliate operating mainly in the North Sinai area continued to provoke violence in 2020, although at a lower intensity than in previous years

These include Cairo's growing concern and involvement in the evolution of the armed conflict in neighbouring Libya (in the middle of the year Egypt warned of a possible direct military intervention if the clashes reached the strategic Libyan town of Sirte; conducted military exercises in the border area; approved a possible troop deployment and strengthened ties with allied countries in an informal anti-Turkey front –Cyprus, France, Greece, UAE–, including naval exercises in December) and for the conflict between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia over the construction of a dam on the Nile river –which led to a series of unsuccessful negotiations during 2020.[66] In addition, the situation of internal tensions linked to the repression of dissidents, human rights violations and the reinforcement of authoritarianism by the regime continued.[67] Despite this outlook and the economic crisis in the country, the regime continued to increase its arms purchases, with Russia, the US and France as the main suppliers. Reports indicate that Paris has allegedly supplied 35% of the weapons demand to the regime between 2015 and 2019.[68]

66. See the summary on Libya in this chapter and "The Nile Basin: cooperation or conflict?" in chapter 5 (Risk scenarios for 2021).
67. See the summary on Egypt in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
68. Maged Mandour, *Dollars to Despots: Sisi's International Patrons,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 November 2020.

Iraq	
Start:	2003
Type:	System, Government, Identity, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Iraqi and Kurdish (peshmerga) military and security forces, Shia militias (Popular Mobilization Units, PMU), Sunni armed groups, Islamic State (ISIS), international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, USA, Iran, Turkey
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:
The invasion of Iraq by the international coalition led by the USA in March 2003 (using the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction as an argument and with the desire to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein due to his alleged link to the attacks of the 11th September 2001 in the USA) started an armed conflict in which numerous actors progressively became involved: international troops, the Iraqi armed forces, militias and rebel groups and Al Qaeda, among others. The new division of power between Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish groups within the institutional setting set up after the overthrow of Hussein led to discontent among numerous sectors. The violence has increased, with the armed opposition against the international presence in the country superimposing the internal fight for the control of power with a marked sectarian component since February 2006, mainly between Shiites and Sunnis. Following the withdrawal of the US forces in late 2011, the dynamics of violence have persisted, with a high impact on the civilian population. The armed conflict worsened in 2014 as a result of the rise of the armed group Islamic State (ISIS) and the Iraqi government's military response, backed by a new international coalition led by the United States.

Levels of violence in the armed conflict in Iraq remained high, although relatively lower than in previous years. According to data compiled by the ACLED research centre, the conflict claimed the lives of at least 2,500 people, mostly as a result of explosions and remote attacks, followed by clashes between various armed actors operating in the country. In 2019, the total number of fatalities rose to 3,232, according to the same organisation. Hostilities in the country continued to have a serious impact on the civilian population. According to preliminary data from Iraq Body Count (IBC), the number of civilian casualties from the armed conflict is expected to rise to at least 848 in 2020, compared to 2,392 in the previous year. The outlook in the country continued to be heavily influenced by the prominence of the US-Iran dispute, as well as ISIS's continuation of its activities, calling into question the Iraqi government's declaration of "victory" over the armed organisation in 2017. Between 2014 and 2017, the escalation of violence in the country led to the forced internal displacement of more than six million people. According to OCHA data, as of October 2020, a total of 1.3 million people remained displaced in extremely precarious conditions, a vulnerability that was accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth mentioning that by the end of 2020 a total of 2,800 women and minors of the Yazidi minority abducted by ISIS after its offensive in Sinjar in 2014, remained unaccounted for.

Levels of violence in Iraq remained high and the armed conflict was affected by the dispute between Iran and the US and the continuing activities of ISIS

As for the evolution of the armed conflict, **the year began with the shock news of the assassination in Baghdad of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in a US operation**. The prominent Iranian military officer, leader of the Revolutionary Guard's al-Quds brigade and head of Iranian efforts in the region, was killed on 3 January in a drone strike that also killed the deputy commander of the Shiite militia coalition Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. **The offensive, which triggered warnings of the potential for destabilisation in an already highly damaged region, prompted retaliatory actions by Tehran against US positions** in the form of air attacks on US bases located in the provinces of Anbar and Erbil and offensives by pro-Iranian militias operating in Iraq. Washington's offensive also encouraged demonstrations and new demands for the withdrawal of US troops by various Iraqi actors, who insisted on this demand throughout the year. In the months that followed there were periodic attacks against US targets, including the US embassy in Baghdad, the so-called Green Zone in the Iraqi capital, bases of the US-led military coalition, companies such as Halliburton, as well as diplomatic personnel. Although responsibility for some of the acts was not acknowledged, the role of pro-Iranian militias in the offensives –especially the Kataib Hizbollah group– was notable. By mid-year it was estimated that since Soleimani's assassination some ten new armed organisations of this type had been activated with the aim of expelling US troops from the country. Washington offered a million-dollar reward for information leading to the capture of Muhammad Kawtharani, a senior Kataib Hizbullah official responsible for coordinating Tehran-backed militias in Iraq.

In June, the US and the new Iraqi government led by former intelligence chief Mustafa al-Khadimi as prime minister, established what were described as "strategic talks". Pro-Iranian groups, especially Kataib Hizbullah, expressed their rejection of al-Khadimi's nomination, accusing him of involvement in the deaths of Soleimani and al-Muhandis. The assassination in July of a prominent security adviser to the prime minister and critic of the actions of pro-Iranian militias in Iraq led to new tensions. The contacts between the Washington and Baghdad authorities following a second edition of the "strategic talks" led, in September, to the announcement of the reduction of US troops in Iraq from 5,200 to 3,000 in exchange for a commitment to protect Iraqi forces and trade agreements aimed at reducing Tehran's influence in the country. Although Iranian-backed militias announced a unilateral truce conditional on the effective withdrawal

of US forces, incidents and acts of violence continued to occur in the final months of the year.

At the same time, **ISIS actions continued and intensified during the year**. **The armed group clashed with security forces, PMU militia, Kurdish forces and also carried out explosive attacks, suicide bombings and other offensives against civilians, as well as acts of sabotage**. Hostilities reached the provinces of Diyala, Nineveh, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Erbil and Anbar. In May, Iraqi security forces launched Operation Desert Lion in an attempt to root out ISIS militiamen in the adjoining areas of Anbar, Nineveh and Salah ad-Din regions bordering Syria. Operations against ISIS and the armed group's actions were ongoing at the end of 2020. It is worth mentioning that **throughout the year there were also tensions between the governments of Ankara and Baghdad over Turkey's incursions into northern Iraq against PKK positions**, in actions that the Iraqi authorities denounced as an infringement of their sovereignty. There were also tensions between Kurdish groups.[69] In addition, it should be noted that during 2020, there was a continuation of the protests and mobilisations that began at the end of 2019 against the authorities by sectors of the population.[70]

Israel – Palestine	
Start:	2000
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory International[71]
Main parties:	Israeli government, settler militias, PA, Fatah (Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), Hamas (Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades), Islamic Jihad, FPLP, FDLP, Popular Resistance Committees, Salafist groups
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The conflict between Israel and the various Palestinian actors started up again in 2000 with the outbreak of the Second Intifada, favoured by the failure of the peace process promoted at the beginning of the 1990s (the Oslo Accords, 1993-1994). The Palestinian-Israeli conflict started in 1947 when the United Nations Security Council Resolution 181 divided Palestinian territory under British mandate into two states and soon after proclaimed the state of Israel (1948), without the state of Palestine having been able to materialise itself since then. After the 1948-49 war, Israel annexed West Jerusalem and Egypt and Jordan took over control of Gaza and the West Bank, respectively. In 1967, Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza after winning the "Six-Day War" against the Arab countries. It was not until the Oslo Accords that the autonomy of the Palestinian territory would be formally recognised, although its introduction was to be impeded by the military occupation and the control of the territory imposed by Israel.

Following the trend of the past three years, direct violence linked to the Israeli-Palestinian armed conflict declined during 2020, despite increased tensions over the Israeli Government's plans and actions to consolidate its *de facto* annexation of occupied Palestinian territories. According to OCHA, as of December, a total of 30 people had been killed in various acts of violence linked to the conflict, of whom 28 were Palestinians and two Israelis. The figure is the lowest in the last three years, considering that there were 144 people killed in 2019 and 313 in 2018. In addition, a total of 2,579 Palestinians were injured during 2020, compared to 57 Israelis. The most lethal violence was concentrated in the first quarter of the year and generally occurred in the Gaza Strip, along the Gaza-Israel barrier, in the West Bank –in towns such as Hebron, Jenin– and in Jerusalem. The incidents included Israeli airstrikes, launches of rockets and incendiary devices from Gaza, shootings by Israeli forces against the Palestinian population and repression of demonstrations and a number of assaults by Palestinians on Israeli soldiers. OCHA also highlighted the impact of demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian property, at its highest levels since 2016. Between January and November this Israeli policy had affected 776 infrastructures, forcing the displacement of 946 Palestinians, including 488 minors. Throughout the year, the Israeli Government continued to announce new permits and plans for the construction of thousands of housing units in different areas of the occupied territories.

Regarding the evolution of events, it should be noted that **at the end of January the US finally presented –after continuous postponements in recent years– its so-called "final peace plan" for the region**, officially confirming the Donald Trump administration's support for and alignment with the positions of the Israeli extreme right. The plan, detailed in a 180-page document and presented by Trump at the White House in the company of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, includes, among other measures, the recognition of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories, the rejection of the right of the Palestinian refugee population to return and the offer of forming a Palestinian State with a capital outside Jerusalem, in addition to economic investments. The plan led to demonstrations and a show of rejection among the Palestinian population and activists and was labelled a conspiracy by the PA. At the same time, efforts continued during the first quarter to try to implement an informal truce around the Gaza Strip, brokered by Egypt in February. In this context, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic from March onwards encouraged some cooperation between the PA and the Israeli Government. Several voices warned about the potential impact of the virus in the Gaza Strip, due to the fragility of its health infrastructures because of the attacks

69. See summary on Turkey (southeast) in this chapter.
70. See summary on Iraq in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
71. Despite the fact that "Palestine" (whose Palestinian National Authority is a political entity linked to a specific population and territory) is not an internationally recognised state, the conflict between Israel and Palestine is considered "international" and not "internal" because it is an illegally occupied territory with Israel's alleged claim to the territory not being recognised by international law or by any United Nations resolution.

and the blockade imposed by Israel in recent years. Hamas and PA representatives also raised the need to release Palestinian prisoners to prevent their exposure to the virus and warned of Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power for the impact of the disease on the Palestinian population.

The Israeli prime minister's proposal to formally annex a third of the occupied territories in the West Bank led to a wave of criticism at the international level as well as causing rejection among Palestinian actors

The following months were marked by the electoral climate in Israel and the outcome of the elections, which led to the formation of a coalition government between Netanyahu's Likud and Benny Gantz's Blue and White party. According to the agreement, the two would rotate the position of prime minister, with Netanyahu holding the first rotation. The agreement also endorsed –although without detailing the mechanisms for its implementation– the **Likud leader's proposal to formally annex a third of the occupied West Bank, including 235 settlements and most of the strategic and fertile Jordan Valley, bordering Jordan**. The prospect that the plan could begin to be implemented as of 1 July, as announced by Netanyahu, raised the level of tension with the Palestinian authorities, encouraged new protests and violence, and prompted international criticism and warnings. The PA denounced the plan and suspended cooperation agreements with Israel in May, while Hamas considered it a "declaration of war". Various voices insisted that the measure violated basic principles of international law, undermined the prospects for a two-state solution –considered moribund or already totally impracticable by many actors–, could aggravate the suffering of the Palestinian population and further destabilise the region. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned of the illegality of any annexation of the West Bank. More than 1,000 European parliamentarians from 25 countries signed a declaration demanding an EU response to the plan, and several European countries on the UN Security Council –France, Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Norway– jointly warned that they would not recognise the annexation. Several analysts stressed the need to put the policy announced by Netanyahu into context and view it as a measure that only makes explicit a *de facto* situation that already exists.[72] As for reactions in the Palestinian territory, in view of the increase in hostilities, a new intervention by Egypt and the UN re-established the informal truce between Hamas and Israel in August, which was still in force at the end of the year –albeit with sporadic incidents.

In this scenario of international criticism, and amid internal divisions within the Israeli government over the form and timetable for implementing the plan, the initiative was temporarily suspended and gave way to a series of agreements on the normalisation of relations with Arab-majority countries promoted by the US. The normalisation of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was announced at the end of August, with Bahrain following in September and Sudan in October. Later, in December, Morocco joined the list and in return Washington made a declaration recognising Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.[73] The US insisted on presenting them as peace agreements despite the fact that, in practice, they formalised already existing relations between Israel and these states, not involved in direct hostilities with Israel in the past, with the exception of Sudan. Although the normalisation of relations was defended by these countries as a way to stop the annexation plan, Netanyahu assured that the proposal was still on the table. Palestinian protests against these agreements failed to gain political backing even among the Arab League, which in September failed to pass a resolution condemning them. This situation was considered by the Palestinian prime minister as a symbol of Arab inaction. Despite this, in November, the PA resumed security cooperation with Israel, underlined its readiness to resume peace talks after the inauguration of a new US government and proposed holding an international peace conference to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the first half of 2021. As for Israel, it is worth mentioning that during the year there were massive demonstrations against the government for its handling of the COVID-19 crisis, the economic situation and the corruption cases involving Netanyahu. In December, amid tensions in the government coalition, the Israeli executive failed once again in its attempt to approve the budget, which led to a call for new elections –the fourth in two years– for March 2021.

Syria	
Start:	2011
Type:	Government, System, Sef-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, pro-government militias, Free Syrian Army (FSA), Ahrar al-Sham, Syrian Democratic Forces (coalition that includes the PYD/YPJ militias of the PYD), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, Turkey, Hezbollah, Iran and Russia
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

72. For more information, see Escola de Cultura de Pau, Centre Delàs, IDHC, *A decisive moment? The importance of halting Europe's arms trade with Israel*, July 2020.
73. Please see the summary on Morocco - Western Sahara in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).

Summary:
Controlled by the Ba'ath party since 1963, the Republic of Syria has been governed since the 1970s by two presidents: Hafez al-Assad and his son, Bashar, who took office in 2000. A key player in the Middle East, internationally the regime has been characterised by its hostile policies towards Israel and, internally, by its authoritarianism and fierce repression of the opposition. The arrival of Bashar al-Assad in the government raised expectations for change, following the implementation of some liberalising measures. However, the regime put a stop to these initiatives, which alarmed the establishment, made up of the army, the Ba'ath and the Alawi minority. In 2011, popular uprisings in the region encouraged the Syrian population to demand political and economic changes. The brutal response of the government unleashed a severe crisis in the country, which led to the beginning of an armed conflict with serious consequences for the civil population. The militarisation and proliferation of armed actors have added complexities to the Syrian scenario, severely affected by regional and international dynamics.

During 2020, the armed conflict in Syria continued to be one of the most serious in the world, characterised by the involvement of numerous local, regional and international armed actors; by hostilities and other acts of violence that affected different areas of the country, with their own dynamics on various fronts; and by a very serious and persistent impact on the population, aggravated this year by a sharp deterioration in the economic situation and by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the difficulties in performing a detailed monitoring of the impact of violence in the country, the available data confirm the high levels of lethality. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the death toll from the conflict in 2020 was around 6,817. This would be the lowest death toll in the country since the start of the revolt against the al-Assad regime almost a decade ago. Data from the ACLED research centre point to a higher death toll of some 7,974 people in the same period. The total number of fatalities is lower than 2019 (15,000 people) and 2018 (30,000 people), according to ACLED data. Regarding civilian casualties, the UN Secretary General's bimonthly reports provided a non-exhaustive count. They concluded that at least 1,164 civilians had been killed in conflict-related incidents between December 2019 and November 2020, 42% of whom were women and minors –145 and 343, respectively. According to UN data, civilian casualties were mainly caused by air and ground attacks, explosive ordnance and explosive remnants of war. The periodic UN reports underlined that the ongoing casualties among the population indicated that the parties involved in the conflict continue to fail to respect fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, such as the necessary distinction between civilians and combatants.

The armed conflict in Syria continued to be characterised by the involvement of numerous local, regional and international actors and by high levels of lethality

Along these lines, the UN warned of other actions perpetrated by armed actors, among them arbitrary detentions (together with numerous reports of deaths in government custody), torture, sexual violence, confiscation of property and land, attacks on health centres and schools. According to data released at the end of the year, only 50% of the country's schools were functioning and 2.1 million children were out of school. This was compounded by the very serious humanitarian situation in the country. **According to UNHCR, Syria remained the largest source of refugees and the second largest internally displaced population in the world.** 80% of the displaced population are women and minors and 28% of displaced women have some degree of disability. The plight of the Syrian population was also compounded by the worsening economic situation –the basic food basket increased in price by more than 200% in one year and 9.3 million people were estimated to be food insecure–, by severe fires in various parts of the country (more than 35,000 hectares of crop fields were reported burned in 2020, with severe long-term consequences for food production) and by increasing access barriers for humanitarian aid – several key border crossings for aid inflows were closed during the year. In this context, several voices warned of the added impact of the pandemic, due to the growing number of cases, although it remained difficult to determine the extent of the outbreak in the country. The appeal to parties to heed the UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire to focus efforts on the pandemic was not received by the vast majority of Syrian armed actors.

Regarding the evolution of the conflict and its main protagonists, **on the northwestern front, high levels of violence and massive forced displacements were recorded in the first months of the year,** following the decision by the regime and Russia to intensify their campaign on Idlib, an opposition stronghold, in December 2019. Turkey, the main supporter of rebel groups in the region, criticised Moscow for violating previous agreements to establish a "de-escalation zone" in Idlib. Amid increasing artillery exchanges between Turkish and Syrian forces in this area, with casualties on both sides, alarms were raised about an escalation in the confrontation. At the end of February an air offensive attributed to the Syrian regime and Russian forces against a Turkish military convoy in Balyun (Idlib) killed 34 soldiers –the incident with the highest number of Turkish deaths since its involvement in the war in Syria– and prompted Ankara to launch Operation Spring Shield, increasing its military activity on all front lines. **It was not until early March that Russia and Turkey agreed to a new truce around Idlib, motivated in part by Ankara's desire to prevent a new mass influx of refugees**. By then the humanitarian situation in the region had deteriorated dramatically: in just three months one million people had fled the hostilities, more than half of whom were located in a narrow strip parallel to the Syrian-Turkish border that was already home to hundreds of thousands of displaced people. Turkey temporarily opened its border with Greece and allowed migrants and refugees to leave in an attempt to put pressure on the EU and gain support for its positions in the Syrian conflict. In the following months, Russia and

Turkey initiated –albeit with difficulty– joint patrols in Idlib. At the same time, violence persisted as a result of clashes between Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and groups close to al-Qaeda such as Hurras al-Din and between these groups and regime forces. Russian airstrikes resumed in Idlib in June, shortly after an attack that wounded several Russian and Turkish soldiers, with responsibility being claimed by a group called Kataib Khattab al-Sistani, allegedly composed of militiamen from the Caucasus. During the second half of the year, there were also reports of HTS attempts to consolidate its position in Idlib by intensifying its crackdown on rival groups. As the year ended, the ceasefire was holding formally in broad terms in the northwest, according to the UN, but amid repeated violations and with near-daily artillery exchanges and increasing clashes along the lines of control in Idlib and Aleppo.

The year also saw intermittent clashes between Ankara-backed forces and the SDF, led by Kurdish YPG/YPJ forces, around the dividing lines between the Turkish operation "Euphrates Shield" and Manbij, and the more recent Ankara operation "Spring of Peace" and the SDF-controlled area in the northwest. The year also saw several bomb incidents that left dozens dead in Afrin and a drone strike that killed three Kurdish activists in an action blamed by the SDF on Turkey. In March, the SDF responded to the UN Secretary General's call for a truce during the pandemic and announced a suspension of its military activities. Clashes continued, however, with fighting around Ain Issa, north of Raqqa, being particularly prominent in the second half of the year. **On the northeastern front ISIS also increased its actions against both the SDF and government forces.** Clashes between ISIS and regime forces in a desert area of Homs province resulted in some forty deaths in April. The second half of the year saw more ISIS clashes with regime forces leaving dozens of fatalities in a wider area, including Raqqa, Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor and Hama, encouraging speculation about the group's possible resurgence. Remnants of the group are reportedly coercing the local population through roadblocks and extortion, and training new recruits in the nominally regime-controlled desert area of Syria. As for the US, after the announcement of its withdrawal and accusations of abandoning its Kurdish allies in the face of Turkey's incursion at the end of 2019, its forces concentrated in the northeast and during 2020 continued on their tasks of supporting the SDF in the protection of oil wells, engaging in some actions against ISIS militants. In this area, it is also worth mentioning that towards the end of the year the SDF declared an amnesty for ISIS fighters and alleged ISIS collaborators who were reportedly not involved in blood crimes and had disavowed their involvement with the group. The measure resulted in the release of more than 600 ex-combatants –all of them Syrian. Of particular concern in the northeast was the situation in the al-Hawl camp, where displaced persons and families of suspected ISIS fighters are being held. By the end of the year it housed almost 64,000 people, 94% of whom were women and children –53% of them under the age of 12.[74]

In the southwest, popular unrest intensified during the year. Although they also occurred in other areas of the country, **in this area targeted killings –whose responsibility was not always claimed– were particularly notable, mainly against members of government or pro-government forces and former members of armed opposition groups that had reconciled with the regime.** More than 400 cases were reported between April and May alone. Throughout the year, there were several Israeli attacks on Syrian regime, Iranian and Hezbollah positions, resulting in the deaths of several dozen people.[75]

Finally, it should be noted that in June 2020 the Caesar Act came into force, the US law that punishes the Syrian regime, including its leader Bashar al-Assad, for war crimes perpetrated against its population and punishes individuals, entities and countries that negotiate with the government in Damascus. The law gets its name from the so-called "Caesar files," a reference to the thousands of images that a Syrian photographer managed to get out of the country in 2014 documenting torture and abuse in the regime's prisons.[76] The initiative received the support of most European countries, but was rejected by Russia and China, which denounced the unilateralism of the measure and considered it a violation of Syrian sovereignty. This issue influenced their actions at the UN Security Council in July, where both countries vetoed the resolution on cross-border humanitarian assistance to Syria and argued that the regime should be the exclusive distributor of aid. Resolution 2533 was eventually passed, but the humanitarian aid operation was limited from two to one crossing in northwestern Syria –the Bab al-Salam crossing– significantly hampering assistance efforts. Two other border crossings had already been closed in January.

The Gulf

Yemen (AQAP)	
Start:	2011
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula AQAP/Ansar Sharia, ISIS, USA, international coalition led by Saudi Arabia, UAE, tribal militias, Houthi militias
Intensity:	1
Trend:	=

74. Please see chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).
75. Please see the summary on Israel - Syria, Lebanon in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
76. US Department of State, *Caesar Syria Civilian Protecion Act, Fact Sheet*, 17 June 2020.

Summary:
With a host of conflicts and internal challenges to deal with, the Yemeni government is under intense international pressure –mainly the USA and Saudi Arabia– to focus on fighting al-Qaeda's presence in the country, especially after the merger of the organisation's Saudi and Yemeni branches, through which al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was founded in 2009. Although al-Qaeda is known to have been active in Yemen since the 1990s and has been responsible for high profile incidents, such as the suicide attack on the US warship USS Cole in 2000, its operations have been stepped up in recent years, coinciding with a change of leadership in the group. The failed attack on an airliner en route to Detroit in December 2009 focused the world's attention on AQAP. The group is considered by the US government as one of its main security threats. Taking advantage of the power vacuum in Yemen as part of the revolt against president Ali Abdullah Saleh, AQAP intensified its operations in the south of the country and expanded the areas under its control. From 2011 the group began to carry out some of its attacks under the name Ansar Sharia (Partisans of Islamic Law). More recently, particularly since mid-2014, AQAP has increasingly been involved in clashes with Houthi forces, which have advanced their positions from the north of Yemen. AQAP has taken advantage of the climate of instability and the escalation of violence in the country since March 2015 in the framework of the conflict between the Houthis and the forces loyal to the Government of Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi. The al-Qaeda branch has faced both sides. Yemen's conflict scenario has also favoured the rise of ISIS, which has begun to claim various actions in the country.

In line with what has occurred in recent years, in 2020 the dynamics of violence that have gained prominence in Yemen over the last five years[77] reduced the visibility of the conflict led by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qaeda's affiliate in the country. This trend has been reinforced by a decline in the group's activities as a result of a number of factors, including the impact of the US campaign of attacks on the group's leaders and troops and the consequences of its rivalry with other armed groups operating in Yemen. The total number of people killed or injured as a result of this conflict is difficult to determine. The incidents with the highest media visibility resulted in a death toll of about ten people. These include the organisation's leader in Yemen, Qassim al-Rimi, killed in a US drone strike in January; one person killed and crucified in August by AQAP in al-Bayda after being accused of spying for the government and guiding US drones into the group's positions; three AQAP militiamen killed in an offensive by government forces in the western province of Mahra; five members of the Security Belt Forces that are part of the STC killed by AQAP in an attack on the outskirts of Lawdar, in Abyan province; and a university professor critical of radical Islamist extremism killed in Dhale province (south).

In late February, AQAP announced that the group's new top leader would be Khalid bin Umar Batarfi, until now al-Rimi's number two and the group's spokesman. The death of al-Rimi prompted a number of analyses of its impact on the future of the organisation. Trained in Afghanistan and one of the founders of AQAP in 2009, al-Rimi was the group's first military chief and became its leader in 2015 following the execution of his predecessor, Nasir al-Wuhayshi, in another US air offensive by drone. Some experts pointed out that although his death was a blow to the organisation because he was one of the group's historic leaders, the consequences would not necessarily be drastic or significant, taking into account that during his time at the helm of the organisation the group had already seen a significant decline, especially in the last three years. According to specialists, AQAP's priority was now to regroup, reduce infiltrations –which led the group to suspend the recruitment of new fighters– and maintain its internal cohesion.[78] In the same vein, an analysis by the think-tank ACLED published at the end of the year highlighted that from the early 2020s the group was allegedly in an "entrenchment" phase, after a brief phase of expansion taking advantage of the general escalation of violence in Yemen (2015-2016) and a phase involving the relocation of the group to the province of al-Bayda and combat with the ISIS affiliate (2017-2019). This new entrenchment phase of the al-Qaeda affiliate was influenced not only by the death of al-Rimi but also by the defeats of AQAP and ISIS in their clashes with Houthis and the assassination of the group's propaganda head, also in a US drone attack, which allegedly diminished its ability to publicly claim responsibility for its actions. Allegedly, AQAP had once again attempted to prioritise its anti Houthis rhetoric –above its dispute with ISIS– to present itself as the leader of the fight against the group, a strategy it had used in the past and which it had supposedly returned to in the face of the new Houthis advance on al-Bayda in 2020 and the possibility of exploiting the grievances of local tribes. According to ACLED, in 2020, half of AQAP's interactions were with al-Houthi forces, while the struggle with ISIS has reportedly subsided in the last year. The US continued to offer financial rewards for information leading to the whereabouts of the organisation's new leaders.

Yemen (Houthis)	
Start:	2004
Type:	System, Government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Armed forces loyal to Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi's Government, followers of the cleric al-Houthi (al-Shabaab al-Mumen/Ansar Allah), armed factions loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, tribal militias linked to the al-Ahmar clan, Salafist militias, armed groups linked to the Islamist Islah party, separatists under the umbrella of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), international coalition led by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

77. See the summary on Yemen (Houthis) in this chapter.
78. AFP, "Questions about the impact in Yemen from killing of AQAP chief", *The Arab Weekly*, 10 February 2020; Saeed al-Batati, "Al-Qaeda suffers heavy losses in Yemen conflicts", *Arab News*, 7 March 2020.

Summary:
The conflict started in 2004, when the followers of the religious leader al-Houthi, belonging to the Shiite minority, started an armed rebellion in the north of Yemen. The government assured that the rebel forces aimed to re-establish a theocratic regime such as the one that governed in the area for one thousand years, until the triumph of the Republican revolution in 1962. The followers of al-Houthi denied it and accused the government of corruption and not attending to the northern mountainous regions, and also opposed the Sanaa alliance with the US in the so-called fight against terrorism. The conflict has cost the lives of thousands of victims and has led to massive forced displacements. Various truces signed in recent years have been successively broken with taking up of hostilities again. As part of the rebellion that ended the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, the Houthis took advantage to expand areas under its control in the north of the country. They have been increasingly involved in clashes with other armed actors, including tribal militias, sectors sympathetic to Salafist groups and to the Islamist party Islah and fighters of AQAP, the affiliate of al-Qaeda in Yemen. The advance of the Houthis to the centre and south of the country exacerbated the institutional crisis and forced the fall of the Yemeni government, leading to an international military intervention led by Saudi Arabia in early 2015. In a context of internationalisation, the conflict has acquired sectarian tones and a regional dimension. The conflict has been acquiring a growing regional and international dimension and has been influenced by tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia and between Washington and Tehran.

The armed conflict in Yemen continued to be one of the most serious in the world, with extremely high levels of lethality, the involvement of numerous armed actors, overlapping disputes and severe impacts on the civilian population that were further exacerbated during the year by violence, the critical humanitarian situation and the impact of COVID-19. According to data from the ACLED research centre, the armed conflict killed nearly 20,000 people in 2020 (19,740), most of them in explosive attacks or as a result of clashes. This figure is similar to the previous year when around 23,000 fatalities were recorded, and lower than in 2018 when around 30,000 were recorded. However, several voices, including the UN humanitarian agency, stressed the need to take into account the indirect deaths caused by the armed conflict. According to OCHA, in the last five years the war in Yemen has left 233,000 people dead, of which 131,000 are allegedly the result of indirect causes such as lack of food or access to health care. By the end of the year, 24.3 million Yemenis were in need of some form of humanitarian assistance and protection, and there were increasing warnings about the famine in the country, the worst in the world in decades, according to the UN secretary-general. The violence also continued to cause massive population displacement: more than 100,000 people had fled their homes between January and June 2020 alone. According to UNHURT data, Yemen was among the countries with the largest internally displaced population globally, with a total of 3.7 million –mostly women and children– in fourth place after Colombia, Syria and the DRC. Food insecurity, increased poverty, difficulties in accessing humanitarian aid and the destruction of health infrastructures in the context of the conflict exacerbated the risks of expansion and the impacts of the pandemic. Without the possibility of collecting comprehensive data, partial information pointed to a disease case fatality rate up to four times higher than the global average.

The armed conflict in Yemen continued to be one of the most serious in the world, with extremely high levels of lethality, the involvement of numerous armed actors, overlapping disputes and severe impacts on civilians

In this context, it is worth noting that **the UN Group of Experts on Yemen submitted a new report on the armed conflict in which it points out the responsibility of all parties in the countless abuses committed against the Yemeni population**. Based on its findings, at the end of the year the group called on the UN Security Council to extend sanctions and refer the Yemen case to the International Criminal Court.[79] In its report, the group analyses the situation in the country between July 2019 and June 2020, insisting that armed actors involved in the conflict have continued to commit violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and that these abuses form a pattern that is repeated during hostilities and beyond the battlefront.[80] Violations include killings of civilians in indiscriminate attacks, forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, gender-based violence including sexual violence, torture, recruitment of children, denial of due process, violations of fundamental rights, and attacks on activists, journalists and human rights defenders, including women's rights defenders. The expert group insisted on the need for third-party States to suspend the transfer of arms to the warring parties and stressed the urgency of a full ceasefire, which did not materialise in 2020.

With regard to the evolution of the conflict, during the year the situation ranged between declarations of a truce and a resurgence of violence, but overall the hostilities between the various armed actors continued and intensified. In fact, if at the beginning of the year there were 33 battlefronts, at the end of October, 47 had been identified, according to OCHA data. The hostilities –which ran parallel to mediation and facilitation initiatives– developed mainly along two lines of confrontation. Firstly, the dispute between the Houthis and the Government of Abdo Rabbo Mansour

79. UN Human Rights Council, *UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen Briefs the UN Security Council Urging an end to impunity, an expansion of sanctions, and the referral by the UN Security Council of the situation in Yemen to the International Criminal Court*, 3 December 2020.79. AFP, "Questions about the impact in Yemen from killing of AQAP chief", *The Arab Weekly*, 10 February 2020; Saeed al-Batati, "Al-Qaeda suffers heavy losses in Yemen conflicts", *Arab News*, 7 March 2020.
80. UN Human Rigths Office of the High Commissioner, *UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen releases their third report Yemen: A Pandemic of Impunity in a Tortured Land,* 9 September 2020.

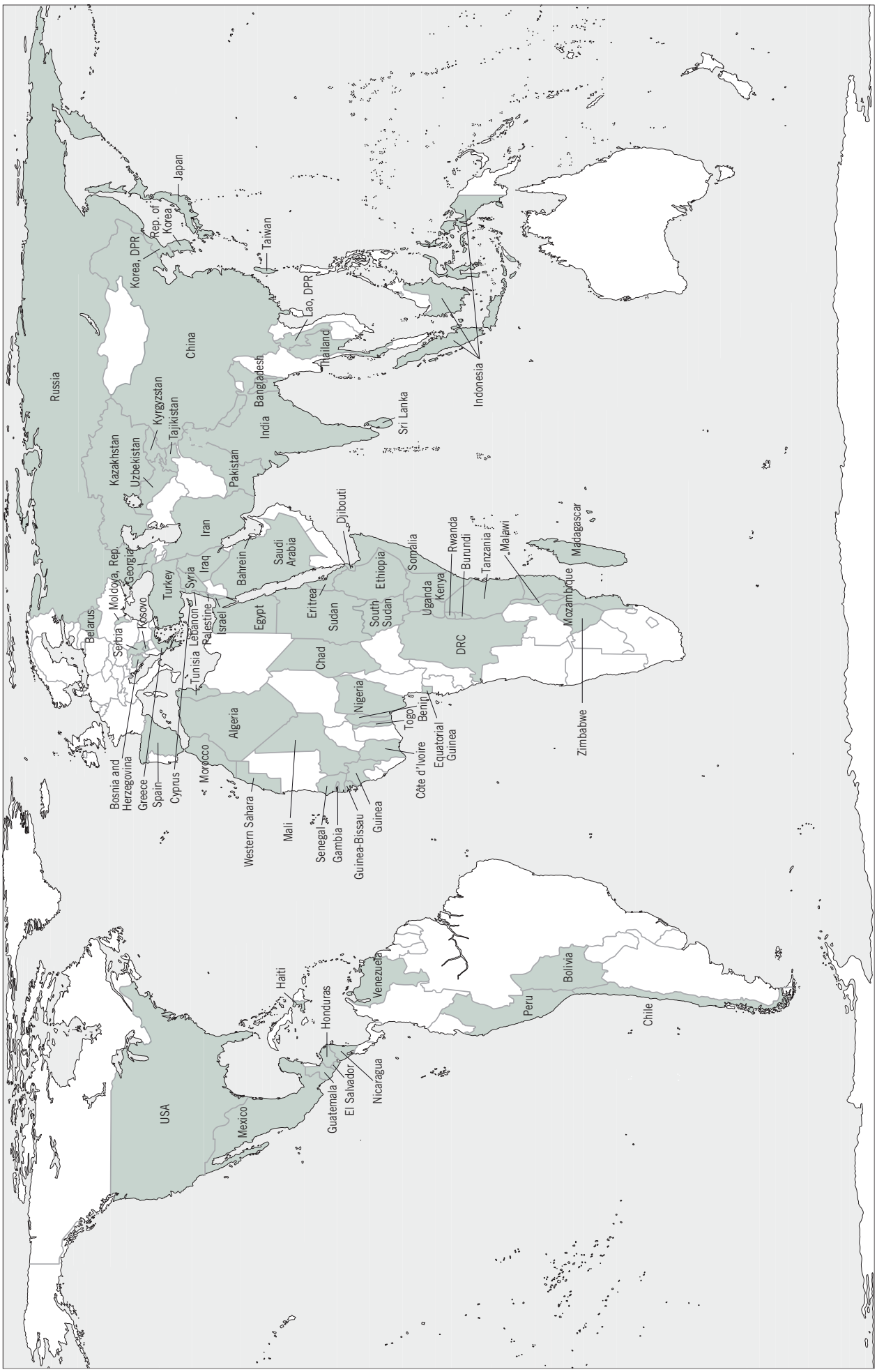
Hadi, supported by the Saudi-led military coalition. Despite certain expectations of a partial reduction in violence at the end of 2019 –in the framework of informal contacts between Riyadh and the Houthis– the intensification of the fighting has been evident since the beginning of 2020. From the first months of the year, violence progressively affected Sanaa, al-Jawf, the Red Sea coast and Marib –the latter oil-rich and the last major urban centre in Hadi's hands. Following the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the parties expressed support for the initiative, but only rhetorically, as hostilities continued. In April, Saudi Arabia formally declared a unilateral truce that raised some expectations, but the initiative was rejected by the Houthis who demanded a broader Saudi commitment, including an end to the blockade in areas controlled by the armed group –considered by Riyadh to be a "proxy" of Iran.[81] In practice, the violence escalated, extending to the al-Bayda region and with increased exchanges of fire in the area bordering Saudi Arabia. In a context of deadlock in the negotiations promoted by the UN and criticism and accusations of bias against the special envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths –by both the Houthis and the Hadi government– the increase in violent incidents in the port of Hodeida raised fears for the continuity of the Stockholm Agreement, signed by the parties at the end of 2018. However, diplomatic efforts allowed progress to be made in the implementation of the agreement with regard to the exchange of prisoners. In October, Houthis and the Hadi government released a thousand prisoners.

The second line of confrontation was within the anti Houthis camp, between Hadi's forces and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a conglomerate of southern separatist forces supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). After the escalation of violence in 2019 and the subsequent signing of the Riyadh agreement, the difficulties in implementing the pact became evident in 2020 and the fighting continued –peaking at certain points throughout the year. The main theatres of violence were Abyan and the strategic island of Socotra. The crisis intensified in April, when the STC decided to decree an autonomous administration in the south, amid accusations that the Hadi government was preparing to launch a new offensive on Aden, its area of influence. In June, STC forces seized the capital of Socotra –incidents had already been reported on the island in February– but tensions subsided following an agreement brokered by Saudi Arabia. In July, the STC rescinded the declaration of autonomy and contacts to try to reduce tensions continued, albeit amid threats and continuing armed incidents. Another scene of clashes during the year was Taiz, where there were clashes between forces of the Islamist Islah party and UAE forces and nearby militias.

Finally, in December, the Hadi government and the STC announced the formation of a new government –one of the key points of the 2019 Riyadh agreement to unblock the process that the UN is attempting to push forward. The new cabinet does not include any women among its members –for the first time in two decades– a fact that was denounced by Yemeni women's organisations. **At the end of the year, a bomb attack at Aden airport just as the new cabinet was disembarking from its plane highlighted the volatile security situation. The offensive did not cause deaths among the ministers, but it did kill 26 other people and wounded around a hundred.** At the end of the year, the prospects for the evolution of the conflict also depended on the possible classification of the Houthis as a terrorist group by the US, following threats by Donald Trump's administration in this sense. A measure that –according to various analyses– could encourage retaliatory actions by the armed group and make the delivery of humanitarian aid even more difficult.[82]

81. See the summary on Yemen at chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona, Icaria, 2021.
82. Human Rights Watch, *Yemen: Houthi Terrorist Designation Threatens Aid*, 10 December 2020; Martin Chulov, "Classifying Houthis as terrorists will worsen famine, Trump is warned", *The Guardian*, 13 December 2020.

Map 2.1. **Socio-political crises**



2. Socio-political crises

- There were 95 socio-political crises around the world in 2020. The largest number of them were concentrated in Africa (38 cases), followed by Asia (25), the Middle East (12) and Latin America and Europa (10 cases in each region).
- The exceptional action taken by the government of Nigeria to stop the advance of COVID-19, together with the excessive use of force by the security forces, sparked widespread social protests.
- In several African countries, political crises worsened due to the tensions generated by elections or constitutional reforms that were marked by political repression against the opposition (Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and others).
- In Western Sahara, after an incursion by Moroccan troops in the Guerguerat area, the POLISARIO Front ended the ceasefire and declared a state of war.
- The US Government removed Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.
- In Central America, there were significant drops in the number of murders.
- The government of Venezuela announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had aborted a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup.
- On the Korean peninsula, concerns mounted about North Korea's weapons programme and inter-Korean relations seriously deteriorated.
- The crisis between India and China worsened, leading to the first deadly clash in 45 years, which resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers.
- The crisis in India persisted due to the approval of the Citizenship Act in 2019 and Hindu extremist groups and supporters of the BJP attacked Muslims, triggering violent clashes in which 53 people died.
- A serious crisis broke out in Belarus with massive anti-government protests against the re-election of President Aleksander Lukashenko, which protestors denounced as fraudulent, followed by serious crackdowns by the authorities.
- Militarised tension increased in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece and other actors over the exploration of natural gas in disputed waters.
- The severe political, economic and social crisis facing Lebanon worsened in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and an explosion that devastated Beirut in August.

The present chapter analyses the socio-political crises that occurred in 2020. It is organised into three sections. The socio-political crises and their characteristics are defined in the first section. In the second section an analysis is made of the global and regional trends of socio-political crises in 2020. The third section is devoted to describing the development and key events of the year in the various contexts. A map is included at the start of chapter that indicates the socio-political crises registered in 2020.

2.1. Socio-political crises: definition

A socio-political crisis is defined as that in which the pursuit of certain objectives or the failure to satisfy certain demands made by different actors leads to high levels of political, social or military mobilisation and/or the use of violence with a level of intensity that does not reach that of an armed conflict and that may include clashes, repression, coups d'état and bombings or attacks of other kinds, and whose escalation may degenerate into an armed conflict under certain circumstances. Socio-political crises are normally related to: a) demands for self-determination and self-government, or identity issues; b) opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state, or the internal or international policies of a government, which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or c) control of resources or territory.

Table 2.1. **Summary of socio-political crises in 2020**

Conflict[1] -beginning-	Type[2]	Main parties	Intensity[3] / Trend[4]
AFRICA[5]			
Algeria	Internal	Government, military, social and political opposition, Hirak movement	1
	Government		↓
Algeria (AQIM)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups AQIM (formerly GSPC), MUJAO, al-Mourabitoun, Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), governments of North Africa and the Sahel	2
	System		=
Benin	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Central Africa (LRA)	International	Ugandan, CAR, Congolese, Sudanese and South Sudanese Armed Forces, self-defence militias of the countries of the region	1
	Resources		=
Chad	Internal	Government, armed groups (UFR, UFDD), political and social opposition, communitary militias	3
	Government		↑
Côte d'Ivoire	Internationalised internal	Government, militias loyal to former President Laurent Gbagbo, mercenaries, UNOCI	2
	Government, Identity, Resources		↑
DRC	Internal	Government led by Cap pour le Changement (coalition led by Félix Tshisekedi), in coalition with Front Commun pour le Congo (coalition led by Joseph Kabila, successor to the Alliance of the Presidential Majority), political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
DRC – Rwanda	International	Governments of DRC, Rwanda, armed groups FDLR and M23 (former CNDP)	1
	Identity, Government, Resources		=
DRC – Uganda	International	Governments of DRC and Rwanda, ADF, M23 (former CNDP), LRA, armed groups operating in Ituri	1
	Identity, Government, Resources, Territory		=
Equatorial Guinea	Internal	Government, political opposition in exile	1
	Government		=
Eritrea	Internationalised internal	Government, internal political and social opposition, political-military opposition coalition EDA (EPDF, EFDM, EIPJD, ELF, EPC, DMLEK, RSADO, ENSF, EIC, Nahda), other groups	2
	Government, Self-government, Identity		=
Eritrea – Ethiopia[8]	International	Eritrea, Ethiopia	1
	Territory		↓
Ethiopia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, various armed groups	3
	Government		↑

1. This column includes the states in which socio-political crises are taking place, specifying in brackets the region within each state to which the crisis is confined or the name of the armed group involved in the conflict. This last option is used in cases involving more than one socio-political crisis in the same state or in the same territory within a state, for the purpose of distinguishing them.
2. This report classifies and analyses socio-political crises using two criteria: on the one hand, the causes or clashes of interests and, on the other hand, the convergence between the scenario of conflict and the actors involved. The following causes can be distinguished: demands for self-determination and self-government (Self-government) or identity aspirations (Identity); opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state (System) or the internal or international policies of a government (Government), which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or struggle for the control of resources (Resources) or territory (Territory). Regarding the second type, the socio-political crises may be of an internal, internationalised internal or international nature. As such, an internal socio-political crisis involves actors from the state itself who operate exclusively within its territory. Secondly, internationalised internal socio-political crises are defined as those in which at least one of the main actors is foreign and/or the crisis spills over into the territory of neighbouring countries. Thirdly, international socio-political crises are defined as those that involve conflict between state or non-state actors of two or more countries.
3. The intensity of a socio-political crisis (high, medium or low) and its trend (escalation, decrease, no changes) is mainly evaluated on the basis of the level of violence reported and the degree of socio-political mobilisation.
4. This column compares the trend of the events of 2020 with 2019, using the ↑ symbol to indicate that the general situation during 2020 is more serious than in the previous one, the ↓ symbol to indicate an improvement in the situation and the = symbol to indicate that no significant changes have taken place.
5. The socio-political crises regarding Cameroon, Chad and Niger that were present in 2016 due to the instability generated by the armed conflict of Boko Haram are analyzed in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts) in the case of the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram). In turn, the socio-political crises regarding Niger and Burkina Faso that were present in 2017 due to the instability generated by the self-called jihadist insurgency are analyzed in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts) in the case of the Western Sahel Region.
6. This title refers to international tensions between DRC–Rwanda–Uganda that appeared in previous editions of this report. Even though they share certain characteristics, DRC–Rwanda and DRC–Uganda are analysed separately since *Alert 2016!*

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
Ethiopia (Oromia)	Internal	Central government, regional government, political opposition (OFDM, OPC parties) and social opposition, armed opposition (OLF, IFLO)	3
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Ethiopia – Egypt – Sudan	International	Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan	2
	Resources		↑
Gambia	Internal	Government, factions of the Armed Forces, political opposition	1
	Government		↑
Guinea	Internal	Government, Armed Forces, political parties in the opposition, trade unions	2
	Government		↑
Guinea-Bissau	Internationalised internal	Transitional government, Armed Forces, opposition political parties, international drug trafficking networks	2
	Government		↑
Kenya	Internationalised internal	Government, ethnic militias, political and social opposition (political parties and civil society organisations), armed group SLDF, Mungiki sect, MRC party, Somali armed group al-Shabaab and groups that support al-Shabaab in Kenya, ISIS	3
	Government, System, Resources, Identity, Self-government		↑
Malawi	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Mali	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		↑
Madagascar	Internal	High Transitional Authority, opposition leaders, state security forces, dahalos (cattle rustlers), self-defence militias, private security companies	1
	Government, Resources		=
Morocco – Western Sahara	International[7]	Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), armed group POLISARIO Front	3
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↑
Mozambique	Internal	Government, RENAMO	1
	Government, System		↓
Nigeria	Internal	Government, political opposition, Christian and Muslim communities, farmers and livestock raisers, community militias, criminal gangs, IMN, IPOB, MASSOB	3
	Identity, Resources, Government		↑
Nigeria (Niger Delta)	Internal	Government, armed groups MEND, MOSOP, NDPVF, NDV, NDA, NDGJM, IWF, REWL, PANDEF, Joint Revolutionary Council, militias from the Ijaw, Itsereki, Urhobo and Ogoni communities, private security groups	1
	Identity, Resources		=
Rwanda	Internationalised internal	Government, Rwandan armed group FDLR, political opposition, dissident factions of the governing party (RPF), Rwandan diaspora in other African countries and in the West	2
	Government, Identity		=
Rwanda - Burundi	International	Government of Rwanda, Government of Burundi, armed groups	2
	Government		↑
Rwanda - Uganda	International	Government of Rwanda, Government of Uganda	2
	Government		↓
Senegal (Casamance)	Internal	Government, factions of the armed group MFDC	1
	Self-government		=
Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland)	Internal	Republic of Somaliland, autonomous region of Puntland, Khatumo State	2
	Territory		=
Sudan	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↓

7. Although Western Sahara is not an internationally recognised state, the socio-political crisis between Morocco and Western Sahara is considered "international" and not "internal" since it is a territory that has yet to be decolonised and Morocco's claims to the territory are not recognised by international law or by any United Nations resolution.

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
Sudan – South Sudan	International	Sudan, South Sudan	1
	Resources, Identity		↓
Tanzania	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Togo	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Tunisia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups, including the Uqba bin Nafi Battalion and the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigades (branch of AQIM), Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), ISIS	1
	Government, System		↑
Uganda	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Zimbabwe	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		=
AMERICA			
Bolivia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
Chile	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
El Salvador	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, cartels, gangs	1
	Government		↓
Guatemala	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, gangs	1
	Government		↑
Haiti	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, BINUH, gangs	2
	Government		↓
Honduras	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, cartels, gangs	1
	Government		↓
Mexico	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, cartels, armed opposition groups	3
	Government, Resources		=
Nicaragua	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
Peru	Internal	Government, armed opposition (Militarised Communist Party of Peru), political and social opposition (farmer and indigenous organisations)	2
	Government, Resources		↑
Venezuela	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		↓
ASIA			
Bangladesh	Internal	Government (Awami League), political opposition (Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami), International Crimes Tribunal, armed groups (Ansar-al-Islami, JMB)	1
	Government		↓
China (Xinjiang)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed opposition (ETIM, ETLO), political and social opposition	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		=
China (Tibet)	Internationalised internal	Chinese government, Dalai Lama and Tibetan government-in-exile, political and social opposition in Tibet and in neighbouring provinces and countries	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		=

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
ASIA			
China (Hong Kong)	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		↓
China – Japan	International	China, Japan	1
	Territory, Resources		=
China – Taiwan	International	China, Taiwan	1
	Territory, Resources		=
India	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	System, Government		↑
India (Assam)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups ULFA, ULFA(I), NDFB, NDFB(IKS), KPLT, NSLA, UPLA and KPLT	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
India (Manipur)	Internal	Government, armed groups PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
India (Nagaland)	Internal	Government, armed groups NSCN-K, NSCN-IM, NSCN (K-K), NSCN-R, NNC, ZUF	1
	Identity, Self-government		↓
India – China	International	India, China	3
	Territory		↑
India – Pakistan	International	India, Pakistan	3
	Identity, Territory		↑
Indonesia (Sulawesi)	Internal	Government, armed group MIT	1
	System, Identity		↑
Indonesia (West Papua)	Internal	Government, armed group OPM, political and social opposition, indigenous Papuan groups, Freeport mining company	2
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		↓
Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	International	DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea	1
	System		↓
Kazakhstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, local and regional armed groups	1
	System, Government		↑
Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	International	DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea	2
	System		↑
Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[8]	International	DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea, China, Russia	2
	Government		↑
Kyrgyzstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	1
	System, Government, Identity, Resources, Territory		↑
Lao, PDR	Internationalised internal	Government, political and armed organisations of Hmong origin	1
	System, Identity		=
Pakistan	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed opposition (Taliban militias, political party militias), Armed Forces, secret services	2
	Government, System		=
South China Sea	International	China Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam	1
	Territory, Resources		↑

8. This international socio-political crisis affects other countries that have not been mentioned, which are involved to varying degrees.

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
ASIA			
Sri Lanka	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, Tamil political and social organizations	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Tajikistan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, former warlords, regional armed groups, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan	1
	Government, System, Resources, Territory		↓
Thailand	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Uzbekistan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan	1
	Government, System		=
EUROPE			
Belarus	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Internationalised internal	Central government, government of the Republika Srpska, government of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation, high representative of the international community	1
	Self-government, Identity, Government		=
Georgia (Abkhazia)	Internationalised internal	Georgia, self-proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia, Russia	1
	Self-government, Identity, Government		↑
Georgia (South Ossetia)	Internationalised internal	Georgia, self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia, Russia	1
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Moldova, Rep. of (Transdniestria)	Internationalised internal	Moldova, self-proclaimed Republic of Transdniestria, Russia	1
	Self-government, Identity		=
Russia (North Caucasus)[9]	Internal	Russian federal government, governments of the republic of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, armed opposition groups (Caucasian Emirate and ISIS)	2
	System, Identity, Government		↑
Serbia – Kosovo	International[10]	Serbia, Kosovo, political and social representatives of the Serbian community in Kosovo, UNMIK, KFOR, EULEX	1
	Self-government, Identity, Government		↓
Spain (Catalonia)	Internationalised internal	Government of Spain, Government of Catalonia, political, social and judicial actors of Catalonia and Spain, Head of State	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Turkey	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, ISIS, Fetullah Gülen organization	2
	Government, System		=
Turkey – Greece, Cyprus[11]	International	Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, EU, Egypt, Italy, United Arab Emirates, France, Libya Government of National Accord	1
	Territory, Resources, Self-government, Identity		↑
MIDDLE EAST			
Bahrain	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government, Identity		=
Egypt	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		=
Iran	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
Iran (northwest)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed group PJAK and PDKI, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)	1
	Self-government, Identity		=

9. In previous editions of this report, the socio-political crises between Russia (Dagestan) and Russia (Chechnya) were analysed separately.
10. The socio-political crisis between Kosovo and Serbia is considered "international" because even though its international legal status remains unclear, Kosovo has been recognised as a state by over 100 countries.
11. In previous editions of this report this crisis was codified as "Cyprus".

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
MIDDLE EAST			
Iran (Sistan and Balochistan)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups Jundullah (Soldiers of God / People's Resistance Movement), Harakat Ansar Iran and Jaish al-Adl, Pakistan	1
	Self-government, Identity		=
Iran – USA, Israel[12]	International	Iran, USA, Israel	3
	System, Government		↑
Iraq	Internationalised internal	Government, social and political opposition, Iran, USA	3
	Government		=
Iraq (Kurdistan)	Internationalised internal	Government, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Turkey, Iran, PKK	1
	Self-government, Identity, Resources, Territory		=
Israel – Syria – Lebanon	International	Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Hezbollah (party and militia)	3
	System, Resources, Territory		=
Lebanon	Internationalised internal	Government, Hezbollah (party and militia), political and social opposition, armed groups ISIS and Jabhat al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Saraya Ahl al-Sham	2
	Government, System		=
Palestine	Internal	PNA, Fatah, armed group al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Hamas and its armed wing Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, Salafist groups	1
	Government		=
Saudi Arabia	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups, including AQAP and branches of ISIS (Hijaz Province, Najd Province)	1
	Government, Identity		=

1: low intensity; 2: medium intensity; 3: high intensity.
↑: escalation of tension; ↓: decrease of tension; =: no changes.

2.2. Socio-political crises: analysis of trends in 2020

This section examines the general trends observed in areas experiencing socio-political crises throughout 2019, at both the global and regional levels.

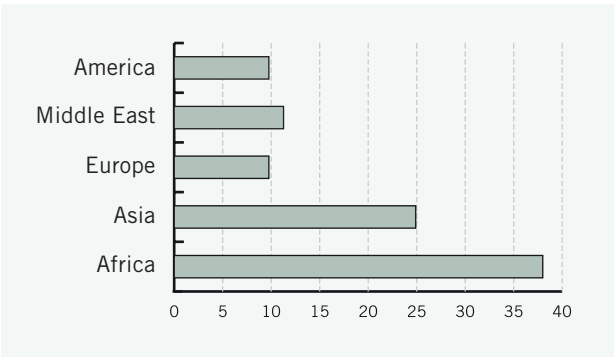
2.2.1. Global trends

Ninety-five socio-political crisis scenarios were identified in 2020: 38 in Africa, 25 in Asia, 12 in the Middle East and 10 in Latin America and Europe

Ninety-five socio-political crisis scenarios were identified around the world in 2020, one more than in the previous year. This increase is significantly lower than the change between 2018 and 2019, when the number of crises rose by 11. As in previous years, the highest number of socio-political crises was concentrated in Africa, with 38 cases, followed by Asia (25), the Middle East (12) and Europe and Latin America (10 in each region). Even though the rise in the number of socio-political crises in 2020 was almost imperceptible, seven new cases were identified while six other contexts were no longer considered as such. Four of the new crises took place in Africa. In Mali, rising political tensions led to a coup that was widely condemned by the international community. In Tanzania, the elections held in October were accompanied by the growing authoritarianism of the ruling party and a notable rise in human rights violations, as well as the first attack in the country for which ISIS claimed responsibility. In Algeria (AQIM), despite the persistence of the underlying dynamics of the dispute, with sporadic incidents reported throughout 2020 (with an approximate death toll of 30), the drop in the levels of violence and the clashes between the security forces and AQIM caused it to cease being considered an armed conflict in 2019. In the case of Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, the political dispute stemming from Ethiopia's continued construction of Africa's largest hydroelectric dam, Ethiopia's Great Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile River, worsened during 2020. In Asia, two new crises were identified. Tension between China and India increased dramatically, with several clashes on their common border causing fatalities for the first time in 45 years. Furthermore, the Indonesian region of Sulawesi saw an increase in activity by the armed group MIT.

12. This international socio-political crisis refers mainly to the dispute over the Iranian nuclear program.

Graph 2.1. **Regional distribution of the number of socio-political crises in 2020**



The vast majority (57%) of the socio-political crises were of low intensity, 26% were of medium intensity and 17% were of high intensity. Compared to the previous year, the number of crises of greater intensity was practically the same, but there was a clear rise in the percentage of less intense cases (from 49% in 2019 to 57% in 2020) and a consequent drop in the percentage of medium-intense crises (35% to 26%). Half of the 16 maximum-intensity crises were concentrated in Africa. In **Chad**, instability persisted in the north and east of the country, along with intercommunity violence and attacks by the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram (BH) in the Lake Chad region, causing the deaths of hundreds of civilians and the start of counterinsurgency operations that killed more than 1,000 combatants. In **Mali**, the increase in anti-government protests due to the political crisis and high levels of insecurity during the first half of the year led to a coup by the self-styled National Committee for the Salvation of the People that was widely condemned by the international community, whose pressure led to the formation of a mixed (military-civil) transition government. In **Nigeria**, in addition to the persistence of the armed conflict between the state and Boko Haram in the three northeastern states of the country and the Lake Chad basin, inter-community fighting continued in the Middle Belt and criminal group activities increased notably, which caused the deaths of around 2,500 people. In **Ethiopia**, hundreds of people were killed in clashes between the state and the armed group OLA and many attacks were reported against the Amhara population in various parts of the country by various militias and self-defence groups. In **Ethiopia (Oromia)**, a highly tense atmosphere persisted as a result of the demonstrations against the political reforms promoted by the federal government, as well as inter-community clashes that occurred at different times of the year in the region. In **Kenya**, alongside the rise in polarisation and political violence linked to the elections scheduled for 2022, attacks by the al-Shabaab group and inter-community clashes continued (killing more than 200) and complaints against the police's excessive use of force and the high number of deaths in custody increased significantly. Regarding the tension between **Rwanda and Burundi**, sporadic clashes between the militaries of both countries were reported along the land and sea borders. The dispute between **Morocco and Western Sahara** experienced one of the most important escalations of tension in recent years in 2020. After Moroccan forces entered the Guerguerat region to face several protests by the Saharawi population, the POLISARIO Front ended the ceasefire and declared a state of war, while Morocco warned of a forceful response in case of a threat to its security.

High-intensity crises in 2020 took place in Chad, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Morocco-Western Sahara, Rwanda-Burundi, Mexico, Venezuela, India-China, India-Pakistan, Iran-USA, Israel, Egypt, Iraq and Israel-Syria-Lebanon

The other region with a high number of maximum-intensity crises was the Middle East. In addition to the increase in international tension over the Iranian nuclear programme regarding the case of Iran-USA-Israel, the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the head of the al-Quds brigade of the Revolutionary Guard, in a US attack in Iraq in January, also had a destabilising impact. In Egypt, the policies of repression and persecution of dissent by the government of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi persisted and intensified. In Iraq, more than 100 people were killed in the crackdown on protests against corruption, nepotism and mismanagement that had escalated since October 2019, as well as clashes between protesters and Iraqi security forces. In the case of Israel-Syria-Lebanon, which increasingly also involves Iran and the United States, around 90 people died as part of the violent episodes that took place in the region, especially Israeli air strikes around the occupied Golan Heights and in different parts of Syria, such as Homs, Aleppo, Quneitra and Damascus. The rest of the high-intensity crises occurred in Asia (two cases) and in Latin America (two other cases). In Asia, fighting between the militaries of **China and India** in the border region of the Galwan Valley caused fatalities for the first time in the last 45 years and triggered one of the most important escalations of political tension between China and India since the war that both countries fought in the 1960s. Regarding the tension between **India and Pakistan**, more than 70 people died and dozens were injured by the crossfire between the militaries of both countries that occurred practically uninterruptedly throughout the year along the Line of Control, the de facto border between India and Pakistan. Finally, the cases of Venezuela and Mexico stood out in Latin America. The political and institutional crisis in **Venezuela** continued (in 2020 it was closely linked to the legislative elections and the control of the National Assembly), one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America was reported and the government announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had stopped a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup. In **Mexico**, more

than 35,000 homicides were reported, many of which were linked to clashes between rival drug cartels or between them and state security forces.

Regarding the evolution of the crises, 38% of them worsened during 2020, 36% did not substantively change compared to the previous year and 26% enjoyed noticeable improvement. Overall, therefore, the number of crises that escalated during the year (36) was clearly higher than the number in which the tension subsided. However, the percentage of scenarios in which tension increased in 2019 (44% of the total) was clearly higher than in 2020. In 2020, more than half the crises that escalated were located in Africa. Regarding the main causes or motivations for the crises, the outlook in 2020 was very similar to that of the previous year. **Seventy-three per cent of the crises analysed were linked to opposition to the internal or international policies of certain governments** or to the political, social or ideological system of the state as a whole, 39% to **demands for self-government and/or identity and 31%** to struggles to control territories and/or resources. Significant regional variations were observed in terms of factors causing the crises. For example, factors linked to opposition to the government or to the system were present in 100% and 76% of the cases in Latin America and Asia respectively, while these percentages were 60% in Asia and in Europe. Similarly, identity-related claims or demands for greater self-government were significant in 80% of the crises in Europe, but were irrelevant in Latin America or represented less than a third of the crises in Africa. Finally, in Africa almost 40% of the crises were linked to disputes over territory or resources, while these factors were significant in only two cases in Europe and the Middle East.

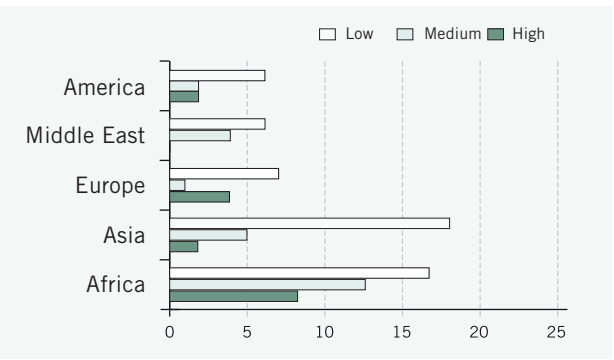
The main causes of around 73% of the crises were opposition to internal or international polices implemented by the respective governments or opposition to the political, social or ideological system of the respective states

In line with previous years, **more than half the crises in the world were internal (53%)**, although this percentage was clearly higher in Africa (61%) and in Latin America, where 100% were internal. Over one quarter of the crises were internationalised internal (26%), although in the Middle East and Europe half were of this type. Finally, just over one fifth (21%) of the crises were international in nature. Despite the fact that there were comparatively less international crises than the other two types, they represent a significant percentage of maximum-intensity cases, such as those of Morocco-Sahara, Rwanda-Burundi, India-China, India-Pakistan, Iran-USA-Israel and Israel-Syria-Lebanon.

2.2.2. Regional trends

In 2020, **Africa** was once again the continent with the highest number of active crises, with 38, or 40% of the total. This figure has remained relatively stable over the last few years. Compared to the previous year, four new cases were included (Mali, Tanzania, Algeria (AQIM) and Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan) and two others (Angola (Cabinda) and Congo) were no longer considered to be socio-political crises. In addition to concentrating the highest percentage of active crises in the world, Africa also had the highest number of maximum-intensity crises, eight out of a total of 16: Chad, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Mali, Morocco-Western Sahara, Nigeria and Rwanda-Burundi. This is a major increase compared to the previous year, when the highest-intensity crises in Africa accounted for 35% of all cases. In addition, half of the cases that escalated in 2020 (specifically 53%) were located in Africa: Benin, Chad, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Morocco-Western Sahara, Nigeria, the DRC, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia and Uganda. In contrast, there were only seven scenarios in which the situation improved from the previous year: Algeria, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda-Burundi, Rwanda-Uganda, Sudan and Sudan-South Sudan. Nevertheless, as a whole almost half the crises in Africa (45%) were of low intensity, a figure relatively similar to that of previous years.

Graph 2.2. **Intensity of the socio-political crises by region**



Opposition to the government was a causal factor in 27 of the 38 crises in Africa, a comparatively high proportion compared to other regions. Opposition to the system was also one of the root causes of four other crises: Mozambique, Kenya, Tunisia and Algeria (AQIM). One third of the crises in Africa were related to identity issues and/or demands for self-government, but there were only five cases specifically linked to demands for greater self-government (Eritrea, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Morocco-Western Sahara and Senegal (Casamance)), a low figure compared to other regions. Finally, competition for control of resources and/or territory was an important explanatory factor in almost 40% of the cases. Thus, there were 12 contexts in Africa in which competition for resources was one of the main causes of the crisis in question, a figure clearly higher than elsewhere. The vast majority of the crises

in Africa (23) **were internal, the same as the previous year**. Although only about one quarter of the crises in Africa were international, accounting for almost half the international crises reported worldwide: Central Africa (LRA), Eritrea-Ethiopia, Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, Morocco-Western Sahara, DRC-Rwanda, DRC-Uganda, Rwanda-Burundi, Rwanda-Uganda and Sudan-South Sudan. The remaining 16% of the cases in Africa were internationalised internal, which witnessed foreign actors, whether non-State armed actors of various kinds –such as the armed organisation al-Shabaab (originating from Somalia) in Kenya–, acts committed by regional or global jihadist groups –such as branches of ISIS and AQIM in Tunisia and Algeria–, the presence of international troops –such as UNOCI in the Ivory Coast or MONUSCO in the DRC–, or the influence of sectors of the diaspora and local armed groups present in neighbouring territories –as in the cases of Eritrea or Rwanda. Finally, there were several countries that were involved in various crisis scenarios, such as Ethiopia, the DRC, Sudan and Rwanda (four crises in each country).

Africa concentrated half of the highest-intensity crises worldwide: Chad, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Morocco-Western Sahara and Rwanda-Burundi

America reported 10 crisis scenarios, 11% of the total. Two fewer cases were observed compared to the previous year (Colombia and Ecuador), where protests subsided significantly compared to the demonstrations of 2019. Although the region continued to host the highest homicide rates in the world, in general terms lower levels of conflict were observed than in 2019, a year marked by significant and massive protests in several Latin American countries. Therefore, in 2020 the tension subsided in 70% of the cases analysed in this chapter, with the only increases in Guatemala, where the most important protests in recent years were reported, and in Peru, where the removal of President Martín Vizcarra led to massive protests and a rise in the activity of a remnant faction of the Shining Path. Sixty per cent of the crises in the region were of low intensity, but two in Latin America were among the most serious in the world. The political, social and economic crisis in Venezuela persisted, as the country suffered one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America and the government announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had stopped a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup d'état. Over 35,000 homicides were reported in Mexico, many of them linked to frequent and sometimes fatal clashes between drug cartels and between them and the state security forces. All the crises in Latin America were internal, which at 100% was almost double the world average. One of the main causes of all the crises in the region was opposition to government policies (in many cases there were major protests against the government and political and institutional crises), while control for resources was also a significant explanatory factor in Mexico and Peru.

Latin America was the only region in which all the crises were internal

There were 25 crises in **Asia**, which accounted for 26% of the total worldwide. Compared to the previous year, two new cases were identified: India-China, where the tension increased notably, to the point that clashes between the two countries' militaries along their common border caused fatalities for the first time in 45 years, and Indonesia (Sulawesi), where the armed group MIT stepped up its armed operations. More than 70% of the crises were of low intensity and only two were considered of high intensity: India-China and India-Pakistan. In both cases, it was mainly border disputes that led to direct confrontations between the militaries of three of the most populated countries in the world, although it should be remembered that India had already fought with both Pakistan and China in the past. More than one third of the crises in Asia escalated compared to the previous year: North Korea-USA-Japan-South Korea, North Korea-South Korea, India, India-China, India-Pakistan, Indonesia (Sulawesi), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Thailand. In eight cases, the intensity did not change significantly in relation to the previous year, while in another eight cases it subsided.

Forty per cent of the crises in Asia were internal and 32% were internationalised internal, whether due to regional armed groups and border tensions, as in four of Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan); owing to transnational links with local armed organisations, such as in the Chinese province of Xinjiang or the Indian state of Assam; because of Hmong organisations in Laos or because of the location of the headquarters of the Tibetan government in exile in India. The remaining 28% of the crises in Asia were international, being the region of the world with the highest percentage of this type of crisis, as in previous years. Most of them are located in the area between the Yellow Sea and the South China Sea: the dispute between China and Japan (mainly over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands), North Korea's tensions with its southern neighbour and also with several other countries regarding its weapons programme, the tensions between China and Taiwan, and the crisis in the South China Sea involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. As mentioned above, the other two international crises involved disputes between India and China and India and Pakistan. Regarding the underlying causes, 60% of the cases were linked to opposition to the government or the state, the lowest percentage in the world together with Europe. Forty-eight per cent of the 25 crises were linked to identity issues or demands

for self-government. Asia was the part of the world in which the greatest number of crises associated with identity were observed, specifically 12: in the regions of Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong in China; in the states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland in India, as well as the historical dispute between India and Pakistan; in the Sulawesi and West Papua regions of Indonesia; and in Kyrgyzstan, Laos and Sri Lanka. Finally, 36% of the cases analysed in Asia were partly motivated by issues related to the control of resources or territory, a percentage similar to that of Africa, making both Asia and Africa the areas with the greatest tension related to the issue. Of the eight crises that revolved around disputes over territory, four were linked to China (China-Japan; China-Taiwan; India-China and the South China Sea), three took place in former Soviet republics in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and the eighth was the conflict between India and Pakistan. Two countries, India and China, were involved in eight and six crisis scenarios, respectively.

Asia was the part of the world with the highest percentage of international crises, many of them in the area between the Yellow Sea and the South China Sea

Ten socio-political crises were counted in **Europe**, one less than in 2019. One scenario was no longer considered a crisis: Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno Karabakh), where the restart of the war in September and a previous escalation of hostilities in July on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border resulted in the deaths of around 5,000 people and forcibly displaced tens of thousands more (mostly Armenian), reclassifying the case as an armed conflict. As in the previous year, no high-intensity crisis was reported, but the situation worsened in 50% of the cases in the region. The crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean, in a conflict over the delimitation of territorial waters and exclusive economic zones involving Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, as well as the exploration of oil in the area, provoked increasing local militarisation and internationalisation of the conflict, with countries such as France, Italy and the UAE conducting joint military exercises shortly after a collision between two Turkish and Greek warships. In addition to the aforementioned case involving Turkey, Greece and Cyprus and the situation in the two self-proclaimed independent republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, tension also rose in Belarus, where massive anti-government protests that followed the re-election of President Aleksander Lukashenko and the authorities' subsequent crackdown led to serious human rights violations and a major political and social crisis in the country, and in Russia (North Caucasus), where incidents of violence between federal security forces and local and insurgents claimed around 40 lives during the year.

Eighty per cent of the crises in Europe were linked to identity issues and to demands for self-government

In Europe, there were two international crises: the one already mentioned in the Eastern Mediterranean and the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo, four of them internal and six internationalised internal. Russia was directly involved in four crises (those occurring in the North Caucasus, in the self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and in the self-proclaimed republic of Transdniestria, in Moldova) and played an important role in the crisis in Belarus. Eighty per cent of the cases were linked to identity issues and demands for self-government, a similar percentage to previous years, making Europe the part of the world in which these factors are clearly most present. Opposition to the government or the system was also present in 60% of the cases, a slightly higher percentage than last year (55%), but lower than in other regions. Disputes for control of resources and/or territory accounted for only 10% of the cases analysed, the lowest percentage in the world.

Finally, there were 12 crises in the **Middle East**, the same as in 2019, accounting for 13% of all cases worldwide. One third of the crises in the Middle East were of high intensity (Egypt, Iran-USA-Israel, Iraq and Israel-Syria-Lebanon), so it was the region with the highest percentage of crises of this type. Almost none of the crises in the Middle East experienced significant changes in intensity compared to the previous year, but there was one in which the tension subsided (Iran, which in 2019 was the scene of massive protests that caused the deaths of more than 300 people) and another in which the situation worsened (Iran-USA-Israel, in which international tension around the Iranian nuclear programme intensified, coupled with the US assassination in Iraq of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's al-Quds Brigade, which had a very destabilising impact in the region). Iran was directly or indirectly linked to seven crises: Iran, Iran (northwest), Iran (Sistan Balochistan), Iran-USA-Israel, Iraq, Iraq (Kurdistan) and Israel-Syria-Lebanon, while a country that does not belong to the region, the United States, was involved in three cases: Iran-US-Israel, Iraq and Israel-Syria-Lebanon.

The main causes of 75% of the crises reported in the region (nine out of 12) included opposition to the internal or international policies of the government or the system, the same figures as last year. More than 40% of the crises were linked to identity and self-government issues, while struggles to control resources or territory were important in 17% of the cases, a lower percentage than in other regions. Half the crises in the Middle East were internationalised internal (the highest percentage in the world, together with Europe), while one third were internal and the remaining 17% were international. Two international tensions were of maximum intensity: Iran-USA-Israel and Israel-Syria-Lebanon.

2.3. Socio-political crises: annual evolution

2.3.1. Africa

Great Lakes and Central Africa

Chad	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources, Territory Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups (UFR, UFDD), political and social opposition, community militias

Summary:
The foiled coup d'état of 2004 and the constitutional reform of 2005, boycotted by the opposition, sowed the seeds of an insurgency that intensified over the course of 2006, with the goal of overthrowing the authoritarian government of Idriss Déby. This opposition movement is composed of various groups and soldiers who are disaffected with the regime. Added to this is the antagonism between Arab tribes and the black population in the border area between Sudan and Chad, related to local grievances, competition for resources and the overspill of the war taking place in the neighbouring Sudanese region of Darfur, as a consequence of the cross-border operations of Sudanese armed groups and the janjaweed (Sudanese pro-government Arab militias). They attacked the refugee camps and towns in Darfur, located in the east of Chad, and this contributed to an escalation of tension between Sudan and Chad, accusing each other of supporting the insurgence from the opposite country, respectively. The signature of an agreement between both countries in January 2010 led to a gradual withdrawal and demobilisation of the Chadian armed groups, although there are still some resistance hotspots. In parallel, Idriss Déby continued controlling the country in an authoritarian way. After the 2016 elections, won without surprises by Idriss Déby, the climate of social instability persisted. Finally, it is worth noting the military interventions in the north against groups based in Libya and against illegal mining, and against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, as well as periodic inter-community clashes over land ownership and uses.

Instability persisted in northern and eastern Chad, with attacks and retaliation in other parts of the country linked to intercommunity violence and attacks by the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram (BH) in the Lake Chad region.[13] BH's attacks claimed hundreds of lives. The worst attack to date occurred in the Boma Peninsula on 23 March and killed about 100 soldiers. In response, the Chadian Armed Forces carried out a military operation in early April during which they claimed to have killed 1,000 BH fighters and lost 52 Chadian soldiers. The Chadian government took political advantage of the exceptional situation to crack down on the political opposition, as has happened elsewhere in Africa. Intercommunity violence caused more than 100 fatalities during the year. In particular, there were clashes between militias from livestock and agricultural communities in the provinces of Ouaddai (east), Dar Sila (east), Batha (centre), Tandjilé (south), Mayo-Kebbi Est (southwest) and others. Tension persisted in the mining areas of the province of Tibesti (northwest) and starting in October the tension rose after the government decided to eliminate all mining rights, except those approved with companies that demonstrated experience in the mining sector. This decision came after Miski's militia withdrew from the agreement reached in 2019, in protest against the government's decision to change the legal framework for mining gold deposits to the militia's detriment. Given the persistence of attacks by Chadian armed rebel groups based in neighbouring countries such as Libya and Sudan, the government tried to boost security. In November, President Déby met with Abdelwahid Aboud Mackaye, a rebel leader based in Sudan, and asked him to give up the armed struggle. The Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic (CCMSR), an armed group based in Libya, carried out some attacks during the year, mainly in February and September in the Kouri-Bougoudi area, Tibesti province (north).

On the political front, President Idriss Déby pushed for the amendment of the 2018 Constitution in view of the presidential election that was to be held in December and was finally postponed to April 2021, citing interruptions in the electoral preparations because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Legislative elections were postponed until October 2021. In an attempt to improve relations with the majority community groups ahead of the 2021 elections, Déby reinstated former Defence Minister Mahamat Nour Abdelkerim into the Chadian Army and pardoned three imprisoned rebel leaders in August. Most opposition and civil society groups boycotted the governmental National Inclusive Forum on constitutional reform held in N'Djamena between 29 October and 1 November. They justified the boycott by claiming that the Forum did not intend to address structural issues or reform of the Chadian Army. Déby restructured the security forces in February, appointing relatives and members of his ethnic group as senior members of the Chadian Army and the police. In the Forum, among other things, the creation of a vice president was discussed, who would be appointed by the president. The proposal was subsequently approved, sowing concern that Déby was trying to promote people from his closest circles to this position. However, in December Parliament approved a constitutional amendment allowing the head of the Senate, and not the vice president, to occupy the position of acting president, as Déby had intended, in the event of the president's absence or incapacitation. This amendment finally came into force on 14 December. According to various analysts, the government politically exploited the emergency situation to repress the political opposition under the cover of the restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government put pressure on the political

13. See the summary on the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

opposition and civil society activists throughout the year. According to some, the government's mismanagement of the crisis caused by the pandemic led the ruling party and the political opposition to join forces to demand improvements in its handling of the situation, which prompted Déby to dissolve the institution in charge of managing the pandemic in May and create a new structure under his personal leadership. On 11 December, the government suspended opposition party Parti Réformiste for three months after its leader, Yacine Abdramane Sakine, claimed that the Chadian Army was controlled by a minority to allow Déby's corrupt regime to remain in power. On 12 and 23 December, the opposition party Les Transformateurs organised demonstrations in N'Djamena to demand greater political freedom. These demonstrations were dispersed with tear gas on the grounds that they disrespected the provisions of the pandemic regulations. Three people were injured. The government prohibited a citizen forum from being held by the opposition in late November, arguing it would violate the restrictions of the pandemic and detained 70 people, most of them journalists, at the FM Liberté radio facilities for trying to organise such a forum. In December, a court dropped charges against human rights activist Alain Kemba and two other collaborators for organising the forum in N'Djamena in November, which had led to their arrest on charges of promoting acts of rebellion and violating the public order, as well as breaching the COVID-19 restrictions.

The Chadian government took political advantage of the exceptional situation to crack down on the political opposition as part of the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19

DRC	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Governance Internal
Main parties:	Government led by Cap pour le Changement (coalition led by Félix Tshisekedi), in coalition with Front Commun pour le Congo (coalition led by Joseph Kabila, successor to the Alliance of the Presidential Majority), political and social opposition

Summary:
Between 1998 and 2003, what has been called "Africa's First World War" took place in DRC.[14] The signing of a series of peace agreements between 2002 and 2003 involved the withdrawal of foreign troops and the creation of a National Transitional Government (NTG), incorporating the former government, the political opposition, the RCD-Goma, RCD-K-ML, RCD-N and MLC armed groups, and the Mai Mai militias. From June 2003, the NTG was led by President Joseph Kabila and four vice presidents, two of whom belonged to the former insurgency: Azarias Ruberwa of the RCD-Goma and Jean-Pierre Bemba of the MLC. The NTG drew up the constitution, on which a referendum was held in December 2005. Legislative and presidential elections were held between July and October 2006, in which Kabila was elected president and Jean-Pierre Bemba came second, amid a climate of high tension and accusations of electoral fraud. The formation of the new government in 2007 failed to bring a halt to the instability and disputes taking place in the political sphere. The elections of November 2011, in which a series of irregularities were committed, fuelled the instability. The extension of President Kabila's mandate, which was due to expire in the 2016 elections that were postponed until the end of 2018, contributed to exacerbating instability and political and social mobilization against his stay in power, which was harshly repressed.

The DRC continued to be affected by an atmosphere of violence and political instability stemming from tension within the ruling coalition, which finally broke down in December, and by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. To this was added persistent violence caused by many armed groups in the eastern part of the country. In the political sphere, tensions remained constant within the ruling coalition between the Cap pour le changement (CACH), an alliance between President Félix Tshisekedi and Vital Kamerhe, and former President Kabila's Front Commun pour le Congo (FCC). Since the controversial parliamentary elections were held in March 2019, which marked the first peaceful transition in the country, albeit under accusations of fraud by the opposition Lamuka coalition, President Tshisekedi has governed through a coalition consisting of the CACH and the FCC. As the 2023 presidential election approaches, these groups have increased their power struggles. The CACH and the FCC discussed ministerial posts, military reorganisation, appointments to the judiciary and the national electoral council and anti-corruption policies. Political infighting led to a series of protests across the DRC during July, although at the time Tshisekedi was still in favour of upholding the coalition. The early protests denounced Kabila's attempts to gain more power and influence before the election by appointing his ally, Ronsard Malonda, to head the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI). They were followed by counter-demonstrations by Kabila supporters. Civil society organisations, the political parties CACH and Lamuka (led by Martin Fayulu and bringing together the main opposition actors, including Moïse Katumbi and Jean-Pierre Bemba) and some religious groups organised protests throughout the country. President Tshisekedi advised the groups tasked with appointing the CENI board members to unify their positions and seek consensus, and later declared that he would not approve Malonda.

Despite restrictions on movement related to the COVID-19 pandemic, civil society organisations were actively involved in political life and staged multiple large-scale demonstrations across the country against

14. See the summary on DRC (East) in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

the proposed judicial reforms, the appointment of the new president of the CENI the lack of electoral reform. At the same time, various announcements by the FCC, such as allegations of a secret clause in the government's deal establishing that Kabila could run in the 2023 election, which the CACH denied, as well as one minister's statement that they were working for Kabila to come back, coupled with the ex-president's appearance in his seat in the Senate, raised rumours of his possible return. In October, the FCC boycotted Tshisekedi's appointment of three new judges to the Constitutional Court, whose replacement was key to promoting greater plurality and independence in the upcoming Congolese elections.

Tensions rose in November. In an attempt to gain support for his plan to separate from the FCC, from 1 to 24 November Tshisekedi held a series of meetings with religious and opposition leaders and some members of the FCC to enlist their support. After messages circulating on social media in early November called on the Congolese Army to rebel against poor working conditions, on 12 November the military body denied any unrest among its ranks and warned politicians against any attempt to manipulate it. Thousands of Tshisekedi's supporters marched in the capital, Kinshasa, to demand an end to the coalition with the FCC. During the demonstration, a wing of Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) party accused the FCC finance minister of freezing funds earmarked for the salaries of public officials and especially military officers to turn them against the president. In early December, the events that culminated in the breakdown of the government coalition accelerated, generating serious concern about its consequences for the country as a whole. In early November, the opposition had obtained the signatures necessary to present a motion of censure against the president of the National Assembly, Jeanine Mabunda (of the FCC), who was accused of bias. On 10 December, Mabunda lost the vote and left office. Previously, on 6 December, Tshisekedi had announced the dissolution of the coalition between the CACH and the FCC and his willingness to build a new majority or call new elections if this was not possible. On 7 December, there were serious clashes and altercations in the National Assembly between MPs from both parties as a result of the previous day's announcement. However, the conflict was inevitable, according to various analysts, since if Prime Minister Sylvestre Ilunga Ilunkamba (of the FCC) did not resign, the National Assembly could reaffirm him, since the FCC has a majority.

Finally, tensions rose in March over the border demarcation crisis between the DRC and Zambia, with their armies clashing in the border area. The dispute remained unresolved until the South Africa Development Community (SADC) deployed a technical mission to the affected border area from 23 to 29 July, which led to the adoption of a gradual approach to begin to demarcate the borders in September.

Rwanda – Burundi	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓
Type:	Governance International
Main parties:	Government of Rwanda, Government of Burundi, armed groups

Summary:
The end of the respective armed conflicts in Rwanda in 1994 and Burundi in 2004 reversed the political and ethnic dominance that had emerged following independence. In Rwanda, the 1959 revolution overthrew the Tutsi monarchy and brought the Hutu elites to power, who were driven out after the 1994 genocide by Tutsi refugees from Uganda, and who installed the RPF, led by Tutsi General Paul Kagame, at the top levels of the country's Government. In Burundi, 40 years of Tutsi military rule ended with an armed conflict and the victory of the largest pro-Hutu faction in the armed rebellion, the CNDD-FDD. Their leader, Pierre Nkurunziza, managed to find a balance within the group allowing him to rise to power. Both have become "strong men" of the region, promoting the development of their countries and an end to conflicts in the area. Rwanda, with the RPF in power, financed Nkurunziza's electoral campaign, which is seen as moderate because it marginalised other sectors of the Burundian Hutu rebellion (Agathon Rwasa's FNL) with connections to his Rwandan Hutu enemy FDLR. Nkurunziza and Kagame have supported one another in the prosecution of their respective insurgencies. However, in 2013 this relationship was severed when the pro-Rwandan M23 rebellion was defeated in DRC (the enemy of the FDLR). Rwanda accused its Burundian neighbour of being the safe haven for combatants whose presence in DRC had until then justified Rwanda's intervention.

During the year, the relationship between Rwanda and Burundi remained tense, with mutual accusations of incursions and military actions on the common border. However, since the beginning of the year, Rwanda had announced a willingness to engage in dialogue in order to normalise relations with Burundi. The tension escalated seriously when the Burundian Armed Forces of both countries clashed on the maritime border of Lake Rweru on 8 May, killing a Burundian soldier. Nevertheless, Rwandan President Paul Kagame repeated his desire to improve relations with Burundi: on 6 June he congratulated Ndayishimiye on his election victory and on 10 June he expressed his condolences for the death of Nkurunziza. However, on 27 June the Rwandan defence minister said that around 100 armed men from Burundi with materiel from the Burundian Armed Forces had attacked a Rwandan Army post in Ruheru, near the border. The government of Burundi denied the accusation, though independent media reports confirmed it. On 10 July, Kagame said that he was ready to work with the new president of Burundi. However, on 6 August, Ndayishimiye said that he did not wish to maintain relations with a "hypocritical" state that was holding Burundian refugees in Rwanda. Despite this, Rwanda responded by facilitating the return of the first 500 refugees in late August. At the same time, the heads of the intelligence services of both countries

met at the Nemba border post in Rwanda and agreed to cooperate on border security. This is the first high-level meeting between both countries since 2015. Gradually, in mid-September, the Burundian government took steps to normalise relations with Rwanda and the Rwandan government began procedures to extradite the alleged perpetrators of the 2015 coup attempt against President Nkurunziza.

Sudan	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Governance Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
Sudan is immersed in a chronic conflict stemming from the concentration of power and resources in the centre of the country. Apart from the conflicts in the marginalised regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, the rest of the country also suffers from governance problems stemming from the authoritarian regime of President Omar al-Bashir who came to power in a coup d'état in 1989 and who exercises tight control and repression of dissidents through state security apparatuses. The tense situation in the country was exacerbated by the separation of Southern Sudan in 2011, as it severely affected the economy of the country which was 70% dependent on oil sales, mostly from the south. The Sudanese state's coffers saw their income drastically reduced by the loss of control over the export of oil and, later, by the failure to reach an agreement with South Sudan for its transportation through the pipelines that pass through Sudan. An economic situation with high inflation and the devaluation of the currency contributed to the start of significant protests in the summer of 2012 in several cities in the country that, in early 2019, led to the fall of the al-Bashir regime and the opening of a transitional process.

After the formation of the transitional government in Sudan and the signing of the new constitutional agreement in 2019, the country made progress in implementing the established reforms in 2020, as well as in the search for peace in the conflict regions. At the beginning of the year, as part of the reforms in the former regime's security sector, the Sudanese security forces faced an orchestrated riot by members of the former National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). The riot originated because the NISS had been transformed into a new agency called the General Intelligence Service (GIS) in June 2019, which generated resistance. As a result of the incident, the chairman of the Sovereign Council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, announced the replacement of GIS Director Abu Bakr Mustafa Damblab with the Sudanese Army intelligence chief. Subsequently, on 9 March, there was a car bomb attack against Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who was unharmed. The Sudanese Islamic Youth Movement claimed responsibility for the attack, which prompted additional measures to dismantle the old regime's security system. Alongside the implementation of the security sector reforms, progress was also made on new political and economic action based on negotiations between the government, the Sovereign Council and the opposition coalition Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). On 6 April, these actors formed a committee to accelerate the transitional reforms, committing to appoint the Transitional Legislative Council and the Economic Emergency Committee by mid-May, as well as the civilian governors by 18 April. However, disagreements between the parties, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, prevented major progress on the transition agenda during the year. This sparked major social demonstrations demanding the agreed reforms. Meanwhile, after a year of peace negotiations in the capital of South Sudan, Juba, the Sudanese government and the rebel coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) and the faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minnawi (SLM/A-MM) **signed a historic peace agreement on 31 August**. The agreement was not signed by the faction of the North Sudan People's Liberation Movement, another rebel group headed by Abdelaziz al-Hilu (SPLM-N), or the Sudan Liberation Movement faction led by Abdel Wahid al-Nur (SLM/A-AW), which are still in separate peace negotiating processes.[15]

Some of the clauses signed in the agreement establish the beginning of a three-year transitional period; the integration of the former rebel leaders into the Sovereign Council, the ministerial cabinet and the Transitional Legislative Council; the establishment of a federal regional government system in Sudan; the formation of a joint security force in Darfur; the consideration of Darfur as a single region where power will be shared; and the granting of autonomy to the Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, in addition to West Kordofan. Subsequently, in December the head of the Sovereign Council of Sudan, al-Burhan, announced the formation of a **Transitional Partners Council (TPC)** composed of 29 members: the prime minister, six members of the Sudanese Army, 13 members of the CFF and nine members of the SRF. The establishment of the TPC was justified due to the need to align the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement with the Constitution. However, the Council of Ministers, civil society organisations, Resistance Committees, the FCC and political parties rejected its formation, calling it contrary to the spirit of the December revolution and the objectives of the transition period and rejected the powers bestowed on it. The Sudanese National Alliance, which brings together stakeholders that forged the transition in the country, asked for the TPC's work to halt until more consultations are held, proposing greater representation of women and youth and of all parties to the peace agreement. These events caused the head of the Sovereign Council to reverse his decision to form the TPC. Likewise, the formalisation

15. See summary on Sudan in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Report on Trends and Scenarios*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.

of the peace agreement, its approval by the Sovereign Council and its incorporation as a constitutional statement generated misgivings in the eastern part of the country against what is called the "eastern track" of the peace agreement, calling for self-determination for eastern Sudan. These events provoked outbreaks of violence in the states of Red Sea and Kassala, where at least 30 people were killed on 20 October.

As part of the progress made in the transition process, in early February, the UN Secretary-General agreed to Khartoum's request to establish a political mission in the country to support peacebuilding and development. In June 2020, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2524 to establish the **United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS)** as of 1 January 2021. The new political mission will complement the work of United Nations agencies and programmes in Sudan and work closely with the Transitional Government and the people of the Sudan in support of the transition. In turn, the UN Security Council announced the end of the **United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID),** which will cease operations after 13 years in June 2021.

Headway was also made during the year in relation to the case that the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** has open against former president Omar al-Bashir and four other former officials of the regime accused of charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the Darfur region since the beginning of the armed conflict in 2003. In February 2020, the Sudanese government agreed to cooperate with the ICC, stating that it was willing to hand over the accused, as well as to sign and ratify the Rome Statute. In August, the trial of al-Bashir and other members of his regime, accused of perpetrating the 1989 coup and other charges, began in Sudan.

Finally, on 23 October, US President Donald Trump signed an order to **remove Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism**. This came after Sudan agreed to financially compensate the families of the victims of the Al Qaeda attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and of an attack on a US warship in Yemen in 2000. The normalisation of relations between the US and Sudan also included US approval of the arrival of the Sudanese ambassador to the country, which had not occurred for two decades. As part of the agreement, President Trump announced that Sudan and Israel had agreed to normalise diplomatic relations, which had been broken for many years. In December, Russia and Sudan signed an agreement to establish a Russian naval base for at least 25 years in Port Sudan, on the Red Sea. The agreement states that the Russian naval base should "help to strengthen peace and stability in the region" and is not directed against third parties. In return, Russia will provide Sudan with weapons and military equipment.

Tanzania	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Governance Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
The Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party has held power in Tanzania since it gained independence in 1961, cementing its dominance for decades under a single-party state formula, and it was not until 1995 that a multi-party system was introduced in the country. Since the rise to power of John Magulufi (CCM) in 2015, this control has increased and the country has been affected by a growing authoritarianism and continuous harassment towards civil society and the political opposition, restricting the political space. Magulufi became president of the country on a wave of anti-corruption discourse and nationalist rhetoric, depicting the political opposition as saboteurs of the country's development agenda and even traitors doing the bidding of the West. Tanzania has become increasingly divided and polarised between supporters of the governing CCM and its detractors, creating a climate of uncertainty and concern about its political future. Magulufi has repeatedly promised that he would only serve as president for two terms, as established by the current Constitution. However, senior officials of the CCM have proposed eliminating the term limit for the presidency, to which the elections held in October 2020 left the door open given the CCM's massive victory, which gave them more than the two-thirds of parliamentary seats necessary to amend the Constitution. These elections were considered fraudulent and were affected by an atmosphere of intimidation, violence and arbitrary detentions. Instability also rose in the semi-autonomous archipelago of Zanzibar, historically affected by fraudulent and violent elections.

In Tanzania there was a serious deterioration of the political space, with grave violations of human rights. The country was affected by the growing authoritarianism of the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, as well as President John Magulufi, which escalated with the general elections that were held on 28 October. His presidency has been characterised by continuous harassment of civil society and the political opposition. Added to this situation was the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. President Magufuli downplayed the risk posed by COVID-19 and silenced critics of the government's response, ruling out any closure of the financial capital or the country due to the escalation of infections and the deaths of at least two MPs and a minister. He also fired the deputy minister of health for having criticised the government's response to the crisis and questioned the credibility of the national laboratory and a special committee on COVID-19. Since April, the government has refused to provide official figures on the spread of the pandemic, arguing that they were being used to chip away at it.

In relation to the restriction of the political space, the repression and persecution of the political opposition and media critical of government management

increased during the year. One example was the 11-month suspension of Kwanza Online TV in July for broadcasting information from the US embassy warning of the exponential growth of the pandemic in the country. In July, three UN special rapporteurs (on the rights of association and peaceful assembly, on the situation of human rights activists and on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression) urged an end to the repression of the civic space and to the restrictions on different basic rights. Amnesty International warned in October that the government had created a battery of laws to suppress all forms of dissent and effectively suppress the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly before the 28 October elections.[16] In the preceding months, opposition candidates had been arrested on trumped-up charges that deprived them of their right to freedom of assembly, association and movement. At the same time, regulations aimed at strengthening the government's control over what the local and foreign media published came into force, violating the right to freedom of expression. There was a climate of violence during the pre-campaign period and the electoral campaign, with continuous acts of repression of political parties, their candidates and electoral events, as well as non-governmental organisations and the media, as reported by many local and international human rights organisations. Dozens of members of the political opposition have been arrested since June and the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) suspended its activities in August, citing a constant atmosphere of intimidation and interference in their activities by the security forces. In October, election violence broke out with the death of at least 10 people in the archipelago of Zanzibar at the hands of the police and the opposition party Chadema denounced the deaths of two people when two officials of the party in power fired live ammunition into an election rally in the town of Nyamongo. Other sources raised the total number of fatalities until November to 15.

There was a serious deterioration of the situation in Tanzania as a result of the authoritarian and repressive drift of John Magulufi's government

Critical media outlets and the Internet and digital messaging applications were shut down temporarily on 27 October, the eve of the election. Many irregularities were found on election day and fraud was reported. The results gave the victory to President John Magulufi with 84% of the votes and his party obtained 253 of the 261 seats, or 98%, a figure well above 70% of the seats in 2015. Also on election day, the regional expert group Tanzania Elections Watch declared that the way that the situation had developed meant there had been a profound drop in the country's democratic standards. Various opposition figures went into exile before the turn of events (the presidential candidate of the Chadema party, Tundu Lissu sought refuge in the German embassy and later moved to Belgium, while the MP Godbless Lema went into exile in Kenya), after being temporarily arrested prior to protests against Magulufi's re-election. In line with the growing climate of human rights violations, the country decided to restrict access to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR), which was created by the AU and is the main African human rights mechanism, supposedly for receiving unfavourable answers from it. Tanzania, which hosts the court, withdrew on 21 November, one year after the request made by the Tanzanian government. However, its withdrawal does not mean that the country will not continue to adhere to provisions of its protocol, as the AfCHPR allows individuals and NGOs from other countries to sue Tanzania even if it has withdrawn.

On 14 October, the first attack committed by the jihadist insurgents operating in the neighbouring Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado in the country was verified. The attack killed at least 22 people, including three members of the security forces in the town of Kitaya, in the region of Mtwara, and was the first attack for which ISIS claimed responsibility in Tanzania. Later there were other attacks in other Tanzanian towns.

Uganda	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
President Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986, when an insurgent movement he commanded succeeded in overthrowing the government of Milton Obote, and has since ruled the country using authoritarian means and a political system controlled by the former rebel movement, the NRM (the Movement). In the 2001 presidential elections Museveni defeated his main opponent, Kizza Besigye, a former colonel in the NRM, amid allegations of fraud. In a referendum held in July 2005 Ugandans voted to return to a multiparty system. Following an amendment to the Constitution in 2005 to increase the existing limit of two consecutive terms to three, Museveni won the 2006 elections, amid serious allegations of fraud. They were the first multiparty elections that had been held since he had come to power in 1986. In 2011 and 2016 presidential elections, Museveni again beat his eternal rival and former ally Kizza Besigye amid new allegations of fraud, which has led to an escalation of social tension and Government repression of the demands for democratic change and protests against the rising cost of living. In parallel, Uganda's military intervention in Somalia increased the threats of the Somali armed group al-Shabaab against Uganda. Finally, various parts of the country are affected by periodic intercommunity disputes and grievances exploited during the electoral period.

Political tension in the country increased considerably during the year due to the start of the campaign for

16. Amnesty International, "Lawfare – Repression by Law Ahead of Tanzania's General Elections", 12 October 2020.

the presidential election scheduled for 4 January 2021. In keeping with the trend of government repression in Ugandan election campaigns in previous years, the year was marked by the arrest of opposition leaders and the criminalisation of and violent crackdowns against the opposition movement. In the five weeks since the election campaign began on 9 November, dozens of people were killed in election-related violence, most of them shot dead by police and other security forces. President Yoweri Museveni, in power since 1986, said that 54 people lost their lives between 18 and 19 November in the protests and riots that followed the arrest of main opposition presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi (popularly known as Bobi Wine). Wine, a popular figure among Ugandan youth, announced in 2019 that he would run in the 2021 election, prompting a campaign of repression and arrests by the Ugandan authorities. On 6 January, Wine suffered the first arrest of the year on charges of violating the 2000 Election Law and the 2013 Public Order Management Law. In March, the police also arrested Henry Tumukunde, a former retired general and former minister of security who was planning to run for president, on suspicion of treason. On 14 October, Ugandan security forces re-arrested Bobi Wine in a raid on the campaign headquarters of his party, the National Unity Platform. Ugandan Army spokeswoman Flavia Byekwaso justified the arrest and the operation as being aimed at seizing the suits and red berets worn by Wine's supporters, since in 2019 Uganda designated them as official military attire, imposing a punishment of up to five years prison on any civilian wearing them. Bobi Wine was arrested again on 18 November on charges of violating health restrictions, triggering two days of protests that caused more than 50 deaths at the hands of the security forces. In total, according to local media reports, over 800 people were arrested in the protests. At the same time, Patrick Oboi Amuriat, who was also a presidential candidate, was arrested for organising an unauthorised demonstration in the northern city of Gulu. Different domestic and foreign actors, including the UN, the US embassy, the European Union delegation and the country's religious leaders, appealed to the security forces to curb their violence, asking them to ensure that the elections proceed properly. The EU asked the government of Uganda for an investigation into the violent events that occurred between 18 and 19 November. Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused Uganda of trying to militarise the pandemic-related restrictions, using limitations on meetings to stop political demonstrations. The organisation claimed to have evidence of the disproportionate use of Ugandan law to restrict opposition meetings. In this repressive atmosphere, the media also saw their rights violated. The Ugandan NGO Human Rights Network for Journalists (HNRJ) reported more than 100 cases of human rights violations against journalists in the country as part of the election campaign, including cases of police violence. The Ugandan Foreign Correspondents' Association also reported at least three incidents of police attacks on its journalists. The Ugandan Media Council cancelled the accreditation of all foreign journalists on 10 December, ordering them to obtain a special media pass before 31 December. This requirement was also applicable to all local media.

Horn of Africa

Ethiopia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Governance Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, various armed groups

Summary:
The Ethiopian administration that has governed since 1991 is facing a series of opposition movements that demand advances in the democracy and governability of the country, as well as a greater degree of self-government. The government coalition EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) is controlled by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party, of the Tigrayan minority, that rules the country with growing authoritarianism with the consent of the Amhara elite. There is discontent in the country with the ethnic federal regime implemented by the EPRDF which has not resolved the national issue and has led to the consolidation of a strong political and social opposition. Along with the demands for the democratization of the institutions, there are political-military sectors that believe that ethnic federalism does not meet their nationalist demands and other sectors, from the ruling classes and present throughout the country, that consider ethnic federalism to be a deterrent to the consolidation of the Nation-State. In the 2005 elections this diverse opposition proved to be a challenge for the EPRDF, who was reluctant to accept genuine multi-party competition, and post-election protests were violently repressed. The following elections (2010, 2015) further limited democratic openness by increasing the verticality of the regime and the repression of the political opposition. The 2009 Counter-Terrorism Act helped decimate the opposition. The attempt since 2014 to carry out the Addis Ababa Master Plan, a plan that provided for the territorial expansion of the capital, Addis Ababa, at the expense of several cities in the Oromiya region, and the organization of the development of the city generated significant protests and deadly repression in the Oromiya region, which contributed to increased tension. Social protests contributed to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in early 2018 and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed, who undertook a series of reforms aimed at easing ethnic tensions in the country, promoting national unity and relaxing restrictions on civil liberties. However, the changes introduced by the government of Abiy Ahmed caused tension in the federation.

The situation in the country deteriorated seriously due to the start of the violent conflagration between Tigray and the federal government,[17] as well as the persistent outbreaks of intercommunity violence and the actions of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) at different times of the year. Violence was committed by civilian self-defence groups

17. See the summary on Ethiopia (Tigray) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

and militias against the Amhara community, the largest in the country and present in different regions, which displaced tens of thousands of people in different areas. There was also fighting between members of the Amhara community and other communities, mainly in the Oromia region in the centre of the country, where the OLA clashed with the security forces, causing hundreds of fatalities. Serious clashes and outbreaks of violence also took place in the Benishangul-Gumuz region (especially in the Metekel Zone), where the Amhara community also suffered reprisals, and in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), against the Amhara civilian population. Clashes and spirals of retaliation also occurred between Afar and Somali communities in the area bordering the Afar and Somali regions. Furthermore, mass protests were staged in June over the death of the singer and activist Hachalu Hundessa. The protests were led by youths from the Oromo community against minorities from other communities that they blamed for his death. The protests were harshly put down by the security forces, causing at least 239 fatalities between 30 June and 2 July in Addis Ababa and the Oromia region, the shutdown of the Internet, the deployment of the Ethiopian Army in Addis Ababa and the arrest of at least 5,000 people. The detainees included people critical of Abiy Ahmed's government, such as opposition leader Jawar Mohammed and journalist Eskinder Nega, imprisoned in 2011 and released by Ahmed in 2018 for his alleged role in instigating a violent response to Hundessa's death. Abiy Ahmed described Hundessa's death and the subsequent violence as coordinated attempts to destabilise the country. The attorney general announced the arrest of two suspects on 10 July who allegedly confessed to Hundessa's murder on orders from the OLA with the aim of inciting tensions to destabilise the government, although the group denied any responsibility for the events. The security forces used excessive force to impose the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, causing various victims during the year. Moreover, amid the debate between the supporters and detractors of the system of ethnic federalism in the country,[18] on 18 June the regional Parliament of the SNNPR transferred power to the new federal state of Sidama as a result of the referendum called by the Sidama community on 20 November 2019.[19] After this, on 6 October the federal Parliament approved a request to call a referendum on the creation of new regional states by five other area administrations and a district of the SNNPR.

According to an Amnesty International report made public in May, security forces have been committing serious human rights violations in recent years, such as extrajudicial killings, torture, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions and the burning of houses as part of military operations in the Amhara and Oromia regions.[20] Produced between December 2018 and December 2019, the report documents these human rights violations despite the reforms undertaken by the government such as the release of thousands of detainees, the opening of the social and political space and the repeal of draconian laws like the Antiterrorist Law. However, in trying to mobilise support, the political class has been instigating ethnic and religious animosities, provoking violence between communities and armed attacks in five of the nine regional states of the country: Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Harari, Oromia and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), as well as in the administrative state of Dire Dawa.

Furthermore, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt decided to resume tripartite talks on 21 May regarding the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile, which has been a source of tension between these three countries as a result of the control that Ethiopia can exercise over a strategic resource that poses a threat to Sudanese and Egyptian national security. The talks were subsequently stalled by Ethiopia's unilateral decision to start refilling the reservoir's reserves as a result of the rainy season and its refusal to accept a binding dispute resolution mechanism on 13 July. Faced with this stalemate, the AU tried to reactivate the talks on 3 August. At the same time, the US decided to cut part of its aid to Ethiopia (about 130 million dollars) due to the lack of progress in the tripartite talks in order to force the negotiations. Egypt warned in September that the talks could not be extended indefinitely, to which Ethiopia responded that it had no intention of harming Sudan and Egypt and expressed its commitment to the AU-led talks. However, statements by US President Donald Trump in October exacerbated the situation, saying that Egypt could not live with the dam and could "blow up" the construction. The Ethiopian prime minister did not respond to these inflammatory statements, but shortly afterwards the Ethiopian foreign minister called the US ambassador for consultations to clarify Washington's position on the issue.

Kenya	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, System, Resources, Identity, Self-Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, ethnic militias, political and social opposition (political parties, civil society organisations), SLDF armed group, Mungiki sect, MRC party, Somali armed group al-Shabaab and al-Shabaab sympathizers in Kenya, ISIS

18. See Josep Maria Royo, "Etiopía y la ofensiva sobre Tigray. Claves de una transición en riesgo", *ECP notes on conflict and peace* no. 9, December 2020.
19. See the summary on Ethiopia in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) in *Alert 2020! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2020.
20. Amnesty International, *Beyond law enforcement: human rights violations by Ethiopian security forces in Amhara and Oromia*, AFR 25/2358/2020, 29 May 2020.

Summary:
Kenya's politics and economy have been dominated since its independence in 1963 by the KANU party, controlled by the largest community in the country, the Kikuyu, to the detriment of the remaining ethnic groups. Starting in 2002, the client process to succeed the autocratic Daniel Arap Moi (in power for 24 years) was interrupted by the victory of Mwai Kibaki. Since then, different ethno-political conflicts have emerged in the country, which has produced a climate of political violence during the different electoral cycles. The electoral fraud that took place in 2007 sparked an outbreak of violence in which 1,300 people died and some 300,000 were displaced. After this election, a fragile national unity government was formed between Mwai Kibabi and Raila Odinga. A new presidential election in 2013 was won by Uhuru Kenyatta, who was tried by the ICC in connection with the events of 2007, though the court dropped the charges in 2015. In parallel, several areas of the country were affected by inter-community disputes over land ownership, also instigated politically during the electoral period. In addition, Kenya's military intervention in Somalia triggered attacks by the Somali armed group al-Shabaab in Kenya, subsequent animosity towards the Somali population in Kenya and tensions between Kenya and Somalia over their different political agendas, posing added challenges to the stability of the country.

Different issues aggravated the political and social situation in Kenya over the past year. The climate of political violence and polarisation worsened ahead of the 2022 elections. The Somali group al-Shabaab continued to carry out armed attacks in the north and east of the country. However, 2020 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, which, as in other African countries, were reflected in a serious increase in police brutality while imposing restrictions to limit the spread of the disease. Political polarisation grew during the year between the supporters of current President Uhuru Kenyatta and Vice President William Ruto, who was gradually marginalised by Kenyatta within the party and political institutions. The race for the presidential elections in 2022 was expected to be long and the first key event will be the referendum for constitutional reform in June 2021, which has united Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga, who are in favour of it, against Ruto, who opposes it. In this sense, on 25 November, the president signed a bill paving the way for the referendum to amend the Constitution in June 2021.

To this situation was added the excessive use of force while imposing the restrictions to limit the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many cases of abuse and police brutality that caused the deaths of dozens of people, as came to light through different reports by HRW[21] and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights,[22] among others. As a result, there were various lawsuits against the government for alleged murders and human rights violations, as well as multiple protests in various cities against police brutality, which were again forcibly repressed. Following harsh criticism, on 1 April President Kenyatta lamented the excessive use of force but did not issue instructions to end the abuse, according to HRW. In June, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority, a government institution that supervises the police in the country, claimed that there had been at least 15 police deaths related to the enforcement of the curfew since March. Human rights organisations indicated that the figure could be higher. Media reports singled out businessmen and state officials for having misappropriated 400 million dollars earmarked for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, sparking fresh protests.[23] This scandal sparked public outrage and protests organised by hundreds of anti-corruption activists between 21 and 25 August in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru and Kisumu, in which the police intervened with tear gas to disperse the protesters, arresting dozens. Kenyatta opened an investigation into the contracts of the governmental Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA) and extended the curfew until the end of September.

ACLED established that 208 people were killed in attacks launched by al-Shabaab and intercommunity violence, a figure higher than in previous years. There were clashes between militias linked to different communities in the northern part of the country throughout the year, mainly due to the theft of cattle, border demarcations between territories of different communities and reprisals for previous attacks over land ownership. On 10 February, the US announced an agreement with the Kenyan government to create a Joint Terrorism Task Force led by Kenya. At the same time, **attacks by the Somali armed group al-Shabaab persisted** in the northeast and east, mainly in Wajir, Mandera and Lamu counties, causing dozens of fatalities during the year, although there were also attacks by possible members of al-Shabaab in the south. In January, al-Shabaab launched an attack against the US military base Camp Simba in Manda Bay in which three Americans died. It was the first attack by al-Shabaab against the US military base in the country. The number of deaths at the hands of the police also rose in 2020, as revealed by Deadly Force when compared to previous years.[24] In 2015, 143 people died at the hands of the police and this figure increased to 205 people in 2016, 256 in 2017, 250 in 2018, 122 in 2019 and 137 in 2020. The escalation

21. Human Rights Watch, *Kenya: Police Brutality During Curfew*, 2020.
22. Sarah Kimani, "Report outlines human rights violations in Kenya during COVID-19 containment", *SABCNews*, 1 July 2020.
23. France24, "Kenya ministry told to publish Covid-19 deals amid graft scandal", 31 August 2020.
24. Deadly Force is a database of murders committed by the police. The Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation's* project, Nation Newsplex, seeks to record all deaths resulting from police operations in Kenya based on public reports, including information from individuals and organisations in the public and private sectors. The database is compiled from information published by the media, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority, other government agencies and counts maintained by human rights organisations.

of police violence in 2017 coincided with the elections in the country at the time, so the fresh escalation of violence may coincide with the restrictions linked to the pandemic, the pre-electoral climate ahead of the constitutional referendum of 2021 and the 2022 elections.

The relations between Kenya and Somalia deteriorated during the year, after having improved in late 2019. In December 2020, Somalia broke diplomatic relations with Kenya and ordered the withdrawal of Somali diplomatic personnel from the country after accusing Nairobi of continuing to meddle in its internal political affairs and ignoring all previous calls to stop violating its sovereignty.[25] The announcement came in the wake of a meeting between the Kenyan president and Somaliland leader Musa Bihi Abdi in Nairobi. Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence from Somalia in 1991. Both leaders declared that they would forge closer relations with the opening of a Kenyan consulate in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, in March, and a direct air connection between Nairobi and Hargeisa.

Kenyan Foreign Minister Cyrus Oguna announced the establishment of a committee to seek a solution to the diplomatic conflict, underlining Kenya's reception of 200,000 Somali refugees who have lived in camps in the eastern part of the country for almost 30 years and recalling that Kenya is currently one of the main contributors of troops to the AU mission in Somalia, AMISOM. Various analysts pointed out that any change in the security situation and Kenya's decisive role due to its participation in the AU mission in Somalia may have serious consequences, alluding to the possibility that Kenya may modify its role in the mission and withdraw troops due to the tense atmosphere between both governments. Another source of tension between Kenya and Somalia was found in the Somali state of Jubaland, which shares a border with Kenya. In late November, Somalia expelled the Kenyan ambassador and called its representative in Nairobi for consultations, accusing Kenya of interfering in the elections in the Somali state of Jubaland. Kenya accuses Mogadishu of trying to replace the regional president, Ahmed Madobe, with someone closer to Mogadishu. Madobe is a key ally of Kenya, which sees Jubaland as a buffer zone against al-Shabaab fighters, who have carried out many attacks across the shared border. The deteriorating relations between both countries is also linked to the upcoming elections, as the administration of President Famajo perceives that Kenya supports the Somali political opposition against him, including Madobe or any other Somali regional leader. Finally, both countries had disputes over their territorial waters due to the possible existence of oil and gas there.

North Africa – Maghreb

Argelia	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Governance Internal
Main parties:	Government, military power, political and social opposition, Hirak movement

Summary:
Having held the presidency of Algeria since 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika has remained in office despite suffering from a serious illness that has kept him out of the public eye since 2013. A shadowy coalition of political and military figures has held on to the reins of power behind the scenes, popularly identified among the Algerian population as "le pouvoir". In 2019, the announcement that Bouteflika (82) would run for a fifth term triggered mass popular protests of an intensity not seen since the country's independence in 1962. Popular pressure forced his resignation and, since then, the military establishment has tried to control the transition and has taken measures such as the persecution and arrest of certain figures associated with the old regime. The peaceful protest movement Hirak has continued to mobilise against corruption, the influence of military power on politics and the ruling class in general, insisting on its demands for a transition to a genuinely democratic system capable of promoting political, social and economic reforms.

Although the restrictions on movement imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic affected the dynamics of massive and periodic protests that characterised 2019, the climate of political tension persisted in Algeria in 2020. After the election of Abdelmadjid Tebboune in December 2019, which had less than 40% turnout, the lowest for a presidential election since the country's independence in 1962, the new president took some steps aimed at placating the Hirak movement, including abolishing the office of the deputy minister of defence, the last civilian position held by a member of the Algerian Army, transferring powers to the prime minister to appoint senior management positions and establishing a commission to design the proposed new Constitution. At the same time, dozens of Hirak activists who remained in prison were released. However, this period of relaxation only lasted a few weeks. In February, with the first anniversary of the massive Hirak protests approaching, the authorities prohibited meetings of Hirak groups and banned all demonstrations in March due to the pandemic. Hirak mostly complied with the public health restrictions as a way to stop the contagion of COVID-19, and as of 20 March, the demonstrations held continuously on Thursdays and Fridays since February 2019 were suspended, with some exceptions. Protests against the regime became more frequent during the year amidst the persecution

25. Al-Jazeera, "Somalia cuts diplomatic ties with Kenya citing interference", 15 December 2020.

of prominent Hirak activists, journalists and critical voices. Throughout the period, there were reports of the imprisonment, prosecution and sentencing of Hirak leaders and reporters for crimes such as "inciting illegal demonstrations", "endangering state security", "attacking national territorial integrity", "attacking the president", "insulting state institutions" and even for "incitement to atheism" and "offences against Islam", in the case of a prominent member of Hirak and representative of the Amazigh community. In April, the Algerian authorities also passed a law criminalising the spread of false information. Organisations such as Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International called on the Algerian authorities not to violate press freedom and to stop the media harassment campaign.

Anti-government protests multiplied in June, despite calls and alerts from some leaders regarding the risks of contagion. In this context, some analysts highlighted Hirak's scepticism of the authorities, since the government remained reluctant to comply with some of its main demands, such as the total renewal of the political class, the end of military interference in politics, genuine respect for the freedom of association, an independent electoral commission and constitutional court, a constituent assembly and other measures that could put the regime's very survival at risk.[26] Along these lines, and despite a presidential pardon for opposition activists in July, Hirak called for a boycott of the referendum on the new Constitution announced in August by the government, perceived as a manoeuvre to neutralise the protest movement. Amidst the persistent crackdown on dissent, the demonstrations intensified and gathered hundreds of people in Algiers and elsewhere in October, coinciding with the anniversary of the 1988 protests and on the eve of the constitutional referendum. The demonstrators demanding the fall of the regime, a civilian and non-military state and the release of Hirak activists (according to the National Committee for the Liberation of Detainees (CNLD), in November a total of 90 people close to the movement remained detained. **The referendum on the new Constitution was held on 1 November and the new text was approved by 66.8% of the votes, but with a record low turnout of 23.8%.** The referendum was overshadowed by the sudden departure of President Tebboune from the country three days earlier, who was rushed to Germany after catching COVID-19. Analysts said that the referendum had not achieved the purpose of reinforcing Tebboune's legitimacy after the low turnout in the presidential election of December 2019 and that, on the contrary, the course of events, which brought to mind the fragile health of former President Bouteflika in the final years of his rule, bolstered the idea that the new government represents more continuity than a break with the old regime.[27] While Tebboune was hospitalised, in fact, the top military leader had special visibility in the media. Upon his return to the country in December, the president insisted on his intention to enact the new Constitution and organise legislative and municipal elections.

Argelia (AQIM)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups AQIM (formerly GSPC), MUJAO, al-Mourabitoun, Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), ISIS, governments of North Africa and the Sahel

Summary:
Since the 90s of the past century, Algeria was scenario of an armed conflict that confronted the security forces against various Islamist groups, following the rise of the Islamist movement in the country due to the population's discontent, the economic crisis and the stifling of political participation. The conflict began when the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was made illegal in 1992 after its triumph in the elections against the historic party that had led the independence of the country, the National Liberation Front. The armed struggle brought several groups (EIS, GIA and the GSPC, a division of the GIA that later became AQIM in 2007) into conflict with the army, supported by the self-defence militias. The conflict caused some 150,000 deaths during the 1990s and continues to claim lives. However, the levels of violence have decreased since 2002 after some of the groups gave up the armed fight. In recent years, the conflict has been led by AQIM, which became a transnational organisation, expanding its operations beyond Algerian territory and affecting the Sahel countries. Algeria, along with Mali, Libya, Mauritania, Niger and others, has fought AQIM and other armed groups that have begun operating in the area, including the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and al-Mourabitoun organisations (Those Who Sign with Blood), Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS) and ISIS. The decrease in confrontations and levels of violence led the case to cease to be considered an armed conflict in 2019, although some dynamics associated with the dispute persist.

Following the trend of the previous year, **sporadic acts of violence involving the Algerian security forces and jihadist armed groups continued to be reported in 2020**. According to the official annual report on the fight against terrorism by the Algerian Ministry of Defence, 21 militiamen were killed and another nine were captured during the period, while dozens of alleged combatants' hideouts were destroyed and weapons (pistols, rifles, submachine guns), ammunition and explosives were confiscated. The Algerian authorities did not specify the total number of deaths among the security forces, but media reports indicate that at least five soldiers perished in incidents with jihadist forces or due to bomb explosions. Meanwhile, the ACLED research centre counted 31 people killed in a score of incidents. Both the official body count and

26. International Crisis Group, *Algeria: Easing the Lockdown for the Hirak?* Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report no. 217, 27 July 2020.
27. Michaël Béchir Ayari, *Algérie: un air de déjà vu?* Q&A Middle East North Africa, International Crisis Group, 6 November 2020.

that of ACLED are slightly higher than those reported the previous year (15 and 22, respectively), but they confirm the low-intensity violence in this context. Incidents that were reported by the media included a suicide attack by a member of the ISIS affiliate against a military base in Bordj Badji Mokhtar, near the border with Mali, in February, in which a soldier also died; an operation against suspected insurgents in Ain Defla that killed one soldier and an incident that killed two other soldiers due to explosives in Medea (both took place in July, in towns south of Algiers); and clashes in the El Ancer area, in Jijel province (northwest), in December, in which a soldier and three AQIM militants were killed, including a regional chief and a member of the armed organisation's council.

The most outstanding event of the year did not take place on Algerian soil and was not carried out by the country's security forces. It involved the **death of the historical leader of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel, as part of a French Special Forces operation in northwestern Mali**, in the town of Talhandak, near the border with Algeria, in June. The veteran AQIM leader since 2007, whose death had been announced several times in the past, died along with several lieutenants shortly after crossing from Algerian territory in a context characterised by competition, clashes and fighting between various jihadist groups of the region to establish their influence in the Sahel.[28] In November, a new AQIM emir was announced: Yazid Mebarek, alias Abu Ubayda Yusef al-Annabi, also Algerian and a veteran of the jihadist struggle. His appointment prompted various interpretations among analysts. Some considered it a tactical error by AQIM which, by opting for a new Algerian chief, continued to ignore the growing influence and priorities of sub-Saharan actors linked to the organisation. Others highlighted his lack of operational and combat experience. Some analysts noted that the way in which al-Annabi's appointment was announced may indicate the greater practical influence of other branches of the group such as Jama'at Nusra al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a coalition of several branches officially affiliated with AQIM, but with more power and independence today. The news of the new emir was spread through a video on AQIM's official channel, al-Andalus, but through a high official (Abu Numan al-Shanqiti, very close to JNIM) and did not include a declaration of allegiance from JNIM to al-Annabi. Several experts agreed that they perceived AQIM as a group in decline, with problems of internal cohesion following the death of its top leader, a lack of connection with new Algerian generations and the reorganisation of jihadist forces that has given pre-eminence to the Sahel over the Maghreb. Furthermore, given its difficulties in recruiting new militants in Algeria and in order to constitute a threat in the country, AQIM's strategy may be to stay in rural and desert areas.[29]

Morocco – Western Sahara	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory International[30]
Main parties:	Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), armed group POLISARIO Front

Summary:
The roots of the conflict can be traced to the end of Spanish colonial rule in Western Sahara in the mid-1970s. The splitting of the territory between Morocco and Mauritania without taking into account the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people or the commitment to a referendum on independence in the area led to a large part of the territory being annexed by Rabat, forcing the displacement of thousands of Sahrawi citizens, who sought refuge in Algeria. In 1976, the POLISARIO Front, a nationalist movement, declared a government in exile (the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic - SADR) and launched an armed campaign against Morocco. Both parties accepted a peace plan in 1988 and since 1991 the UN mission in the Sahara, MINURSO, has been monitoring the ceasefire and is responsible for organising a referendum for self-determination in the territory. In 2007 Morocco presented the UN with a plan for the autonomy of Western Sahara but the POLISARIO Front demands a referendum that includes the option of independence.

Tensions rose markedly in 2020 compared to previous years, especially in the last quarter, amidst chronic impasse in the diplomatic channel to resolve the dispute. Previous dynamics prevailed in the first few months of the year. Morocco continued its investment in infrastructure west of the separation barrier and enacted laws on the limits of its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone that included areas on the coasts of Western Sahara in January. Both events were reported to the United Nations by the POLISARIO Front, which considered them a reflection of Rabat's policies to normalise and consolidate the military occupation and the illegal annexation of parts of Western Sahara, as well as violations of its legal status as a non-autonomous territory. Since December 2019 and throughout 2020, several African countries (Burundi, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, the CAR and São Tomé and Príncipe) decided to open "general consulates" in Laayoune and Dakhla, which were also denounced by the POLISARIO Front for attacking Western Sahara's status as a non-autonomous territory. Morocco maintained its position that the autonomy proposal presented in 2007 was the

28. See the summaries on Mali and Western Sahel region in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
29. Yasmina Allouche,"Al-Qaeda's Maghreb branch has revealed its weakness with new leadership", *Middle East Eye*, 2 December 2020.
30. Although Western Sahara is not an internationally recognised state, the tensions between Morocco and Western Sahara are classified as "international" and not internal as this is a territory which is awaiting decolonisation and which is not recognised as belonging to Morocco either under international law or in any United Nations resolution.

only way to make progress on a solution to the conflict. Meanwhile, the POLISARIO Front blasted the inability of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to carry out its mandate, which included holding a referendum, as its name suggests, and warned that it was reconsidering its participation in the UN peace process. In this sense, the office of the UN Secretary-General's personal envoy for Western Sahara was vacated in May 2019 after the resignation of former German President Horst Köhler and António Guterres himself acknowledged in his annual report on the Sahara Occidental that there was a "pause" in the political process stemming from his resignation. At the end of 2020, the UN had still not appointed anyone to the position.[31] At the same time, there was an increase in violations of the provisions relating to the ceasefire during the year, which has been in force since 1991. The annual report of the UN Secretary-General reported 61 violations between September 2019 and August 2020, particularly east of the barrier. In October, shortly before the renewal of MINURSO's mandate, the head of the mission also warned the UN Security Council of an increase in violations by both parties of military agreement number 1, which regulates the truce.

After an incursion by Moroccan forces in Guerguerat in October, the POLISARIO Front ended the ceasefire and declared a state of war

The situation deteriorated in November after incidents in Guerguerat, an area that had already been a source of tension in recent years and that in 2020 was also the scene of Sahrawi demonstrations and barricades in the face of what the POLISARIO Front has repeatedly denounced as an illicit step. On 21 October, about 50 Sahrawis blocked traffic in this area, located between Mauritania and the area of Western Sahara occupied by Morocco, and demonstrated to ask that the UN Security Council, which at that time was discussing the renewal of the MINURSO mandate, to fulfil the task of holding a referendum on self-determination. In line with what has happened in recent years, Resolution 2548 was approved on 30 October with wording more favourable to the Moroccan position, as it made no explicit mention of the referendum and emphasised the need for a "realistic, practicable and lasting political solution" to the issue of Western Sahara. **The Sahrawi protests in Guerguerat continued and on 13 November, Moroccan forces entered the area, which is supposed to be a demilitarised buffer zone, in order to break up the protests and re-establish commercial traffic. Faced with this incursion, the POLISARIO Front ended the ceasefire and declared a state of war**. Morocco avoided using the term "war" and assured that it remained committed to the ceasefire, but warned of a forceful response in the event of a threat to its security. Various analysts highlighted that with this approach, the POLISARIO Front intended to alter the status quo, respond to the frustration of generations of young people in refugee camps who have been waiting for decades for a political solution and challenge Morocco's strategy of silencing and covering up the conflict. The UN Secretary-General lamented his organisation's failure to prevent an escalation, expressed his concern, called for preventing the collapse of the ceasefire and stressed his determination to remove obstacles to reactivate the political process. Despite its responsibilities as the administering power of Western Sahara, Spain maintained a discreet position, limited to supporting UN initiatives to guarantee the truce.

Comparing information on developments in the dispute is complex due to the limitations on access for independent observers. Since mid-November, the POLISARIO Front reported that it had mobilised its armed forces, conducted periodic attacks on Moroccan bases and announced Moroccan casualties (not confirmed by Rabat), without reporting any casualties of its own. Other sources pointed to low-intensity exchanges of fire at points along the 2,700-kilometer barrier built by Morocco. At the same time, an increase in harassment and repression was reported in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, including raids, arrests, attacks, increased surveillance and crackdowns on demonstrations in towns such as Laayoune, Smara, Dakhla and Boujdour.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said that even though no civilian casualties had been reported in the hostilities, the events reinforced the need for an effective mechanism to monitor the human rights situation, including MINURSO's powers and responsibilities in this area, continuously rejected by Rabat. **In December, the United States became the first country to recognise Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara, a position that the Trump administration adopted in exchange for Rabat "normalising" diplomatic relations with Israel**.[32] The POLISARIO Front condemned the announcement, stressing that it violates the legitimacy of international resolutions and obstructs efforts to reach a solution. The US announced that it would open a consulate in Laayoune. The United Arab Emirates, which also signed an agreement with Israel in August at the behest of the United States, opened a diplomatic office in this same city in November and media outlets reported that Bahrain and Jordan, two other Washington allies in the region, would follow the same path. Although Trump's deal was presented as a success and boosted the Moroccan position, at the end of the year no changes were foreseen in the UN or the EU's approach and the position that the incoming US administration would take in this regard was also unclear.

31. See the summary on Morocco-Western Sahara in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Report on Trends and Scenarios.* Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.
32. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

Tunisia	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, System Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups including the Uqba ibn Nafi Battalion or the Oqba ibn Nafaa Brigades (branch of AQIM), Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), ISIS

Summary:
From its independence in 1956 until early 2011, Tunisia was governed by only two presidents. For three decades Habib Bourghiba laid the foundations for the authoritarian regime in the country, which Zine Abidine Ben Ali then continued after a coup d'état in 1987. The concentration of power, the persecution of the secular and Islamist political opposition and the iron grip on society that characterised the country's internal situation stood in contrast to its international image of stability. Despite allegations of corruption, electoral fraud and human rights violations, Tunisia was a privileged ally of the West for years. In December 2010, the outbreak of a popular revolt exposed the contradictions of Ben Ali's government, led to its fall in early 2011 and inspired protests against authoritarian governments throughout the Arab world. Since then, Tunisia has been immersed in a bumpy transition that has laid bare the tensions between secular and Islamist groups in the country. At the same time, Tunisia has been the scene of increased activity from armed groups, including branches of AQIM and ISIS.

The tension in Tunisia intensified during 2020 compared to the previous year in a context marked by **greater polarisation and political instability, economic crisis and frustration among parts of the population due to the lack of improvement in living conditions 10 years after the revolt that overthrew Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's regime**. At the same time, the country continued to be the scene of sporadic acts of violence that involved the security forces and jihadist armed groups. The parliamentary elections of October 2019 outlined a more fragmented and tenser political scenario, characterised by discourses that were more populist, radical and nostalgic for the dictatorship, changing and volatile alliances and periodic struggles between Islamist and anti-Islamist groups, among other dynamics, which resulted in difficulties in forming a new government. In early January, Ennahda, the Islamist party that won the elections, but did not have a sufficient majority to govern alone, nominated a cabinet that was rejected by the assembly. The new president, Kaïs Saïed, elected in October 2019 with 73% of the vote in an election with 57% turnout, charged Elyes Fakhfakh, of the Ettakatol party, to form a new government, who obtained approval for his cabinet in late February. The new government was therefore set up more than four months after the elections, a period that laid bare the disputes and particularly the power struggle between the president and Ennahda, which was awarded seven ministries in the new government. In the following months, the political landscape was marked by the need to respond to the pandemic (emergency powers were approved in April), by growing debates about the political system (some, including Saïed, back a presidential system instead of the current parliamentarian one defended by Ennahda) and by tensions linked to the conflict in neighbouring Libya. Ennahda's parliamentary spokesman and leader, Rached Ghannouchi, was accused of violating Tunisian neutrality regarding the Libyan conflict for his pronouncements in favour of the Libyan government led by Fayez al-Sarraj (based in Tripoli and supported by Turkey) and for his contacts with Ankara.[33]

The national anti-corruption office's accusations of a conflict of interest against Prime Minister Fakhfakh in July prompted a motion of no confidence initiated by Ennahda that ended with his resignation and the dismissal of the government. Another motion against Ghannouchi in the same period failed. Interior Minister Hichem Mechichi was charged with forming a new technocratic government, which was approved in September after new power struggles (Ennahda initially rejected a cabinet that did not reflect the political forces of Parliament, but ended up accepting it despite its reservations about the complex situation in the country). The Mechichi government therefore became the third in less than a year. In the final months of 2020, new tensions emerged, now between Saïed and the prime minister due to the latter's decision to appoint people who had worked with Ben Ali as advisors. Likewise, there was tension in Parliament and calls from political groups to dissolve the assembly. In December, the main union in the country (UGTT) called for a national dialogue, to which the president committed at the end of the year as a way to correct the course of the revolution. Ennahda also expressed its support for the dialogue, promoted in the midst of the **protests commemorating the 10th anniversary of the revolt, which revealed parts of the population's disaffection and disappointment with the political class**. During the second half and particularly the final months of 2020, the protests intensified, especially in the poorest regions of the country. There were also warnings about the increase in the number of young Tunisians who are emigrating to Europe. According to data from the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, about 13,000 young Tunisians arrived on Italian shores in 2020, compared to 2,654 in 2019 and 5,200 in 2018.

According to data from the ACLED research centre, a dozen people died in acts of violence that involved the security forces and jihadist armed groups in 2020. During the year, training camps and explosives were discovered in the Kasserine area (February), four Jund al-Khilafa militiamen were killed in two security force operations (February and April), a double suicide attack on a security

33. See the summary on Libya in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

checkpoint near the US embassy in the Tunisian capital killed a police officer (March) and an attack on a security checkpoint in Sousse killed a guard and subsequently caused the death of three of the alleged attackers (September). In November, the government reported that it had killed four leaders and injured an unknown number of militiamen in a security force operation (at an undetermined date) in which weapons, ammunition and electronic equipment were also confiscated. According to official records, 1,020 people suspected of terrorism had been arrested in the first 11 months of the year.

West Africa

Mali	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
Since its independence from France in 1960, Mali has lived through several periods of instability, including the coup d'état in 1968, a popular and military rebellion in 1991 and the Tuareg insurgency and uprisings since independence, demanding greater political participation and the development of the north of the country. Mali held its first multi-party elections in 1992, although since then several elections have taken place amid opposition criticism concerning the lack of democratic guarantees. The army's influence was apparent in a new attempted coup d'état of 2000, which was foiled. The instability increased once again in 2012 when control of the north was seized by Tuareg and Islamist groups and the government was ousted by a coup d'état. From that moment on, the country's successive governments have faced multiple political, economic and security challenges, with violence persisting in the northern part of the country and spreading to the central region. There was a significant increase in popular protests and demonstrations in 2019, which were followed in 2020 by a coup d'état and the formation of a new transitional government in the country.

Political tensions increased in Mali during the year, giving rise to a coup that toppled the government and opened a new transitional process in the country. The first half of the year was marked by demonstrations and social protests against the government led by Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta due to the political crisis and the deteriorating security situation in the country. Added to this was the outrage over the kidnapping (allegedly by Katiba Macina militants) of Soumaila Cissé, the leader of the main opposition party, Union for the Republic and Democracy, and of 11 members of his team in Timbuktu on 25 March, while campaigning for legislative elections. The controversies arising from the Constitutional Court's annulment of part of the results of the legislative elections held between 29 March (first round) and 19 April (second round) caused greater discontent and boosted the popular demonstrations. Led by the M5-RFP movement, made up of a coalition of opposition groups and civil society groups headed by the prominent Imam Mahmoud Dicko, the protests grew in June and July and called for Keïta's resignation, the formation of a government led by the M5-RFP and the dissolution of the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court. Faced with rising tensions, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) appointed former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan to be the special envoy for Mali and created a high-level delegation to mediate, requesting the formation of a unity government and partial repetition of the legislative elections. The protests continued and on 18 August, a group of high-ranking military commanders calling themselves the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), led by Malian Army Colonel Assimi Goita, staged a coup that forced President Keïta to resign. Several senior government officials were arrested, including Keïta and Prime Minister Boubou Cissé.

Though it was welcomed by the M5-RFP, the coup provoked widespread international condemnation, such as from ECOWAS, the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the United States and others, which demanded the immediate release of the government and the return to constitutional order. The ECOWAS delegation held meetings with the CNSP, Keïta and Cissé in Bamako in mid-August to mediate the return of the civilian government, but no results were achieved. The CNSP announced the start of a three-year transitional period and released Keïta, but ECOWAS demanded an immediate civilian-led transition and elections within a year, imposing sanctions on Mali. Finally, after months of pressure and negotiations between the CNSP and opposition groups and civil society, including the M5-RFP coalition, a transitional government made up of civilian and military figures was created in October that obtained international recognition. The new interim president, Bah N'Daw, appointed the 25 members of the new government, awarding four key portfolios to military officers, three to the civilian movement and two to the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA). However, the M5-RFP complained that it had no representation in the new government and kept the protests going. In early November, President N'Daw decreed the formation of an interim legislative body called the National Transitional Council (CNT), granting the vice president and leader of the CNSP, Assimi Goïta, the authority to appoint its members. The CNT will have 121 seats, of which the CNSP will be the best represented group, with 22. At the same time, the government appointed military officers as governors of various regions, raising the number of those governed by military or police officers to 13 out of 20. The M5-RFP described the decrees as unacceptable, questioning the military nature of the transition and continuing to call for popular protest.

Mali formed a civilian-military transitional government after the coup in August

Nigeria	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Resources, Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political opposition, Christian and Muslim communities, livestock and farming communities, community militias, criminal gangs, IMN, IPOB, MASSOB

Summary:
Since 1999, when political power was returned to civilian hands after a succession of dictatorships and coups, the government has not managed to establish a stable democratic system in the country. Huge economic and social differences remain between the states that make up Nigeria, due to the lack of real decentralisation, and between the various social strata, which fosters instability and outbreaks of violence. Moreover, strong inter-religious, inter-ethnic and political differences continue to fuel violence throughout the country. Political corruption and the lack of transparency are the other main stumbling blocks to democracy in Nigeria. Mafia-like practices and the use of political assassination as an electoral strategy have prevented the free exercise of the population's right to vote, leading to increasing discontent and fraudulent practices.

Violence and instability increased in Nigeria beyond the armed conflict linked to the actions of Boko Haram, which affects the three northeastern states of the country and the Lake Chad basin.[34] In northwestern Nigeria, there was a rise in tensions that began in 2018, centred on the activities of criminal groups, to which was added the permanent climate of intercommunity violence in the middle belt of the country and, above all, the exceptional measures imposed by the government to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and social demonstrations against the excessive use of force by the security forces and particularly by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The increase in criminal violence in the northwest spread to the capital, Abuja, prompting rising security concerns. This escalation of criminal violence has caused around 8,000 fatalities since 2011 and forcibly displaced around 200,000 people to neighbouring Niger, despite local and government-level military operations and peacebuilding initiatives, as highlighted by the International Crisis Group. This violence is rooted in competition for resources between Fulani cattle communities and Hausa agricultural communities and has escalated due to the involvement of criminal gangs dedicated to stealing cattle, kidnapping people for ransom and looting and burning various towns, a situation exploited by jihadist groups, according to the organisation. Criminal violence claimed thousands of lives during the year, mainly in the northwestern states, with 2,481 fatalities according to the Nigerian Security Tracker, most of them in the states of Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara. The death toll was higher than in 2019, when more than 2,000 people died as a result of the actions of many different actors, including criminal groups, security forces, jihadists, groups linked to livestock-raising communities and civilian self-defence militias. There was a persistent climate of violence in the central states known as the "middle belt" (the states of Taraba, Benue, Plateau and Niger) due to inter-community clashes between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and agricultural communities in the centre and south. Inter-community fighting continued to spiral due to actions and reactions that exacerbated the climate of violence, including the looting and burning of fields and the theft and destruction of livestock, which caused hundreds of fatalities during the year.

Notably, there was an escalation of popular protests accompanied by a wave of repression resulting from the imposition of coercive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic and especially because of the demonstrations that took place in October. In imposing the emergency measures, the security forces were accused of committing multiple human rights violations and of using excessive force, according to information received by the National Human Rights Commission. The commission received 209 complaints of human rights violations by the security forces, including at least 29 extrajudicial killings committed between 30 March and 4 May. This climate of repression continued throughout the year and worsened in October. On 5 October, there were peaceful protests and sit-ins against police brutality and impunity in Abuja and Lagos due to a video that went viral showing a police unit of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) that shot an unarmed man dead in the town of Ughelli, in Delta State. SARS had a long and previous history of abuse, extrajudicial killings and torture. Initially focused on #ENDSARS and against police brutality, the growing demonstrations increased their demands and called for greater democracy and freedom. Tens of thousands of people in the country participated in the protests, including many young people and women who received support from local and international cultural celebrities and athletes. As a result of all this, on 11 October the government agreed to dismantle SARS. However, two days later it announced the creation of a new police unit to replace it, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT). This decision caused a resurgence in the protests, which were even more intense. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated and the protests turned violent due to the security forces' efforts to disperse them, including vigilante groups that attacked the protesters and acts of looting and criminal violence in many cities. On 20 October, the Nigerian Army opened fire on protesters in Lagos, killing at least a dozen people according to human rights groups, though these deaths were denied by the government. Subsequently, the protesters destroyed at least 25 police stations, killed or wounded dozens of policemen, facilitated the escape of over 2,000 prisoners and looted shopping centres and food stores. On 23 October, the government reported that 69 people had been killed in violence related to the

34. See the summary on the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

protests, including civilians, police officers and soldiers. As of 25 October, 27 state governments and the government of the Federal Capital Territory had set up judicial commissions to investigate police abuse. However, in November the government took legal action against organisations and activists linked to the protests, such as activist Rinu Oduala, lawyer Modupe Odele and the Feminist Coalition, which included the freezing of bank accounts and the confiscation of travel documents.

2.3.2. America

North America, Central America and the Caribbean

El Salvador	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, cartels, gangs

Summary:
After the end of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992), which claimed around 75,000 lives, the situation in El Salvador has been characterised by high levels of poverty and inequality, the proliferation of gangs of youths and other organised crime structures and high homicide rates that have made the country one of the most violent in the region and the world. A truce with the gangs was achieved during the government of Mauricio Funes (2009-2014), which led to a significant drop in the homicide rate, but the inauguration of Sánchez Cerén in 2015 was followed by a tightening of security policies and a substantial rise in levels of violence, resulting in a crisis of defencelessness and the forced displacement of thousands of people.

The number of murders fell by 45% compared to the previous year, thus reaching the lowest homicide rate since the end of the civil war in the country in 1992

The number of killings fell by 45% over the previous year, reaching the lowest homicide rate since the end of the country's civil war in 1992. In 2020, the rate was 20 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, a figure clearly lower than the 36 reported in 2019 and the 103 reported in 2015, making El Salvador the country with the highest rates of violence in the world. Since then, the country has experienced a gradual decline in the number of homicides, and most pronouncedly since the current President Nayib Bukele took office in June 2019. **According to the government, in June 2019 the homicide rate was 50 per 100,000 inhabitants, and the reduction of violence in the country is mainly due to the implementation of the Territorial Control Plan, which mainly consists of increasing the police and military presence in areas with high levels of gang activity, while reasserting control over the prisons** where the main gang leaders are located (according to media reports, around 17,000 of the estimated 60,000 to 70,000 gang members in El Salvador are currently serving prison sentences).

However, some analysts argue that the sharp drop in the number of homicides is explained not only by government policies, but also by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (March was the least violent in the country's recorded history, while in other countries in the region there was a substantial drop in the number of homicides during months with more severe restrictions). These same analysts argue that since levels of violence fell across the country and not only in the 22 municipalities in which the Territorial Control Plan is focused, it may be worth considering structural and systemic explanations. Thus, according to the International Crisis Group, after more than 15 years of open warfare between El Salvador's main maras (especially MS-13 and Barrio 18) for control of several parts of the country, levels of violence both between them and involving the security forces fell substantially once each gang's areas of influence were delimited and stabilised. According to these analysts, the gangs decided to lower levels of conflict between themselves and with the state since their mechanisms of extortion and enrichment through illicit activities worked reasonably well without resorting to the high levels of violence achieved in 2015 and in previous years. Some media outlets supported the view that it was the gangs' decision to reduce violence and not so much the impact of government policies against civic insecurity, arguing that the peak of violence between 24 and 27 April, in which 74 murders were reported, should be interpreted as a message from the gangs (especially MS-13) regarding their presence in the communities and their control over levels of violence in the country.

Finally, the political crisis that rattled the country early in the year after the majority of the Legislative Assembly refused to approve the necessary funds for implementing the third phase of the aforementioned Territorial Control Plan, which led to the militarisation of Congress by Bukele to pressure lawmakers who opposed his plans. After several calls from the international community to end the serious clash between the executive and legislative branches and following criticism from the opposition for considering such an action a coup and an act of sedition, the Supreme Court demanded that Bukele refrain from using the Salvadoran Army for unconstitutional purposes.

Guatemala	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, gangs

Summary:
Although the end of the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996), one of the longest and deadliest civil wars of the entire 20th century in Latin America, led to a notable drop in levels of violence in the country, the growing territorial expansion of gangs (especially MS-13 and Barrio 18) and other criminal organisations linked to drug trafficking caused Guatemala to have one of the highest homicide rates in the region in recent decades. In 2020, the opposition of large parts of the population to congressional approval of the new budgets and their questioning of more structural social, political and economic issues gave rise to one of the most intense protests in recent years.

The number of homicides dropped considerably compared to 2019 and previous years, but at the end of 2020 the new government of Alejandro Giammattei faced some of the most intense protests in recent times. According to government data, 2,574 homicides were recorded in 2020, or 28% less than in 2019. The homicide rate per 100,000 people was 15, while in 2019 it had been 22. This fall in the number of homicides is in keeping with the gradual decline of levels of direct violence in the country in the last decade. In 2009, for example, the homicide rate was 46 (more than triple that of 2020), and it has been steadily declining each year since. According to the government, 32% of the violent deaths were concentrated in the department of Guatemala, followed by those of Escuintla (12%) and Izabal (8%). Both the National Institute of Forensic Sciences and the NGO Mutual Support Group (GAM) released data that differ significantly from the government data, though they identify similar trends. According to the first agency, 2,500 homicides were reported in 2020 (2,276 of them with firearms), a 24.6% drop compared to 2019. The GAM also noted that there were 3,472 homicides in 2020, 25% less than in 2019, and that more than 6,500 complaints of violence against women had been processed. According to the GAM, the homicide rate was 23 per 100,000 inhabitants, but some departments far exceeded these figures, such as Chiquimula (61), Izabal (54), Escuintla (54) and Zacapa (43). As has happened in many other countries, **several analysts noted that the main reason for the decrease in violent deaths was the restrictions on mobility linked to the COVID-19 pandemic** (as evidenced by the fact that that March, April and May were clearly the months with the lowest homicide rates), but the police emphasised the new government's anti-organised crime policies. In this sense, in his inaugural speech in mid-January, Giammattei had promised to make the fight against civic insecurity one of his government's priorities, pledged to push for new legislation to declare gangs as terrorist organisations and urged the governments of Honduras and El Salvador (which together with Guatemala make up the so-called Northern Triangle, the area where gangs are most entrenched in the world) to join forces to fight gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha (or MS13) and Barrio 18. The legislative processing of this law began in February, which was criticised by various human rights organisations. Citing the need to fight organised crime with the appropriate tools, the government imposed a state of emergency in several cities (Mixco, San Juan Sacatepéquez, Escuintla or Chumaltenango), an exceptional action that does not require congressional approval and that grants additional powers to the security forces of the state. In just five days after the state of emergency implemented, more than 120 people had been detained in the cities of Escuintla and Chimaltenango alone.

Meanwhile, **one of the events that managed to capture national and international media attention were the protests that took place in the capital in November, in which Congress was set on fire and clashes were reported between protesters and police officers**. The trigger for the protests was Congress' opposition to passing the budget bill, but some analysts argue that there were other factors explaining both the exasperation of large parts of the population and the congregation of thousands of people in the late November, as well as the impact of Hurricane Eta and Hurricane Iota (which killed at least 57 people and killed 96 others in November); rising levels of malnutrition (the World Food Programme noted that 921,000 households were at risk of food insecurity and that there were 13,000 children with acute malnutrition in the country); rising electricity costs; allegations of corruption in managing funds allocated to fighting against the pandemic (and which led to the removal of the minister of health and other senior government officials in June); and the management of mobility restrictions linked to COVID-19 (between late March and late June, almost 25,000 people were arrested for violating confinement orders). Following the serious incidents, Congress withdrew the aforementioned budget bill, but protests continued in the following days and demands for the resignation of the president and many members of Congress continued. Giammattei called the incidents an attempted coup and invoked the OAS' democratic charter to preserve the country's democratic institutions. The United Nations urged an investigation into the alleged excessive use of force by the police, which allegedly led to many injuries during the protests.

Haiti	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, BINUH, gangs

Summary:
The current crisis affecting the country, with mass protests and numerous episodes of violence recorded in 2019, is linked to the accusations of corruption, electoral fraud and negligence in the action of the Government of President Jovenel Moïse. However, the situation of institutional

paralysis, economic fragility and socio-political crisis began to worsen after the forced departure from the country of former President Jean Bertrand Aristide in February 2004, who avoided an armed conflict with the rebel group that had taken over much of the country. Since then, the deployment of a Multinational Interim Force and later of a UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH, replaced by MINUJUSTH in 2017 and by BINUH in 2019) and the greater involvement and coordination of the international community in normalising the situation in the country have led to progress in certain areas of its governance, but have not succeeded in achieving political, social and economic stability, nor have they reduced the high levels of corruption, poverty, social exclusion and crime rates, or completely eliminated the control held by armed gangs in certain urban areas of the country.

Although the protests were significantly less intense than those of 2019, in which around 70 people lost their lives, the political crisis in Haiti persisted, protests and clashes were reported almost uninterruptedly during the year, the economic crisis and migration crisis worsened and there was an increase in violence linked to the many armed gangs operating in certain neighbourhoods of the capital and other cities. The political crisis was significantly worse than in the previous year due to the government's intention to amend the Constitution during the first quarter of 2021 and before the next legislative elections, which were supposed to have been held in November 2019. This led to the **end of the terms of two-thirds of the Senate in January and President Jovenel Moïse has governed since then mainly through presidential decrees**. In addition, the polarisation between the government and the opposition increased due to their different interpretations of when the term of the current president ends, whether in February 2021, as the opposition maintains, or in February 2022, as the government argues. Amidst this political polarisation and institutional fragility, the Core Group (made up of the United Nations, the OAS, the EU and the governments of Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain and the United States), the United Nations Integrated Office (BINUH) and many civil society and human rights organisations expressed their concern over the rise in violence in certain cities of the country and the growing territorial spread and coordination of certain armed gangs. For example, in July the Episcopal Peace and Justice Commission (CE-JILAP) declared that 244 people had died in the first six months of the year in the metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince alone in episodes of violence linked to armed gangs. CE-JILAP related in its report that many of the victims were burned, lynched or beheaded. In August, the National Network for the Defence of Human Rights warned that in the Cité Soleil neighbourhood in the month of June alone, 111 people had died, 48 had disappeared and 20 more had been injured by clashes and attacks carried out by armed groups. The Je Klere Foundation (FKJL) claimed in a report published in the middle of the year that the clashes between gangs are not just economically motivated and also aimed at controlling territory, but very often have political connotations, with some gangs more identified with the government and others with other political groups. This FKJL denounced the government's collusion in assassinations committed for ideological reasons in areas with an opposition majority, as well as the government's attempt to control certain armed gangs for electoral purposes and to intimidate certain political groups or prevent them from promoting or capitalising on anti-government protests.

According to some analysts, **one of the most worrying events of the year was the formation in June of G9 an Fanmi ("G9 and Family"), a coalition of at least nine armed groups** created and led by Jimmy Chérizier, aka Barbecue, a former police officer involved in the massacres of Grand Ravine in November 2017 (involving the extrajudicial killing of 14 people) and La Saline in November 2018 (in which 71 people were murdered), both while active in the police force. Despite having a search and arrest warrant against him since February 2019 on multiple murder charges, Chérizier participated in several attacks in the Bel Air neighbourhood that same year. After it became known to the public in June, the G9 participated in many acts of violence in various neighbourhoods near the capital in which many people were killed and dozens of houses were set on fire. In addition, hundreds of members of this coalition of armed groups staged violent protests to demand their legal recognition as local authorities in the areas they control and to demand the release of one of their leaders, Albert Stevenson (aka Djouma). The Je Klere Foundation (FKJL) denounced the government and the police's responsibility for and collusion in the creation and subsequent implementation of the G9, while other civil society organisations reported that some gangs even used police cars and uniforms to carry out kidnappings (the number of which increased during the year) and other illicit activities.

In Haiti, one of the most worrying events of the year was the formation of G9 an Fanmi, a coalition of at least nine armed groups

Another one of the main sources of tension during the year was linked to the police. In the first quarter, **the director general of the police's refusal to create a police union sparked several violent protests by hundreds of policemen in February and early March, in which dozens of roadblocks were set up, buildings and cars were burned and three people died in the violent clashes that occurred**. Although the government authorised the union in mid-March, throughout the year a group known as Fantom 509, a police cell that staged protests and disturbances at various times of the year, took a leading role in making various labour-related demands and demanded the resignation of the president of Haiti and the release one of the group's leaders, arrested in May. The government criticised the group for setting up roadblocks and barricades and starting fires with police uniforms and even threatened to designate

Fantom 509 a terrorist organisation. There were anti-government demonstrations and protests throughout the year, alongside rising insecurity and violence across the country, but the demonstrations and riots were especially intense in the final quarter of the year. **In November alone, 11 people lost their lives in the riots in Port-au-Prince and other cities.** Finally, the serious political and social situation gripping the country and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the economic and migration crisis in Haiti. According to various sources, the number of people suffering from food insecurity increased to four million people. Similarly, migratory flows from Haiti increased significantly to the point that the Dominican Republic closed the border and deployed 10,000 additional soldiers to prevent undocumented Haitians from entering.

Honduras	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, gangs cartels

Summary:
The political and social situation in the country is mainly characterised by the high homicide rates in Honduras, which in recent years has often been considered among the most violent countries in the world, as well as by the social and political polarisation following Manuel Zelaya's rise to power in 2006. Criticism from broad swathes of the population for his intention to call a referendum to reform the Constitution and run for a new term of office and for his relationship with the governments that make up the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), especially in Venezuela, led to a coup in 2009 that was criticised by the international community, led to the loss of the country's membership in the OAS and forced Zelaya into exile, which prevented him from running in the presidential election of 2009. Although Zelaya was able to return to the country in 2011, there has been an important degree of social and political polarisation in the country. The current phase of the crisis, which has led to mass anti-government protests and serious episodes of violence, was exacerbated after the 2017 presidential election between outgoing President Juan Orlando Hernández and Salvador Nasralla (a candidate who is politically very close to Zelaya) in which Hernández, finally re-elected by a narrow margin of votes, was accused of electoral fraud.

Protests linked to food shortages and deteriorating living conditions increased, as did tension between the government and the opposition in the run-up to the 2021 elections, but there was also a significant drop in the number of homicides. According to the government, 3,482 homicides were reported in 2020, a significant dip compared to 4,082 reported in 2019, 3,864 in 2018 and 3,732 in 2017. Levels of violence in the country increased dramatically between 2005 and 2001, when Honduras had the highest homicide rate in the world (92 homicides per 100,000 people). Since then, except for the increase in homicides in 2010 compared to 2018, there has been a gradual decrease to a homicide rate of 37 in 2020. In that year, the number of "multiple murders" also fell compared to the previous year (from 66 in 2019 to 44 in 2020). **The Observatory of Violence of the National Autonomous University of Honduras stated that the decline in violence is mainly attributable to the confinement, curfew and mobility restrictions linked to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic**. The government acknowledged the impact, but also stressed the effectiveness of its strategy to combat crime, citing the breakup of drug cartels (including the extradition of people, seizures of drugs and the dismantling of secret airstrips and laboratories); the creation of the National Anti-Mara and Gang Force (FNAMP), which had detained almost 1,700 gang members by December 2020; the recovery of spaces controlled by such gangs; legislative changes to better address drug trafficking, organised crime and money laundering; and purges the police force to make it more effective and improve its reputation. According to the Observatory of Violence, 65% of the violent deaths in the country are linked to drug trafficking. Despite this reduction in levels of violence, many episodes of political violence against and killings of social and community leaders, human rights defenders and environmental activists continued to be reported during 2020.

However, the political tension between the government and the opposition over the organisation of the primary and general elections respectively scheduled for March and November 2021 rose significantly due to the lack of agreement to approve new electoral legislation (especially regarding the establishment of a second presidential term and the creation of a runoff in the presidential election) and the problems in updating the electoral census (at the end of the year, the competent authorities said they had detected problems in identifying 500,000 people, which according to some analysts could lead to serious tensions in the election and question the legitimacy of the results). **Political tension was also exacerbated by accusations against President Orlando and people he trusted for his closeness and connivance with organised crime** (in 2019 a US court convicted his brother of drug trafficking) and by the end of the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras in January, following a lack of agreement between the government and the OAS on continuing its activities. Finally, there were demonstrations and protests throughout the year due to food shortages and deteriorating living conditions.

Mexico	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, cartels, armed opposition groups

Summary:
Since 2006, when Felipe Calderón started the so-called "war on drug-trafficking", the level of violence and human rights' violations throughout the country increased substantially making the country one of the ones with most murders in the world. Since then, the number of organized crime structures with ties to drug trafficking have multiplied. In some parts of the country, these structures are disputing the State's monopoly on violence. According to some estimates, by the end of 2017, the "war against drug-trafficking" had caused more than 150,000 deaths and more than 30,000 disappearances. Also, Mexico has insurgency movements in States such as Guerrero and Oaxaca –including the EPR, the ERPI or the FAR-LP. In Chiapas, after a short-lived armed uprising of the EZLN in 1994, conflict is still present in Zapatista communities.

In general terms, the levels of violence were similar to those of the previous year. According to data from the National Public Security System, there were 35,484 homicides in 2020 (133 less than in 2019) and the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 27. **The government warned that most of these homicides (20,188) were committed with firearms and that the number of intentional homicides with firearms has increased by 133% in the last five years.** These figures do not include missing persons or bodies found in mass graves. According to data from the National Registry of Missing and Unlocated Persons, more than 200,000 people have disappeared since 1964, almost 82,000 of which have not been located. In 2020, 15,656 people disappeared (23% less than in 2019), of which 6,753 were still unaccounted for at the end of the year. **According to media estimates based on official data, since the beginning of the war against drug trafficking that began in 2006, more than 300,000 homicides have been reported in Mexico.** In 2020, 52% of homicides were concentrated in five states (Guanajuato, Baja California, Chihuahua, Jalisco and Michoacán), and this percentage exceeded 80% when five other states were included (Tamaulipas, Jalisco, State of Mexico, Veracruz and Colima). According to government data published in August, 19 main cartels operate in Mexico, eight of which increased their operations during 2020: the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel (CJNG) and the Sinaloa Cartel at the national level; Los Viagras in Michoacán; Guerreros Unidos y Rojos in Guerrero; Cartel de Santa Rosa de Lima in Guanajuato; and Unión Tepito y Cártel de Tláhuac in the country's capital. Several analysts highlighted the rapid expansion of the CJNG, which was active in two states in 2010 and had a solid presence in 24 states in 2020, including in several of the traditional strongholds of the Sinaloa Cartel (currently considered the second largest cartel in the country), such as Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Sinaloa, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Colima, Querétaro, State of Mexico, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas and Quintana Roo. According to information from the DEA, the six cartels with the greatest capacity to bring narcotics into the US were CJNG, Sinaloa, Beltrán Leyva, Juárez, Golfo and Los Zetas. In December, US President Donald Trump pointed out that despite the design of a new anti-drug strategy and the progress made in seizures and extraditions that were carried out under the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the country had yet to make many more accomplishments in this area and ran the risk of not fulfilling its international commitments to anti-drug policy.

According to some estimates, since the beginning of the war against drug trafficking that began in 2006, over 300,000 homicides have been reported in Mexico

Regarding the dynamics of violence, there were almost daily clashes between rival cartels or between them and the state security forces during 2020. Some of the episodes that generated more political and media attention were two attacks on a rehabilitation centre in Irapuato (Guanajuato) in which 10 people lost their lives (in June) and another 27 in July; clashes in January and April between the CJNG and Los Viagras in Michoacán and Guerrero, which resulted in the deaths of 10 and 21 people respectively; clashes between the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels in Chihuahua in April, which killed 19 people; the killing of 12 alleged members of the Cártel del Nordeste in Tamaulipas in July by the Mexican Army; clashes in Zacatecas in December between the CJNG and the Sinaloa Cartel, which killed at least 28 people; the murder of 26 people and the displacement of more than 1,000 due to fighting between the CJNG and an alliance of organized crime organisations in Michoacán in December; and the discovery of mass graves in Guanajuato in November (76 corpses in the town of Salvatierra and another 45 in the town of Cortázar) and in Colima in August (22 bodies).

The government highlighted its policy on citizen security and the fight against drugs, noting that the 2020 data represents the first drop in the number of homicides in the last five years and alleging a significant decrease in kidnappings (36%) and robberies (21%). The government also announced an agreement with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for a group of experts to resume the investigation into the disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa (Guerrero) in 2014, in which evidence had been found of the complicity of state and federal security forces. However, **both human rights organisations and the National Human Rights Commission criticised the growing militarisation of citizen security policies**, especially after López Obrador signed a presidential decree in May allowing the deployment of the Mexican Armed Forces in a wide range of functions related to public security until May 2024. According to these organisations, this decree does not specify under what circumstances and in which areas the Mexican Armed Forces can be used. Along the same lines, civil society organisations warned that there are currently 31% more soldiers deployed throughout the country than during the two previous governments.

South America

Bolivia	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
Although President Evo Morales' resignation and departure from the country at the end of 2019 were precipitated by accusations of fraud in the presidential elections held that same year, the country has been immersed in a process of political and social polarisation practically ever since former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada went into exile in the United States in 2003 following the crackdown on anti-government protests in which more than 100 people died. After a period of uncertainty during which two Presidents took power on an interim basis, Evo Morales won the elections in December 2005, becoming the country's first indigenous leader. However, his actions while in Government, especially the agrarian reform, the nationalisation of hydrocarbons and the approval of a new Constitution, were hampered by the strong opposition of several political parties and the eastern regions of the country which, led by the department of Santa Cruz, demanded greater autonomy. Alongside the political struggle between the Government and the opposition, in recent years Bolivia has faced one of the highest rates of social conflict in the continent, with protests of different kinds linked to sectoral labour demands, the activity of mining companies or the rights of indigenous peoples. The political crisis became especially acute in 2016 after the ruling party lost –by a narrow margin of votes, marking Evo Morales' first electoral defeat– a referendum on constitutional reform on whether or not to allow Evo Morales a further re-election and thus to compete in the 2019 presidential elections.

Although there were significant protests before and after the presidential and legislative elections in October, there was considerably less political and social tension in Bolivia compared to the previous year, in which the country was shaken by a major crisis that caused the deaths of more than 30 people and prompted President Evo Morales to leave the country and seek political asylum. Early in the year, the protests subsided significantly compared to the final quarter of 2019, and more so in early January after the Supreme Electoral Tribunal called for new elections on 3 May. However, in February the tension increased again after the Supreme Electoral Tribunal rejected Evo Morales's candidacy to the Senate, claiming that he did not reside in Bolivia. Two different criminal proceedings were also initiated against the former president on charges of terrorism and electoral fraud in the October 2019 elections. However, the moment of greatest political and social tension began in late July, when the Supreme Electoral Tribunal postponed the elections for the third time, this time until 18 October, alleging that it would be impossible to hold them earlier due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This delay was criticised by both Morales and various parts of the opposition, which argued that the interim government led by Jeanine Áñez was using the pandemic as a pretext to prolong and consolidate her rule. In such circumstances, **the Bolivian Workers' Centre (COB) union and other organisations that the media considers close to Morales encouraged protests, called for a general strike and set up more than 70 roadblocks throughout the country in early August**. After the lack of agreement in the talks between several of these organisations and the government, protests increased in various parts of the country, causing dozens of injuries and shortages of supplies. In fact, the government deployed the Bolivian Army to guarantee the transport of oxygen for people sick with coronavirus.

The protests subsided after Áñez signed a decree that set 18 October as the maximum deadline for calling new elections and Morales called for the roadblocks to come down. Days later, the headquarters of the COB and another union were attacked with bombs and in early September, the provisional government urged the International Criminal Court to launch an investigation for crimes against humanity against the organisers of the protests and roadblocks. There were dozens of episodes of political violence against members or sympathisers of the ruling and opposition parties in September and October, as denounced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, the government, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and four electoral observation missions, including that of the OAS, certified that the legislative and presidential elections of 18 October were free and peaceful. **The party of Evo Morales (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS) won the victory in both houses of Congress, while its presidential candidate, Luis Arce, the minister of the economy in the government of Evo Morales, won a massive victory (more than 55% of votes) against former President Carlos Mesa (29%) and Luis Fermando Camacho (14%).** Despite these results, protests continued to occur on a regular basis in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba in October and November, mainly by individuals and organisations alleging that there had been electoral fraud and requesting an audit of the results of the elections. Finally, a judge annulled the arrest warrant against Evo Morales for crimes of terrorism and sedition and Morales returned to Bolivia from Argentina in early November. The outgoing Congress approved a motion in October requesting that Áñez and 11 of her government ministers be prosecuted for their responsibility in the acts of violence that occurred in the final months of 2019, in which hundreds of people were injured and more than 30 died.

Peru	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed opposition (Militarised Communist Party of Peru), political and social opposition (farmer and indigenous organisations)

Summary:
In 1980, just when democracy had been restored in the country, an armed conflict began between the government and the Maoist armed group Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso in Spanish) that lasted for two decades and claimed 60,000 lives. The counter-insurgency policy implemented in the 1990s pushed the state towards authoritarianism under Alberto Fujimori, who in 2000 went into exile in Japan having been deposed by congress and accused of numerous cases of corruption and human rights violations. Since 2008, the remaining Shining Path factions have stepped up their operations significantly in the Alto Huallaga region and especially in the VRAE region (Valley between the Apurímac and Ene Rivers). The government, which claims that the Shining Path organisation is involved in drug trafficking, has intensified its military operations in both regions notably and has refused to enter into talks of any sort. It has also intensified the political and legal struggle against its political arm, Movadef. Meanwhile, several collectives, especially indigenous groups, have organised periodical mobilisations to protest against the economic policy of successive governments and against the activity of mining companies.

The removal of President Martín Vizcarra by Congress in November sparked the start of some of the most important protests in recent years in many parts of the country, which in turn led to the resignation of incoming President Manuel Merino and his entire cabinet. The protests began in Lima and other cities in the country on the same day that Congress overwhelmingly approved Vizcarra's removal (with 105 votes in favour out of a total of 130) on charges of "permanent moral incapacity" for allegations of corruption during his term as governor of Moquegua between 2011 and 2014. Previously, in September, the same Congress had initiated a procedure for Vizcarra's removal, accused at that time of corruption to favour a singer, but it did not pass in the end due to lack of congressional support. Following Vizcarra's removal and the inauguration of the new president, formerly the speaker of Congress, Manuel Merino, tens of thousands of people participated in demonstrations across the country, especially during the three "national marches" on 12, 14 and 17 November, during which there were many riots and clashes between protesters and police. According to the National Coordinator for Human Rights, two people died, more than 100 were injured (more than 60 hospitalised) and more than 40 went missing. Several civil society organisations have accused the police of using rubber pellets and tear gas indiscriminately, while **international bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as international human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, expressed concern about police action in containing the protests, demanding that the state investigate.**

Faced with the scale of the protests, President Merino and most of his cabinet resigned shortly after two protesters were shot dead. Following the subsequent appointment of congressman Francisco Sagasti as the new president of the country (who had voted against Vizcarra's removal), the protests calmed down at the end of the month and especially after Sagasti announced police reforms, the appointment of a new chief of staff and the dismissal of several officers accused of police brutality. According to some analysts, the main reason for the protests was Vizcarra's removal, described by some as a covert coup by Congress to prevent Vizcarra from carrying out his anti-corruption programme. According to various media outlets, 68 of the 130 congresspeople were being investigated for fraud, money laundering, bribery and other forms of corruption. Other analysts believe that the protests were also encouraged by other more structural factors, such as the deteriorating economy, criticism of the party system, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic (at various times of the year Peru had the highest coronavirus death rate in the world), the demand for a new Constitution and the people's disgust with the high levels of corruption in Peruvian politics.

Venezuela

Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
The current political and social crisis gripping the country goes back to the rise to power of Hugo Chávez in 1998 and his promotion of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, but it became more acute during the political transition that led to Chávez's death in March 2013 and his replacement by Vice President Nicolás Maduro, which was considered unconstitutional by the opposition. The tensions rose markedly after the presidential election of April 2013, which Maduro won by a narrow margin (50.6% of the votes), with the opposition denouncing numerous irregularities and demanding a recount and verification of the votes with the support of several governments and the OAS. Amidst a growing economic crisis and recurrent and sometimes massive demonstrations, the political crisis in Venezuela worsened after the opposition comfortably won the legislative elections in December 2015, winning its first election victory in two decades. This victory caused a certain degree of institutional paralysis between the National Assembly on the one hand and the government and many of the judicial authorities on the other.

There were no mass demonstrations or significant episodes of violence, but the political and institutional crisis in the country persisted. In 2020, this crisis was closely linked to the holding of legislative elections and the control of the National Assembly, while the government accused the opposition of instigating a coup d'état and a high number of homicides continued to be reported. Regarding the first issue, at the beginning of the year the government deployed the National Guard in the vicinity of the opposition-controlled National Assembly to prevent it from voting

on a one-year extension to the term of Juan Guaidó as its president, a position also disputed by the official candidate Luis Parra (expelled from Guaidó's party in late 2019). Parra was proclaimed the new president of the National Assembly, but the opposition warned that such a vote had not had the necessary quorum and held a session outside the National Assembly building in which Guaidó was ratified in office. Days later, Guaidó withdrew from holding a legislative session after groups of people known as "colectivos" attacked a convoy that was transporting several MPs to the National Assembly. In February, shortly after Juan Guaidó returned from a three-week international tour in which he was received as head of state by several countries, Caracas carried out military exercises in which 2.3 million people may have participated, combining the Venezuelan Armed Forces (with some 365,000 troops) and a good part of a civilian militia made up of around 3.7 million reservists and that the government may have formally incorporated into the state security forces.

The government of Venezuela announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had aborted a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup

The moment of maximum tension in the year occurred in May, when **the government announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had aborted a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup**. This military operation in the city of Macuto resulted in the death of eight people and was led by a former captain of the National Guard and by a former member of the US special forces who was the head of a private security company called Silvercorp at the time. **The Maduro government accused the opposition and the US government of being behind the coup attempt**, and some of those involved confirmed contacts with certain people close to Guaidó, but both he and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denied any link to what was called Operation Gideon. In May, around 30 people were arrested for their alleged connection to said operation and the Attorney General urged the Supreme Court to declare Guaidó's party a terrorist organisation. The political tension continued in June, after the Supreme Court appointed the new members of the National Electoral Council and modified the electoral law. Such movement provoked complaints from the opposition and a large part of the international community, which argued that such appointments and legislative modifications correspond only to the National Assembly and not to the Supreme Court, and that the only objective of the government was to control the legislative elections called for December. In such circumstances, most of the opposition decided to boycott the elections, in which Caracas claimed that turnout was 30% and in which the parties that support the Maduro government obtained more than 90% of the seats. Guaidó ignored these results and said that the outgoing opposition-controlled National Assembly was the only legitimate legislative body until free and fair elections were called. At the end of the year, the National Assembly extended its term for another year (which officially ended on 4 January 2021), but both the government and the Supreme Court declared such an extension unconstitutional.

Regarding the number of homicides, the Venezuelan Violence Observatory (VVO) indicated that there had been 11,891 violent deaths in 2020, a significant decrease from the 16,506 in 2019. **The homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 45.6, the highest in Latin America** according to the VVO. Of the violent deaths in 2020, 4,231 were categorised as caused by "resistance to authority". According to the Venezuelan Violence Observatory, the number of deaths at the hands of state agents and structures was higher than that of criminal homicides for the first time. At the time, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet, had already requested the dissolution of bodies such as the National Police's Special Actions Force after many complaints of extrajudicial executions, although other bodies such as the National Guard and the security forces of some states have also committed some abuses. In September, a United Nations investigation mission accused various state security and intelligence bodies of various human rights violations (such as extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture) that could amount to crimes against humanity since 2014, noting that Maduro and other senior government officials were aware of the situation and calling for an international investigation in this regard. Shortly afterwards, **the ICC Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, declared that there was a reasonable basis for believing that crimes against humanity may have been committed since 2017**, asked the Venezuelan government for information on the legal proceedings initiated against the alleged perpetrators of said crimes and pledged to launch a full investigation into the matter in 2021. Previously, in March, the US Attorney General had announced the prosecution of Maduro, the defence minister and others for crimes related to drug trafficking. The Venezuelan government categorically rejected all these accusations.

2.3.3. Asia and the Pacific

Central Asia

Kazakhstan	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Identity, Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, local and regional armed groups

Summary:
Since its independence from the USSR in 1991, Kazakhstan has undergone strong economic growth in parallel with mostly stable socio-political development. However, the 30 years of Nursultan Nazarbayev's presidency were also marked by democratic shortcomings and authoritarian tendencies, without space for the political and social opposition. Following his departure in 2019, Nazarbayev continued to hold leadership positions, including as Leader of the Nation and president of the ruling Nur Otan party. The sources of conflict include tension between the authorities and opposition regarding governance and access to political power and strain between the authorities and sectoral groups regarding socio-economic issues in a context of economic inequality and poor working conditions in sectors such as the petrol industry. In Central Asia as a whole, Islamist-inspired local and regional armed actors have staged incidents of violence at various times, including in Kazakhstan, while governments in the region have also exploited the alleged risk of Islamist violence to justify repressive practices.

Tension increased in the country, with a rise in opposition protests on which the authorities cracked down. One year after the resignation of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who remains chairman of the Security Council, president of the ruling party and Leader of the Nation for life, protests continued at various times of the year, both in the capital, Nur-Sultan, and elsewhere. Early in the year, persecution intensified against supporters of the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, hampering their plans to hold their founding congress scheduled for 22 February. Instead, the opposition staged peaceful protests, demanding the registration of opposition parties, democratic reforms and an end to repressive practices. Janbolat Mamai a journalist, activist and leader of the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, was arrested one day before the protests. Several dozen people were arrested (between 100 and 200, according to some sources). In May, the government passed legislation that allowed a certain degree of protest only under certain circumstances, with severe restrictions on the right to assembly and demonstration. In the months that followed, crackdowns continued against expressions of social and political protest. **The government's management of the pandemic was also challenged by the protests and international NGOs denounced the state's use of restrictive measures to control the pandemic to persecute opposition activity**. Another 100 protesters were arrested in new protests in June, organised by the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan and the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan movement, a party not registered and considered by the authorities to be an extremist organisation. Throughout the year there were also protests over the death of civil rights defender Dulat Aghadil in preventive detention in February, including demands for an independent investigation into his death. In November, opposition groups called for a boycott of the parliamentary elections scheduled for January 2021 and the persecution of the opposition and arrests continued until the end of the year.

There were also several demonstrations over socio-economic issues at various times of the year, including protests by women demanding aid in different places. Another source of tension was the **violence in February between the Kazakh population and the Dungan minority in several towns in Korday district (Zhambyl region, southeast), which killed 11 people, wounded 192** and damaged 168 houses and 122 vehicles, according to the authorities. The Interior Ministry deployed special forces. The incidents forcibly displaced 24,000 ethnic Dungans. **The government denied that they were ethnic disputes and blamed the violence on criminal gangs, while some organisations described an ethnic conflict and pogroms against the Dungan ethnic minority in the towns of Masanchi, Sortobe, Bular Batyr and Aukhatty**. The violence was preceded by two unrelated incidents involving Kazakhs and Dungans that some analysts said were interrelated on social media, generated nationalist reactions and gave way to subsequent violence. Dungan representatives denounced arbitrary detentions, torture and mistreatment of their ethnic group by the security forces after the events in February.

Kyrgyzstan	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Government, Identity, Resources, Territory Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

Summary:
Since its emergence as an independent state in August 1991, the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan has experienced several periods of instability and socio-political conflict. The presidency of Askar Akayev (1991-2005) began with reformist momentum but gradually drifted towards authoritarianism and corruption. In March 2005 a series of demonstrations denouncing fraud in that year's elections led to a social uprising that forced the collapse of the regime. The promises of change made by the new president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, soon came to nothing, giving way to a regime of authoritarian presidentialism in which corruption and nepotism were rife, especially from the end of 2007. All of this took place in a scenario involving economic difficulties for the population, latent tension between the north and south of the country, and the exclusion of ethnic minorities from political decision-making processes. Five years later, in April 2010, a new popular uprising led to the overthrow of the regime, with clashes that claimed 85 lives and left hundreds injured. This was followed in June by a wave of violence with an inter-ethnic dimension, claiming more than 400 lives. Other sources of tension in Kyrgyzstan are related to the presence of regional armed groups with Islamist tendencies in the Fergana Valley (an area between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) and border disputes with the neighbouring countries.

There was a post-election crisis in October, with protests and a controversial regime change, while

border tensions with neighbouring countries continued. In relation to the internal political crisis, the country held parliamentary elections on 4 October amidst previous complaints of intimidation and vote buying, the significant economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, disaffection with the ruling class due to the levels of corruption and high levels of political factionalism. Only four of the 16 political parties authorised to participate in the elections exceeded the 7% threshold, leaving practically the entire opposition outside Parliament. The Birimdik (Unity) party, which supports President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, won the election with 24.9% of the votes; followed by Mekenim (Homeland), with 24.27%, which is associated with the Matraimov family, whose member and former high-ranking customs officer Raimbek Matraimov was being investigated for an alleged money-laundering and smuggling scheme. In turn, the Kyrgyz Party obtained 8.9% and Butun (United Kyrgyzstan) won 7.25%. The latter was the only party opposed to the government that entered Parliament. The opposition claimed that fraud had been committed. Protests broke out on 5 October, promoted by the parties that were left without parliamentary representation, and were joined by supporters of Butun. The security forces violently cracked down on the protests. **Opposition protesters seized the parliamentary headquarters and other government buildings** and released former President Almazbek Atambayev and former MP and member of the Mekenchil party, Sadyr Japarov, from jail, as well as other prominent figures. **The core of the protest took place in the capital, Bishkek, although there were also demonstrations in the northern towns of Talas, Naryn and Karakol** in the context of north-south regional political divisions. On 6 October, the prime minister resigned. The president of Parliament, the mayor of the capital and several regional governors also resigned.

Even though the electoral authorities cancelled the election results on 6 October, the instability continued. Three self-styled coordination councils were formed that were intended to lead the transition of power. On 9 October, the president decreed a state of emergency, authorised the deployment of the Kyrgyz Army, dismissed the entire cabinet and denounced a coup. He later went missing, while the opposition demanded his resignation. There was a controversial transfer of power **in an extraordinary meeting in a hotel in which the outgoing Parliament appointed Japarov as prime minister, though this was rejected by the president, citing illegitimate procedure**. Media outlets reported that Japarov had been nominated with 61 votes, whereas only 51 people voted (out of 120 MPs). At a press conference, Japarov defended the legitimacy of his election. In another extraordinary meeting on 13 October, Parliament appointed a new parliamentary speaker, Kanat Isayev. **The Kyrgyz president announced his resignation on 15 October and urged the political opposition to withdraw their supporters from the streets and to pursue non-violent means of protest.** Following the departure of the president and the speaker of Parliament's refusal to assume the interim presidency, Parliament transferred presidential powers to Japarov, who simultaneously became both acting prime minister and president. The crisis initially led Russia to announce the suspension of financial aid to Kyrgyzstan until political stability was guaranteed. Russia is a strategic partner of Kyrgyzstan, with a military base in the country and links to the various political factions. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Smitry Kozak met with Jeenbekov and Japarov in the Kyrgyz capital on 12 October, in what some analysts described as an attempt to facilitate a solution to the crisis. In various statements, Japarov confirmed his interest in maintaining strategic relations with Russia. As the situation developed, Russia confirmed the disbursement of the planned funds. With growing economic importance in the country and the creditor of more than 42% of Tajikistan's external debt, China kept a low profile during the crisis.

At the end of October, the electoral commission announced the presidential election for 10 January 2021, as well as repetition of the parliamentary elections on 10 December, though it delayed the latter until no later than July 2021. In November, Japarov resigned as the president and head of government with the aim of being eligible for the presidential election. The government presented a draft constitutional amendment that expanded presidential powers, concentrating executive powers in the presidency and reducing the size of Parliament. The draft amendment triggered demonstrations with hundreds of protesters and criticism from various former presidents and other political figures for posing a threat to the democratic process and questioned the legitimacy of the interim government to promote such reforms. The government also gave the green light to changes in electoral legislation in November, lowering the electoral threshold from 7% to 3%. **On the government's initiative in December, Parliament also passed a law to hold a referendum on the controversial constitutional amendment promoted by Japarov**. The approval of the law for the referendum sparked protests from dozens of activists and civil rights defenders.

Other tension during the year emanated from borders with neighbouring countries. There were several incidents of violence with Tajikistan along with several towns in the Batken region that led to the evacuation of the population, with one person killed and several injured at various times of the year. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan established a joint working group early in the year to make progress on delimiting the border, though tensions remained high throughout the year. There were also clashes along the border of the Sokh district, an enclave in the Ferghana Valley belonging to Uzbekistan inside Kyrgyzstan, due to water access issues that wounded 180 Uzbeks and 25 Kyrgyz nationals. The increase in tension prompted telephone conversations between the presidents of both countries.

East Asia

DPR Korea - USA, Japan, Rep. Of Korea[35]	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government International
Main parties:	DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. Of Korea, China, Russia

Summary:
International concern about North Korea's nuclear programme dates back to the early 1990s, when the North Korean government restricted the presence in the country of observers from the International Atomic Energy Agency and carried out a series of missile tests. Nevertheless international tension escalated notably after the US Administration of George W. Bush included the North Koreannregime within the so-called "axis of evil". A few months after Pyongyang reactivated an important nuclear reactor and withdrew from the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2003, multilateral talks began on the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula in which the governments of North Korea, South Korea, the USA, Japan, China and Russia participated. In April 2009, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the said talks after the United Nations imposed new sanctions after the country launched a long range missile.

The concerns rose among the United States and other countries about the development of new weapons by North Korea increased, while Pyongyang substantially stepped up its ballistic tests. In his end-of-year speech, **Kim Jong-un had warned that his country no longer felt bound to the commitments made on denuclearisation (especially in relation to the moratorium on nuclear and ballistic tests), so he intended to strengthen his arms programme and said that his country would soon roll out a new strategic weapon**. Kim Jong-un's statement was backed up by the North Korean government in January during the United Nations Conference on Disarmament, in which Pyongyang warned that there would never be any denuclearisation process in North Korea if the US did not lift its sanctions and end its hostile policies towards the country. When North Korea launched short-range missiles for several days in March, the governments of the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, France and Estonia condemned the tests and the US defence secretary warned that North Korea was trying to modernise its entire missile system. In April, North Korea conducted artillery exercises and carried out further tests with cruise missiles and air-to-surface missiles fired from fighter jets. In addition to the concern expressed by several governments throughout the year about the notable increase in cyber activity in North Korea, in late 2020 tension increased around the North Korean arms programme for two reasons. First, in November because the IAEA warned of the resumption of nuclear activity at the Kangson enrichment site. Previously, media outlets had reported that Pyongyang was manufacturing miniaturised nuclear devices that could be transported in missiles. The second factor of concern was the presentation of new ICBMs and unprecedented submarine-launched missiles during a military parade commemorating the founding of the Workers' Party in October. Shortly thereafter, **the United States tested the missile defence system installed in the Marshall Islands for the first time**. Alongside these events, tension between China and several countries rose as a result of the publication of a report by the United Nations sanctions panel that noted that North Korea had violated several United Nations sanctions in 2019 with the support of the Chinese shipping industry, specifically in the import of refined petroleum and the export of coal by North Korea.

Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	System International
Main parties:	Korea, DPR Rep. of Korea

Summary:
After the end of the Second World War and the occupation of the Korean peninsula by Soviet troops (north) and US troops (south), it was split into two countries. The Korean War (1950-53) ended with the signing of an armistice (under the terms of which the two countries remain technically at war) and the establishment of a de facto border at the 38th parallel. Despite the fact that in the 1970s talks began on reunification, the two countries have threatened on several occasions to take military action. As such, in recent decades numerous armed incidents have been recorded, both on the common border between the two countries (one of the most militarised zones in the world) and along the sea border in the Yellow Sea (or West Sea). Although in 2000 the leaders of the two countries held a historic meeting in which they agreed to establish trust-building measures, once Lee Myung-bak took office in 2007 the tension escalated significantly again and some military skirmishes occurred along the border. Subsequently, the death of Kim Jong-il at the end of 2011 (succeeded as supreme leader by his son Kim Jong-un) and the election of Park Geun-hye as the new South Korean president at the end of 2012 marked the start of a new phase in bilateral relations.

Alongside the deterioration in relations between the US and North Korea over the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, **the inter-Korean dialogue not only failed to resume, but the tension between both countries escalated significantly compared to previous years.** Since the beginning of the year, Pyongyang had ruled out any continuation of talks with South Korea regarding possible reunification or any other aspect and had asked South Korean President Moon Jae-in to stop trying to facilitate a rapprochement between North Korea and the US. The tension between the two countries reached its highest point in recent years in May and June. In early May, North Korea reportedly fired into the so-called Demilitarised Zone

35. This international socio-political crisis relates mainly to the dispute over the North Korean nuclear programme.

several times, launching some projectiles at a South Korean border post, which responded with warning shots. North Korea later did not respond to Seoul's request for explanations or cooperate with the United Nations investigation. The incident, the first in the Demilitarised Zone since the North Korean Army fired on a defector in 2017, took place shortly after Kim Jong-un's reappearance in public (after several weeks of speculation about his health and even rumours about his death). A few days after the exchange of fire, North Korea threatened South Korea with retaliation for military exercises near the disputed border in the Yellow Sea that Seoul believed were carried out in its territorial waters and did not contravene the 2018 agreement that established a security zone free of military exercises there.

In early June, Pyongyang cut off all military and political communication with South Korea (including the direct line between Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in), called South Korea an enemy, broke relations with its authorities and announced the remilitarisation of stretches of the common border that had been demilitarised and pacified under the previous bilateral agreements reached since 2018. Shortly thereafter, **Pyongyang detonated the liaison office in the North Korean town of Kaesong that both countries had established in 2018**. In addition, the North Korean government threatened to deploy troops to the nearby border areas of Mount Kumgang and Kaesong. In 2018, both countries had begun to dismantle border military posts and deactivate mines in the Demilitarised Zone, but this progress came to an end with the interruption of inter-Korean dialogue and negotiations between North Korea and the United States. According to the media, the main reason for North Korea's actions was Seoul's alleged inactivity when private organisations sent hot air balloons with anti-government pamphlets, memory cards and food. Some analysts said that this crisis coincided with the 20th anniversary of the first inter-Korean summit between the two top leaders of both countries and that it led to a period of detente between them. Moon Jae-in urged that the inter-Korean dialogue must be saved and suggested that a special envoy try to de-escalate tensions, but this offer was rejected by North Korea. Seoul promised to investigate Pyongyang's allegations and even to press charges against the aforementioned private organisations, but also made it clear that there would be a forceful response to any military provocation. In late June, the North Korean media noted that Pyongyang had abandoned its military actions against South Korea. However, tensions between the two countries increased again in September after a South Korean fisheries officer was shot dead by a North Korean soldier on the de facto maritime border between both countries. Pyongyang threatened further action if South Korea continued with naval operations to recover the body, but days later it apologised for the shooting.

South Asia

Bangladesh	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government (Awami League), political opposition (Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami), International Crimes Tribunal, armed groups (Ansar-al-Islam, JMB)

Summary:
Since the creation of Bangladesh as an independent State in 1971, after breaking away from Pakistan in an armed conflict that caused three million deaths, the country has experienced a complex political situation. The 1991 elections led to democracy after a series of authoritarian military governments dominating the country since its independence. The two main parties, BNP and AL have since then succeeded one another in power after several elections, always contested by the loosing party, leading to governments that have never met the country's main challenges such as poverty, corruption or the low quality of democracy, and have always given it to one-sided interests. In 2008, the AL came to power after a two-year period dominated by a military interim Government was unsuccessful in its attempt to end the political crisis that had led the country into a spiral of violence during the previous months and that even led to the imprisonment of the leaders of both parties. The call for elections in 2014 in a very fragile political context and with a strong opposition from the BNP to the reforms undertaken by the AL such as eliminating the interim Government to supervise electoral processes led to a serious and violent political crisis in 2013. Alongside this, the establishment of a tribunal to judge crimes committed during the 1971 war, used by the Government to end with the Islamist opposition, especially with the party Jamaat-e-Islami, worsened the situation in the country.

Violence in Bangladesh dropped considerably, although political tension in the country persisted. Arrests of political dissidents and anti-terrorist police operations against members of different armed groups intensified during the year. Thus, there were dozens of arrests of members of the main armed group in the country, JMB. There were some sporadic attacks at different times of the year, especially against members of the security forces, causing some injuries. The holding of local elections was also a source of tension and there were clashes between militants and followers of the ruling AL party, which won the elections in Dhaka, the capital, and the BNP, the main opposition party, which repeated allegations of fraud. In March, former prime minister and BNP leader Khaleda Zia was temporarily released from prison, though she had to remain at her home. According to the International Crisis Group, the government used the restrictions to contain the pandemic to increase the persecution and arrests of political opponents. There were also many arrests under the Digital Security Law, especially of journalists, intellectuals and people linked

to academia. In addition, thousands of textile workers protested the situation caused by the suspension of production due to the confinement, demanding support. In November, thousands of people demonstrated against French President Emmanuel Macron for his defence of satirical cartoons against Muhammad and there were several attacks against Hindu communities for their alleged defence of Macron's position. Several houses belonging to Hindu people were set on fire. The situation of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp also remained unresolved.

Over 50 people died in India in attacks by supporters of the governing BJP party against Muslims during protests against the Citizenship Act

India	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
In May 2014, the Hindu nationalist party BJP won the elections and took over the country's Government, led by Narendra Modi as prime minister. In 2019, Modi repeated his election victory. Since then, the Government has promoted a Hindu nationalist governance programme accompanied by discriminatory rhetoric, measures and policies against the Muslim population. Tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India had increased in previous decades, especially following the serious violence in Gujarat in 2000, when a train carrying Hindu pilgrims caught fire and 58 people were killed, and violent riots broke out, killing nearly 800 Muslims and more than 250 Hindus (although civil society organisations claim the numbers were much higher). Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat and a member of the ultra-nationalist Hindu organisation RSS, was accused of collusion and even incitement to violence against the Muslim population. In 2019, the Modi Government adopted several measures considered to be highly detrimental to the Muslim community, including the withdrawal of the special autonomy and statehood status from Jammu and Kashmir; the National Register of Citizens in Assam, which excluded two million Muslims from Indian citizenship; and the adoption of the Citizenship Act, excluding Muslims from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh from being granted Indian citizenship.

The tense situation remained serious in India, with episodes of community violence that were especially intense in Delhi in March. Violent clashes took place over several days in the northeastern part of the city after a local leader of the ruling BJP party, Kapil Mishra, threatened to violently evict a group of Muslims who were peacefully protesting against the approved Citizenship Act in December 2019. Since the law was passed, hundreds of thousands of people, mostly Muslim, have staged protests against the law across the country. These threats prompted **Hindu extremist groups and BJP sympathisers to attack Muslims, sparking violent clashes in which 53 people were killed, most of them Muslims, and many Muslim-owned homes, businesses and mosques were attacked and burned**. The clashes took place between Hindus and Muslims and against the police, who were accused by human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, of serious human rights violations, brutality and complicity with the Hindu groups that violently attacked the Muslim population. The riots lasted for several days and spread to other parts of the capital, exacerbated by false rumours that circulated among the population that various mosques were organising actions to expel the Hindu population from Delhi. The clashes coincided with the visit to Delhi by US President Donald Trump, who in public statements expressed his support for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The governments of several states (Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Rajasthan) refused to apply the law. Furthermore, **India continued to be a scenario of alarming levels of sexual violence**, especially against Dalit women. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, more than 32,000 women were victims of rape during 2019, which may only account for a small proportion of real cases, as sexual violence continues to be underreported. Finally, massive demonstrations were staged by farmers in which hundreds of thousands of people participated during 2020, with marches to the capital to protest legislation passed by the government that favoured large corporations over small-scale farmers. In recent years, hundreds of small-scale Indian farmers have committed suicide because they cannot pay their debts as a result of different laws that are detrimental to these agricultural producers.

India (Assam)	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups ULFA, ULFA(I), NDFB, NDFB(IKS), KPLT, NSLA, UPLA and KPLT

Summary:
The armed opposition group the ULFA emerged in 1979 with the aim of liberating the state of Assam from Indian colonisation and establishing a sovereign State. The demographic transformations the state underwent after the partition of the Indian subcontinent, with the arrival of two million people from Bangladesh, are the source of the demand from the population of ethnic Assamese origin for recognition of their cultural and civil rights and the establishment of an independent State. During the 1980s and 1990s there were various escalations of violence and failed attempts at negotiation. A peace process began in 2005, leading to a reduction in violence, but this process

was interrupted in 2006, giving rise to a new escalation of the conflict. Meanwhile, during the eighties, armed groups of Bodo origin, such as the NDFB, emerged demanding recognition of their identity against the majority Assamese population. Since 2011 there has been a significant reduction in violence and numerous armed groups have laid down their arms or began talks with the government.

Tension fell notably in the Indian state of Assam and the activity of armed opposition groups decreased dramatically, consolidating the trend of previous years. In January, 644 members of different insurgent groups surrendered and handed over their weapons in an official ceremony. The insurgents belonged to the armed groups National Liberation Front of Bengalis (NLFB) (301), Adivasi Dragon Force (ADF) (178), National Santhal Liberation Army (NSLA) (87), United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) (50), Rabha National Liberation Front (RNLF) (13), National Democratic Front of Bodoland-Saoraigwra (NDFB-S) (8), Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) (6) and CPI (Maoist) (1). The handover was a result of negotiations between the armed groups and the Indian government. In November, an important leader of the ULFA-I, Drishti Rajkhowa, who is considered very close to ULFA-I leader Paresh Baruah, surrendered in Meghalaya. Some analysts said that the virtual disappearance of armed activity in Assam, as well as in other northeastern states of India, was due to factors such as the increase in the budget of the Ministry of the Interior in recent years (which had led to a greater deployment of police and security forces in the region), the use of ceasefire agreements and cooperation in counterterrorism matters with border countries.[36]

India - China	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory International
Main parties:	India, China

Summary:
The border shared by China and India has been disputed since the 1950s, after the partition of India and Pakistan and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This border has never been formally delimited by an agreement between the two countries and there are several areas whose demarcation is a source of conflict. In the western part of the border, the dispute revolves around the uninhabited Aksai Chin area, whose territory is claimed by India, which considers it part of the Ladakh region (part of Jammu and Kashmir) and is administered by China as part of the Xinjiang region. China's announcement of the construction of a highway linking Xinjiang with Tibet through the Aksai Chin region increased tension with India, which was exacerbated after the Dalai Lama was granted asylum in India in 1959. In the years that followed, there were troop movements by both countries in the area. In 1962, a war began that ended with India's military defeat, but the issue of demarcation was left unresolved and continued to shape relations between both powers and with other countries in the region, especially Pakistan. In 1988, both governments agreed to resolve the dispute peacefully. However, since then no progress has been made in the negotiations and the military tension in the disputed areas has persisted.

Tension between China and India increased during the year, leading to violent clashes between the security forces of both countries in the Galwan Valley border area. The clashes took place along the Line of Actual Control, as the border between both countries is known, which is not demarcated and has been disputed for the last few decades. Tension between India and China had been mounting since May, when several clashes between Indian and Chinese soldiers deployed on the border took place, leaving some people wounded. The trigger for the clashes may have been China's opposition to India's construction of a road in the disputed area, as well as different elements of infrastructure that could facilitate India's military access there, which is quite a challenge because it is a high-altitude mountainous area. As a consequence of the escalating tension, there was an increase in the number of troops deployed on both sides of the border. Although both sides agreed to reduce the tension, **the first deadly clash in 45 years took place on 15 June, which resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers**. China did not disclose any information regarding whether any of its soldiers had been killed. The soldiers fought with sticks, stones and fists, but did not use firearms. Both sides traded blame for the escalation of violence. China noted that Indian soldiers had broken through the Line of Actual Control and engaged in "illegal activities", initiating a provocative attack. India claimed that the clashes began during a meeting in which hundreds of soldiers from both sides participated, which was initially aimed at discussing de-escalation measures, but during which they felt insulted by China. Other sources mentioned an unplanned encounter between patrols from both countries that led to a major clash involving hundreds of soldiers. After the fighting, high military commanders of both countries held in situ meetings to try to lower the tension, though the mutual accusations were repeated. On 24 June, the parties reached an agreement as part of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, with new subsequent meetings, which were repeated during July. In late August, however, India accused China of conducting military movements that it called "provocative" and that it said were intended to alter the configuration of the Line of Actual Control.

However, in September, after the situation escalated again, the defence ministers of both countries met in Russia at the highest-level meeting since the crisis resurged in April. Three days after the meeting in Russia there was a fresh escalation, with complaints of warning shots from both sides, violating a decades-

36. Paul Staniland, *Political Violence in South Asia: The Triumph of the State?,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 September 2020.

long agreement that prohibited the use of firearms at the border, as they had in fact not been used in the different clashes throughout 2020. However, days later both governments issued a joint statement in which they agreed that no new confrontations should take place. The statement by the foreign ministers of both countries stated that both China and India agreed to "continue the dialogue, withdraw as soon as possible, maintain an appropriate distance and mitigate tensions". In the months that followed, the talks were repeated to try to ease the tension. Though no agreement was reached, there were no new escalations or episodes of violence either.

China and India clashed violently for the first time in 45 years in the disputed border area in the Galwan Valley

India – Pakistan	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Territory International
Main parties:	India, Pakistan

Summary:
The tension between India and Pakistan dates back to the independence and partition of the two states and the dispute over the region of Kashmir. On three occasions (1947-1948, 1965, 1971, 1999) armed conflict has broken out between the two countries, both claiming sovereignty over the region, which is split between India, Pakistan and China. The armed conflict in 1947 led to the present-day division and the de facto border between the two countries. In 1989, the armed conflict shifted to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1999, one year after the two countries carried out nuclear tests, tension escalated into a new armed conflict until the USA mediated to calm the situation. In 2004 a peace process got under way. Although no real progress was made in resolving the dispute over Kashmir, there was a significant rapprochement above all in the economic sphere. However, India has continued to level accusations at Pakistan concerning the latter's support of the insurgency that operates in Jammu and Kashmir and sporadic outbreaks of violence have occurred on the de facto border that divides the two states. In 2008 serious attacks took place in the Indian city of Mumbai that led to the formal rupture of the peace process after India claimed that the attack had been orchestrated from Pakistan. Since then, relations between the two countries have remained deadlocked although some diplomatic contacts have taken place.

The tension between India and Pakistan persisted and could not be redirected after the serious deterioration suffered in 2019 following India's cancellation of the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir. Rhetorical and diplomatic confrontations were repeated throughout the year and there was also crossfire between the militaries of both countries deployed along the Line of Control, the de facto border, with exchanges of fire every month. According to figures compiled by the International Crisis Group, 74 people died on both sides of the border during the year as a result of gunfire and attacks by the Indian and Pakistani armies, most of them civilians. Furthermore, dozens of people were injured as a result of these clashes, which were violations of the 2003 ceasefire agreement. The most serious episodes of violence occurred in November, in which at least 30 people were killed (23 of them civilians) in different armed attacks. Neelum Valley, in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, was one of the areas most affected by the violence in November, where in addition to casualties, at least 100 houses were destroyed. Media outlets reported an increase in ceasefire violations since late 2019, especially those related to the cross-border infiltration of armed insurgents from Pakistan. However, Pakistan repeated its denial of accusations that it promotes armed insurgent activity. In addition to the armed violence, there were also diplomatic incidents and in June the diplomatic missions of both countries in the respective capitals cut their deployed personnel by half amid accusations of acts of espionage by officials, as well as contact with terrorist organisations. New Delhi accused Pakistan of kidnapping two diplomats held illegally for 10 hours and subsequently released after the intervention of the Indian Foreign Ministry. Pakistan claimed that they were detained after fleeing in a hit-and-run incident. The UN Security Council addressed the situation in Kashmir again in August, the third time since the region lost its autonomy in 2019. The discussion took place at the request of Pakistan, with the support of China, but did not lead to any concrete action. In December, the Indian government rejected a resolution passed by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation condemning the change in status of Jammu and Kashmir.

South-east Asia and Oceania

Indonesia (West Papua)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, OPM armed group, political and social opposition, Papuan indigenous groups, Freeport mining company

Summary:
Although Indonesia became independent from Holland in 1949, West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) was administered for several years by the United Nations and did not formally become part of Indonesia until 1969, following a referendum considered fraudulent by many. Since then, a deep-rooted secessionist movement has existed in the region and an armed opposition group (OPM) has been involved in a low-intensity armed struggle. In addition to constant demands for self-determination, there are other sources of conflict in the region, such as community clashes between several indigenous groups, tension between the local population (Papuan and mostly animist or Christian) and so-called

transmigrants (mostly Muslim Javanese), protests against the Freeport transnational extractive corporation, the largest in the world, or accusations of human rights violations and unjust enrichment levelled at the armed forces.

In general terms, clashes between the Indonesia Armed Forces and the armed opposition group OPM continued at the same level of intensity, but the death rate linked to the protests in West Papua fell dramatically compared to the previous year, in which almost 60 people lost their lives and thousands were arrested during protests in August and September. The government did not provide data on associated mortality rates, but according to media outlets and research centres, around 30 people died during the year. **In July, civil society organisations protested against human rights violations in the region and against the murder of more than 200 civilians between December 2018 and July 2020.** At the end of the year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights warned of the increase in tension and violence in the region in recent months and urged the government to investigate the rise in attacks against civilians and human rights activists. Regarding the war dynamics of the conflict, a military offensive was launched in April in response to a previous attack (claimed by the OPM) against FP Freeport, one of the largest mining companies in the world, in which a New Zealander was killed and two Indonesians were injured. In the middle of the offensive, on 11 April, the OPM issued a statement offering Indonesia a ceasefire to contain the spread of coronavirus in the region and also in response to the United Nations' call for the parties to the conflict to cease their armed activity. However, the government did not respond to this initiative. Also noteworthy was the assassination of a prominent OPM leader, Henking Wanmang, in August. In the days that followed, the OPM declared that it had killed several members of the state security forces and agencies. Twelve police officers and soldiers also died in September after alleged attacks by the armed group, including one perpetrated in the district of Nduga on 5 September in which eight soldiers died.

At the political level, **many protests took place in various provinces of the country between July and December against the extension of the special autonomy status granted to West Papua in 2001**, whose extension should be approved by Parliament this year. In July, a coalition of organisations (Petitsi Rakyat Papua) demanded an end to special autonomy and called for a referendum on self-determination. In August, protests were reported in several cities against the New York Agreement of 1962, by which the Netherlands (a colonial power in the region) ceded the administration of Papua to Indonesia. In September and October, there were major clashes between the police and protesters, which resulted in the arrest of more than 150 people. In November, about 100 people were also arrested during various protests against autonomy. In December, the leader of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua, Benny Wenda, declared a provisional government-in-exile based in London with himself as president, but this was rejected by Jakarta and unknown to other actors who advocate for West Papua self-determination, such as the OPM and the National Committee for West Papua.

2.3.4. Europe

Eastern Europe

Belarus	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
The former soviet republic of Belarus achieved its independence in 1991 and became a presidential republic. Since 1994 it has been governed by Alexander Lukashenko, whose presidential powers and term limits were extended in referenda in 1996 and 2004. With a centralised economy inherited from the Soviet era and energy-dependent on Russia, Belarus has oscillated between a strategic alliance with Russia and a policy of affirmation of its national sovereignty that has brought it through stages of crisis with its large neighbour. The Lukashenko regime's political authoritarianism and violation of human rights has left little room for political and social opposition, while driving low-intensity tension at the same time. In 2020, Lukashenko's re-election sparked massive anti-government protests.

The country was the scene of a serious political crisis, with large-scale anti-government protests following the re-election of President Aleksander Lukashenko in elections considered fraudulent and a campaign of repression conducted by the authorities that resulted in mass arrests and serious human rights violations. After the call for elections for August, opposition groups said they intended to present alternative candidates to Lukashenko, who has been president since 1994, and began collecting signatures and mobilising in the months prior to the elections. Hundreds of people were arrested in those months, including leaders, activists and journalists. They included Sergei Tikhanovsky, a well-known blogger who aspired to register as a candidate, was arrested in protests in late May and replaced in his candidacy by his wife, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya; and Viktor Babariko, a former Gazprombank banker who received broad support in collecting signatures for his candidacy and was arrested in June. In July, the Central Election Commission authorised only four candidates in addition to Lukashenko, including Tikhanovskaya, while others such as Babariko and the diplomat and businessman Valeri Tsepkalo were denied. Tsepkalo had left the country in May due to an arrest warrant against him. Both went on to give their support to Tikhanovskaya's candidacy. Similarly, Veronika Tsepkalo

(the wife of Valeri Tsepkalo) and Maria Kolesnikova (Babariko's campaign manager) joined Tikhanovskaya's campaign. The rejection of the candidates triggered protests that were broken up harshly by the police. Amnesty International denounced the excessive use of force against protesters. The Belarusian president warned that he was prepared to use the Belarussian Army to restore order if necessary.

The elections were held on 9 August, in a context in which the government's management of the pandemic, denying the existence of the coronavirus in the country, aggravated the unease of large sectors of the population. **According to the electoral authorities, Lukashenko won 80% of the vote, followed by Tikhanovskaya (10%), with a turnout of 84%. The opposition denounced fraud and demanded new elections.** The results set off protests in Minsk and other cities, such as Brest, Gomel, Grodno and Vitebsk. Amnesty International repeated its criticism of the use of "brutal violence against peaceful protestors" by the anti-riot police in the post-election protests. Tikhanovskaya urged the police and the forces of the Ministry of the Interior to put an end to the violence and exhorted the protestors not to give them reasons to use force against them. After being detained for a few hours, Tikhanovskaya fled to Lithuania in August and later announced the creation of the Coordination Council to promote a peaceful solution to the political crisis and a transition of power. **Lukashenko ruled out holding new elections and the attorney general's office opened a criminal case against the Coordination Council on charges of trying to take power illegally** and of having an anti-Russian agenda. Several of its leaders went into exile in the weeks after it was created or were arrested, some of them by masked men.

A serious crisis broke out in Belarus, with massive anti-government protests against the re-election of President Aleksander Lukashenko, which were denounced as fraudulent, and serious crackdowns by the authorities

In the weeks after the elections, protests followed one another and lasted almost continuously for months, with massive participation of up to hundreds of thousands of people in some of them. The demonstrations were peaceful and the protestors pursued strategies of nonviolent civil disobedience. There were also strikes at companies. All the demonstrations had high levels of female participation, both in the political leadership and in the protests themselves, with peaceful marches that multiplied female involvement. **Many people reported torture and ill-treatment in police custody. Several hundred were injured and several people died**. Thousands were arrested (28,000 as of mid-December, according to some media reports, and 32,000, according to Tikhanovskaya).

In October, opposition leader Tikhanovskaya spoke on behalf of the Coordination Council, threatening Lukashenko with a general strike if he did not respond to three demands: his departure from the presidency, the end of police violence against the protesters and freedom for the political prisoners. In addition, Tikhanovskaya claimed that new elections should enjoy international observation, while indicating at various times of the year that she would not stand for new elections. Lukashenko did not respond to the ultimatum and on 26 October, various parts of the country participated in the strike, including students and pensioners, although it was followed unevenly. According to the government, all the companies were operating normally. Previously, **on 10 October, Lukashenko met with several detained opposition figures. According to official media reports, the meeting discussed the possibility of a constitutional reform process**. Tikhanovskaya's advisors noted that there were some contacts between the Coordination Council and the regime. In late November, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Lukashenko in Minsk to promote constitutional reforms. Analysts pointed to Russia's interest in constitutional reforms aimed at a multiparty system in which it could establish influence over some factions. **One day after Lavrov's visit, Lukashenko stated that he would leave the presidency once a new Constitution was adopted, although he did not offer a timetable with the possible changes.** In early December, Russian President Vladimir Putin urged the Belarussian government and the opposition to resolve the conflict through dialogue and said that he hoped that an internal political dialogue could take place with all political forces to resolve internal issues without interference or external pressure. Throughout the crisis, the EU condemned human rights violations, urged dialogue to resolve the crisis and imposed three rounds of sanctions against high-ranking officials of the regime responsible for cracking down on the protests, as well as against some economic actors. However, analysts noted that the sanctions had a limited impact. The opposition movement maintained that it did not want to transform the internal crisis into an international geostrategic conflict. At the end of the year, the protests continued in a decentralised way, though fewer in number and lesser in intensity, and the authorities' repressive practices continued. Tikhanovskaya warned that after the winter, the protests would intensify again.

Russia and the Caucasus

Russia (North Caucasus)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Identity, Government Internal
Main parties:	Russian Federal Government, Governments of the republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, armed opposition groups (Caucasus Emirate and ISIS)

Summary:
The North Caucasus is the scene of several hotbeds of tension, in the form of conflict between federal and local security forces, on the one hand, and jihadi insurgent actors, on the other. The violence is the result of a combination of factors, including the regionalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency in Chechnya (a republic that was the setting for two wars, between 1994-1996 and between 1999 and the beginning of the 21st century) as well as the impact of policies persecuting Salafist Islam adherents, serious human rights violations, deficits in governance and social unrest. Over the years, local armed structures were established in republics such as Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, connected regionally through the so-called Caucasus Emirate. From the end of 2014, several commanders in the North Caucasus proclaimed their loyalty to ISIS, breaking away from the Caucasus Emirate and establishing a Caucasian branch linked to ISIS (Vilayat Kavkaz). In addition, part of the insurgency moved to Syria and Iraq, joining various armed groups. The levels of violence have fluctuated in the various republics (being considered an armed conflict in the case of Dagestan between 2010 and 2017), while in the North Caucasus as a whole, armed violence has subsided in recent years. In addition to the armed violence, other flashpoints include serious human rights violations, especially against activists, human rights defenders and independent journalists, as well as disputes over borders, inter-ethnic tensions, rivalries for political power and criminal violence.

Low-intensity tension continued in the North Caucasus, with incidents of violence between federal and local security forces and insurgents. During the year, there were at least 40 deaths linked to the conflict, according to the body count of the independent portal Caucasian Knot, most of them allegedly insurgents. Shootings and clashes took place as part of counterinsurgency operations. The authorities conducted operations and raids and detained dozens of suspected combatants and suspected sympathisers of armed organisations, including ISIS. In October, various analysts pointed to a rise in conflict-related violence in Chechnya and Ingushetia. In that month, the security forces carried out the first counterterrorism operation in the Chechen Republic since November 2018, which was followed by several others. In Ingushetia, over a dozen such operations were carried out during the year. The pandemic also aggravated the socio-economic situation and overburdened health infrastructure in the region. Protests against the confinement orders broke out in North Ossetia with over 1,000 people dispersed by the police and more than 50 protestors arrested. Also in Dagestan, there were public protests in June opposed to the police's use of violence against citizens who had breached pandemic-related restrictions. Russian media outlets reported that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov was admitted to hospital in Moscow in May for coronavirus. At the end of the month, Kadyrov confirmed that he was in good health. Meanwhile, complaints of human rights violations by local authorities in the North Caucasus continued. Sixteen OSCE member governments sent the organisation a statement asserting that Russia had not addressed the serious human rights violations committed by the authorities in Chechnya and documented in a report prepared by the OSCE in November 2018 that indicated forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and other serious human rights violations against the population, including LGTBI people, human rights defenders, civil society organisations and independent journalists. The signatories of the statement denounced that the climate of impunity for violence against these parts of the population continued in Chechnya.

South-east Europe

Turkey – Greece, Cyprus	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory, Resources, Self-government, Identity International
Main parties:	Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, EU, Egypt, Italy, United Arab Emirates, France, Libya Government of National Accord

Summary:
Turkey, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus are embroiled in disputes around various sources of tension in the eastern Mediterranean, with a growing number of international actors involved in intertwined scenarios of conflict. The disputes include the conflict over the island of Cyprus, which has been divided since the Turkish invasion in 1974 that followed the attempted coup that sought to unite it with Greece and triggered massive displacements of the Turkish-Cypriot and Greco-Cypriot populations. The Republic of Cyprus is internationally recognised, and a member of the EU since 2004, while the northern third of the island functions as a de facto state with the support of Turkey. The conflict over the status of the island is linked to disputes involving Turkey over Cyprus' maritime borders and access to its natural resources. Turkey and Greece are at odds over the delimitation of maritime borders, their exclusive economic zones, their continental shelves and airspace, as well as the sovereignty of some islands. The tension has also had a militarised expression at various times in recent decades. The discovery of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean, including in disputed waters, and the cooperative approach on energy between various countries (Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Israel and others) through mechanisms that exclude Turkey, with which they compete in various spheres, including ideologically, has aggravated the tension between Ankara and those countries in the region. The tension is also found in the armed conflict in Libya, where Turkey supports the Government of National Accord recognised by the UN in the face of attempts to expand power and territorial control by the armed group of Khalifa Haftar, supported by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, France and others.

The crisis in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece and Cyprus increased over the delimitation of territorial waters and their exclusive economic zones and natural gas exploration, with growing militarisation in the area and the internationalisation of the conflict.

The crisis was also projected onto other disputes, such as in Libya. In January 2020, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Italy, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine signed the founding charter of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), a platform created the previous year to promote cooperation on gas and create a regional market without Turkey, to which France also requested admission. Turkey criticised the EMGF's interest in excluding it. **During the year, Turkey continued its gas exploration activity in the waters off the Republic of Cyprus** and in its exclusive economic area, deploying several drilling vessels in the first few months of the year. The EU warned of sanctions and urged a halt to exploratory activity, while Ankara rejected the EU's warnings and confronted it. As part of their periodic coordination, known as 3+1, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus and France came together with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to issue a joint statement in May expressing concern about the escalation in this part of the Mediterranean and denounced Turkey's "illegal" activities in Cyprus' waters. They also cautioned against an escalation of Turkish violations of Greece's airspace over its waters and reaffirmed their rejection of the two memoranda on the delimitation of maritime borders in the Mediterranean and on military cooperation signed in 2019 between Turkey and Libya's Government of National Accord (GAN), an actor recognised by the UN and fought by the armed group of Khalifa Haftar, the armed leader of eastern Libya, who is supported by Egypt, the UAE, France and others.

In the middle of the year, the tension escalated. In July, Turkey issued a naval alert (Navtex) on oil and gas drilling activity until 20 August near the Greek island of Kastellorizo, in Greek waters disputed by Turkey. That same month, the Greek Defence Ministry put the Greek Army on high alert, issued a notice of military operations and stepped up its naval presence near Kastellorizo. Although Greece and Turkey were open to talks in early August, the atmosphere seriously deteriorated. In early August, a partial demarcation agreement of the maritime borders between Greece and Egypt was announced, which produced an exclusive economic area and rights over natural resources and invalidated the maritime delimitation agreement between Turkey and Libya in 2019. A few days later, on 10 August, Turkey sent its drillship *Oruç Reis*, escorted by warships. Two days later, **two warships from Greece and Turkey collided in an episode that Turkey described as Greek provocation and that sources from the Greek Defence Ministry said was an accident. Greece, Cyprus and international actors allied to them, including France, Italy and the UAE, carried out joint military exercises in the area that same month**, including the deployment of two warplanes and a frigate by France, as well as UAE fighter jets in Greece. Turkey warned Greece of retaliation if it provoked the *Oruç Reis* any further, issued new notices for exploratory action, conducted naval military manoeuvres and cautioned the EU of the consequences of granting unconditional support to Greece. In late August, the Turkish foreign minister said that if Greece expanded its maritime borders into the Aegean Sea, Turkey would view it as a cause for war. The president of the EU Council expressed full support for Greece and called for de-escalation and a priority on dialogue. In addition, the EU made progress on a list of sanctions against Turkey if Ankara did not withdraw from waters that Greece considers its own before the extraordinary EU summit on 24 September.

Turkey withdrew its vessel *Oruç Reis* from the area in September. The Turkish president was open to dialogue and linked the withdrawal to giving diplomatic channels a chance, though he said that the dialogue depended on the EU not imposing the announced sanctions. **Greece celebrated the ship's withdrawal, while announcing moves to expand its military** both in the number of troops and the purchase of war vehicles (combat aircraft, frigates and naval military helicopters). **Both countries announced the resumption of direct exploratory talks that had been suspended in 2016** (60 rounds in 14 years) to delimit the continental shelf and the exclusive economic area for both countries. The parties' willingness to talk persuaded the EU to not impose sanctions at its October summit, though it warned that it would use all tools at its disposal to defend the interests of its member states, while Turkey continued to disqualify the EU. **After high-level meetings, Greece and Turkey agreed to establish a mechanism for technical talks within NATO to move towards a military de-escalation** and reduce the risk of incidents in the eastern Mediterranean. Several rounds of technical talks were held at NATO headquarters in Brussels in September and the mechanism was formally established in October, including a direct line of communication between Greece and Turkey to help to de-escalate in the air and at sea. Germany also promoted efforts to redirect the conflict.

Despite the start of talks and the establishment of the NATO mechanism, tensions rose again in the final months of 2020 over several issues. For instance, Turkey continued its drilling activity. Political tensions also increased due to the visit of the Turkish president to the coastal town of Varosha in northern Cyprus, whose Greek Cypriot population fled after the Turkish invasion in 1974, which had been abandoned and closed ever since, then partially reopened shortly before the Turkish Cypriot elections in October 2020. In a speech during his visit, Erdogan called for discussing and negotiating a two-state solution to the conflict over the division of Cyprus, challenging the bizonal federation solution on which the peace process is predicated, a position also defended by the new Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar. Turkey also prevented the EU's naval Operation IRINI from searching a Turkish cargo ship that was suspected of transporting weapons to Libya, increasing the tension between Turkey and the EU. In December, Brussels imposed sanctions on Turkish officials and agencies involved in gas exploration activity, though it delayed a decision on broader forms of pressure, such as a weapons embargo and trade tariffs, to establish earlier meetings with the new US administration.

2.3.5. Middle East

Mashreq

Egypt	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
Within the framework of the so-called "Arab revolts", popular mobilisations in Egypt led to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak at the beginning of 2011. During three decades, Mubarak had headed an authoritarian government characterised by the accumulation of powers around the Government National Democratic Party, the Armed Forces and the corporate elites; as well as by an artificial political plurality, with constant allegations of fraud in the elections, harassment policies towards the opposition and the illegalisation of the main dissident movement, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The fall of Mubarak's regime gave way to an unstable political landscape, where the struggle between the sectors demanding for pushing towards the goals of the revolt, Islamist groups aspiring to a new position of power and the military class seeking guarantees to keep their influence and privileges in the new institutional scheme became evident. In this context, and after an interim government led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the electoral triumph of the MB in the parliamentarian and presidential elections seemed to open a new stage in the country in 2012. However, the ousting of the Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, when he had just been in power for one year, opened new questions on the future of the country in a context of persistent violence, polarisation, political repression and increasing control by military sectors.

The government of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi continued to concentrate greater quotas of power in Egypt, while maintaining its policies of repression and persecution of dissent at the same time. Throughout the year, several rounds of legislative elections were held that strengthened the president. His allied party, Mustaqbal Watan, won an overwhelming majority of seats in the new Senate in August, in elections that had a very low turnout (15%) and were boycotted by opposition groups. In December, the final results of the lower house elections confirmed the prominence of Mustaqbal Watan and other parties sympathetic to al-Sisi in Parliament. Despite the repressive climate, during 2020 dissident groups continued to criticise and express their rejection of the government. Demonstrations in September called for the president's resignation. Hundreds of protesters took to the streets in Cairo, Alexandria, Aswan, Luxor and Giza to protest against corruption, the economic crisis and police repression. There were some incidents with the security forces, as at least one protester died in Giza. At the same time, the harassment of critics continued during 2020. **According to estimates by human rights groups, around 60,000 people remained in prison in Egypt for political reasons, including secular activists, journalists, lawyers, academics and Islamists**. One of the most notorious cases in 2020 occurred in November, when Egyptian authorities arrested three senior officials from the NGO Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) on charges that included "membership in a terrorist group" and "spreading fake news". The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, and organisations such as Amnesty International warned that the arrests had been made in retaliation for an EIPR meeting with diplomatic personnel that had addressed the human rights situation in the country. The case also prompted several countries to express concern.

Al-Sisi's government continued to concentrate power and persecute dissent with its policies: around 60,000 people remained in prison in Egypt for political reasons, according to estimates by human rights groups

International human rights organisations also warned of an increase in executions in the country. According to data from Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Egyptian Front for Human Rights, between January and October, the Egyptian authorities had applied the death penalty to 83 people, 25 of whom were charged with political violence.[37] Along the same lines, Amnesty International warned that 57 people were executed in October and November alone, a figure almost double the total number of executions in Egypt in all of 2019 (32 cases).[38] Throughout the year, some also warned of the precarious conditions of people detained in the country, which was aggravated by the pandemic. HRW reported that dozens of people imprisoned for political reasons died in custody, including at least 14 from COVID-19 between March and July, and that the authorities also arrested health officials who criticised the government's response to the pandemic. Though the government released nearly 20,000 people between March and July, human rights groups reported that those detained for political reasons were excluded and that prisons remained overcrowded. HRW also reported and documented a variety of other abuses, including detentions without trial; the harassment and arrest of relatives of dissident Egyptians living abroad; accusations of "morality" violations against popular women in social networks and against witnesses in cases of abuse; arrests, arbitrary detention and the disappearance of opponents, including minors, by the security forces of the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior and the National Security Agency; and arbitrary arrests, abuse and torture of people based on sexual orientation or gender. Regarding the latter, in June 2020 the prominent Egyptian feminist and

37. Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: Events of 2020", *HRW World Report 2021*, January 2021.
38. Amnesty International, *Egypt: Chilling rise in executions reveals depth of human rights crisis*, 2 December 2020.

LGTBI rights activist Sarah Hegazy committed suicide in exile in Canada after being detained and subjected to mistreatment for several months in 2017. Despite the human rights situation and the intensification of authoritarian drift in the country, various countries maintained good commercial and/or strategic relations with the Egyptian government and collaborated in areas such as security. Thus, during 2020, information emerged about large weapons sales contracts by countries such as the US, France and Italy. Finally, former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who ruled the country for three decades until being overthrown in 2011 during the Arab uprisings, died in a military hospital in February.

Iraq	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Internationalised internal Governance
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, Iran, USA

Summary:
The United States-led international invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and the shaping of a new political system. The new system set up at Washington's behest divided the Government along sectarian lines. Against this backdrop, in recent years there has been an increase in feelings of alienation and frustration with a ruling class perceived as corrupt and motivated by personal and group interests, at the expense of citizens' quality of life. Thus, since 2015, there has been a succession of mass demonstrations (mainly led by young people) denouncing the endemic corruption, governance deficits, serious problems in the provision of services, unemployment and lack of future prospects. In 2019, mass anti-government protests and a severe crackdown by the security forces exposed the serious political crisis gripping the country, the lack of legitimacy of its authorities, and misgivings concerning the influence of external actors (and in particular Iran's growing prominence in the region) in Iraqi affairs.

The climate of opposition, anti-government protests and political ups and downs persisted in Iraq in 2020, in the wake of the massive demonstrations against corruption, nepotism and mismanagement that intensified as of October 2019. Although the protests were not as massive as the previous year, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they did not stop in 2020. **The crackdown on the protests and clashes between protesters and Iraqi security forces, including pro-Iranian Popular Mobilisation Unit militias (PMUs) reportedly killed more than 100 people**. According to Human Rights Watch data, at least 560 died under these circumstances between October 2019 and the end of 2020, mainly in Baghdad and southern cities (Najaf, Karbala, Nassiriyah), mostly in the last quarter of 2019, accounting for over 400 deceased persons. Data from the ACLED think tank indicate that 104 people died in Iraq in 2020 as a result of riots, violent protests, peaceful demonstrations and the excessive use of force by the security forces. After the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi at the end of 2019, there were several attempts to form a government in the first few months of 2020 that failed due to a lack of political support, while protests against the authorities and politicians, repression and clashes with security forces continued. After the unsuccessful attempts of Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi (a former minister, who failed due to the boycott of Kurdish and Sunni parties) and Adnan al Zurfi (a former governor of Najaf, who ended up withdrawing due to lack of support from Shiite parties), in April the Iraqi president appointed Intelligence Director Mustafa al-Khadimi to be the new prime minister. Rejected by the Kataib Hezbollah group, which accused him of involvement in the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad in early January,[39] al-Khadimi won a vote of confidence from Parliament in May. One of the first steps of the new government was to reinstate General Abdul-Wahab al-Saedi as the head of counterterrorism efforts, as his dismissal had been one of the triggers for the protests in 2019. The government also set up a committee to investigate abuses committed against the protesters, although by the end of the year the results of its work were not known. In the middle of the year, the authorities announced compensation for the families of those killed during the protests, medical treatment for the wounded and the arrest of some low-ranking officers, but no high-ranking prosecutions were reported.

The protests continued, with demands for the purge of senior officials for the crackdown, the creation of jobs, improvements in public services and the resignation of local authorities. In some cases, protestors led attacks against party headquarters. In August, the killing of two activists in Basra, including a prominent female leader, sparked several days of demonstrations and arson attacks on government buildings and led to the removal of the governor, the director of the national security office and the chief of police in the governorate. In October, thousands of people gathered to commemorate the first anniversary of the massive popular protest, with subsequent clashes with the police causing dozens of injuries. The protests continued in Baghdad and various cities until the end of the year. In this context, some warned of the persistence of abuses and demanded accountability. **A report by the UN mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) concluded in late August that despite some promising measures taken by the new government,**

39. See the summary on Iraq in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

impunity and abuse in response to demonstrations continued.[40] The document warns of a deliberate use of violence to silence activists, documents the deaths of 487 people and injuries to 7,715, mostly men, between October 2019 and April 2020, and identifies patterns of excessive use of force against protesters, including live ammunition. It also estimates that around 3,000 people had been arrested in this period, warning of torture, kidnapping and arbitrary detention, and denounces restrictions on the freedom of expression, with attacks on journalists, raids on media outlets and forced Internet outages. Coinciding with the UNAMI and OHCHR report, Human Rights Watch's annual report on the situation in Iraq until December 2020 warned of the arbitrary detention, forced disappearance and extrajudicial killing of protesters and regretted that the new government did not stop the abuses against the protesters, despite the commitments made when it took office. In his last periodic report of the year on the situation in Iraq, in November, the UN Secretary-General also considered insufficient the specific action taken to guarantee truth and accountability for human rights abuses committed during the demonstrations.[41]

Israel – Syria, Lebanon	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	System, Resources, Territory International
Main parties:	Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Hezbollah (party and militia), Iran, USA

Summary:
The backdrop to this situation of tension is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its consequences in the region. On the one hand, the presence of thousands of Palestinian refugees who settled in Lebanon from 1948, together with the leadership of the PLO in 1979, led Israel to carry out constant attacks in southern Lebanon until it occupied the country in 1982. The founding of Hezbollah, the armed Shiite group, in the early 1980s in Lebanon, with an agenda consisting of challenging Israel and achieving the liberation of Palestine, led to a series of clashes that culminated in a major Israeli offensive in July 2006. Meanwhile, the 1967 war led to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights, which together with Syria's support of Hezbollah explains the tension between Israel and Syria. Since 2011, the outbreak of the armed conflict in Syria has had a direct impact on the dynamics of this tension and on the positions adopted by the actors involved in this conflict.

In keeping with the trend reported in recent years, **the historic international tension involving Israel, Syria and Lebanon (and increasingly Iran and the United States) continued to motivate periodic acts of violence that caused the deaths of around 90 people,** according to informal counts. As in previous years, most of the incidents associated with this crisis were Israeli air strikes in different parts of Syria, including the areas of Homs, Aleppo, Quneitra and Damascus, as well as incidents around the occupied Golan Heights. According to the information that emerged in 2020, the most serious events occurred in February, when a series of Israeli attacks caused the deaths of 26 Syrian soldiers and pro-Iranian militiamen in the vicinity of Damascus; in June, when another series of air strikes against suspected Iranian and pro-Iranian targets killed another 26 people across Syria; and in November, when 27 other alleged pro-Iranian militiamen were killed in similar attacks. In July, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu openly acknowledged that his country was relentlessly attacking Iranian targets in Syria. Netanyahu warned the Syrian president of the risks of allowing a greater Iranian military presence and threatened further attacks. The death of a Hezbollah militiaman in Syria and subsequent incidents along the disputed border with Lebanon were also reported in July, though no casualties were reported. According to Israel, its security forces fired at a group of five suspected Hezbollah militants who crossed the Blue Line area. In August, the Lebanese Shia group claimed responsibility for shooting down an Israeli drone. In November, Israel claimed to have destroyed a Hezbollah drone that was in Israeli airspace. As in previous years, the UN Secretary-General on the mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) reported continuous violations of Lebanese airspace by Israel on an almost daily basis, most of them with drones. António Guterres expressed his concern about this and about indications of Israeli attacks in Syria.[42]

No progress was made in establishing a permanent ceasefire between Lebanon and Syria during the year. However, in October both governments announced a framework agreement to discuss the definition of the maritime boundary under the mediation of the US and with UN participation through its Special Coordinator for Lebanon. Although at the time it was highlighted that these were the first meetings not related to security issues in three decades and that several were held in the last quarter, at the end of the year sources linked to the process warned of the distance between the parties. Additionally, during 2020 the US government intensified its policy of punishment and sanctions against people and institutions linked to Hezbollah. Israel and the US raised the need to change UNIFIL's mandate, a demand that was publicly rejected by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. According to him, the Trump administration argued that the mission's mandate should be reconsidered to give it a more active role to confront Hezbollah.

40. OHCHR, *UN: Accountability for human rights violations during peaceful protests is key*, Geneva, 27 August 2020.
41. UN Secretary General, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Resolution 2522 (2020),* 10 November 2020.
42. UN Secretary General, *Report on the Implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006*), 14 July 2020 and 12 November 2020.

Lebanon	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	Government, System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Hezbollah (party and militia), political and social opposition, armed groups ISIS and Jabhat al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Saraya Ahl al-Sham

Summary:
The assassination of the Lebanese prime minister, Rafiq Hariri, in February 2005 sparked the so-called "Cedar Revolution" which, following mass demonstrations, forced the withdrawal of the Syrian Armed Forces (present in the country for three decades), meeting the demands of Security Council resolution 1559, promoted by the USA and France in September 2004. The stand-off between opponents of Syria's influence (led by Hariri's son, who blamed the Syrian regime for the assassination) and sectors more closely linked to Syria, such as Hezbollah, triggered a political, social and institutional crisis influenced by religious divisions. In a climate of persistent internal political division, the armed conflict that broke out in Syria in 2011 has led to an escalation of the tension between Lebanese political and social sectors and to an increase in violence in the country.

If Lebanon was the scene of the largest anti-government demonstrations in a decade in 2019, **in 2020 the situation in the country worsened due to multiple overlapping and interrelated crises: a marked deterioration in the economic situation, chronic political instability and persistent social unrest, aggravated in the first quarter by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and by a devastating explosion in August that destroyed part of the capital, Beirut**. The year began amid protests against the new cabinet proposed by acting Prime Minister Hassan Diab, appointed to office after protests in October 2019 led to the resignation of Saad Hariri's government. Parliament gave its vote of confidence to the new Diab government in February amidst protest, periodic demonstrations and clashes between protesters and the security forces that in the first months of the year left hundreds of people injured and led to numerous arrests. The protesters rejected the cabinet, which they considered to be part of the Lebanese political elite, as well as rampant inflation, currency devaluation and increasing poverty. Demonstrations, arson attacks and incidents persisted despite restrictions on mobility imposed to curb the pandemic in cities such as Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and Tire. In Tripoli, for example, three days of clashes with the Lebanese Armed Forces in late April resulted in the death of one protester and wounded 77 civilians and 159 soldiers, according to UN data. In June and July, the protests intensified after the Lebanese pound depreciated by 85% (compared to October 2019), increasing power cuts (which reached up to 22 hours a day) and the suicide of two men that dissatisfied groups blamed on the authorities' ineptitude in managing the crisis. Attacks on banks and clashes with sectarian overtones followed after some protesters demanded the disarmament of all militias, including Hezbollah. The incidents in June and July left more than 100 people injured and dozens arrested. President Michel Aoun then tried unsuccessfully to start a national dialogue to prevent an escalation, warning of the dangerous climate of confrontation in the country. Meanwhile, the blockade persisted in the talks between the government and the IMF to negotiate a "rescue" plan.

The economic, political and social crisis in Lebanon was exacerbated in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the devastating explosion in the port of Beirut in August that killed 200 people and injured 7,000

In this highly turbulent context, **on 4 August there was a huge explosion in the port of Beirut that destroyed a significant part of the city, causing the deaths of over 200 people, wounding 7,000 and forcibly displacing 300,000.** The detonation occurred due to 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate that were stored in the port for six years without the appropriate security measures due to the indolence of the authorities, according to various media reports. The impact of the explosion further aggravated the socio-economic crisis and especially affected the food supply (Lebanon imports 85% of its food and the port was the gateway for 70% of these supplies), destroyed or damaged almost 200 schools in the city and rendered half of the health centres inoperative, which were already running at their limits before the explosion due to the pandemic. The detonation triggered massive protests and new clashes between protesters and security forces in which 700 civilians and 70 policemen were injured. Activists denounced the excessive use of force against the protesters. Diab's government resigned one week later, attributing the crisis to "endemic corruption in the political class, the administration and the state" and in late August Parliament voted the diplomat Mustafa Adib as the new prime minister. However, Adib resigned weeks later due to the impossibility of forming a cabinet amidst growing polarisation. Added to the struggles between Lebanese political actors were disagreements between foreign actors, mainly the US and France, over the role that Hezbollah should play in a new administration. French President Emmanuel Macron promoted a donor conference co-led by the UN, travelled to Lebanon to try to press for political reforms and was in favour of incorporating Hezbollah, while the US intensified its campaign of pressure and sanctions against the Shia group. Some analysts suggested that this was not the right time to question Hezbollah's role in Lebanon, as it could increase polarisation in the country.[43] Thus in October,

43. International Crisis Group, *Avoiding Further Polarisation in Lebanon,* Middle East and North Africa Briefing 81, 10 November 2020.

just one year after being ousted from power, Saad Hariri won the necessary votes in Parliament to return to office as prime minister and, in theory, to appoint a technocratic cabinet to implement the reforms outlined in the French initiative. By the end of the year, however, power struggles persisted, Hariri had failed to form his cabinet and both the prime minister and the president traded blame for the political impasse. In December, France, the UN and the EU announced an aid fund conditional on the formation of a new government and political reforms. Meanwhile, protests continued at the end of 2020, especially after the authorities announced the early cancellation of subsidies for basic products. The investigation into the August explosion pointed to former Prime Minister Diab and three other ministers in December for their responsibility for the events, but the development of the judicial process remained uncertain. Local and international figures called for an independent investigation on various occasions.

There were also several violent clashes between rival factions in 2020 that caused the deaths of many people in different parts of the country. The authorities also warned of an increase in crime in the last year, of several violent episodes between the security forces and suspected ISIS fighters, which left a dozen people dead between August and October, and of various incidents involving the Syrian refugee population in the country. The media and NGOs described growing tensions between refugees and the Lebanese population in a context characterised by the extreme precariousness of Syrians living in the country. According to HRW, **78% of the 1.5 million Syrian refugees lacked legal status and consequently faced a high risk of abuse, exploitation, arrest and deportation.** The NGO also said that 21 Lebanese municipalities introduced discriminatory restrictions for Syrians that were not applicable to Lebanese as part of the action taken against COVID-19. Finally, in August the Special Tribunal for Lebanon convicted a member of Hezbollah for his involvement in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in a bomb attack in 2005. Neither the group's leaders nor Syria's participation in the crime was proven.

The Gulf

Iran	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, social and political opposition

Summary:
This tension is framed within a political context that is marked by the decades-long polarisation between the conservative and reformist sectors in the country, and by the key role of religious authorities and armed forces – especially the Republican Guard– in Iran's power politics. Internal tensions rose towards the middle of 2009 when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in elections that were reported to be fraudulent by the opposition and that fueled the largest popular protests in the country since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The end of Ahmadinejad's two consecutive mandates and the election of the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani in 2013 seem to have started a new stage in the country, giving rise to expectations regarding a possible decrease in the internal political tension and an eventual change in the relations between Iran and the outer world. However, internal tensions have persisted.

Although in general the atmosphere of persecution of critics in Iran persisted, **internal tension in the country subsided compared to 2019, when the largest internal upheaval in a decade occurred**, with mass protests put down by the Iranian security forces that resulted in the deaths of at least 304 people. As 2020 began, Iran was rocked by news of the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, head of the Revolutionary Guard's (IRGC) al-Quds brigade, in a US attack in Iraq. Amidst a very strained atmosphere with the US following the senior military officer's death, **anti-government protests started up again in January when the Revolutionary Guard admitted to having accidentally shot down a Ukrainian plane carrying 176 civilians near Tehran**.[44] The protests over the downing of the plane, for which the IRGC initially denied responsibility, spread to different cities in the country and the security forces used live ammunition to disperse the protesters in Tehran. The authorities prosecuted about 20 people for their participation in the protests and two prominent activists were sentenced to up to five years in prison for their involvement and their messages on networks about them. Meanwhile, human rights organisations such as Amnesty International presented evidence of the deliberate use of lethal force in the crackdown on the demonstrations in late 2019 and warned of the arrests of more than 7,000 people, many of them victims of serious violations, such as arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, torture, mistreatment and others.[45] Several organisations requested an independent investigation led by the UN into the events of November 2019.[46] Reinforcing demands for accountability, in December a group of UN human rights experts accused the Iranian authorities of massacres of dissidents in prisons in 1988, warning that they could constitute crimes against humanity and that they would request an international investigation if these violations persisted today. **Iran also continued to be one of the most active countries in applying the death penalty and had executed 233 people as**

44. See the summary on Iran - USA, Israel in this chapter.
45. Amnesty International, *Iran: Trampling Humanity - Mass Arrests, Disappearances and Torture since Iran's 2019 November Protests*, 2 September 2020.
46. Amnesty International, *Joint call for states to mandate a UN-led inquiry into the serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, torture and unlawful killings during and in the aftermath of the November 2019 protests in Iran, on the occasion of the 45th session of the HRC*, 9 September 2020.

of November, according to Human Rights Watch. Regarding Iran's internal political dynamics, conservative forces triumphed in the February elections and the presidential election was announced for June 2021.

Iran – USA, Israel[47]	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Government International
Main parties:	Iran, USA, Israel

Summary:
Since the Islamic revolution in 1979 that overthrew the regime of Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi (an ally of Washington) and proclaimed Ayatollah Khomeini as the country's Supreme leader, relations between the US, Israel and Iran have been tense. The international pressure on Iran became stronger in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when the George W. Bush Administration declared Iran, together with Iraq and North Korea as the "axis of evil" and as an enemy State due to its alleged ties with terrorism. In this context, Iran's nuclear programme has been one of the issues that have generated most concern in the West, which is suspicious of its military purposes. Thus, Iran's nuclear programme has developed alongside the approval of international sanctions and threats of using force, especially by Israel. Iran's approach to the conflict during the two consecutive mandates of the ultra-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) did not contribute to ease tensions. The rise to power of the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani, in turn, has generated high hopes of a turn in Iran's foreign relations, especially after the signing of an agreement on nuclear issues at the end of 2013. However, the rise to power of moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani has raised expectations about a turning point in Iran's foreign relations, especially after negotiations began on the Iranian nuclear programme in late 2013 and after a related agreement was signed in mid-2015. In recent years, the withdrawal of the United States from the Iran deal in 2018 and the intensification of its sanctions policy, the progressive distancing of Iran from the commitments made in the deal and a chaotic regional backdrop have worsened tensions and made it difficult to find a way out of this dispute.

In keeping with the trend of the previous year, international tension around the Iranian nuclear programme intensified in 2020, in a context marked by various factors that exposed the challenges in preserving the validity of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed in 2015: the agreement was abandoned by the Trump administration (in 2018) according to its preference for a strategy of coercion and maximum pressure from the US on Iran; Tehran gradually backed away from the commitments made under the agreement (since 2019); there was a series of incidents affecting Iranian infrastructure, senior officials and scientists in 2020; and various acts of violence involved Iranian, US and Israeli forces in different parts of the Middle East that raised alarms about the potential for escalating tension between the parties. Notable in this regard was the **destabilising impact of the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, head of the Revolutionary Guard's al-Quds brigade in early January, who was killed in a US strike in Iraq**. Soleimani's funeral was attended by tens of thousands of people in the Iranian town of Kerman, where a stampede killed 56. Suleimani's death also led to retaliatory actions by Iran, which launched attacks against US positions on Iraqi soil. In January the Revolutionary Guard acknowledged having accidentally shot down a Ukrainian civilian plane outside Tehran, killing 176 people. There were other acts of violence and skirmishes throughout 2020, mainly in Iraq and the Persian Gulf, which exposed the tension between the parties. Additionally, a series of attacks and acts of sabotage were reported in July against infrastructure linked to the Iranian atomic programme, including the Natanz and Isfahan plants. In November, the assassination of the main person in charge of the Iranian nuclear programme caused a special stir and Tehran accused Israeli forces of participating. At the same time, the Trump administration stepped up its policy of sanctions against Iran and imposed a series of them throughout the year against people, companies, scientists, banks, transport and metal companies, suppliers of fuel and electricity and others. According to the International Crisis Group, in two and a half years (until December 2020) Washington imposed almost 1,500 unilateral sanctions against Iran, with dramatic consequences for the Iranian economy. These sanctions were not only maintained, but intensified during 2020, even though Tehran asked the UN to promote lifting them to facilitate the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely affected the country.

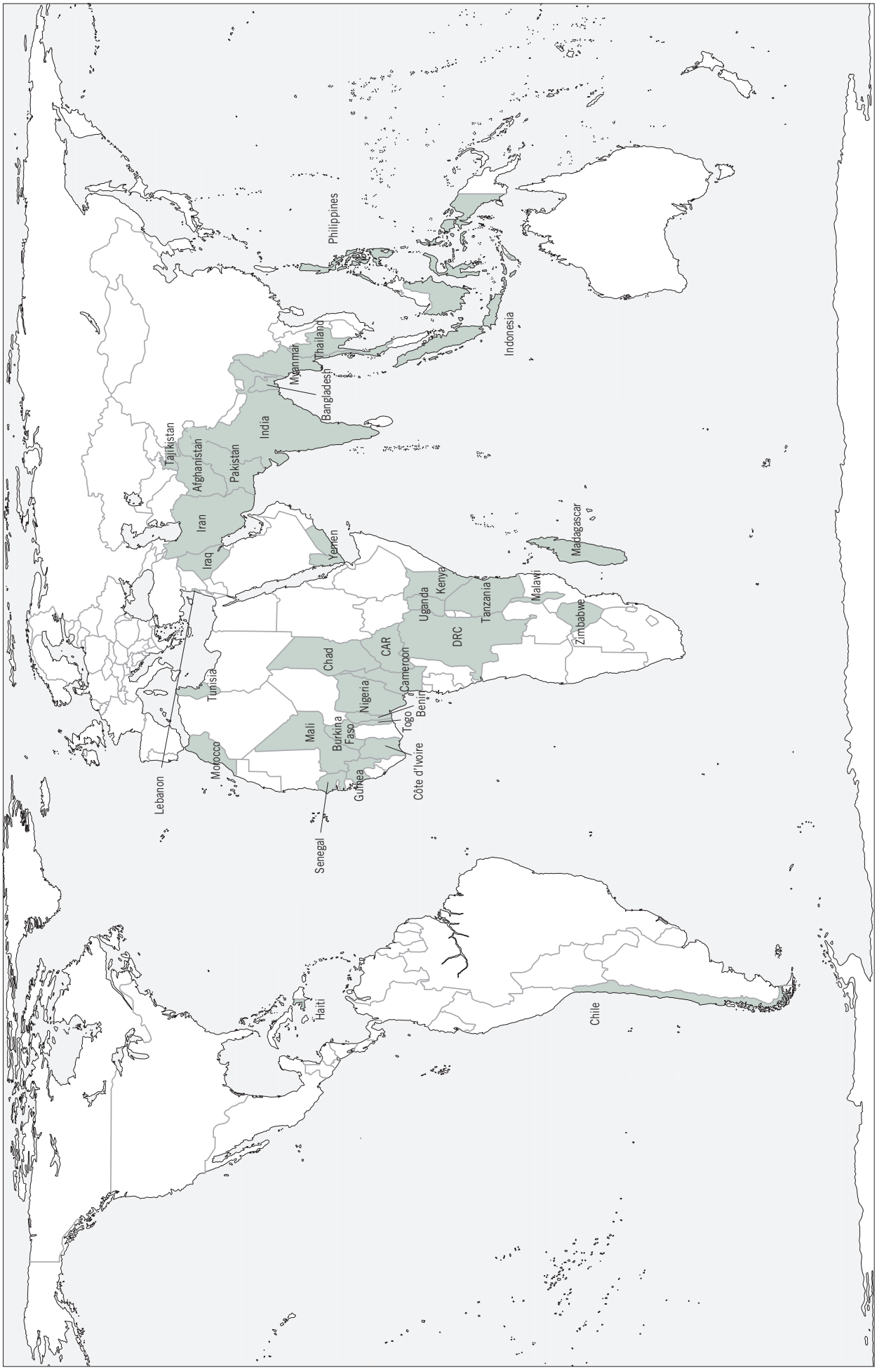
Iran also continued to violate the nuclear programme agreement. Early in the year, the three European states involved in the agreement (France, Germany and the United Kingdom, known as the E3 group) activated the dispute resolution mechanism provided for in the agreement to respond to detected breaches. Nevertheless, during a visit by the EU foreign representative to Tehran in February, the Iranian president insisted that his country was sticking to the agreement and would continue to work with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In June, an IAEA report found that Iran had continued to enrich and accumulate uranium above the limits allowed by the JCPOA and warned of Tehran's lack of cooperation in accessing two sites where suspicious activities had been identified. The E3 countries urged Iran to cooperate with the IAEA and in July the deadline for implementing the dispute resolution mechanism was extended. In November, new information from the IAEA confirmed that Iran continued to maintain uranium reserves above agreed thresholds and that the country should provide explanations for sites where traces of nuclear activity had been identified.

In August, Washington unsuccessfully tried to reactivate the United Nations sanctions against Iran that were in

47. This international socio-political crisis affects other countries that have not been mentioned, but which are involved to varying degrees.

force before the 2015 nuclear agreement, a right reserved for the parties that signed it, which the US abandoned. The attempt sparked discussion within the UN Security Council and evidenced the disparity of positions between the US and the countries that signed the agreement, which Tehran celebrated as a victory. Coinciding with the expiration of the UN arms embargo against Iran, the Trump administration approved new unilateral sanctions against it. At the end of the year, media reports warned that Trump had considered military action against Iran's main atomic facility, adding that any moves against Tehran could not be ruled out until the final days of his term. In February, the US Senate approved regulations to prevent the president from launching any military strike against Iran without authorisation from Congress. **At the end of 2020, expectations rested on the changes that could take place after the new US administration came to power**. In statements prior to his election as president, Joe Biden was in favour of resuming US commitments to the JCPOA. In December, at their first meeting in a year, the foreign ministers of the countries that had signed the agreement (France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, Russia and Iran) agreed not to set any preconditions and welcomed Washington's possible return to the agreement. Meanwhile, in response to the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist in an attack blamed on Israel in November, Iran's Parliament passed a law in December urging the government to enrich uranium to 20% (according to the JCPOA it should remain below 4%) and to block the IAEA's access if sanctions against Iran were not lifted in the first few months of 2021.

Map 3.1. **Gender, peace and security**



3. Gender, peace and security

- Twenty of the 34 armed conflicts active over the course of 2020 took place in countries where there were serious gender inequalities, with medium, high or very high levels of discrimination.
- The UN Secretary-General reported that the COVID-19 pandemic was exacerbating the impact of sexual violence in conflicts, making it difficult for victims to access justice systems.
- In Colombia, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace received reports of victims of sexual violence committed during the armed conflict with the FARC-EP.
- The year 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the approval of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action.
- By the end of 2020, 18 countries in armed conflict situations had a National Action Plan on UNSC Resolution 1325.

The Gender, Peace and Security chapter analyses the gender impacts of armed conflicts and socio–political crises, as well as the inclusion of the gender perspective into various international and local peacebuilding initiatives by international organisations, especially the United Nations, national governments, as well as different organisations and movements from local and international civil society.[1] In addition, a follow–up is made of the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. The gender perspective brings to light the differentiated effects of the armed conflicts on women and men, but also to what extent and in what way both women and men are participating in peacebuilding and the contributions that women are making to peacebuilding. The chapter also analyses the consequences of conflicts on lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual and intersexual (LGTBI) population and their participation in peacebuilding initiatives. The chapter is structured into three main sections: the first provides an assessment of the global situation with regard to gender inequalities by analysing the Social Institutions and Gender Index; the second analyses the gender dimension in armed conflicts and socio–political crises; and the final section is devoted to peacebuilding from a gender perspective. At the beginning of the chapter, a map is attached that shows those countries with serious gender inequalities according to the Index of Social Institutions and Gender. The chapter conducts a specific follow–up of the implementation of the agenda on women, peace and security, established after the adoption by the UN Security Council in 2000 of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

3.1. Gender inequalities

The Index of Social Institutions and Gender (SIGI)[2] is a measure of discrimination against women in social institutions, which reflects discriminatory laws, regulations and practices in 180 countries taking into account five dimensions: discrimination within the family, violence against women, preference for sons, women's access to resources and their access to public space. Discriminatory social institutions (formal and informal regulations, attitudes and practices) restrict women's access to rights, justice and empowerment, and perpetuate gender inequalities in areas such as education, health, employment or participation in politics.

1. Gender is the analytical category that highlights that inequalities between men and women are a social construct and not a result of nature, underlining their social and cultural construction in order to distinguish them from biological differences of the sexes. Gender aims to give visibility to the social construction of sexual difference and the sexual division of labour and power. The gender perspective seeks to show that the differences between men and women are a social construct, which is a product of unequal power relations that have historically been established in the patriarchal system. Gender as a category of analysis aims to demonstrate the historical and context–based nature of sexual differences.
2. The SIGI is an index developed by the OECD that measures five sub–indexes composed of 14 indicators that include: legal age of marriage, early marriage, parental authority, violence against women, female genital mutilation, reproductive autonomy, selective abortions by sex, fertility preferences, secure access to land, secure access to the ownership of other resources, access to financial services, access to public space, access to political participation and representation. OCDE, *Social Institutions & Gender Index,* OCDE, 2019.

Table 3.1. **Countries in armed conflict and/or socio-political crisis with medium, high or very high levels of gender discrimination**[3]

	Medium levels of discrimination	High levels of discrimination	Very high levels of discrimination	No data
Armed conflict	Burkina Faso[4] DRC (3) India (2) Thailand	CAR Chad[5] Mali Myanmar Nigeria[6]	Afghanistan Cameroon (2)[7] Iraq Philippines (2) Pakistan (2) Yemen (2)	Burundi Egypt Israel[8] Libya Niger[9] Palestine[10] Somalia South Sudan Sudan (2) Syria
Socio-political crises	Chile DRC (4)[11] Haiti India (6)[12] Kenya Senegal Tajikistan Thailand Zimbabwe	CAR[13] Chad Côte d'Ivoire Indonesia (2) Malawi Mali Madagascar Nigeria (2) Sri Lanka Tanzania Togo Tunisia Uganda (4)[14]	Bangladesh Guinea Iran (4) Iraq (2) Lebanon (2)[15] Morocco Pakistan (2)	Algeria (2) Bahrain Brunei Darussalam Burundi China (7) Egypt Equatorial Guinea Eritrea Gambia Guinea-Bissau Israel (2) Kosovo Malaysia Palestine[16] Saudi Arabia Somalia South Korea South Sudan (2)[17] Sudan (4)[18] Syria Taiwan Uzbekistan Venezuela Western Sahara

According to the SIGI, levels of discrimination against women were high or very high in 29 countries, mainly concentrated in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The analysis obtained by comparing the data from this indicator with that of the countries that are affected by situations of armed conflict reveals that **14 of the 34 armed conflicts that took place throughout 2020 occurred in countries where serious gender inequalities exist, with high or very high levels of discrimination; 6 in countries with medium levels of discrimination; and that 9 armed conflicts took place in countries for which there are no available data in this regard –Burundi, Egypt, Israel, Libya, Niger Palestine,[19] Syria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan.** Similarly, in 4 other countries where there were one or more armed conflicts, levels of discrimination were lower, in some cases with low levels (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Ukraine and Turkey) or very low levels (Colombia) of discrimination, according to the SIGI. As regards socio-political crises, **at least 45 of the 96 active cases of socio-political crisis during 2020 took place in countries where there are severe gender inequalities (medium, high or very high**

3. Table prepared from levels of gender discrimination in the OECD's SIGI as indicated in the latest available report (2020) and Escola de Cultura de Pau's classifications of armed conflict and socio-political crisis. See chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) and chapter 2 (Socio-political crises). The SIGI establishes five levels of classification based on the degree of discrimination: very high, high, medium, low and very low. The number of armed conflicts or socio-political crises in which that country is involved is given between parentheses..
4. Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali are scenes of the same armed conflict, called the Western Sahel Region.
5. Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger are scenes of the same armed conflict, called the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. Cameroon is also the scene of another armed conflict called Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West).
8. Israel and Palestine are scenes of the same conflict.
9. See note 5.
10. In the SIGI, Palestine is known as Gaza and the West Bank.
11. One of the socio-political crises in the DRC is the international one called Central Africa (LRA), which involves the Congolese Armed Forces. See chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
12. One of the socio-political crises in India deals with Pakistan and another deals with China.
13. The socio-political crisis in the CAR refers to the one called Central Africa (LRA). See chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
14. One of the socio-political crises in Uganda refers to the one called Central Africa (LRA). See chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
15. One of the socio-political crises in Lebanon refers to the one maintained with Israel and Syria.
16. See note 11.
17. One of the socio-political crises in South Sudan refers to the one called Central Africa (LRA). See chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
18. One of the socio-political crises in Sudan refers to the one called Central Africa (LRA). See chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
19. See note 11.

levels according to the SIGI). 32 socio-political crises took place in countries for which no data are available (Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Burundi, China, DPR Korea, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Gaza and the West Bank, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Israel, Kosovo, Western Sahara, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Taiwan, Uzbekistan and Venezuela).

3.2. The impact of violence and conflicts from a gender perspective

This section addresses the gender dimension in the conflict cycle, especially in reference to violence against women. The gender perspective is a useful tool for the analysis of armed conflicts and socio–political crises and makes it possible to give visibility to aspects generally ignored in this analysis both in terms of causes and consequences.

3.2.1. Sexual violence in armed conflicts and crises

20 of the 34 armed conflicts that took place in 2020 were in countries with medium, high or very high levels of gender discrimination

As in previous years, during 2020 sexual violence was present in a large number of active armed conflicts.[20] Its use, which in some cases was part of the deliberate war strategies of the armed actors, was documented in different reports, as well as by local and international media.

In July, the **open debate on sexual violence** that takes place annually in the UN Security Council was held, having been postponed this time from April to July as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.[21] The debate was promoted by Germany and the Dominican Republic, countries that co-chair the Informal Experts Group on women, peace and security, and the central themes of the debate were the promotion of accountability in matters of sexual violence and the implementation of a survivor-focused approach, in line with UNSC Resolution 2467, promoted by Germany in 2019. During the debate, the UN Secretary-General's special representative for sexual violence in conflict, Pramila Patten, said that weapons help to aggravate sexual violence in conflicts and that this violence takes place in militarised contexts. The debate was attended on behalf of civil society by Khin Ohmar, a Myanmar human rights activist, who denounced the use of sexual violence by the Burmese Armed Forces, and Nadia Carine Therese Fornel-Poutou, a lawyer from the CAR, which urged the Security Council to guarantee the protection of the civilian population by MINUSCA. The UN Secretary-General's report analysed the situation of 19 countries, 15 of them in conflict situations:[22] the CAR, the DRC, Burundi, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan (Darfur), Nigeria,[23] Colombia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Twelve of the 19 armed conflicts[24] that were analysed in the UN Secretary-General's report experienced high levels of intensity in 2020 –Libya, Mali, DRC (East), DRC (East-ADF), the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel region, Somalia, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen (Houthis)–, topping 1,000 fatalities during the year and producing serious impacts on people and the territory, including conflict-related sexual violence. Seven of these also saw an escalation of violence during 2020 compared to the previous year –Mali, South Sudan, Sudan Darfur, DRC (East- ADF), Colombia, Myanmar and Yemen (Houthis). Most of the armed actors identified by the Secretary-General as responsible for sexual violence in armed conflict were non-state actors, some of whom had been included on UN terrorist lists.

Moreover, on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted that the **COVID-19 pandemic** was exacerbating the impact of this violence. As a result of the confinement implemented to combat the coronavirus, it is difficult for victims to access justice systems, increasing the serious structural barriers to reporting sexual violence in conflict situations. The Secretary-General also warned of the risk that care services for victims of sexual violence such as access to shelters, psychosocial and health services could cease to be prioritised and that impunity could increase. The pandemic not only had an impact on sexual violence in

20. The UN considers sexual violence related to conflicts to be "incidents or patterns of sexual violence [...], that is, rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancies, forced sterilisation or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, boys or girls. These incidents or patterns of behaviour occur in situations of conflict or post–conflict or in other situations of concern (for example, during a political confrontation). In addition, they have a direct or indirect relationship with the conflict or political confrontation, that is, a temporal, geographical or causal relationship. Apart from the international nature of the alleged crimes, which depending on the circumstances constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of genocide or other gross violations of human rights, the relationship with the conflict may be evidenced by taking into account the profile and motivations of the perpetrator, the profile of the victim, the climate of impunity or the breakdown of law and order by which the State in question may be affected, the cross–border dimensions or the fact that they violate the provisions of a ceasefire agreement". UN Action Against Sexual Violence In Conflict, Analytical and conceptual framework of sexual violence in conflicts, November 2012.
21. Security Council Report, *What's in Blue. Conflict Related Sexual Violence: Open Debate*, Security Council Report, 16 July 2020.
22. According to the definition of armed conflict and the classification contained in this report (see chapter 1, Armed conflicts)
23. Nigeria is involved as a main actor in the armed conflict Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram).
24. There was more than one armed conflict in some countries covered by the UN Secretary-General's report, according to the definition of the Escola de Cultura de Pau. The complete list of armed conflicts in the countries included in the Secretary-General's report is: the CAR; the DRC (East); the DRC (East-ADF); the DRC (Kasai); the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram), which includes Nigeria; Libya, Mali (North); Somalia; South Sudan; Sudan (Darfur); Colombia; Afghanistan; Myanmar; Iraq; Syria; Yemen (Houthis); and Yemen (AQAP).

Box 3.1. **Armed actors and sexual violence in conflicts**[25]

The UN Secretary-General's report on sexual violence in conflicts, published in March 2020, included a list of armed actors who are suspected of having committed systematic acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence or of being responsible for them in situations of armed conflict, which are subject to examination by the Security Council.[26]

	STATE ACTORS	NON-STATE ACTORS
CAR		Lord's Resistance Army; Ex-Séléka factions: Union pour la paix en Centrafrique, Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique, Front populaire pour la renaissance dela Centrafrique – Gula faction, Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique – Abdoulaye Hussein faction, Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique; Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain – Abdoulaye Miskine; Révolution et justice; Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation – Abbas Sidiki; Anti-balaka associated militia.
DRC	Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo; Police nationale congolaise.	Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain-Janvier; Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain-Rénové; Allied Democratic Forces; Forces pour la défense du Congo; Bana Mura militias; Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda; Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri; Kamuina Nsapu; Lord's Resistance Army; Nduma défence du Congo; Mai-Mai Kifuafua; All Mai-Mai Simba factions; Nyatura; Nduma défence du Congo-Rénové; Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki; All Twa militia, Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale; Mai-Mai Malaika; Mai-Mai Fimbo Na Fimbo; Mai-Mai Yakutumba; Lendu militias.
Iraq		ISIS
Mali		MNLA, Ansar Eddine, MUYAO, AQMI, Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés.
Myanmar	Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw Kyi)	
Somalia	Somali National Army; Somali Police Force (and allied militia); Puntland forces.	Al-Shabaab
South Sudan	South Sudan People's Defence Forces; South Sudan National Police Service	Lord's Resistance Army; Justice and Equality Movement; pro-Riek Machar Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition; Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition forces aligned with First Vice-President Taban Deng.
Sudan	Sudanese Armed Forces; Rapid Support Forces.	Justice and Equality Movement; Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid faction.
Syria	Syrian Arab Armed Forces, Intelligence services; National Defence Forces and pro-government militias	ISIS; Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front; Army of Islam; Ahrar al-Sham.
Other cases		Boko Haram

armed conflicts, but also increased the risk for many women of suffering violence in the family and home.

With regard to **sexual violence against minors**, four experts on children's rights from the United Nations—Luis Pedernera, chairman of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; Mama Fatima Singateh, UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children; Najat Maalla M'jidd, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; and Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict—called on all member states to strengthen the protection of children against sexual exploitation and recruitment and to universally ratify the international tools that protect children from these serious human rights violations. These are the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, currently in force in 176 countries, and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, in force in 170 countries. Both were proclaimed 20 years ago. These optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have prompted more than 100 countries to establish 18 as the minimum age for recruitment and participation in hostilities, for example, with more than 80 countries having criminally banned the recruitment of children by parties to a conflict.

In **Mozambique**, UNHCR expressed concern about the rising number of displaced people in Cabo Delgado province. The United Nations agency noted that some women and girls had been kidnapped and had become victims of forced marriage, rape and other forms of sexual violence. More than 530,000 people were displaced in different provinces of the country as a result of the armed clashes in the north.

In **Cameroon**, the United Nations expressed concern in February about the situation of the civilian population, whose human rights were being seriously violated in the armed conflict, including rape and other forms of sexual violence. Local and international civil society organisations also warned that sexual violence was frequently used as a weapon of war in conflicts affecting the country (the armed conflict in the Ambazonia/North West and South West regions, as well as the conflict

25. This table uses the names of the armed actors as they appear in the Secretary-General's report, so they do not necessarily coincide with the ones used in chapters 1 and 2 of this report.
26. UN Security Council, *Sexual violence related to conflicts. Report of the Secretary–General,* S/2020/48703, June 2020.

region involving Boko Haram and countries in the Lake Chad region).[27]

In relation to the armed conflict in the **Tigray** region, in **Ethiopia**, the UN warned in December of serious human rights violations, including sexual violence against women and girls. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said that information about this had been corroborated. Bachelet also warned of obstacles to communication and access to the most affected areas. The conflict situation was described as extremely worrying and volatile, in an increasing breakout with devastating impacts on the civilian population, which included civilian fatalities, kidnappings and sexual violence against women. In the opening weeks of 2021, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, expressed grave concern over reports of sexual violence in Tigray, including a high number of rapes in the capital, as well as stories of people forced to rape their relatives and growing reports of sexual violence against women and girls in refugee camps. Patten urged all parties to the conflict to prohibit the use of sexual violence and cease hostilities in the region. She also warned of the reduction in assistance to survivors of violence caused by the difficulties of humanitarian access and limited resources.

In 2020, UNHCR disclosed cases of kidnapping, sexual assault and rape against women and girls in the **Mopti region, in Mali**. According to the UN agency, around 1,000 cases were reported in that region in 2000. This was part of a broader alert in December about the increase in child trafficking, forced labour and forced recruitment of children by armed groups across Mali. UNHCR warned that boys and girls were being forced to fight and were being trafficked, raped and forced into sexual and domestic servitude and marriage.

In the **Western Sahel Region** as a whole, the actors of the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) of the Protection Cluster (a network of NGOs, international organisations and UN agencies involved in protection work in humanitarian crises, including those related to armed conflicts) warned of rising levels of gender-based violence due to the COVID-19 pandemic and an increase in violence and insecurity. They called attention to high levels of early and forced marriage in Burkina Faso and Mali, an increase in child marriage in the Sahel in 2020 amidst increased physical and food insecurity and women and girls' concerns about the problem of human trafficking and violence by armed actors. They also reported an approximately 12% increase in levels of domestic violence due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the region and the risk of a growing increase in trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse and female genital mutilation. They said that the central Sahel faces the highest levels of gender-based violence in the world in a context affected by humanitarian crises exacerbated by the pandemic and violence. Nevertheless, they continued, the humanitarian response in the area still fails to prioritise prevention and respond to gender violence.[28]

In **Nigeria**, with regard to the violence in the Niger Delta in the states of the Middle Belt and in the conflict between Boko Haram (BH) and the Nigerian security forces, in December 2020 the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Fatou Bensouda, presented the conclusions of the opening of the preliminary investigation of human rights violations in the country and possible crimes against humanity and war crimes in the aforementioned scenarios. Bensouda said that there is a reasonable basis to believe that both members of the BH insurgency and its splinter groups, as well as members of the security forces, committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, including rape, the military recruitment and enlistment of children under the age of 15 and their use to actively participate in hostilities, persecution on political and gender grounds and other inhumane acts. The BH insurgency was also charged with sexual slavery, including pregnancy, forced marriage and hostage taking, while the security forces were accused of forced disappearance and forced population transfer.

3.2.2. Response to sexual violence in armed conflicts

Througho ut the year there were different initiatives to respond to sexual violence in the context of armed conflicts, as well as to fight against impunity in different judicial bodies. Some of these are described below.

In response to sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel performing service under UN command, UN Secretary-General António Guterres's strategy since 2017 continued to be implemented, which seeks to prioritise putting an end to impunity for abuse and exploitation and upholding the dignity of the victims. According to the Secretary-General, progress was made in terms of alignment and consistency in approaches to prevention and response, awareness-raising and change of attitudes, although substantial challenges remained. The progress mentioned included the establishment of requirements for a stronger accountability framework, which means that United Nations agencies must present mandatory action plans on prevention and response measures. In 2019, the year under study of the 2020 report, 50 heads of UN

27. Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), Cordaid, Association Rayons de Soleil, *Policy Paper-Cameroon. Gender-Based (Sexual) Violence: An Unfolding Crisis*. 15 July 2020.
28. Gender-Based Violence AoR, Global Protection Cluster, *GBV in the Central Shale. Briefing Document for the Central Sahel Ministerial Meeting*, 20 October 2020.

departments, offices, regional commissions, agencies, funds and programmes presented their action plans, compared to 37 and 35 plans in 2018 and 2017, respectively. Guterres also said that headway had been made in institutionalising the victim-centred approach and that the United Nations protocol on providing assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, approved in late 2019 by the UN High-Level Steering Group on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, was deployed to the field in 2020. However, many challenges remained, as Guterres warned, such as the lack of specific services for victims, as set out in the report's conclusions. Furthermore, in most countries where United Nations agencies were active, there was no coordinator figure specifically designated to ensure implementation of the victim-centred approach (with only four Victims' Rights Defenders on the ground). Another lingering challenge was the scarcity of resources.

The UN continued to face allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by military and civilian personnel deployed to peacekeeping missions and special political missions. **According to the data from the Secretary-General's 2020 report, there was an increase in complaints in 2019, reaching 80, compared to 56 filed in 2018 and 63 in 2017**. Twenty-four of the 80 complaints were related to sexual abuse (the lowest figure since 2010, according to the Secretary-General's report) and 56 were linked to sexual exploitation. Seventy per cent of the complaints referred to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which received 41 and 15 complaints, respectively. This was in line with 2018, in which 74% of the complaints also referred to both missions. Another 23% affected the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the former United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the former United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). The remaining 7% involved three special political missions (the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, and the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau).

In **Colombia**, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) received reports of victims of sexual violence committed during the course of the armed conflict with the FARC-EP.[29] Thus, victims of sexual violence in Montes de María participated in the first virtual hearing with the JEP to present their cases. Most of the women were victims of sexual violence committed by FARC-EP guerrilla fighters, though some perpetrators were members of the Colombian Army and the National Police. Corporación Humanas and the Helenita González Lawyers Collective documented these cases of sexual violence to present evidence to the JEP. The violence took place between 1983 and 2014, though most of the sexual violence committed by the FARC happened between 1998 and 2002 and sexual violence perpetrated by national security forces mostly occurred between 2002 and 2009. Human rights organisations identified some patterns to this violence, such as the punishment of women who were accused of having a relationship with an armed actor, the control of women's sexuality, determining with whom they could have sexual relations, rape as a reward and trophy for troops, sexual violence as a forced displacement strategy and sexual violence to establish hierarchies within armed groups. Subsequently, the testimonies of 21 victims of sexual violence in 10 municipalities of the Norte de Santander Department were also presented, regarding events that took place between 1991 and 2016, committed by the FARC-EP, the Colombian Army and the National Police. One third of the women who testified had been minors when they suffered the abuse. Moreover, victims and human rights organisations asked the JEP to open a macro-process on sexual violence, since many of the cases investigated include sexual violence. In addition, the Truth Commission continued to gather investigations of victims of sexual violence, including reproductive violence committed by the different armed actors in the conflict through practices such as forced contraception, forced sterilisation, forced maternity, forced pregnancy, forced abortion and institutional reproductive violence like forced miscarriages with glyphosate sprays.

In **Syria**, seven survivors of sexual violence filed the first criminal complaint for this type of abuse against Bashar Assad's regime with the German prosecutor's office, which has already opened several investigations against nine high-ranking officials of the Syrian government for crimes committed during the armed conflict. The group of survivors (four women and three men) suffered the abuse while in prison in Damascus, Aleppo and Hama between April 2011 and August 2013. During that period they were victims or witnesses of torture and sexual violence, including rape, electric shocks to the genitals and forced abortion. The filing was supported by 42 Syrian organisations and international feminist organisations, which hope that the German justice system will apply the principle of universal justice to expand its investigations and prosecute these abuses as crimes against humanity.

29. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) is the justice component of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition, established in the peace agreement signed in 2016 by the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP, for the purpose of administering transitional justice and investigating crimes committed in the context of the armed conflict before 1 December 2016.

3.2.3. Other gender-based violence in socio-political crises or armed conflict

In addition to sexual violence, armed conflicts and crises had other serious gender impacts. Impunity for human rights violations continued to be a recurring theme. The annual report on **forced displacement** presented by UNHCR collected demographic data on the displaced population in the world during 2019.[30] UNHCR provided some data disaggregated by sex, noting that 48% of refugees were women. This year there was a total of 79.5 million displaced people in the world, including 26 million refugees. According to data from the United Nations agency, in the decade between 2010 and 2019, at least 100 million people in the world were forcibly displaced from their homes, without most of them achieving a solution to their situation. Only 3.9 million people managed to return to their places of origin and 1.1 million were resettled in other countries. Since 2011, the annual number of refugees has continued to grow. Women accounted for 52% of the internally displaced population in all 16 of the 20 operations for which UNHCR had demographic data. In some contexts such as Burundi and Sudan, women accounted for 65% and 57%, respectively. Women represented 51% of the stateless population. UNHCR also warned of the situation of refugee women during the COVID-19 pandemic and their increased risk of suffering gender-based violence during confinement situations in which there was significantly less access to basic services. A report by Refugees International noted the specific impact that the pandemic was having on the refugee population, including women and girls,[31] arguing that it could seriously harm refugee girls due to the restrictions imposed on face-to-face education and the enormous difficulties they faced in accessing distance education. Refugee women also faced problems in accessing the job market. As a result of the increase in care tasks falling on women as a result of the health impacts of the pandemic and the tighter restrictions on the informal economy imposed by governments during confinement, refugee women's access to the paid job market could be seriously limited.

Different organisations complained of the violence that occurred against transgender people in contexts of armed conflict and humanitarian crisis. In Pakistan, the organisation TransAction Alliance Khyber Pakhtunkhwa denounced the shooting murder of trans activist Gul Panra in Peshawar, noting that in the last five years 1,500 trans people have been victims of sexual violence and 68 have been killed. Human Rights Watch reported that there were 479 attacks against trans women in 2018. Human Rights Watch also said that there was violence against trans women in the armed conflict in Syria, perceived as gay men and attacked for their sexual orientation. These women were subjected to harassment at military checkpoints and were victims of torture and sexual violence in detention centres. Human Rights Watch noted that the victims did not seek medical or psychological support in Syria for fear of reprisals and that they also faced many difficulties in Lebanon, to where many were forcibly displaced as a result of the armed conflict and repression. In Guatemala, the murder of a trans asylum seeker from El Salvador highlighted the situation of violence suffered by the LGTBI population in Central America, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR called on the countries of the region to bring those responsible for violence against transgender people to justice and to respect the right to asylum for those seeking protection in other countries. A report by the Comcavis Trans organisation pointed out that the trans population in El Salvador is forcibly displaced in the country as a result of the constant violence and discrimination it suffers, whether by armed actors such as criminal groups and gangs or by the police and public servants.[32]

The United Nations independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity presented his report on the situation of LGTBI people during the coronavirus pandemic.[33] The expert highlighted the disproportionate impact that this situation was having, with consequences such as an increase in violence in nearby environments due to the confinement situation, and noted that the response to the pandemic reproduced and exacerbated previously identified patterns of social exclusion and violence against LGTBI people. In addition, the situations of violence and discrimination that LGTBI people usually face could dissuade them from seeking out healthcare, worsening their situation in the public health emergency caused by the pandemic. The expert also warned of possible regression in the refugee and asylum policy, as well as the intensification of violence against LGTBI and gender-diverse people in the countries of origin of forcibly displaced people and the spread of COVID-19 in refugee camps due to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions at these locations.

Across the entire region of North Africa and Middle East, the suicide of activist Sarah Hegazi in June caused particular consternation. Her case exposed the harassment and persecution suffered by the LGTBI movement in Egypt. The queer activist had gone into exile in Canada after being targeted in a persecution campaign against homosexuals by the government of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and after being arrested in 2017 for displaying symbols associated with the LGTBI community. She suffered mistreatment during the three months that she spent in prison. Throughout 2020, human rights organisations such as Human

30. UNHCR, Global Trends 2019: Forced Displacement in 2019, UNHCR, June 2020.
31. Devon Cone, Issue Brief. Gender Matters: COVID-19's Outsized Impact on Displaced Women and Girls, Refugees International, 7 May 2020.
32. COMCAVIS Trans, "El desplazamiento forzado interno de la población LGTBI en El Salvador", COMCAVIS Trans, December 2019.
33. Independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. *Violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity and gender identity during the coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19)* A/75/258

Rights Watch reported that the Egyptian government continued to arbitrarily detain people based on their sexual or gender identity and denounced cases such as the campaign of harassment against women active on social networks (influencers) that led to the arrest of at least 15 people on vague charges related to "public morals" or the violation of "family values". Estimates indicate from the time that al-Sisi came to power in 2013 until 2017, a total of 232 people were detained for their sexual orientation or gender identity. In March 2020, during the Universal Periodic Review before the UN Human Rights Council, Egyptian authorities rejected recommendations urging the country to end arrests and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Although sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region in which the most countries criminalise consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex or persecute LGTBI individuals and groups, there is a trend towards decriminalisation. During 2020, two important breakthroughs were observed with the repeal in Sudan of the death penalty and corporal punishment for consensual acts between people of the same sex in July and the Gabonese Parliament's revocation of the criminalising provision that was introduced in 2019. This progress towards decriminalisation joins similar headway achieved just in the last decade in Lesotho (2010), São Tomé and Príncipe (2012), Mozambique (2015), Seychelles (2016) and Angola and Botswana (2019).

An example of gender-based violence during the pandemic was in the Central African Republic, where the UNDP published a study in July that found an estimated 69% rise in gender-based violence since the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the existence of a national strategy to reduce violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation, statistics began to increase even before the pandemic, with 11,777 cases identified in 2019, representing an increase of 174% compared to 2014. The CAR also ranks second worldwide for gender inequality, according to the UNDP Gender Inequality Index of 2019. Women, especially in rural areas, are more affected by poverty (81%) than men (69%) and the country ranks second globally in global maternal mortality rates. Action to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, such as the closure of businesses and schools, has increased the household burdens borne by women and girls and has drastically reduced their income, increasing existing vulnerabilities, confining them to homes that they often share with their abusers and limiting access to support and health services. Since April, gender-based violence increased by 10%, while injuries reported to women and minors increased by 69%, rapes by 27%, and other assaults by 45%, according to a June report by MINUSCA. Since the first COVID-19 case was reported in the country, 97% of the victims of gender-based violence have been women and 76% have been minors. Cyberviolence is also on the rise, according to the report, with more people confined to their homes and spending more time online.

Other forms of gender violence amidst socio-political tension occurred in places such as **Belarus**. In July, prior to the presidential election in August, which was considered fraudulent, Amnesty International (AI) reported a deliberate campaign by the regime against female activists and relatives of political opponents with specific reprisals, including threats to use sexual violence and threats to remove their children from their custody. Amnesty International also reported that women faced political persecution, intimidation, harassment and retaliation, such as disproportionately high fines and the withholding of personal hygiene products from women arrested for participating in protests. According to AI, these discriminatory practices were fuelled by state-sponsored misogyny. Furthermore, throughout the months of protests, women and men reported torture and ill-treatment in police custody. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, warned of the criminalisation of human rights activism in Belarus and the specific persecution of female human rights defenders, including Maria Rabkova, Irina Sukhiy and Marina Dubina. During the election campaign, President Aleksandr Lukashenko used strategies to delegitimise opposition candidate Tikhanovskaya through gender stereotypes.

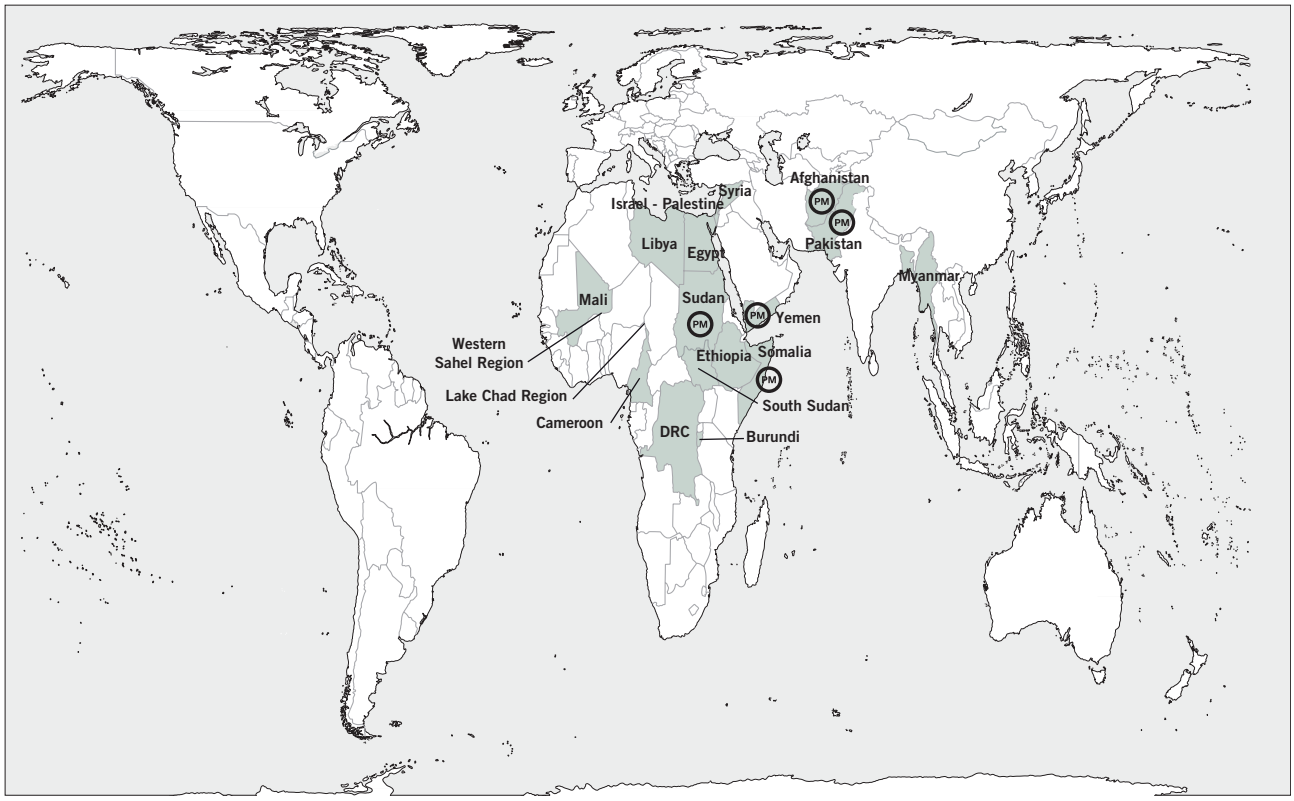
Regarding the impact of armed conflicts on children, the UN Secretary General presented his annual report in which he included some specific gender impacts.[34] The report noted that 735 complaints of sexual violence were made in countries such as the DRC, Somalia, the CAR, Sudan and South Sudan and found that the number of cases attributed to government agents had doubled. Sexual violence particularly affected girls. Other violations of the human rights of girls and boys in armed conflicts were attacks on schools and kidnappings. The report also warned of the risk that children may be detained and deprived of liberty in conflict situations, when they are frequently victims of sexual violence and torture.

3.3. Peacebuilding from a gender perspective

In this section some of the most notable initiatives are analysed to incorporate the gender perspective into the various aspects of peacebuilding.

34. Children and Armed Conflict – Report of the Secretary-General (A/74/845–S/2020/525). UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, 9 June 2019.

Map 3.2. **Countries in armed conflict and with discriminatory legislation against the LGBTI population**



Countries in armed conflict in 2020 with discriminatory legislation against LGBTI population (this includes criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts, legal barriers to freedom of expression on sexual orientation issues and barriers to the establishment of NGOs).

PM Countries in armed conflict where death penalty for LGTBI population is codified. (ILGA, *State Homophobia*, 2021)

Source: Prepared internally with data from Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alerta 2021! Informe sobre conflictos, derechos humanos y construcción de paz. (Alerta 2021! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*). Barcelona: Icaria, 2021. ILGA World: Lucas Ramón Mendos, Kellyn Botha, Rafael Carrano Lelis, Enrique López de la Peña, Ilia Savelev y Daron Tan, *Homofobia de Estado 2020: Actualización del Panorama Global de la Legislación (State Homophobia 2020: Global Legislation Overview Update)*. Geneva, ILGA, December 2020.

Table 3.2. **Armed conflicts in 2020 in countries with discriminatory legislation against the LGBTI population**[35]

AFRICA	ASIA	MIDDLE EAST
Burundi Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) DRC (East) DRC (East-ADF) Ethiopia Libya Mali Somalia South Sudan Sudan (Darfur) Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile) Western Sahel Region	Afghanistan Myanmar Pakistan Pakistan (Balochistan)	Egypt (Sinai) Iraq Israel - Palestine[36] Syria Yemen (AQPA) Yemen (Houthis)

Source: Prepared internally with data from Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alerta 2021! Informe sobre conflictos, derechos humanos y construcción de paz. (Alerta 2021! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*). Barcelona: Icaria, 2021. ILGA World: Lucas Ramón Mendos, Kellyn Botha, Rafael Carrano Lelis, Enrique López de la Peña, Ilia Savelev y Daron Tan, *Homofobia de Estado 2020: Actualización del Panorama Global de la Legislación (State Homophobia 2020: Global Legislation Overview Update)*. Geneva, ILGA, December 2020.

35. This list includes those countries included in the ILGA's report in the categories of Criminalisation (Consensual sexual acts between adults of the same sex and Consensual sexual acts between adults of the same sex) and Restriction (Restrictions on freedom of expression in issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics and Restrictions on the registration or running of civil society organisations). ILGA World: Lucas Ramón Mendos, Kellyn Botha, Rafael Carrano Lelis, Enrique López de la Peña, Ilia Savelev y Daron Tan, *Homofobia de Estado 2020: Actualización del Panorama Global de la Legislación (State Homophobia 2020: Global Legislation Overview Update)*. Geneva; ILGA, December 2020.
36. ILGA report highlights de criminalization and restriction in Gaza (Palestine).

3.3.1. Resolution 1325 and the women, peace and security agenda

The year 2020 marked the **20th anniversary of the approval of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action**.[37] These two anniversaries were enormously important for the women, peace and security agenda, which should have been used to evaluate the progress and pending challenges in the implementation of the promises made in the last two decades. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic cast a cloud over both anniversaries, making them less visible and forcing the open debate in the Security Council to be held online. **Russia, which held the presidency of the Security Council, presented a proposal for a new resolution on women, peace and security, but it was not approved due to insufficient support**. China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Russia and South Africa voted in favour of the resolution and 10 countries abstained (Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the United States). Analysts gave different reasons why the resolution was rejected, saying that it contained nothing new and referring to the tense atmosphere in which the last resolutions were approved in 2019 (2467 and 2493),[38] which led many Security Council members to prefer the formula of a presidential statement over a new resolution to mark the 20th anniversary.[39] The fact that the resolution was focused on socio-economic aspects, without addressing rights, did not please some members of the Security Council and civil society organisations argued that it was an attempt to lower the profile and water down the promises made by national governments as part of the agenda.[40] Furthermore, the enormous political differences between the members of the Security Council did not help the resolution to get approved, as the vote fell in line with international geostrategic alliances.

By the end of 2020, 18 countries in armed conflict had a national action plan on UNSC Resolution 1325

The UN Secretary-General presented his annual report, which included an extensive assessment of the implementation of the agenda, identifying the main challenges. With regard to participation in peace processes, the report stated that between 1992 and 2019, 13% of the negotiators, 6% of the mediators and 6% of those who signed peace agreements were women. Seven out of 10 peace processes still did not include female mediators or signatories. Seven United Nations-deployed peacekeeping missions still did not have a gender advisory figure on their staff. Though the progress was limited, between 1995 and 2019 the proportion of peace agreements that included provisions related to gender equality rose from 14 to 22%. In 2019, 30% of the members of the support teams in the peace processes facilitated or co-facilitated, directed or co-directed by the United Nations, were women. The report also addressed other issues on the agenda, such as the situation of female human rights activists, noting that between 2015 and 2019, at least 102 female defenders were murdered in 26 countries where armed conflicts took place.

In relation to the gender impacts of the international arms build-up, the UN Secretary-General's report stated that **only 30% of the National Action Plans on UNSC Resolution 1325 included the issue of disarmament, in a context of growing global military spending** (1.9 billion USD in 2019). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also spoke in this regard in a report on the impact of arms transfers on human rights, which included several repercussions on gender. The OHCHR highlighted that unregulated firearms exacerbate violence against women and especially sexual violence, as many armed groups use illicitly acquired weapons to commit this violence. In addition, the circulation of weapons imposes enormous restrictions on the mobility and free movement of women amidst serious insecurity and can also impact girls' right to education, since attacks against schools deprive them of this right.

More than 550 civil society organisations from around the world addressed the UN Security Council for the open debate, demanding a firm commitment to and requirement of women's direct and formal participation in all peace processes supported by the UN.[41] In the letter, they indicated that this participation could be achieved "by prioritising, resourcing and actively supporting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls; grounding all peace and security policymaking, strategies and programmes in international human rights and humanitarian law; preventing threats and violence against diverse women leaders, human rights defenders and peacebuilders; and holding all actors, including the United Nations and other relevant regional organisations, accountable".

A discussion entitled "Twenty years of African women's participation in the women, peace and security agenda: civil society perspectives" took place on the eve of the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution

37. For further analysis of the 20th anniversary, see María Villellas Ariño, *20 años de implementación de la Agenda Género, Paz y Seguridad,* ECP Notes on Conflict and Peace no. 3, Escola de Cultura de Pau, March 2020.
38. See chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2020! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2020.
39. Security Council Report, *Women, Peace and Security: The Agenda at 20*, Research Report no. 3, 2020.
40. NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, *Security Council members unite to protect the Women, Peace and Security agenda on its 20th anniversary*, 30 October 2020.
41. NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, 2020 Open Letter to Permanent Representatives to the United Nations on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 (2000), October 2020.

Table 3.3. **National Action Plans on UNSC Resolution 1325 in countries in armed conflict situations**

Conflicts in countries with NAPs on Resolution 1325	
Burundi (2011)*	Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile) (2020)
Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) (2017)	South Sudan (2015)
Mali (2012)	Afghanistan (2015)
Mozambique (2019)	Philippines (NPA) (2009)
Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram): Nigeria (2013), Cameroon (2017), Niger (2016)	Philippines (Mindanao) (2009)
Western Sahel Region: Burkina Faso (2012), Mali (2012), Niger (2016)	Ukraine (2016)
CAR (2014)	Iraq (2014)
DRC (east) (2010)	Israel-Palestine: Palestine (2015)
DRC (east ADF) (2010)	Yemen (Houthis) (2019)
Sudan (Darfur) (2020)	Yemen (AQAP) (2019)
Conflicts in countries without a NAP on Resolution 1325	
Ethiopia (Tigray)	Pakistan
Libya	Pakistan (Balochistan)
Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram): Chad	Thailand (south)
Somalia	Turkey (southeast)
Colombia	Egypt (Sinai)
India (Jammu and Kashmir)	Israel-Palestine: Israel
India (CPI-M)	Syria
Myanmar	

*In parentheses, the year of approval of the NAP

1325 on women, peace and security. The event was jointly organised by 11 civil society organisations in Africa, including the Human Sciences Research Council, the Africa Institute of South Africa, the Women's International Peace Centre, Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID), the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), African Women in Dialogue (AfWID), the African Leadership Centre, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Training for Peace (TfP), ACCORD and the South African Department of Science and Innovation. The objectives of the event were to hear the perspectives of women on the progress and challenges since the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 and to chart new paths for women in peace and security in Africa. The discussion focused on four themes: prevention and protection, mediation, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. During the plenary debate, Pravina Makan-Lakha, from ACCORD, referred to the uneven balance of emerging results. For example, in southern Africa, despite increasing female representation in parliaments, this progress is not being translated into realities in the community, as those countries continue to receive poor rankings in the Gender Inequality Index. To illustrate this point, 46.8% of the members of South Africa's Parliament were women in January 2019, yet the country ranked 97th on the Gender Inequality Index. Furthermore, of the 16 peace agreements signed in Africa between 1992 and 2011, only two included women as signatories and only three included women as primary mediators. Pravina Makan-Lakha added that more recently, women in Libya, the CAR, Sudan and South Sudan have faced many obstacles and even open resistance to demands for their participation in peace processes.

The government of Cyprus approved the country's first National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 in 2020. The five-year plan (2021-2025) has four main pillars: 1) participation and empowerment, 2) protection, 3) prevention and 4) the promotion of and information about Resolution 1325. The main objective of the plan is to identify the disproportionate impacts of the armed conflict on women, as well as conflict prevention and resolution through women's experiences. Cyprus' National Action Plan was prepared by the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government ministries and services and enjoyed participation from civil society organisations. Throughout the process, there were several ways to get involved. Civil society organisations participated in the preparations, some of whose contributions were incorporated into the draft, as reported by the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality in June 2019. A month of consultations on the draft took place in February 2020, during which civil society organisations could submit their suggestions and opinions. Initially the plan was planned for the period 2020-2024. In addition to Cyprus, five other countries also approved national action plans in 2020: Malta, Slovakia, Latvia, South Africa and Sudan. The UN Secretary-General's report indicates that by June 2020, only 24% of the NAPs in force had an assigned budget (20 plans).

By the end of 2020, 18 countries in armed conflict situations had a national action plan on Resolution 1325, 11 of them in Africa (Burundi, Cameroon, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, the CAR, the DRC, Sudan and South Sudan). Asia was the region with the least countries in conflict with approved national action plans, since only Afghanistan and the Philippines had one.

Meanwhile, **the UN Security Council approved UNSC Resolution 2538 on peacekeeping in 2020, which focused on female involvement in these missions. This is the first resolution exclusively focused on women and peacekeeping** and was promoted by the Indonesian government. The resolution, which was not approved under the umbrella of the women, peace and security agenda, calls on national governments, the United Nations and regional organisations to promote the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in the security forces and civilians in peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, it specifically demands that member states formulate strategies and take action to boost the deployment of female members of the security forces. The latest statistics available on female participation in peacekeeping forces indicated that women represented 7%, though if a distinction is made between police and military forces, there are notable differences, since women constitute 17.5% of the police forces deployed in UN peacekeeping missions and 5.7% of the military forces. Some analysts mentioned an important change of the wording in the resolution, which did not focus on justifying female participation in missions for their alleged abilities to counteract the negative effects of male involvement in terms of sexual abuse and exploitation. In recent years, essentialising stereotypes of women have been used to argue for their contributions to the operational effectiveness of missions. As such, the responsibility was placed on them to reduce the impact of sexual violence on the civilian population. However, as a result of pressure from some states, the resolution finally did not include such language in its text.

Four women were part of the Afghan government's negotiating delegation in the intra-Afghan dialogue between the Kabul and the Taliban

3.3.2. Gender issues in peace negotiations[42]

Several peace processes were relevant from a gender point of view during the year 2019. Women's organisations demanded greater participation in different negotiations around the world as well as the inclusion of gender agendas. However, in most of the negotiating processes, significant changes were not implemented to include the participation of women in a significant way.

Afghanistan

The peace process in Afghanistan made significant progress in 2020. In February, the US government and the Taliban reached a peace agreement after a negotiating process that took place without the participation of women.[43] The peace agreement did not include any explicit mention of the women, peace and security agenda, women's rights or gender equality, despite the fact that both the 2016 US National Action Plan and the Women, Peace, and Security Act (with the force of law) establish that female participation in peace processes should be promoted. The peace agreement between Washington and the Taliban opened the door to the beginning of an intra-Afghan negotiating process in which some women did participate. The government negotiating team, led by Masum Stanekzai, was made up of people representing different political factions and warlords in the country, while reflecting ethnic and geographic diversity. Four women sat on the team: Fawzia Kufi, Fatema Gailani, Habiba Sarabi and Sharifa Zurmati. The Taliban's negotiating team, led by Abdul Hakim, was entirely male. Women's civil society organisations expressed their demands regarding the peace negotiations.[44] In July, the UN Security Council held a session under the Arria formula[45] on women's participation in the peace process in Afghanistan that involved female Afghan politicians and civil society leaders.

Colombia

The gender approach continued to be a cross-cutting part of the entire implementation of the peace process. The Kroc Institute presented its follow-up report on the application of the gender approach in the peace agreement, noting that there is still a gap with respect to the gender provisions, whose degree of implementation is less than that of the agreement as a whole. The main progress was made in processes that allowed the participation of women, the LGTBI community and indigenous people in the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition, though

42. For more exhaustive information on the incorporation of a gender perspective in currently active peace processes, see the report of Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus. Report on Trends and Scenarios.* Icaria editorial, 2021.
43. See Jorrit Kamminga, Lotje Boswinkel and Tamara Göth, *Because She Matters*, Oxfam International, Cordaid and Association for Inclusive Peace, September 2020 and María Villellas Ariño, "Las negociaciones de paz en Afganistán en un año decisivo" in *ECP notes on conflict and peace* no. 8, November 2020.
44. See the summary on Afghanistan in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus. Report on Trends and Scenarios*. Icaria editorial, 2021.
45. According to the UN Security Council's working methods manual, "Meetings held according to the 'Arria formula', which are very informal in nature, allow members of the Security Council to exchange views frankly and confidentially, in a flexible framework in procedural matters, with people to whom, in the opinion of the member or members of the Council who extend the invitation (who also act as moderators or organisers), it would be interesting to listen or who might wish to convey a message. These meetings provide interested Council members with the opportunity to engage in direct dialogue with senior representatives of governments and international organisations, often upon request, as well as with non-state parties, on issues that affect them and fall within the scope of responsibility of the Security Council".

not as much headway was made in other points of the agreement as was made in participation. Especially serious was the security situation, given the many threats and attacks against female human rights defenders and leaders. The civil society organisation platform GPAZ also evaluated the implementation of the gender approach and noted the slowdown.[46] Meanwhile, other institutions linked to the peace agreement continued their work at the same time. Several initiatives took place as part of the Truth Commission's work, such as hearings on reproductive violence in the armed conflict, in which testimonies were collected from the victims of this violence, recognised as systematic in the armed conflict perpetrated by both the FARC and the state security forces. Moreover, the Fundación Círculo de Estudios issued the report "Right to Voice(s): report on 479 cases of sexual violence due to the armed conflict in Colombia". Women's organisations demanded that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace open a macro process for cases of sexual violence committed during the armed conflict.

Mali

The Carter Center, an independent body in charge of monitoring the implementation of the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement, found that both the Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA) and various international partners have made progress in actively trying to promote women's participation in the monitoring bodies of the peace agreement. Nine women (three for each signatory party) participated in the CSA sessions held in June and November 2020, representing real progress over the composition of the previous CSA. However, the Carter Center pointed out that the inclusion of women in the four subcommittees and the other executing bodies is still pending, as is the creation of Women's Observatories in the northern regions of the country.

Libya

The negotiating process in Libya in 2020 illustrated the challenges for women's participation. The political component of the UN-backed negotiations, the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), formally began its work in November, although it was preceded by consultations in which women, youth and civil society groups were able to make some recommendations. The LPDF was now made up of 75 representatives, 17 of whom are women (23%). The 17 members of the LPDF issued a joint statement with suggestions to improve and boost women's participation in the political process, demanding that women fill at least 30% of the leadership positions in the new executive authority that will result from the negotiations and for a woman to occupy one of the two offices of deputy prime minister. Their statement defended United Nations Resolution 1325 and emphasised the importance of respect for women's rights, steps to combat discrimination against women (especially against survivors of violence associated with the conflict), the provision of legal and psycho-social support services for survivors of gender violence and the protection of female activists and women involved in politics. Along these lines, UN Women warned of the threats and personal risks assumed by the women participating in the LPDF and demanded that action be taken to guarantee their protection and participation in the process.

Yemen

During 2020, Yemeni women's organisations repeated their demands for inclusion in the negotiations to address the conflicts rattling the country. After the approval of Yemen's National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 in December 2019, which was not formally presented by Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi's internationally recognised government until May 2020, activists and organisations criticised some aspects of the text and the approval process, but also welcomed the explicit commitment to the inclusion of women in 30% of the peace negotiation team and urged its implementation. Throughout the year, platforms such as the "Group of Nine", made up of nine women's and youth civil society organisations, stressed the need for an inclusive peace process and demanded that all the contending parties effectively commit to a ceasefire, in tune with the UN Secretary-General's call for a global truce to focus efforts on responding to the pandemic. Since April, the UN special envoy for Yemen had tried to negotiate a joint statement with the internationally recognised government and the Houthis, with a focus on a ceasefire, humanitarian measures and the reactivation of the political process. Organisations such as the Peace Track Initiative warned in July that civil society was not being consulted in the process, including women's and youth groups. At the same time, the Women Solidarity Network and others put forward concrete proposals for a ceasefire in the governorate of Ma'rib, the scene of rising hostilities since the first quarter of 2020. At the end of the year, after the formation of a unity government between Hadi's forces and southern secessionist groups as part of the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, women's groups complained that it was made up exclusively of men. They denounced the marginalisation of women and recalled the conclusions of the National Dialogue Conference (2013-14), whose conclusions included a minimum of 30% female participation in all decision-making spheres.

European Union

The European Union's new guidance document on mediation, *Concept on EU Peace Mediation*, approved in December 2020, which replaces *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities* (2009), strengthened the gender dimension as compared to the previous framework document. *Concept on EU Peace Mediation* specifies the promotion of gender

46. GPAZ, *La paz avanza con las mujeres. Observaciones sobre la incorporación del enfoque de género en el Acuerdo de Paz, GPAZ – 2019,* GPAZ, 2020.

equality and the empowerment of women as one of its 12 principles, broadening the focus with respect to the equivalent principle in 2009, then focused on promoting female participation. In its current form, the EU is committed to the full implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, including the application of international standards to support mediation with a gender perspective. The EU is also committed to including and facilitating female participants as mediators, chief negotiators and political representatives. A minimum threshold of 33% is set for female participation in all EU action related to peace processes. The new framework document also emphasises the importance of the systematic integration of a gender perspective in all mediation and conflict prevention activities. Furthermore, the EU undertakes to support women's active and effective participation in peace processes and highlights the work of national and regional networks of female mediators. The document also incorporates other principles, such as that of inclusiveness, in which the EU also commits to systematic consultation with civil society and in which it specifically designates women as a part of the population to which it should pay special attention regarding their substantive participation. As in previous stages, the main challenge in relation to the EU gender commitments to mediation lay in their implementation and in the transition towards an organisational culture that systematically integrates gender analysis and practices with a gender perspective, given the shortcomings and gaps identified in various recent studies.[47]

Women's organisations suggested including the principles of gender equality and the assumptions of the women, peace and security agenda in the UN Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire

3.3.3. Civil society initiatives

Different peacebuilding initiatives led and carried out by women's civil society organisations took place in 2020. This section reviews some of the most important ones.

In March, the UN Secretary-General sent out his **call for a global ceasefire** due to the coronavirus pandemic, urging all armed actors to cease violence to guarantee the protection and health of the population in places affected by armed conflict. In response to his appeal, different civil society organisations expressed their support for the initiative. Women's organisations suggested including the principles of gender equality and the assumptions of the women, peace and security agenda in his appeal. Thus, five organisations (WILPF, MADRE, Kvinna till Kvinna, Medica Mondiale and the Nobel Women's Initiative) came together to present five feminist principles for a meaningful ceasefire, including guarantees for the full and effective participation of women and civil society groups; action based on social, economic and humanitarian priorities; the prioritisation of urgent and non-discriminatory access to services for survivors; a commitment to taking practical action to ensure the sustainability of ceasefires; and the reallocation of military expenditure to fund local civil society initiatives for recovery, reconciliation and reconstruction.

Moreover, more than 90 women's organisations from **Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Palestine** issued a joint statement echoing the Secretary-General's call, urging the armed actors of the Arab countries to observe the ceasefire and begin negotiating processes to end the armed conflicts affecting the region. The appeal was made to coincide with the religious holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

Thousands of women demonstrated in four of the main cities of the **DRC** in October, demanding justice for the sexual violence and murders committed in the armed conflict in the country. The demonstrations were peaceful, although in Kisangani, one of the towns where many of the abuses investigated by the UN took place, the authorities prohibited the demonstration and the police intervened by using excessive force, beating the protesters. The largest demonstration, in Bukavu, was joined by around 3,500 victims of sexual violence. Led by lawyers, it commemorated the 10-year anniversary since the United Nations documented hundreds of crimes that had taken place in the country between 1993 and 2003. The demonstrations were supported by Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege, who is committed to caring for and supporting victims of sexual violence. Solidarity with Mukwege was expressed during the protests, who had received threats because of his work with victims of sexual violence. The head of the OHCHR, Michelle Bachelet, had condemned the threats made against Mukwege and asked the Congolese government to guarantee the safety of the Nobel laureate, his family and the work carried out at Panzi Hospital in Bukavu. As a result of the pandemic, in May the UN had withdrawn the protection it offered Mukwege, though it restored it in September. One of the demonstrators' demands was for the 2010 United Nations reports to serve as the basis for prosecuting those responsible and for the international organisation to be required to publish the names of perpetrators that had not previously been disclosed.

Women played a leading role in the massive protests against Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime in **Belarus**, both before and after the August presidential election, which was won by Lukashenko, who had been in power for 26 years, while the opposition denounced electoral fraud. Women participated both in street demonstrations and in opposition political leadership. Activists from Belarus stressed the high number of female participants with nonviolent strategies for action. Some local feminists also said that the way some protests were represented and promoted, such as those of the Women in White,

47. See chapter 4 (Opportunities for peace).

played on stereotypes and were described as a march of beautiful women, showing that women were not yet perceived as political actors.[48] Women were involved in the protests both before and after the election. After the election, the protests continued to have a high level of female participation. Notable in this regard was the first women's march following the first three days of post-election protests, which included more than 200 women and suffered serious police violence. Some analysts described this demonstration as a catalyst, multiplying people's participation in successive protests, specifically including women, and helping to focus on a nonviolent strategy for action.

The disqualification of the candidacies of Sergei Tikhanovsky, Viktor Babariko and Valery Tsepkalo, and their personal persecution, led to the political initiative of several women, some of them without previous experience in the political sphere. Tikhanovsky's wife, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, presented her candidacy, which was authorised by the authorities and received the support of Babariko and Tsepkalo. In addition, Veronika Tsepkalo (Valery Tsepkalo's wife) and Maria Kalesnikava (Babariko's press officer) joined Tikhanovskaya's team, promoting female political leadership and thereby questioning the decade-long regime of male domination and vertical power politics. They also challenged Lukahshenko's delegitimising strategies, as he questioned Tikhanovskaya's candidacy during the campaign through gender stereotypes. Some analysts mentioned the regime's underestimation of female candidates. Opposition activists said that Lukashenko's misogyny was a factor that mobilised many women against him.

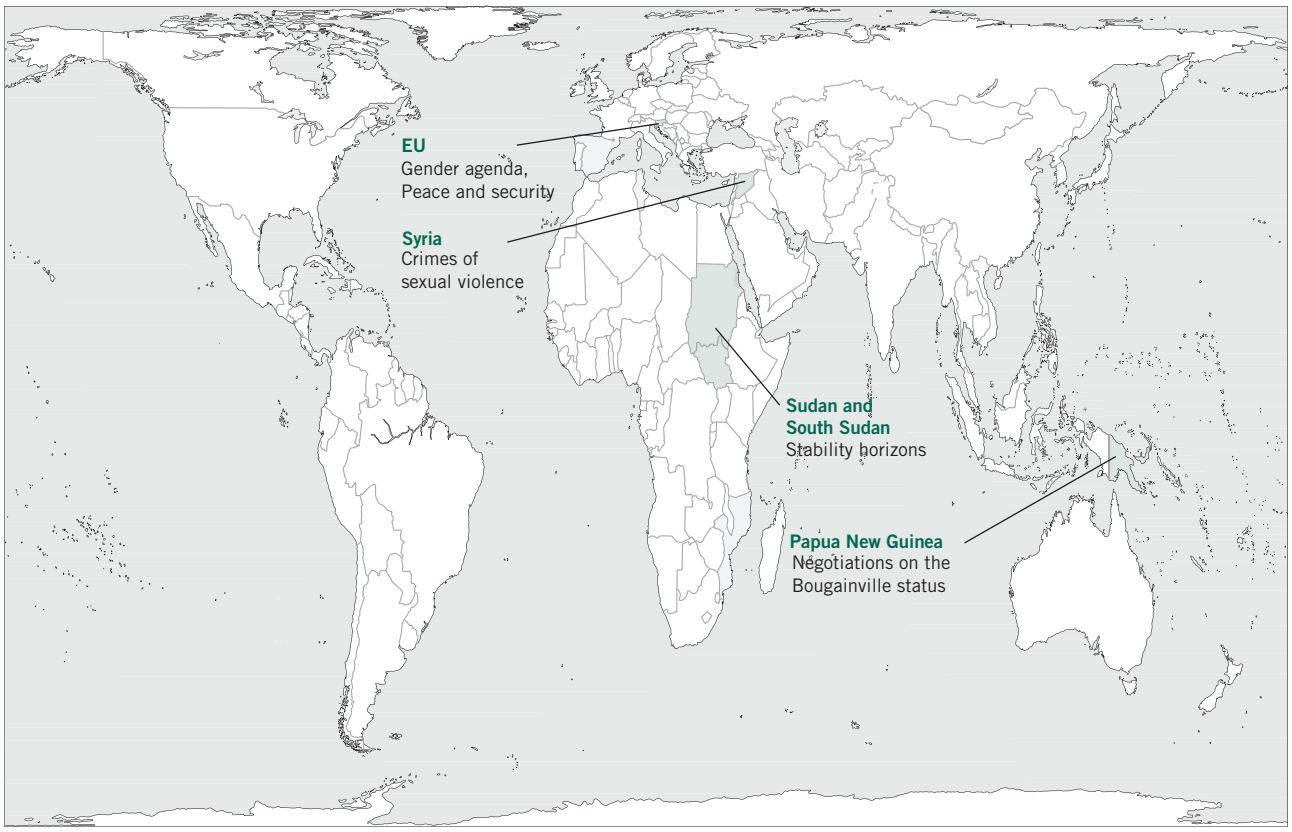
48. WILPF, *The "Women in White" and Belarus' Emerging Women's Movement*, WILPF, 16 October 2020.

4. Opportunities for peace in 2021

After analysing the year 2020 from the perspective of conflicts and peacebuilding, the UAB's School for a Culture of Peace highlights in this chapter five areas that are opportunities for peace in 2021. They are contexts where there is, or has been, an armed conflict or socio-political crisis in the past where a series of factors converge that could lead to a positive turn in the situation and/or issues of the international agenda that may, in the short to mid-term, contribute to building peace. The opportunities identified for 2021 refer to the new horizons, challenges and hopes for stability in the Sudan region; the negotiations between Papua New Guinea and Bougainville; the fight against impunity and prosecution of crimes of sexual violence in Syria; and the perspectives of a greater focus on the gender, peace and security agenda in the EU.

All these opportunities for peace will require a real commitment and huge efforts from the parties involved and, whenever required, the support of international actors for the existing synergies and positive factors to lead to the building of peace. In this regard, the analysis by the School for a Culture of Peace aims at offering a realistic view of these scenarios and issues, identifying the positive elements that feed the hope for changes, but without neglecting the difficulties that exist and could be an obstacle for the realisation of these peace opportunities to come true.

Map 4.1. **Opportunities for peace in 2021**



4.1. New horizons, challenges and hopes for stability in the Sudan region

In the last decade, the region including Sudan and South Sudan has gone from a major political crisis that escalated after the independence of South Sudan in July 2011, to the initiation of transitional processes in recent years that have opened a new path of hope for the construction and consolidation of peace and stability in the area. While the January 2011 referendum in the southern Sudan region –foreseen in the 2005 peace agreement– resulted in the birth of the South Sudanese state, representing a turning point in the armed confrontations in the region, South Sudanese independence triggered new processes of confrontation and violence within both states. In Sudan, the regions of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, which had been excluded from the referendum, continued the war against the government in Khartoum with the SPLM-N, thus joining the other front of armed conflict in the west of the country, in the region of Darfur. Meanwhile, in South Sudan, a year and a half after the proclamation of independence in December 2013, civil war broke out, marked by lines of allegiance between supporters of President Salva Kiir and former Vice-President Riek Machar. At the same time, tensions between Khartoum and Juba increased with mutual accusations of supporting the neighbour's rebellions, as well as disputes over the unfinished border demarcation between the two states, with the Abyei enclave as the main focus of tension.

Both countries have successfully signed a peace agreement and implemented transitional processes in recent years

However, in recent years, due to significant external pressures on the countries to put an end to the violence, as well as the increase in protests and citizen mobilisation, mainly in the case of Sudan, a new scenario has emerged in the two Sudans, marked by the creation of two transitional governments, as well as the signing of two important peace agreements that have opened new horizons in the region. In Sudan, following the fall of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 –after 30 years in power– a transitional government was set up by the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the opposing coalition known as Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) in mid-2019.[1] Subsequently, in October 2020, the new government succeeded in signing a historic peace agreement with some of the main armed actors in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, the rebel coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), the Sudan Liberation Movement faction led by Minni Minnawi (SLM/A-MM) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) faction led by Malik Agar. In parallel, but in reverse, in South Sudan, the 2015 peace agreement, renamed the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), was ratified in August 2018, leading to the formation of the long-awaited Government of Unity (RTGoNU) in February 2020. A noteworthy aspect of both processes is that in achieving stability in each country, the engagement and mediation of the neighbouring state in the signing of the peace agreement has been fundamental –Khartoum hosted the signing of the South Sudan peace agreement, while Juba played a similar role in the northern neighbour's peace agreement– which has smoothed bilateral and diplomatic relations between the two states and facilitated progress in easing tensions over the unresolved border demarcation.

In both states, the clauses on the formation of the transitional governments and the peace agreements establish different aspects relating to the sharing of political power (at the state level –executive and legislative bodies– and at the sub-state level), the political-administrative decentralisation of the territory, reforms of the political, legal, economic and security sector systems (formation of armies of unity), and the establishment of a road map for the transitional period (about three years in both states), which should lead to the holding of elections, scheduled for 2022 in the case of South Sudan, and 2024 in the case of Sudan.

To accompany the development of the transitional process and stabilisation in both countries, the United Nations has kept peacekeeping missions deployed. In the case of Sudan: the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), which is the latest mission approved by the Security Council in June 2020 in its resolution 2524 (2020). In South Sudan: the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), deployed since 2011. In the disputed enclave of Abyei, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) remains in place. In addition to these missions, regional organisations such as the AU and IGAD, guarantors of the peaceagreements, are committed to ensuring their proper implementation.

Although important steps towards peacebuilding and stability have been taken in both countries, the major challenges on the horizon relate, on the one hand, to the capacity to incorporate non-signatory armed actors into the peace accords, and on the other, to the stabilisation of the transitional governments and compliance with the agreed roadmap. Regarding the former, in Sudan the government is engaged in a dialogue process with

1. See Josep María Royo Aspa, "La revolución sudanesa y sus mujeres de Pau", *Apunts ECP de Conflictes i Pau*, Núm.1, Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2020.

the faction of the rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu (SPLM-N) and with the faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Abdelwahid al-Nur (SLM/A-AW). At the same time, the situation in South Sudan is similar, with peace talks being held between the government and non-signatory groups to the R-ARCSS, initially organised through the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA). These talks led to the signing of the "Rome Declaration on the Peace Process in South Sudan" on 12 January 2020, in which the parties committed themselves to a ceasefire, humanitarian access and continued dialogue. The rebel SSOMA coalition fractured in mid-2020 due to disagreements between its organisations, but talks are still taking place at separate tables. On the other hand, in relation to consolidating progress in the transition, while important steps have been taken to date, both countries need to find effective ways to reduce the animosity and regional-ethnic-identity fractures forged over decades, as well as to reduce the effects of the collapse of their economies on society and rebuild society's trust in their institutions after years of poor governance. The deadline for meeting these important challenges is 2022 in the case of South Sudan and 2024 in the case of Sudan, and therefore the progress made over the next few years will be crucial for the future of the region.

4.2. The negotiations between Papua New Guinea and Bougainville

During 2020, the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) laid the foundations for a negotiating process that could lead to resolution of the political status of the island of Bougainville and thereby complete a peace process begun in the 1990s. Indeed, after an armed conflict between 1988 and 1998 in which around 20,000 people died, the government of Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army signed a truce in 1998 that facilitated the signing of the Arawa Agreement in 2001. Among other issues, the Arawa Agreement provided for the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARB), the disarmament and demobilisation of the combatants and the holding of a non-binding independence referendum within a maximum period of 15 years after the election of the first ARB government, which finally took place in 2005. The clear results of the referendum, which was held in late 2019 (with 87% turnout and 98% of the votes in favour of the island's independence), motivated the start of the dialogue between the authorities of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, which should lead to a proposal on the political status of Bougainville that will have to be ratified by the national Parliament.[2]

Negotiations between Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Government of Bougainville open the possibility of completing a peace process that began in the 1990s, implementing the 2001 peace agreement and making a consensual decision on the island's political status

Although the COVID-19 pandemic, the elections in Bougainville and the outbreak of a political crisis within the government of Papua New Guinea slowed down the start of negotiations in 2020, at various times during the year both parties repeated their commitment to the negotiating process and their respect for the results of the referendum. In early January 2021, Papuan Prime Minister James Marape and new ARB President Ishmael Toroama met in the country's capital, Port Moresby, and agreed on the bases of the negotiating process, such as the institutional framework of the negotiations, the substantive agenda and the facilitation of dialogue at the hands of a neutral third party (in late 2020, it had emerged that such a role would fall to Bertie Ahern, the former Prime Minister of Ireland and chairman of the Bougainville Referendum Commission). Both leaders also agreed that in recent years the Autonomous Government of Bougainville had complied with two of the three fundamental pillars of the peace agreement (good governance and the disarmament and demobilisation of combatants) and reiterated that previously both governments had agreed that the concept of independence included full sovereignty, recognition under international law and separation from Papua New Guinea.[3] This last point is important because according to some analysts, the government of Papua New Guinea could have tried to focus the negotiations on economic independence and self-determination, excluding from the dialogue the separation of Bougainville from the rest of the country.

Several analysts have stressed the importance of the leadership of both parties to the negotiations. James Marape took office as Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea a few months before the referendum was held. According to various media outlets, he facilitated the organisation of the referendum and expressed respect for it in advance. Furthermore, the President of Bougainville assumed office after the elections that were held between 12 August 1 and September 2020, the fifth since autonomous status was granted to Bougainville, in which Toroama defeated the other 24 candidates running by a wide margin. The fact that Ishmael Toroama had been commander of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and that he had played an important role in the demobilisation of the group could strengthen the negotiating process in two ways: first, because the negotiations on the political status of the island are going to be one of his government's priorities, as he has already stated; and second, because his personal background could give him some sway and political influence over groups that may be more sceptical of the developments or the outcome of the negotiations, now or in the future.

Another factor bolstering the negotiating process is the international support that it has enjoyed thus far. In the 1990s and the early 21st century, the United Nations was actively involved in supervising the truce signed in 1998 (Lincoln Agreement), in facilitating the political dialogue that led to the 2001 peace agreement and in supervising its implementation through the United Nations Political Office in Bougainville (attached to the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and not the Department of Peacekeeping Affairs) and the United Nations Observer Mission in Bougainville. Since the late 1990s, several countries in the region, such as Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu and Fiji, actively participated in the Truce Monitoring Group and later in the Peace Monitoring Group, which were essential to verifying the disarmament process. More recently, former Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern chaired the Bougainville Referendum Commission, which is charged with organising it. In 2018, the authorities of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville agreed to create

2. Ben Bohane, *The Bougainville referendum and beyond*, Lowy Institute, October 2019.
3. Keith Jackson, "Crucial Bougainville independence talks begin", PNG Attitude.com, 13 January 2021.

the Post-referendum Planning Task Force ahead of the negotiations that both governments were supposed to begin after the referendum was held, doing so through the Joint Supervisory Body, the main tool for implementing the peace agreement. The Task Force enjoyed the support and participation of UNDP and the British NGO Conciliation Resources. In fact, both governments have formally asked the United Nations to support the joint secretariat of this negotiating process and in late 2020 the media reported that Bertie Ahern had been appointed the facilitator for the consultations by both governments. In recent years, UNDP, UN Women and UNFPA have implemented projects of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund to guarantee the inclusiveness of the peace process as a whole and the negotiating process on the political status of Bougainville, as well as the participation of women, youth and former combatants in both processes, and have expressed their intention to continue doing so in the future. In this regard, in late January the Autonomous Government of Bougainville organised the Bougainville Consultation Forum in the city of Buka, in which a team of 56 representatives from various civil society organisations was formed to hear the demands of civil society and help the authorities of Bougainville to design their negotiating strategy with the government of Papua New Guinea. In mid-June, the Bougainville Women's Federation Bill was approved, which according to the Autonomous Government of Bougainville guarantees female participation in decision-making processes in the political sphere and also in the private sector.

Despite the good political disposition of both negotiating parties, the support of the international community and efforts to make the process as participatory and inclusive as possible, the upcoming negotiations between Port Moresby and Bougainville also face some significant challenges, since according to the peace agreement, the independence referendum is not binding, the final result of the negotiations must be ratified by the national Parliament and the negotiations between both authorities do not have a defined timetable.[4] In fact, some media outlets have indicated that from Port Moresby's perspective, these negotiations could take several years. In fact, if both authorities fail to agree on a joint proposal, the current status quo will prevail. Even though Prime Minister Marape has shown greater support for holding the referendum than his predecessors in office from the outset, on several occasions he has insisted on a third way beyond the two proposed in the referendum (independence or greater autonomy), which would consist of economic independence for the region.[5] Marape has occasionally also indicated that he considers the economic empowerment of Bougainville more important than the political aspect of the negotiations between the two authorities. In addition to these more structural issues, some in Bougainville were also sceptical about the political desire of the government of Papua New Guinea to initiate the negotiating process, especially after the formal meeting of the Joint Supervisory Body scheduled for late November 2020 did not take place, in which fundamental aspects of the negotiations were supposed to be discussed. The meeting had been agreed upon by Marape and Toroama in a previous meeting in Port Moresby, but it could not be held in the end due to the political situation of the government of Papua New Guinea, which was rattled by the resignation of several ministers and the possibility that the opposition would present a motion of censure against Marape.

Furthermore, some analysts of the political situation in Bougainville argue that holding a referendum on self-determination with such high turnout rates and with such a clear result could fuel centrifugal tensions and demands for greater self-government in Papua New Guinea, a state made up of many islands, while also strengthening demands to hold referenda in the region. Examples of this include New Caledonia (France), which held a referendum in September 2020; the island of Chuuk (Micronesia), whose referendum is scheduled for March 2020 (postponed until 2022); the Indonesian region of West Papua, where Papuan nationalist organisations argue that the 1969 referendum that incorporated the region into Indonesia had major flaws and failed to express the majority of the population's feelings about the political status of West Papua, so the region did not in fact exercise its right to self-determination; and even the Indonesian province of Aceh, where despite the signing of a peace agreement in 2005 that provided for higher levels of autonomy than the rest of the country's provinces, some have recently called for a referendum on self-determination.

Despite all the uncertainties and risks looming in the future, the political negotiations recently begun by the governments of Bougainville and Papua New Guinea not only open the possibility of fully implementing the 2001 peace agreement, overcoming one of the most lethal conflicts in the region in recent decades and making a consensual decision on the political status of the island, but they can also serve as an interesting example of conflict resolution for self-determination as long as the exercise of this principle (in this case in the form of a referendum) is agreed by both parties to the conflict and is contingent on achieving the other fundamental pillars of the peace agreement: the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants, the establishment of autonomous institutions in Bougainville and the subsequent deployment of good governance policies on the island.

4. Gordon Peake, *Consulting on Bougainville's future: the what, who, how and when*, The Interpreter, 8 July 2020.
5. Kylie McKenna, *The Bougainville referendum: celebrations turn to sadness and hope*, The Interpreter, 20 January 2020.

4.3. Towards greater focus on the gender, peace and security agenda in the EU?

In recent years, the European Union's (EU) regulatory framework for the international women, peace and security agenda has broadened and strengthened its formal dimension. Several steps have been taken that make the new framework a potential tool for use by women's organisations in conflict zones and/or in peace processes that demand for women's effective participation, among others. Formal advances include a stronger and more comprehensive framework, greater connections between complementary agendas, as well as some openness to intersectionality. However, risks and obstacles remain, including the chronic gap between formal commitments and practical implementation, as well as the burden of incoherent policies, where the women, peace and security agenda –which aims to defend women's rights and promote women's agency– coexists with other European policies that undermine women's rights, such as migration policies or the promotion of large free trade agreements.

Among the developments shaping this opportunity, notable is the strengthening of the policy framework of the EU's women, peace and security agenda, which has been updated and reinforced in recent years. On the one hand, at the end of 2018 the EU adopted the Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security, which replaces, updates and expands the previous Comprehensive Approach to Women, Peace and Security of 2008. The Strategic Approach represents a qualitative step forward, strengthening the dimension of women's agency and the human rights approach and gender analysis aspects of conflicts, promoting effective participation in peace processes, making the prevention dimension more robust, and broadening references to the spectrum of EU actors with responsibilities for the implementation of the agenda, among other elements. Among the objectives of the new framework are the promotion of women's leadership and agency in all areas related to peace and security, the substantive participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution, as well as the prevention of all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, and the promotion and protection of the full exercise of women's human rights and the empowerment of women and girls. It establishes among other principles the nexus between internal and external policy, stating that the women, peace and security agenda is universally applicable and should therefore be systematically implemented by all EU actors in all internal and external policies, programmes and actions. Civil society organisations at the EU level participating in the gender working group of the European Peacebuilding Liasion Office (EPLO) platform were able to influence the drafting process, so that many of their recommendations were incorporated into the officially approved document.

The new regulatory framework of the EU's women, peace and security agenda offers opportunities for women's organisations in conflicts, although implementation and policy coherence deficits remain

Moreover, unlike the previous framework document of 2008, the Strategic Approach has been accompanied by an Action Plan. It includes six objectives (participation, gender mainstreaming, leadership by example, prevention, protection and assistance/recovery), criteria for determining the degree of attainment of the objectives, as well as actions (short-, medium- and long-term) related to each objective, which it assigns to the respective EU actors. It includes relevant actions for the implementation of the agenda, such as establishing and institutionalising a mechanism to consult with women from diverse backgrounds and civil society organisations, both in Member States and in conflict-related settings, where the EU is operating (action 1.6), as well as the development and application of systematic gender and conflict analysis into all EU contributions to conflict prevention and peacebuilding (action 4.1). The Action Plan therefore establishes and operationalises commitments to the broad Strategic Approach, potentially enhancing opportunities for implementation of the agenda and accountability. However, the indicators and criteria for meeting the objectives are vague and make it difficult to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan. Moreover, in many cases, the proposed actions are accompanied by a certain degree of ambiguity that can either lead to anecdotal implementation or move towards a more systematic practice. Nevertheless, the approval of the plan is a step forward in that it creates a tool with practical objectives and actions.

Another significant element is the recent integration of the women, peace and security agenda into the so-called gender equality and women's empowerment agenda (GEWE, the successor to the EU's gender and development agenda). In previous decades, both EU agendas –their circuits, actors– had remained largely disconnected from each other, despite the obvious links between the two. And although a basic tenet of the women, peace and security agenda has been gender mainstreaming, the EU –like other governance actors on the international stage– has for the most part kept the women, peace and security agenda isolated from other agendas and policies. The new Gender Action Plan III (2020-2025) incorporates the women, peace and security agenda –together with the objectives of the women, peace and security action plan– as one of its six thematic areas, finally aligning both agendas and expanding their potential. In addition, the update to the EU framework document on mediation has included a reinforcement of

its gender perspective, thereby advancing the alignment of these policies. Thus, the Concept on EU Peace Mediation, adopted in 2020, expands and strengthens its principle of "promoting gender equality and women's empowerment" and mainstreaming certain gender elements. Among other concrete elements, the EU sets a minimum of 33% participation of women in all EU actions related to peace processes, underlines the importance of mainstreaming gender through gender analysis and its incorporation into political agendas, and commits to the implementation of international gender standards to support mediation. While this is a step forward and an opportunity, limitations in terms of commitments and accountability may continue to place their implementation in the realm of anecdotal practice, rather than a move towards their full integration.

Another element of progress, with the potential to be used by civil society actors, is the intersectional dimension. While the new regulatory and operational framework for women, peace and security (Strategic Approach and Action Plan) is weak on intersectionality –Member States' resistance to include references to LGBTI people led to the need to circumvent this with references to non-discrimination– the recent adoption by the European Commission of the first ever LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 potentially opens the door to an intersectional approach to the women, peace and security agenda. Although this is not the focus of the Strategy, it combines the identification of a series of priority actions with attention to and mainstreaming of LGTBIQ-specific needs and concerns in all EU policies, legislation and funding.

However, alongside the formal advances that have been made in recent years, accompanied in some cases by practical experiences in which the EU has supported the promotion of women's participation in peace processes and dialogue initiatives, the exchange of experiences between women involved in peacebuilding and the strengthening of national frameworks (e.g. Georgia, Yemen's national dialogue prior to the resumption of the war, Syria, among others), in practice there are many obstacles and challenges that limit the potential of the EU's women, peace and security agenda. As in the case of other international actors, progress is still low, with anecdotal practices rather than systematic integration of the gender dimension in all policies, and little accountability. Many women's civil society organisations in countries in the global South continue to perceive the EU as remote from their needs and priorities, inaccessible and overly bureaucratic in its processes, and tending in practice to prioritise large organisations. Furthermore, the course of various policies of the EU and its Member States (e.g. increasing militarisation, migration policy, promotion of large free trade agreements, among others) are in direct collision with women's human rights in many territories, as well as with the sustainability of their ecosystems, perpetuating processes of gender inequality, exclusion and violence.

Against this background, the EU's women, peace and security agenda is an opportunity –albeit a limited one– insofar as it is a framework that sets out commitments and obligations for the EU and possible avenues of support that can be used by women's organisations in contexts of conflict and tension to advocate for their rights in their interactions with the EU. Numerous constraints and obstacles, including substantive policy incoherence, limit, but do not nullify, its potential. As with the international women, peace and security agenda as a whole, the EU agenda is a further tool –with its strengths and weaknesses– and potentially a strategic one, and any interaction with the EU in the area of women, peace and security will require awareness and caution regarding its limitations.

4.4. Fight against impunity and prosecution of crimes of sexual violence in Syria

Ten years ago, Syria became another scene of the popular uprisings that shook the entire North Africa and Middle East region. A decade later, the brutal repression of Bashar Assad's regime and the developments of the armed conflict have decimated demands for peaceful change, making the country synonymous with violence, devastation and extremely serious suffering among the civilian population. More than half a million people have died as a result of the conflict, half the country's population has been forced to flee their homes due to the violence and millions of Syrians are surviving amidst a severe humanitarian crisis and a marked rise in poverty. And that is far from all. In recent years, Syria has also become an emblematic case worldwide due to systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Countless reports from the United Nations and international NGOs have blamed the armed actors involved in the conflict for a wide range of abuses. These violations have continued and persist in a context of impunity, setting a dangerous precedent. In this context, and given the obstruction of other options to hold the perpetrators accountable, recent initiatives, some of which appeal to the principle of universal jurisdiction, encourage an incipient hope of justice and reparation for victims of the conflict, including survivors of sexual violence.

The need for accountability for crimes perpetrated in Syria has been on the table since the beginning of the armed conflict. References to it are already mentioned in the Geneva Communiqué (2012), a reference document for the peace negotiations on Syria that outlined principles that were supposed to guide an eventual transition in the country. There have also been various calls and initiatives for the case to be studied by the International Criminal Court, though this last avenue has been blocked by Russia and China's veto. Moscow, a staunch ally of Damascus, has warned that it will not allow the creation of a special tribunal similar to those established for Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, other international mechanisms have been put in place with a view to combating impunity and assigning responsibility. The UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has regularly documented abuse committed during the conflict. In 2016, the UN General Assembly created the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to collect, preserve and analyse evidence of human rights violations, international humanitarian law and other abuses in Syria in order to facilitate and expedite court proceedings. In 2017, the UN Security Council established an Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL. Although its priority is to support the Iraqi authorities' efforts to bring justice to this issue, its work is also important for violations that have taken place in Syria, given the transnational nature of the armed group's activity. More recently, in 2020, the Netherlands has tried to open another avenue by notifying the Syrian government that it intends to pursue responsibility for the massive allegations of torture in the regime's detention centres through a "dispute" procedure before the International Court of Justice. Although the initiative is still pending a series of procedures, human rights organisations have said that this route opens another gap in the concerted obstruction of efforts to ensure accountability in Syria.[6]

In recent years, the joint efforts of international human rights organisations, Syrian organisations and survivors of the armed conflict have also called for opening a series of judicial processes in mostly European third countries, appealing to the principle of universal jurisdiction. According to this principle, a national court can try individuals for their role in cases of torture, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, assuming that these violations affect and erode the international community as a whole. That is, it allows for the investigation and prosecution of crimes regardless of where they were committed or the nationality of the victims and provides the possibility of seeking justice, deterring new abuse and preventing certain countries from becoming safe havens for human rights violators.[2] Therefore, proceedings related to the Syrian armed conflict have been initiated in Austria, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands. Most of the cases seek to prosecute perpetrators who are in the respective countries. Thus, for example, in January 2020, Islam Alloush, a senior official of the armed group Jaysh al-Islam, was arrested and charged in France for the kidnapping and disappearance of prominent human rights defenders and activists in Syria in 2013, including Razan Zaitouneh and Samira Khalil, in addition to other crimes. Alloush was arrested in Marseille following a complaint by the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). France has also issued arrest warrants for three senior Syrian military officials in connection with the disappearance of two Franco-Syrian citizens.

Many of the cases target senior security and intelligence officials of Bashar Assad's regime. One prominent example is the lawsuit filed with the German public prosecutor's office in June 2020 by seven survivors of sexual violence against high-ranking officials of the regime, the first legal action taken against this type of abuse. The lawsuit was filed by four women and three men who were detained in four prisons run by the Syrian Air Force Intelligence Directorate between April 2011 and October 2013, a period in which they suffered or

6. Balkees Jarrah, "The Netherlands' Action against Syria: A New Path to Justice", *Just Security*, 22 September 2020.
7. Human Rights Watch, *Germany: Syria Torture Trial Opens. Universal Jurisdiction Provides Opening for Justice*, HRW, 23 April 2020.

witnessed various forms of sexual violence, including rape, threats of rape, sexual harassment, electric shocks to the genitals and forced abortion. The complaint was filed by the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) together with the Syrian Women's Network and Urnammu, and enjoyed the support of 40 other Syrian organisations and international feminist organisations. They have urged the German justice system to investigate crimes against humanity in Syria, giving priority to those of a sexual and gender-related nature. This lawsuit complements another brought against nine high-ranking officials of the regime in 2017 that already contributed to the issuance of an arrest warrant in 2018 against Jamil Hassan, then chief of the Air Force Intelligence Directorate. According to witnesses, Hassan was aware of the episodes of sexual violence committed in the facilities under his command and did not act to stop them. The lawsuit brought by survivors of sexual violence also coincides with the start of an emblematic trial in Germany against two former senior Syrian intelligence officials in April 2020, the first trial in the world against Syrian government agents in a decade of armed conflict. The Koblenz case has put Eyad A. and Anwar R. in the dock, the latter the highest-ranking Syrian official prosecuted in Europe, on charges of supervising the torture of more than 4,000 people in the Khatib detention centre (Damascus), in addition to accusations of murder, rape and sexual abuse.

Syrian and international organisations that are promoting reports to prosecute crimes of sexual violence have stressed the need to address them not as isolated cases, but to take into account the magnitude of the phenomenon in Syria and prosecute them as war crimes and/or crimes against humanity.[8] Various armed actors have been denounced for their responsibility for this type of abuse, but the forces of the regime and its related militias have especially been singled out, accused of using sexual and gender-based violence as a form of torture and as part of a deliberate strategy to punish civilians and weaken the political opposition. In 2018, a specific report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic found that rape and other forms of sexual abuse had been persistent in the country during the conflict since 2011, that women and girls had been disproportionately affected by these crimes (although abuse against men and minors has also been documented), and that they constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.[9] Sexual violence has been used to humiliate, frighten, extract confessions and intimidate. Nevertheless, the sexual violence perpetrated by the regime's forces has not sparked substantive discussion in places such as the UN Security Council, which has tended to focus its attention on other actors, such as ISIS and its serious abuse of the Yazidi population.[10]

Despite its prevalence, sexual and gender-based violence is one of the least frequently reported crimes. It is a sensitive issue in a patriarchal society where it is not only an affront to the victim, but also to the honour of her family and community. As such, there is a need to judge these crimes quickly to minimise the suffering of the survivors, who in addition to suffering the direct consequences of the abuse, are also affected by social stigma, discrimination and even marginalisation and rejection in their immediate environment. Syrian and international organisations have stressed the need for gender-sensitive justice that is not limited to legal mechanisms and that addresses the structural and less visible effects of sexual violence, including its economic, social and political dimensions and its effects on perpetuating the inferior status of women. They have also warned that the proliferation of weapons and the absence of protective mechanisms in Syria continue to be an obstacle for victims to report abuse and gain access to justice. Along these lines, a series of recommendations have been made, including holding not just individuals responsible for the use of sexual violence, but also the regime, and trying all responsible actors and excluding them from any type of amnesty.[11] In compliance with current regulatory frameworks, such as UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008), great importance has been placed on integrating the issue of sexual violence into any possible negotiations or agreement on the future of Syria.[12] The peace agreement in Colombia has set a precedent and may serve as an example in this regard.

The incipient and still timid steps towards accountability for the crimes perpetrated in Syria are currently the only hope for victims, including survivors of sexual violence. Efforts in this area should be intensified, with more initiatives exploring alternative avenues to prevent the perpetrators of abuse and the Syrian regime from continuing to feel untouchable. Judicial processes in third countries that appeal to the principles of universal jurisdiction represent one of these avenues, with an important symbolic role in the fight against impunity. Justice and reparation must be key aspects of any future peace and reconciliation effort for Syria.

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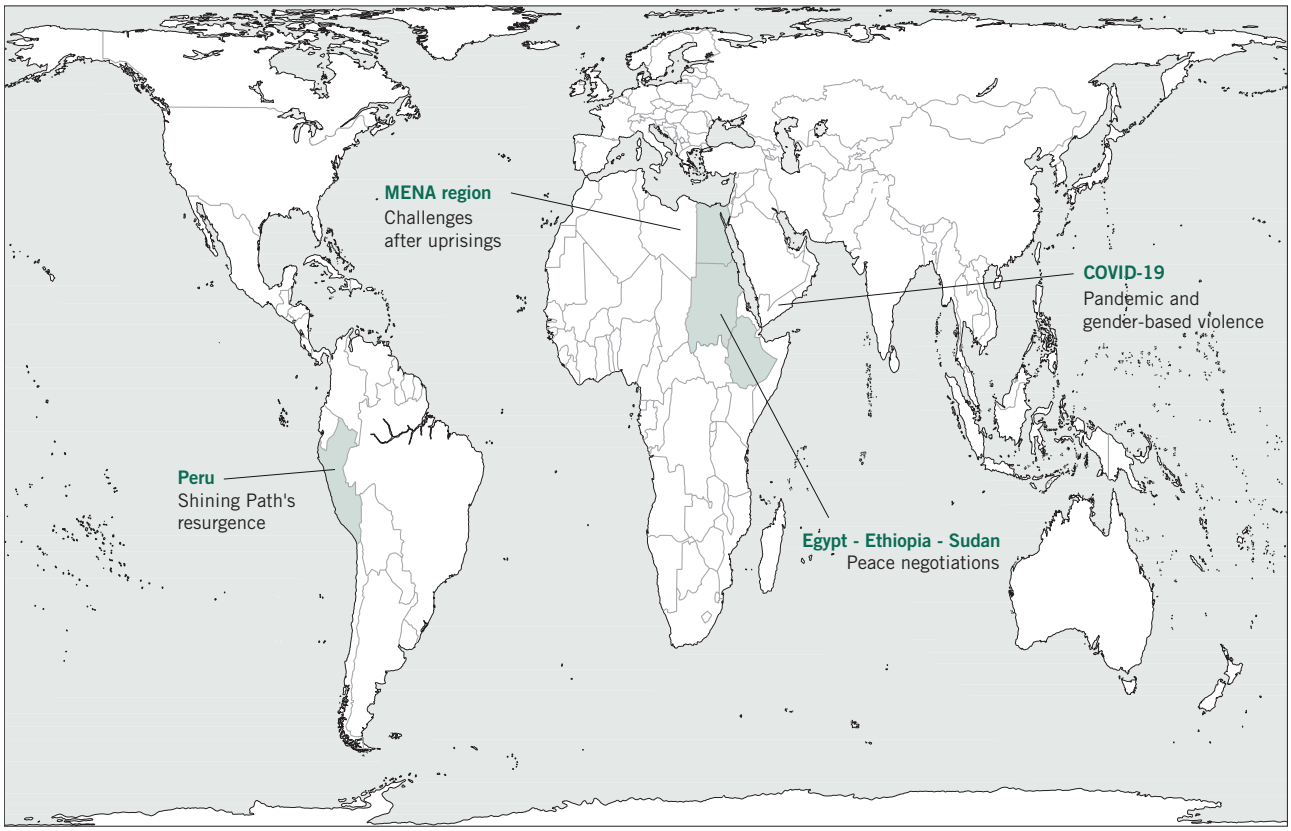
8. ECCHR, *Survivors: Sexual Violence by Syrian Intelligence Services Are Crimes against Humanity*, 2021; Hannah el-Hitami, "Syrian And Yazidi Trials: Why Victims' Lawyers Want Sexual Violence Considered", *JusticeInfo.net*, 5 February 2021; Dawlaty – WILPF, *Sexual violence by force of arms against women in Syria. A tool of political repression, social dismantling and impoverishment of women and communities*, Policy paper, 2020.
9. Human Rights Council, *'I lost my dignity': Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Syrian Arab Republic,* A/HRC/37/CRP.3, 8 March 2018.
10. Marie Forestier, *"You want freedom? This is your freedom": Rape as a Tactic of the Assad Regime*, LSE, 1 February 2017.
11. Dawlaty – WILPF, op.cit.
12. Marie Forestier, *The Way Forward for Syrian Survivors of Sexual Violence*, LSE, 8 December 2020.

5. Risk scenarios for 2021

Drawing on the analysis of the contexts of armed conflict and socio-political crisis in 2020, in this chapter the School for a Culture of Peace identifies four scenarios that, due to their conditions and dynamics, may worsen and become a focus of greater instability and violence. The risk scenarios for 2021 refer to the COVID-19 pandemic and the worsening violence against women, the climate of tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Sudan due to the construction of a dam in the Nile river; the Shining Path's resurgence in Peru; and the challenges and risks 10 years after the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East.

Map 5.1. **Risk scenarios for 2021**



5.1 The COVID-19 pandemic and the worsening violence against women

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many inequalities, including those of gender. Specifically, it has aggravated the pre-existing global problem of gender-based violence and has increased the risk of a related rise in the near future and beyond. Meanwhile, it remains invisible and neglected by political and social actors amidst the normalisation of violence and the deep-rootedness of patriarchy, the redirection of priorities and funds and the excessive burden placed on services and actors involved in the response. In contexts with added crises, such as armed conflicts, the risks produced by the COVID-19 pandemic are increased as it intersects with the impacts and dynamics of armed violence.

The data available on gender-based violence since the irruption of the COVID-19 pandemic shows a serious increase in violence against women and girls in all kinds of contexts. A UN report from April 2020 already warned of a 30% rise in calls to telephone support lines in Cyprus, of another 33% in Singapore, of a 25% spike in emergency calls for domestic violence in Argentina and of a 30% increase in reports of domestic violence in France. At that early period in the spread of the pandemic, the UN warned that although it was early for global data, there were already many worrying reports of intensification of gender violence, with 25% increases in many countries with systems to report it.[1] As the UN has pointed out, restrictions associated with the pandemic can act as factors aggravating violence, such as isolation measures, which have forced many women to live interruptedly with the perpetrators, restrictions on movement and overcrowded housing conditions, concerns about health, safety and livelihood and difficulties in accessing services and support networks.[2] The coronavirus pandemic intensifies a situation that was already very serious, as 243 million women and girls between 15 and 49 years old had faced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in the 12 months before the outbreak.[3]

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened gender inequality and the violence faced by women and girls

Taking the form of a coordinated United Nations appeal, the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan for the period from April to December 2020 asserted that gender inequalities would worsen with the pandemic, and recalled that in public health emergencies, women and girls tend to have less access to protection networks and services, including sexual and reproductive health, and may face greater risks of violence in quarantines.[4] It also warned that the LGTBI population could face a greater negative impact, as a group that habitually faces discrimination, prejudice and barriers to accessing care. Another study commissioned by UN Women has indicated that the pandemic is increasing the poverty rate for women. The report predicts and cautions that in 2021 there will be 435 million women and girls in the world living on less than $ 1.90 a day, including 47 million of them due to COVID-19. It is also estimated that the pandemic could force 2.5 million girls into child marriage in 2025, on top of the estimated 58.4 million without a pandemic, according to Save the Children. The NGO said that the risk is greatest during humanitarian crises associated with armed conflict, flooding, drought and disease outbreaks.[6]

In situations of armed conflict, the intersection of war and pandemic can further widen the economic gender gap and exacerbate gender-based violence and its manifestations. As ICRC analysts point out, the pandemic has had an impact in two opposite directions. On the one hand, sexual violence has increased in contexts already affected by conflict and violence—an increase in both domestic violence and sexual violence that is contrary to international humanitarian law (IHL), including sexual violence by armed actors, forced prostitution and sexual slavery.[6] The same analysts cite humanitarian agencies' figures of 31 million additional cases of gender-based violence in the first six months of confinement, which include both domestic violence and sexual violence in violation of IHL. Others warn of the risk of increased sexual violence in the context of humanitarian crisis, though they did mention the difficulties in obtaining data.[7] On the other hand, the pandemic has led to a reduction in resources and support services in a context of changing priorities and redirected resources in response to COVID-19, restrictions on movement, the oversaturation of support providers and services, accumulated impacts on health infrastructure and others.[8]

Moreover, the intersecting dynamics of gun violence and the pandemic are increasing the risk of exposure to gender-based violence in multiple ways. In Yemen, for example, obstacles to ensure access to water, stemming from attacks on civilian infrastructure due to the armed

1. United Nations, *Policy Brief. The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. 9th April 2020.
2. UN WOMEN, *COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*, EVAW COVID-19 briefs, 2020.
3. Ibid.
4. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19*, March 2020.
5. Save the Children, *Global Girlhood 2020: COVID-19 and progress in peril*, 2020.
6. May Maloney, *Sexual violence in armed conflicte: can we prevent a COVID-19 backslide?* Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog, 25th November 2020.
7. Sophie Sutrich, *COVID-19, conflict and sexual violence: reversing the burden of proof*, Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog, 19th June 2020.
8. May Maloney, op. cit.

conflict, the climate emergency and the mismanagement of water resources, have increased with the pandemic at the same time that the price of water has risen.[9] Altogether, this has forced many Yemeni women to travel farther to access water, especially in rural areas, exposing themselves to a higher risk of sexual violence. In Libya, the dynamics of violence increased during 2020, including actions against international law that had direct impacts on the response to the pandemic, with attacks on hospitals and deliberate cuts to the water supply in the capital, entailing serious consequences for the rights of women and the civilian population. In Burkina Faso, northeastern Nigeria and South Sudan, conflicts and the pandemic aggravated situations of food insecurity, increasing the risk of deepening inequalities and gender violence.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened gender inequality and the violence faced by women and girls, specifically in contexts of armed violence and other crisis situations. Even if confinement and movement restrictions have gradually been lifted, various impacts and factors associated with the pandemic will foreseeably continue to aggravate the inequality gap and the risks of exposure to gender violence in the years to come, which only strengthens the urgent need to put the rights of women and girls at the forefront of action and policy.

9. Margaret Habib, *COVID-19 exacerbates the effects of water shortages on women in Yemen*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 20 August 2020.

5.2. The Shining Path's resurgence in Peru

In 2020, Peru experienced one of the greatest political crises in recent times, with three presidents in office in a period of a few days, massive demonstrations across the country and accusations of excessive use of force by the police levelled by international bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as by international human rights organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. As these events unfolded, capturing the political and media attention of the country, some analysts warned of an increase in tension linked to the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), a Maoist armed organisation that actively participated in the internal armed conflict in Peru between 1980 and 2000 and caused the deaths of over 69,000 people, according to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Although the capture in 1992 and subsequent sentence to life imprisonment of its leader and founder, Abimael Guzmán, greatly weakened the group, to the point that the government declared the group militarily defeated and the conflict ended in 2000, there were some remnant factions that continued to operate in various regions of the country, especially in the Alto Huallaga Valley and in the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Valley (VRAEM). In the last decade, however, the state has focused its counterinsurgency strategy on the VRAEM, especially after the capture in 2012 of the Shining Path's leader in Alto Huallaga, Florindo Eleuterio Flores Hala, alias Comrade Artemio, loyal to Guzmán's ideology and strategy. As the last active member of the Shining Path central committee, his arrest caused the group to be practically dismantled in Alto Huallaga.

The declaration of the state of emergency in 1999 in the VRAEM and the increasing militarisation of the region, where the state currently has 52 military bases and has between 8,000 and 10,000 soldiers deployed, led to the arrest of important leaders of the group and weakened its structures, but in late 2020 the president of Peru acknowledged that the Militarised Communist Party of Peru (MPCP), a name used by the group in recent years, continued to pose a significant threat to the country's national security. Also in late 2020, the Defence Minister expressed her concern about the MPCP's growing capacity for war and about the rebound in its armed actions. According to some analysts, the state's concern not only has to do with the uptick in MPCP attacks, but also with the resilience that the group has shown in its strongholds in recent decades due to its allegedly solid alliances with drug trafficking organisations, and with the communist movement's attempts to create and strengthen support structures. In this regard, in December the government announced the arrest of 77 people for creating structures to support the Maoist movement in Peru. Several of the detainees were linked to the Movement for Amnesty and Fundamental Rights (MOVADEF), which the state considers the Shining Path's political and legal wing, including one of its leaders and the lawyer of Abimael Guzmán.

Regarding the MPCP's capacity for war, there was a certain upturn in armed actions in the VRAEM in 2020. At least 16 people died and several others were injured in various episodes of violence, most of them attacks carried out by the MPCP. The ambush of a military convoy in late October claimed the lives of three soldiers and wounded four. In late August, there was a clash in which four combatants and two soldiers died in the Ayacucho region. A firefight in the same region in July killed a soldier and three members of the MPCP and an attack against several Peruvian Army military vessels in the town of Puerto Palmeras in December claimed one soldier's life and wounded three others. Although this death toll is clearly lower than before, it is also true that there has recently been an increase in attacks against military targets and facilities. According to a report by the NGO Waynakuna, allegedly based on data collected by the insurgency, 446 people (including 323 soldiers and 85 police officers) had died in 276 episodes of violence in the VRAEM between 1999 and 2017. However, other media reports based on police data revealed that 165 military and police personnel had died in the same region between 1999 and 2019. According to reports issued by the US State Department, which considers the Shining Path to be a terrorist organisation (the only one in Latin America, together with the FARC and the ELN in Colombia), there was an average of around 100 armed attacks per year in the VRAEM between 2006 and 2013[10], but they declined significantly after two of the top four MPCP leaders known as Comrade Alipio and Comrade Gabriel were killed in combat in 2013. For example, in 2014 and 2015 the number of attacks by the MPCP had fallen to 20 and 13, respectively.

Despite the large-scale military and police deployment in the VRAEM in the last two decades, the Peruvian government acknowledged that the Militarised Communist Party of Peru continues to pose a significant threat to national security

According to the government and various analysts, in recent decades the Shining Path (and later the MPCM) has taken advantage of the rugged, remote, jungle and isolated nature of some areas of the VRAEM to forge a solid alliance with organisations linked to drug trafficking,

10. Patricia Santillán, *Sendero Luminoso: evolución histórica y relevancia actual*, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Documento de Opinion, 30 March 2017.

to which they provide security and protection both in the production and transit of narcotics. According to some, the group, which may consist of around 450 people (the alleged number of the group's members varies significantly depending on the source), is also obtaining resources for the protection it provides to peasants who grow coca leaves. According to data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the VRAEM is the home to 70% of the coca leaf crops in Peru, the world's second largest producer of cocaine. According to recent data (IDEELE), 30% of the VRAEM population (almost 450,000 people) live in poverty and another 58% are below the extreme poverty line.[11] In August 2020, the US government's Office of National Drug Control Policy stated that in 2019 the area devoted to coca leaf cultivation and cocaine production had increased by 38% and 40% respectively over the previous year.

The consolidation of the VRAEM as the MPCP's stronghold and as the epicentre of drug production in Peru has in turn exacerbated certain dynamics that could increase tension and violence in the region. For instance, there is growing pressure from coca growers on the lands of indigenous peoples in the region, such as the Ashaninka communities. Some of the strategies used by such groups include the harassment of these communities and the creation of villages to legalise their occupation and possession of the land, which is normally deforested to grow coca leaves or install secret laboratories to process basic cocaine paste. Furthermore, in the face of pressure from peasant groups and drug trafficking groups to increase the area devoted to coca leaf cultivation, in recent years the government has declared that it will increase the so-called "peasant rounds" that have played an active role in its counterinsurgency strategy to fight against the Shining Path and against the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. The government affirms that its work consists mainly of providing training in the responsible use of weapons to the people living in these committees and in registering and controlling such weapons, but other organisations indicate that the delegation of security powers to community committees may entail human rights abuses and violations.

Faced with this complex situation, the Peruvian government has on several occasions expressed its commitment to militarily defeat the Shining Path and has reiterated its support for the Peruvian Armed Forces' efforts in the VRAEM, while also acknowledging that the counterinsurgency strategy in the region cannot only be of a military nature. In this regard, after coming to power, President Martín Vizcarra, who was removed from office in late 2020, publicly stated his intention to place greater emphasis on the policy of forced eradication of the coca leaf and on offering alternative crops to the peasants of the VRAEM to improve living conditions in the region, reduce coca production there and erode the MPCP's base of support and funding mechanisms. Thus, since the policy to eradicate illicit crops was implemented in the 1980s, it was carried out in the VRAEM for the first time in 2019. It should be noted, however, that only 750 of the more than 25,500 hectares forcibly eradicated were located in the VRAEM, but the government insisted that this is a turning point in the strategy towards the region. Similarly, in October 2020 the president repeated his intention to implement a new policy to combat drug trafficking and the Shining Path insurgency based on a comprehensive approach to development in the VRAEM, emphasising not only the replacement of crops, but also the promotion of infrastructure, agriculture, sanitation and health. Moreover, in mid-2020 the government's National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs declared that the price of cocaine in the VRAEM had fallen by 58% as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn could erode the MPCP's sources of funding.

There are still unknowns about whether the new government that was established in Peru after Vizcarra's removal in 2020 will decide to continue with a more holistic approach that transcends a strictly militaristic solution to the conflict with the MPCP and drug trafficking in the VRAEM. In any case, it does not seem that the MPCP, led by the brothers Víctor and Jorge Quispe Palomino after the arrest of Comrade Feliciano in 1999, is open to starting any negotiations or rapprochement with the state. In contrast, the leader of the Shining Path in Alto Huallaga, Comrade Artemio, did advocate this path and even publicly requested political dialogue with the government in 2011, shortly before he was arrested. Even if the MPCP has publicly made political and social demands, the government and much of Peruvian public opinion do not consider the group to be the direct heir to the Shining Path, but rather an organisation that is sometimes branded as narco-terrorist. In fact, Abimael Guzmán does not recognise the group and the MPCP described Guzmán as a traitor, having distanced himself from the strategy that he followed after his imprisonment in 1992 (in fact, after Guzmán's arrest, the Shining Path movement was split between groups more supportive of the agreement with the state, commonly called "acuerdistas", and those who want to continue the armed struggle, called "Proseguir" or "Sendero Rojo" ('Red Path'). In short, there are several factors that cast uncertainty about the political and social situation in the VRAEM and about the tension linked to the political and armed actions of the Shining Path movement, such as the political crisis that the country experienced at the end of the year, which could lead to a change in strategic orientation in managing the conflict, the rebound in armed actions by the MPCP in 2020, the increase in political and judicial pressure from the state on organisations considered related to the Shining Path movement and the strong presence of drug trafficking organisations in the VRAEM, a region that is difficult to access, lacks state institutions and suffers from high rates of poverty.

11. Mariella Villasante, *La guerra en el VRAEM: los problemas del Estado para restablecer la paz y los vacíos legales aplazados*, Revista Ideele, num. 284.

5.3. A spring to come? Challenges and risks 10 years after the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East

The date of 17 December 2020 marked the 10th anniversary since the young street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi blew himself up in Sidi Bouzid, one of the most economically depressed areas in the interior of Tunisia. A decade had passed since his act of protest became a symbol of exhaustion and set off massive popular demonstrations to protest social injustice, corruption, inequalities, restrictions on freedom and the lack of opportunities in many countries in North Africa and the Middle East. The phenomenon spread rapidly, challenging the legitimacy of many of the authoritarian regimes in the region. Despite the unique aspects of each context, the revolts of what was called the "Arab Spring" showed that the grievances were based on common ground: a crisis of legitimacy and a lack of representative institutions, frustrated young populations with no expectations for improvement, the concentration of power, nepotism, impunity and more. The seemingly untouchable governments of the region tried to quell the revolts with a combination of incentives and repression (the now classic carrot-and-stick strategy), though with mixed results. Some rulers fell in less than a year after decades in power, such as Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Gaddafi in Libya and Saleh in Yemen. Bumpy transitions began and developed in different ways: the Yemeni experience was derailed in less than three years; Tunisia continues to inspire the most hope in the region; and some contexts led to increasingly complex armed conflicts due to the proliferation of armed groups, the projection of foreign interests and the open or veiled involvement of many regional and international actors, as illustrated by the situations in Yemen, Syria and Libya.

Not enough time has passed to assess the historical impact of a phenomenon of such magnitude as the Arab Spring. In the short term, however, a decade provides enough perspective to identify a series of challenges and risks with the potential to destabilise the region. Though several factors could be considered, whose relevance depends on different contexts, this analysis focuses on three key aspects. First, the grievances that motivated the riots have persisted or the situation has even worsened in some respects. Ten years later, youth unemployment rates in the region remain the highest in the world, a problem of great concern considering that two-thirds of the region's population is under 30 years old. According to the ILO, in 2020 the Arab and North African countries had the lowest youth participation rate in the job market, at only 27%.[12] Living standards have not improved, but have remained the same or have worsened in many contexts, especially in countries like Syria and Yemen where socio-economic indicators have plummeted after years of conflict and violence.[13] In addition, the North Africa and Middle East region continues to be perceived as highly corrupt according to international indices such as those of Transparency International and the limited progress promoted by civil society has been blocked by the implementation of emergency measures to deal with COVID-19.[14] Surveys in several countries in the region indicate that large sectors of the population consider that their situation is worse than before the riots and that the gap between rich and poor has widened in the last decade.[15]

The continuity of the grievances partly explains the new wave of revolts that shook the region in 2019, with massive protests in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan. Though these countries had not experienced intense protests at the beginning of the decade, on this occasion their rulers were also forced to leave power. However, as Georges Fahmi points out, the people who demonstrated in 2019 had already learned several lessons from the first revolutionary wave, including that the fall of the head of the regime does not amount to a change in the system.[16] Therefore, they persisted in their protests until the pandemic forced a halt to public demonstrations rejecting the elites and their power. These new protests challenged those who considered the revolts to be over and bolstered arguments that demonstrations would continue or become more vigorous in the region due to the persistent erosion of the social contract and the deep feeling of injustice there, in addition to the severe economic consequences of the pandemic.

Joining the persisting grievances is a second factor linked to the strengthening, return and/or reconfiguration of authoritarianism in the region. Various analysts agree that faced with questions about their legitimacy, local regimes have strengthened their repressive structures, in part thanks to the support of actors such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), champions of the counterrevolutionary forces. Egypt has become an illustrative case of this trend, since after the coup against the government of the Muslim Brotherhood—a turning point for Islamism in the region—the military regime has stepped up its persecution of dissidents from across the political spectrum and has buttressed

12. International Labour Organisation (ILO), *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs,* International Labour Office, Geneva: ILO, 2020.
13. Kali Robinson, *The Arab Spring at Ten Years: What's the Legacy of the Uprisings?,* Council on Foreign Relations, 3 December 2020.
14. Transparency International, *Middle East & North Africa: Corruption continues as institutions and political rights weaken*, 29 January 2019; *CPI 2020: Middle East and North Africa*, 28 January 2021.
15. Guardian-YouGov poll, "Life has got worse since Arab Spring, say people across Middle East", *The Guardian*, 17 December 2020.
16. Georges Fahmi, *Five Lessons From the New Arab Uprisings*, 12 November 2019.

its power. Restrictions on freedom and human rights violations are considered worse than what existed under Mubarak era. The brutal crackdown on dissent has also been key to the Syrian regime's survival strategy. With the exception of Tunisia, indicators on political rights and civil liberties have deteriorated at the regional level, as has the situation of press freedom, with more journalists imprisoned for reasons related to how they do their jobs.[17] Arab Barometer surveys confirm that most of the population in the region continues to prefer democracy. However, some analysts warn of a certain "nostalgia" for heavy-handed rulers in some contexts. In 2020, an opinion survey in several countries in the area (Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) identified high levels of support (more than 50% in the five countries) for a strong and efficient leader, even at the expense of not fully complying with rules or procedures, or even bypassing the respective parliaments (more than 50% in Libya, Tunisia and Lebanon).[18] Even in Tunisia, analysts have identified nostalgia for the old regime among some parts of the population and have warned about the increase in populist discourse.[19]

A decade after the uprisings in the region, the persisting grievances and the deterioration of the socio-economic situation, the strengthening of authoritarianism and the long-term consequences of the serious armed conflicts in the region are all serious risk factors

A third risk factor has to do with complexities stemming from the development of armed conflicts in the region, which have imposed serious long-term consequences and great obstacles for negotiations and initiatives for non-violent conflict resolution. There are several aspects to consider here. First is the very serious impact of armed conflicts on entire generations in the region, taking into account the high levels of lethality, forced displacement and the devastating effect of humanitarian crises. The wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen are among the most intense in the world. In Syria alone, over half a million people have died in a decade. Another 250,000 have died in Yemen since 2015—more than half due to indirect consequences of the conflict, such as a lack of access to health or food—and the country faces the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Half of Syria's population has been forced to flee their homes due to the violence, placing the country at the top of the global refugee and internally displaced population rankings. Civilians have been targeted in indiscriminate and deliberate attacks by various armed actors in an atmosphere of impunity, which sets a dangerous precedent for systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Added to this are the consequences springing from the proliferation of armed actors in the region and the growing involvement of regional and international actors in conflicts, phenomena that increase their complexity and make them difficult to tackle. In Syria, Yemen and Libya, this drift has aggravated institutional weakness and accentuated the fragmentation of power, turning these countries into territories divided into different zones of influence and control.[20] Moreover, in all three cases, the development of hostilities is directly influenced by the involvement, competition and projection of the interests of foreign actors, including Russia, the United States, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Egypt and others. In this context, some analysts have stressed that the North Africa and Middle East region faces an unprecedented level of interrelated conflicts, with new dynamics overlapping and intersecting with pre-existing conflicts that at times conceal the original catalysts of the conflicts.[21] This trend has been accentuated by the absence of effective regional and international mechanisms for resolving and transforming conflicts and poses a challenge for actors and institutions that seek to promote peaceful solutions.

Despite the bitter assessment of this decade after the revolts, various voices inside and outside the region insist on vindicating the process and its value as a turning point. Along these lines, they highlight its symbolic value by challenging the idea of "Arab exceptionality" and the perception of a region condemned to authoritarianism. Despite what has happened in recent years, polls indicate that in many countries of the region, a majority say they do not regret the Arab Spring protests.[22] The revolts still resonate as a sign of non-conformity, of non-resignation and of overcoming the barriers of fear. They are still seen a reflection of the deep aspirations of the peoples of the region to a dignified life. In fact, various analysts assert that the regimes' harsh crackdowns are rooted in fear, the perception of a threat and the realisation that the revolts could be repeated, because if they have happened once, they can happen again.[23]

17. Kali Robinson, op. cit.
18. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, *10 years after the Arab Springs: Where does public opinion in the region stand today?* KAS/POLDIMED, 2020.
19. International Crisis Group, *Avoiding a Populist Surge in Tunisia*, Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing no. 73, 4 March 2020.
20. Virginie Collombier et. al. "Armed conflicts and the erosion of the state: The cases of Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria" in Jordi Quero and Cristina Sala (eds.), *MENARA Booklet for Humanitarian Actors*, CIDOB, February 2019
21. Joost Hiltermann and María Rodríguez, "De las profundidades a la superficie: catalizadores de conflicto en Oriente Medio y el Magreb", *ARI* 70/2019, Real Instituto Elcano, 18 June 2019.
22. The Guardian-YouGov poll, op. cit.
23. Nesrine Malik, "The Arab Spring wasn't in vain. Next time will be different, *The Guardian*, 21 December 2020.

5.4. The Nile Basin: cooperation or conflict?

The Nile, Africa's longest river and the second longest in the world –following recent studies that give the world lead to the Amazon– has been the epicentre of disputes in the Horn of Africa and East Africa for decades. At the centre of the conflict are Egypt and Ethiopia, the two main regional players. The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile –a tributary of the Nile on Ethiopian territory– which Ethiopia has been constructing since 2011, has exacerbated the situation and the climate of tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Sudan.

Egypt depends on the Nile for virtually all of its water supply. The river accounts for almost all of its drinking and irrigation water, as the country receives little rainfall and almost all of its farmland is irrigated. The Nile is also a key transport route for the country. Its main tributary, the Blue Nile, flows from Ethiopia's Lake Tana and joins the White Nile in Sudan, where it contributes about 85% of the water that forms the main Nile. It is also central to almost every aspect of life in Ethiopia; about 32% of the country lies in the Nile Basin, where about 40% of the country's population is concentrated. In the case of Sudan, the Nile crosses the entire country from south to north and provides about 77% of the country's freshwater.[24]

The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam initiated by Ethiopia in 2011 along the course of the Blue Nile, a tributary of the Nile on Ethiopian territory, has led to increased tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Sudan

Historically, Egypt has adopted an approach in which the Nile is a matter of national security and its positioning has included threats of military action against riparian states if they interfere with the river's water volume. The first agreement concerning the management of the waters of the Nile was reached between Britain, as the colonial power in East Africa, and Egypt in 1929. Cairo was favoured over other riparian countries for its agricultural potential, as well as for being the guarantor of the management of the Suez Canal, vital to British imperial ambitions. The other British riparian colonies –Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika (now Tanzania)–, as well as Ethiopia, had no say in these agreements. Under the terms, Egypt would not need the consent of upstream states to undertake water projects in its own territory, but could veto projects on any tributary of the Nile in the countries through which the Nile flows, including Lake Victoria. Lake Victoria, the world's second largest freshwater lake, is fed by direct rainfall and thousands of streams from Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda and Kenya, all located in central eastern Africa. Egypt maintains that the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and its amended version, the 1959 Agreement, remain valid. These bilateral agreements completely ignored the needs of other riparian states, including Ethiopia. Consequently, none of the other Nile Basin countries have endorsed the agreements.

Attempts to build a multilateral framework for cooperative and sustainable management of the Nile's waters have been ongoing. In 1999, the Nile Basin countries created the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), which aimed to establish a forum to promote the collaborative development and management of the Nile waters, including the drafting of a multilateral treaty. In 2010, four countries (Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia) signed and ratified the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA)[25] after a negotiation process between all riparian countries, including Egypt and Sudan, which eventually rejected the agreement because it did not serve their interests. Burundi and Kenya subsequently also signed the agreement, but did not ratify it. Six countries need to ratify or accede to the agreement for it to enter into force. The Treaty was intended to establish principles, rights and obligations to ensure the long-term and sustainable management and development of the shared waters of the Nile. Under its provisions, the Nile Basin States would assume the obligation to cooperate in the conservation, management and development of the basin and its waters. The Treaty has no legal effect on Nile Basin states that do not sign and ratify the CFA, as they are not bound by it. The CFA provides for the establishment of a permanent institutional mechanism, the Nile River Basin Commission (NRBC). The NRBC would become the successor to the rights, obligations and assets of the NBI.

In 2011 Ethiopia announced the construction of the GERD on the Blue Nile riverbed after signing a contract with the Italian multinational Salini Construttori for between $4.5 billion and $4.8 billion, according to various sources. With a power generation capacity of 6.45 GW, the dam will be the largest hydropower plant in Africa and the seventh largest in the world and will allow Ethiopia to control the waters of the Nile River. Once construction of the dam is completed, the filling of the reservoir may take between five and 15 years to complete, depending on climate conditions during the period and the agreements reached between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. Cairo expressed concern over the announcement and the size of the dam, and threatened to use all means at its disposal to protect its interests, since in periods of prolonged drought the management of the Nile is crucial to the country's survival. In the case of Sudan, the country supports the GERD (because of the benefits derived from the project in terms of cheap energy production, irrigation potential and control of water flow to avoid floods), but its concern is focused on the impacts

24. Nile Basin Initiative [online]. Accessed on 10 December 2020.
25. Cooperative Framework Agreement [online]. Accessed on 10 December 2020.

derived from its construction, as the dam is located 20km from the border and poor coordination could mean the flooding of the Sudanese Roseires dam, and for this reason it has demanded that impact studies be carried out, as well as guarantees in reservoir management and safety procedures.

In the last decade, different negotiation processes have been launched between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia to try to establish a framework for cooperation on the issue, and in 2015 the leaders of the three countries signed the GERD Declaration of Principles, which highlighted their commitment to cooperate and peacefully resolve their differences. To date, this has not borne fruit. At the end of 2019, the three countries resumed talks under the observation of the US and the World Bank (WB). In February 2020, Ethiopia rejected a draft agreement initiated by Egypt and argued that the US and the WB were overstepping the framework of impartiality in their observation by proposing drought water accumulation mitigation measures that favoured Cairo. Following this, on 10 April Addis Ababa proposed an agreement affecting the first two years of reservoir filling, which was rejected by Cairo and Khartoum (which demanded a global and not a partial agreement). This Ethiopian proposal was intended to reduce tensions in the short term, facilitate the building of trust that would lead to a comprehensive agreement being reached and the commencement of operations to fill the reservoir. Although Sudan acknowledged that the parties were very close to agreement,[26] the main stumbling blocks remain unresolved: the coordination and dispute resolution mechanism and drought protocols, among others. During 2020, the EU and South Africa (as chair of the AU) joined in observing the dispute. However, although talks resumed on 21 May, they stalled again in mid-June due to a lack of agreement on the dispute settlement mechanism, the minimum river flow in times of drought and the legal status of the final agreement.

A number of issues have contributed to exacerbating the situation in the second half of the year. Firstly, Ethiopia's unilateral decision to start filling the reservoir. On 19 June Ethiopia reiterated that it would start filling the dam in July with or without an agreement, prompting Egypt and Sudan to request UN Security Council intervention. On 20 June the Egyptian president reiterated his commitment to use all diplomatic means to resolve the crisis, and although talks remained open with the aim of reaching an agreement after an AU meeting on 26 June with Ethiopia pledging to halt the imminent filling of the reservoir until an agreement was reached, the following day Addis Ababa announced the filling of the reservoir to coincide with the rainy season. At a UN Security Council meeting on 29 June, Cairo announced that GERD posed a threat to its security and warned that conflict could break out if the UN did not intervene to prevent it. On 3 July, tripartite talks resumed under the auspices of the AU, and on 27 July Cairo announced that the three countries had agreed to prioritise the development of a legally binding agreement to fill and operate the GERD. On the same day, the Ethiopian prime minister said that Ethiopia had achieved its first-year target for filling the reservoir thanks to the strong rainy season, prompting Egypt and Sudan to immediately condemn the unilateral move. There continued to be clashes surrounding Ethiopia's position that it intends to negotiate an agreement only regarding the filling of the dam, rather than –as Egypt and Sudan intend– a comprehensive agreement on filling and operation, with a subsequent separate treaty on the allocation of Blue Nile water being negotiated separately. Despite the AU's efforts, the situation remained unchanged for the rest of the year.

Secondly, it is worth noting the position of the US, as a traditional ally of Egypt and Ethiopia. From being an observer to the negotiations until February 2020, it was accused by Ethiopia of favouring Egypt's interests by proposing measures that allegedly reinforced stances defended by Cairo. This was compounded in early September by the announcement of a $130 million cut in US aid to Ethiopia in the absence of progress in the tripartite talks, in an attempt to force negotiations. US President Donald Trump's statements in October further aggravated the situation, when he stated that Egypt could not live with the dam and could "blow up" the construction. The Ethiopian prime minister did not respond to these inflammatory statements, but shortly afterwards the Ethiopian foreign minister recalled the US ambassador for consultation to clarify Washington's position on the issue.

Another issue to consider is the internal pressures to maintain maximalist positions in both Ethiopia and Egypt, as both countries consider the issue to be of vital national interest. The fragile internal political situation in Ethiopia, compounded by the war in the Tigray region, has led to a climate of polarisation that reduces room for manoeuvre and does not contribute to facilitating a negotiation process since it could be interpreted by nationalist sectors as granting concessions to the adversary at the negotiating table. Ethiopia's announcements in October and November regarding the closure of airspace over the GERD to ensure the safety of the dam, and the announcement that the GERD is expected to start generating electricity in June 2021, respectively, are interpreted along these lines. In addition, Egypt's diplomatic offensive is perceived in Ethiopia as an attempt to stop the GERD project and maintain the unequal status quo.

The GERD reservoir has already started to fill, so time is running out for negotiations to reach a compromise, increasing the pressure on Sudan and especially Egypt. The fact that Ethiopia initiated the filling unilaterally has left Egypt in a weak position, as the country had opposed the move. Ethiopia has taken a decision that has contributed to the deterioration of the fragile climate of trust between the three countries. The Blue Nile is critical to the development of the Egyptian, Ethiopian and

26. UN Security Council, Letter dated 2 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2020/480, June 2020.

Sudanese populations, and all three countries have strong incentives to reach an agreement. Such an agreement would result in a global commitment across the Nile Basin states. It is worth noting that changes at the helm of the US administration could contribute to a new direction in this dispute. Transboundary water cooperation is a key element in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this regard, climate change, combined with projected population growth and socio-economic changes, increases the challenges of water management worldwide. A serious example of this is the dispute over the construction of the GERD, which is rooted in historical disputes exacerbated by colonialism that persist today, and in which climate change and the progressive scarcity of and competition for water may play a decisive role in aggravating the situation and increasing tensions between the countries of the region, with the potential to escalate into conflicts with serious consequences.

Glossary

AA: Arakan Army
ABSDF: All Burma Students' Democratic Front
ABM: Ansar Beit al-Maqdis
ACLED: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
ADF: Allied Democratic Forces
AKP: Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
ALBA: Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America)
ALP: Arakan Liberation Party
AMISOM: African Union Mission in Somalia
APCLS: Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo)
AQIM: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQPA: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
ARS: Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia
ARSA: Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASWJ: Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a
AU: African Union
AUBP: African Union Border Program
BDB: Benghazi Defense Brigades
BH: Boko Haram
BIFF: Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BLA: Baloch Liberation Army
BLF: Baloch Liberation Front
BLT: Baloch Liberation Tigers
BRA: Balochistan Republican Army
BRP: Baloch Republican Party
CAR: Central African Republic
CENCO: Conférence Épiscopale Nationale du Congo (Congolese Episcopal Conference)
CHD: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
CMA: Coordination of Movements of Azawad
CMPFPR: Coordinating Committee of Patriotic Resistance Movements
CNDD-FDD: Congrès National pour la Défense de la Démocratie - Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (National Congress for the Defense of Democracy - Forces for the Defense of Democracy)
CNDP: Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (National Congress for the Defense of the People)
CNF: Chin National Front
CPA: Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPI-M: Communist Party of India-Maoist
CNL: Congrès National pour la Liberté (National Congress for Freedom)
DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DFLP: Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DKBA: Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DMLEK: Democratic Movement for the Liberation of the Eritrean Kunama
DPA: Darfur Peace Agreement
DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC: East African Community
ECOWAS: Economic Community Of West African States
EDA: Eritrean Democratic Alliance
EFDM: Eritrean Federal Democratic Movement
EIC: Eritrean Islamic Congress
EIPJD: Eritrean Islamic Party for Justice and Development
ELF: Eritrean Liberation Front
ELN: Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
ENSF: Eritrean National Salvation Front
EPC: Eritrean People's Congress
EPDF: Eritrean People's Democratic Front
EPL: Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ETA: Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Country and Freedom)
ETIM: East Turkestan Islamic Movement
ETLO: East Turkestan Liberation Organization
EU: European Union
EUCAP NESTOR: European Union Mission on Regional Maritime Capacity-Building in the Horn of Africa
EUCAP SAHEL Mali: European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali
EUCAP SAHEL Niger: European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger
EUFOR: European Union Force
EUNAVFOR Somalia: European Union Naval Force in Somalia - Operation Atalanta
EUTM Mali: European Union Training Mission in Mali
EUTM Somalia: European Union Training Mission in Somalia
EZLN: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army)
FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAR-LP: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Liberación del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces for the Liberation of the People)
FARC: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FARC-EP: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army)
FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FDLR: Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda)
FIS: Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front)
FLEC-FAC: Frente de Liberação do Enclave de Cabinda (Cabinda Enclave's Liberation Front)
FLM: Front de Libération du Macina (Macina Liberation Front)
FNL: Forces Nationales de Libération (National Liberation Forces)
FPB: Forces Populaires du Burundi (Popular Forces of Burundi)
FPR: Front Populaire pour le Redressement (Popular Front for Recovery)

FPRC: Front Patriotique pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (Patriotic Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic)
FSA: Free Syrian Army
GATIA: Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies)
GII: Gender Inequality Index
GNA: Government of National Accord
GSIM: Groupe de Soutien à l'Islam et aux Musulmans (Support Group for Islam and Muslims)
GSPC: Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat)
HCUA: High Council for Unity of Azawad
HRW: Human Rights Watch
HTS: Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
IAEA: International Atomic Energy Agency
IBC: Iraq Body Count
ICC: International Criminal Court
ICG: International Crisis Group
ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross
ICU: Islamic Courts Union
ICTY: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IDMC: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IFLO: Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia
IGAD: Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IISS: International Institute for Strategic Studies
IOM: International Organization for Migration
ISGS: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISIS: Islamic State
ISWAP: Islamic State in the West African Province
IWF: Iduwini Volunteers Force
JEM: Justice and Equality Movement
JKLF: Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
JMB: Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Assembly)
JNIM: Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Support Group for Islam and Muslims)
KANU: Kenya African National Union
KCP: Kangleipak Communist Party
KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party
KFOR: Kosovo Force
KIA: Kachin Independence Army
KLA: Kosovo Liberation Army
KNA: Kuki Liberation Army
KNF: Kuki National Front
KNPP: Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU: Kayin National Union
KNU/KNLA: Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army
KPLT: Karbi People's Liberation Tigers
KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government
KYKL: Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (Organization to Save the Revolutionary Movement in Manipur)
LeJ: Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Army of Jhangvi)
LeT: Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Good)
LGBTI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LNA: Libyan National Army
LRA: Lord's Resistance Army
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
M23: March 23 Movement
MAA: Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (Arab Movement of Azawad)
MASSOB: Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra
MB: Muslim Brotherhood
MEND: Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MFDC: Mouvement de las Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance)
MILF: Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MINUSCA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MINUSTAH: United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
MLC: Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo (Movement for the Liberation of the Congo)
MLCJ: Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice)
MNDAA: Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MNJTF: Multinational Joint Task Force
MNLA: Mouvement National pour la Libération de L'Azawad (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)
MNLF: Moro National Liberation Front
MONUSCO: United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
MOSOP: Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
MPC: Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique (Patriotic Movement for Central Africa)
MRC: Mombasa Republican Council
MUYAO: United Movement for Jihad in West Africa
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCP: National Congress Party
NDA: Niger Delta Avengers
NDAA: National Democratic Alliance Army
NDF: National Democratic Front
NDFB: National Democratic Front of Boroland
NDGJM: Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate
NDPVF: Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
NDV: Niger Delta Vigilante (Niger Delta Patrol)
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
NMSP: New Mon State Party
NNC: Naga National Council NPA: New People's Army
NPA: New People's Army
NSCN (K-K): National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Kole-Kitovi)
NSCN-IM: National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isaac Muivah
NSCN-K: National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang
NSCN-R: National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Reformation
NSLA: National Santhal Liberation Army
OAS: Organization of American States
OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs
OFDM: Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement
OIC: Organization for Islamic Cooperation
OLF: Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF: Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPC: Oromo People's Congress
OPM: Organisasi Papua Merdeka (Organization of Free Papua)
OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OXFAM: Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PA: Palestinian Authority
PDKI: Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan
PFLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PJAK: Party of Free Life of Kurdistan
PKK: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan **(**Kurdistan Workers' Party)
POLISARIO Front: Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro
PREPAK: People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak
PREPAK (Pro): People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak – Progressive
PS: Province of Sinai
PYD : Democratic Union Party of Kurds in Syria
RED-Tabara: Résistance pour un État de Droit au Burundi (Resistance for the Rule of Law in Burundi)
RENAMO: Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Mozambican National Resistance)
REWL: Red Egbesu Water Lions
RPF: Rwandan Patriotic Front
RPF: Revolutionary People's Front
RSADO: Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization
RSF: Rapid Support Forces
SADC: Southern Africa Development Community
SADR: Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
SCACUF: Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front
SCDF: Southern Cameroons Restoration Forces
SIGI: Social Institutions and Gender Index
SIPRI: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLA: Sudan Liberation Army
SLA-AW: Sudan Liberation Army - Abdul Wahid
SLA-MM: Sudan Liberation Army- Minni Minnawi
SLDF: Sabaot Land Defence Forces
SNNRPS: Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State
SOCADEF: Southern Cameroons Defence Forces
SPLA: Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLA-IO: Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition
SPLM: Sudan People's Liberation Movement
SPLM-N: Sudan People's Liberation Army-North
SRF: Sudan Revolutionary Forces
SSA: Shan State Army
SSA-N: Shan State Army – North
SSC: Sool, Saanag and Cayn
SSDM/A: South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army
SSLA: South Sudan Liberation Army
SSOA: South Sudan Opposition Alliance
SSPP: Shan State Progress Party
SSUF: South Sudan United Front
TAK: Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan (Kurdistan Freedom Falcons)
TNLA: Ta-ang National Liberation Army
TFG: Transitional Federal Government
TPLF: Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
TTP: Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan
UAE: United Arab Emirates
UFDD: Union des Forces pour la Démocratie et le Développement (Union of the Forces for Democracy and Development)
ULFA: United Liberation Front of Assam
ULFA-I: United Liberation Front of Assam - Independent
UN: United Nations
UNAMA: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNAMI: United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq
UNAMID: United Nations and African Union Mission in Darfur
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UNHCHR: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFIL: United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNISFA: United Nations Interim Security Force in Abyei
UNLF: United National Liberation Front
UNMIK: United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNMIL: United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMISS: United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOCI: United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
UNOWAS: United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSMIL: United Nations Support Mission in Libya
UPC: Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique (Union for Peace in Central Africa)
UPLA: United People's Liberation Army
USA: United States of America
USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UWSA: United Wa State Army
VRAE: Valle de los Ríos Apurímac y Ene (Valley between Rivers Apurimac and Ene)
WB: World Bank
WFP: World Food Programme of the United Nations
WILPF: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WTO: World Trade Organization
YPG: People's Protection Unit
YPJ: Women's Protection Units
ZUF: Zeliangrong United Front

Escola de Cultura de Pau

The Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace, hereinafter ECP) is an academic peace research institution located at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The School for a Culture of Peace was created in 1999 with the aim of promoting the culture of peace through research, Track II diplomacy, training and awareness generating activities.

The main fields of action of the Escola de Cultura de Pau are:

- Research. Its main areas of research include armed conflicts and socio-political crises, peace processes, human rights and transitional justice, the gender dimension in conflict and peacebuilding, and peace education.

- Track II diplomacy. The ECP promotes dialogue and conflict-transformation through Track II initiatives, including facilitation tasks with armed actors.

- Consultancy services. The ECP carries out a variety of consultancy services for national and international institutions.

- Teaching and training. ECP staff gives lectures in postgraduate and graduate courses in several universities, including its own Graduate Diploma on Culture of Peace at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It also provides training sessions on specific issues, including conflict sensitivity and peace education.

- Advocacy and awareness-raising. Initiatives include activities addressed to the Spanish and Catalan society, including contributions to the media.

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Alert 2021! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding is a yearbook providing an analysis of the state of the world in terms of conflict and peacebuilding from three perspectives: armed conflicts, socio-political crises and gender, peace and security. The analysis of the most important events in 2020 and of the nature, causes, dynamics, actors and consequences of the main armed conflicts and socio-political crises that currently exist in the world makes it possible to provide a comparative regional overview and to identify global trends, as well as risk and early warning elements for the future. Similarly, the report also identifies opportunities for peacebuilding and for reducing, preventing and resolving conflicts. In both cases, one of the main aims of this report is to place data, analyses and the identified warning signs and opportunities for peace in the hands of those actors responsible for making policy decisions or those who participate in peacefully resolving conflicts or in raising political, media and academic awareness of the many situations of political and social violence taking place around the world.

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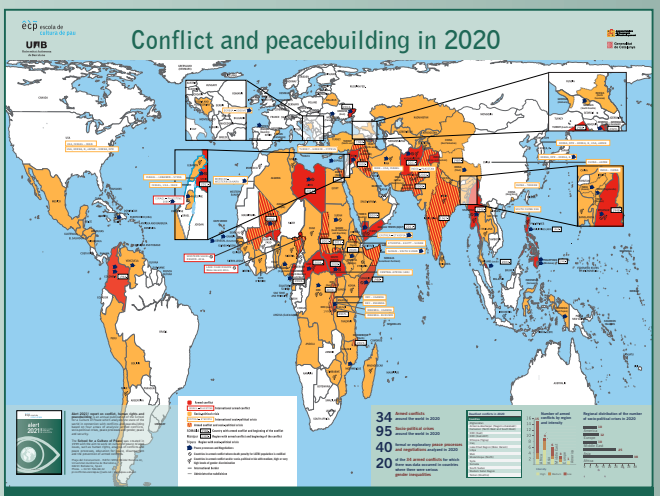

Foldable map on conflict and peacebuilding attached inside

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Peace will always be an opportunity to build, engage in dialogue between opposites and seek consensus and new outlooks from different perspectives. It is constantly evolving and allows for action at different levels to overcome confrontation and establish fairer and more equitable scenarios for all. Therefore, the *Alert!* reports are a reference tool for Colombia and the world that make it possible to understand the dynamics of conflicts in different contexts, providing insight into what is happening in different countries through judicious, methodological and in-depth analysis. The statistics that they compile illustrate the human drama that thousands of men and women suffer due to war, as well as those places where we must focus action and effort to prevent the emergence of new conflicts or help to put an end to others.

Paula Gaviria Betancur,
Director-General of Fundación Compaz and former Presidential Counsellor on Human Rights for the Government of Colombia

With its mass of factual information and well marshalled analytical insights, the *Alert!* series of reports have become valuable part of the international literature on conflicts and prospects for resolving them. Particularly useful, beyond the factual material, is the analysis of background factors, the emphasis on gender and the spotlight on opportunities for peaceful resolution.

Dan Smith,
Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

In early 2020, I visited Yemen, travelling to Sana'a, Aden, bases and displaced person camps. I was devastated by the impact of the conflict on the civilian population and impressed by the struggle and leadership of women from local organisations and female Oxfam team members. Their cry for peace must be heard. The United Nations has warned that 235 million people will need humanitarian aid in 2021 after the impact that COVID-19 has also had on conflicts, exacerbating restrictions on humanitarian access. A challenge of this magnitude justifies and requires in-depth analysis, which provides the best information and explains what is required for peace from a perspective of gender justice. For anyone interested in or affected by conflict, from a base in Yemen to a university in Europe, a document like the *Alert! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding* is simply essential.

Chema Vera,
Former Executive Director of Oxfam and Oxfam Intermon