

# ANNUAL BRIEF ON VIOLENCE AFFECTING CIVILIANS

## HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2021, at least 3,414 civilians were subject to killing, injury, abduction, and conflict-related sexual violence in South Sudan. This represents a **decrease of 42 per cent in the number of victims** compared to 2020, when 5,850 affected civilians victims were recorded.
- The number of killings, injury and abductions decreased significantly as compared with 2020. While the number of recorded cases of conflict-related sexual violence declined marginally, it remains an issue of great concern.
- Despite this overall decrease in 2021, civilians continue to be at risk of violence. Sub-national violence accounted for the vast majority of victims (87 per cent).

## CONTEXT

This annual brief presents an overview of trends in violence affecting civilians from January to December 2021, by assessing four major forms of individual harm experienced across South Sudan (killing, injury, abduction, and conflict-related sexual violence). While the impact of violence extends beyond these forms of harm, they represent the most common incidents documented.

Sources of information include victim and eyewitness accounts, as well as reports from secondary sources

identified during field missions by the UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD). All reported incidents, particularly those involving sub-national violence, are deconflicted with incidents documented by the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD). In accordance with its UN Security Council mandate, UNMISS has issued this annual brief as an advocacy tool to reduce the impact of armed violence on civilians. UNMISS also continues to urge the national authorities to investigate human rights violations and abuses, and to hold all perpetrators accountable.

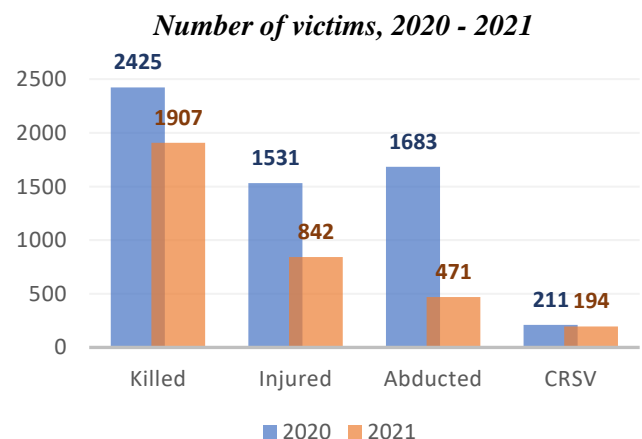
## GENERAL TRENDS

In 2021, civilians continued to bear the brunt of armed violence in South Sudan. Between January and December, HRD documented more than 982 violent incidents (*1,197 in 2020*) affecting at least 3,414 civilians (*5,850 in 2020*) subjected to one of the four major types of individual harm (killing, injury, abduction and conflict-related sexual violence). This constitutes a 18 per cent decrease in the number of incidents and a 42 per cent decrease in the number of victims, as compared to the same period in 2020.

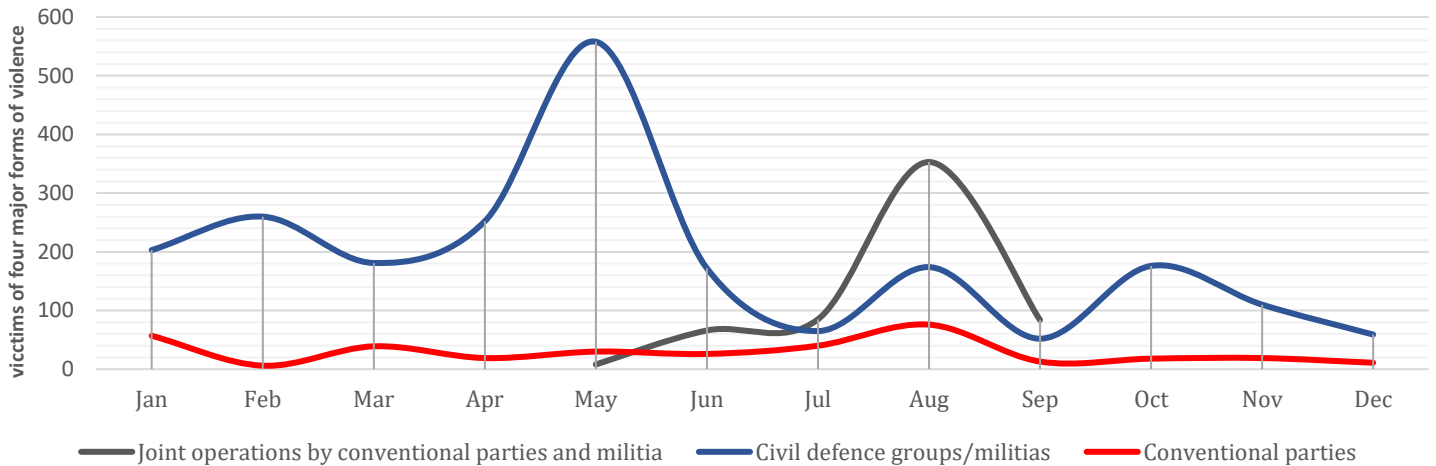
It is important to note that COVID-19-related prevention and mitigation measures, as well as other challenges hindered HRD's capacity to verify and document all incidents, which may have led to under-reporting of the number of victims.

As illustrated by the following chart, all types of harm affecting civilians decreased as compared to 2020. Killings declined by 21 per cent (from 2,425 to 1,907),

cases of injury by 48 per cent (from 1,531 to 842) and abductions declined significantly by 72 per cent (from 1,683 to 471), while victims of conflict-related sexual violence declined by 8 per cent (from 211 to 194).



***Trends in the number of victims, desegregated by category of perpetrators***



In 2021, sub-national violence accounted for the vast majority of victims (87 per cent or 2,875 civilians) documented across the country.

Significant decreases in sub-national violence were observed in June and September. Following a spike in clashes and attacks in May, violence involving community-based militias from the Dinka, Nuer and Murle communities in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) decreased in June and July. In addition, violence between Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF) soldiers and Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) and their respective affiliated armed militias in Tambura, in the Western Equatoria region decreased significantly in September, following the arrival of the Joint Defense Board Taskforce on 8 September to deescalate the conflict.

***Inter-communal violence in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area***

An overwhelming majority (98 percent) of casualties in Jonglei and the GPAA – the killing of at least 230 civilians (32 women and 7 children) and injuring of 120 (31 women and 4 children), abduction of 178 (57 women, 67 boys and 53 girls), and 14 women subject to conflict-related sexual violence – are attributed to community-based militias from Nuer and Murle communities, and to a lesser extent, Dinka communities. Notably, the reduction in violence compared to the previous year’s cycle of intercommunal violence between the communities contributed to a significant decrease in abduction rates by community-based militias in Jonglei (818 to 181).

While cattle-raiding, a predominant form of localized violence, is historically rooted in the societal practices of pastoralist communities in South Sudan, the violence documented in recent years involved civil defence groups

and/or community-based militias with a level of organization, capable of conducting planned and coordinated military-style attacks, independently as well as with the support of members of Government or opposition forces.

***Armed conflict in Tambura, Western Equatoria***

Ninety three percent of casualties in Western Equatoria are attributed to fighting between the SPLM/A-IO and SSPDF troops, and their respective armed militias, in and around Tambura County between June and September. The outbreak of violence stemmed from sub-national and national level politicians, government officials and traditional leaders who politicized, exacerbated and exploited pre-existing fractures between the Azande and Balanda communities in Western Equatoria State.

The armed conflict led to at least 440 civilians killed (332 men, 60 women and 48 children), and 18 others injured (17 men and one woman). At least, 64 individuals (53 women, seven men and four girls) were subjected to sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, and at least 80,000 civilians were forcibly displaced from the areas affected by the violence. At least 74 civilians (52 men, nine women, 13 children) were abducted; men and boys were forcibly recruited to take part in the hostilities. Destruction and looting of private and public property, including humanitarian facilities and schools, were also documented in many of these incidents.

Similarly, the armed conflict in the Tambura area saw high levels of coordination between parties to the R-ARCSS and their affiliated community-based militia. Information gathered by UNMISS suggest that SSPDF soldiers led by a Major General, a former SPLM/A-IO commander who defected to the government in March 2020, have been operating with the support of armed community-based militia believed to be loyal to an Azande traditional chief and a local County official.

According to several victims, eyewitnesses, and secondary sources, mixed Azande-Balanda armed militias were seen operating alongside SPLM/A-IO forces.

Notably, armed militias in the Tambura conflict functioned as proxies of conventional parties and received their support. At the same time, HRD found that these actors were engaged in a specific conflict in Tambura with linkages to the broader political conflict in South Sudan. Accordingly, HRD has distinguished between these perpetrators and other civil defence groups/community-based militias elsewhere in the country, which vary in the degree of their nexus to the conflict in South Sudan. Hence, the violence perpetrated by these actors are referred to as joint operations by conventional actors and affiliated militias.

### Conventional parties

As a result of efforts to adhere to the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), the overall number of victims attributed to violations and abuses by conventional parties has remained significantly lower (11 per cent) than those attributed to civil defence groups and/or community-based militias.

The number of victims harmed by conventional parties in 2021 decreased by 60 per cent (from 1152 to 461 victims) as compared to 2020. However, if the data was to include violence by joint operations by conventional parties and affiliated militias, the decrease in number of victims is less stark, at only 8 per cent (1,152 to 1,057 victims).

Victims harmed by conventional parties were mainly subjected to abduction (39 per cent), primarily for the purpose of forced military recruitment and/or forced labour. The highest number of abductions by conventional parties are attributed to NAS in Central Equatoria (115 victims).

Notably, a significant number of civilians killed by conventional parties (state actors) in Warrap State (31 civilians) and Lakes State (26 civilians) were through extrajudicial killings ordered by state officials and local administrative authorities and carried out predominantly by SSPDF or SSNPS personnel.

High incidence of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by conventional parties persist in Central Equatoria state, particularly in Yei and Lainya county, (20 per cent, 36 cases). Conflict-related sexual violence surged in Western Equatoria state (33 per cent, 65 cases) due to the conflict in the Tambura area.

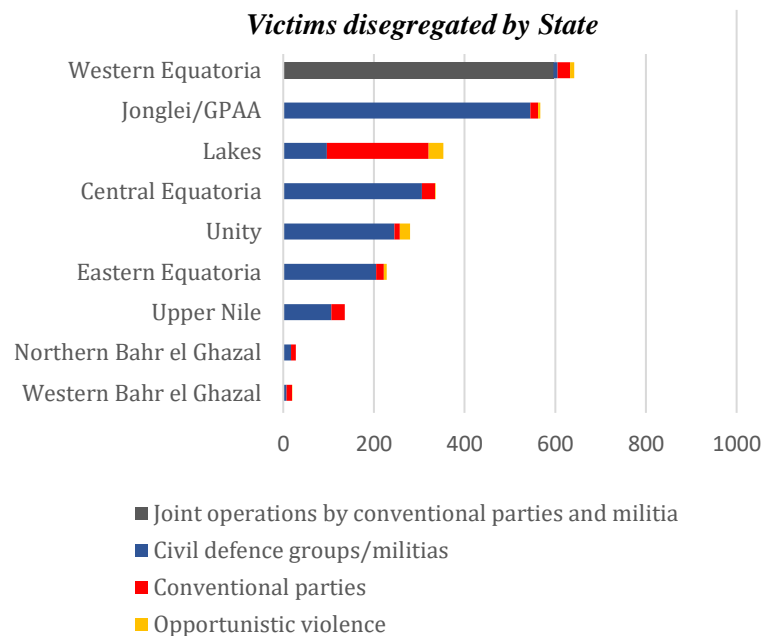
### Opportunistic actors

HRD also documented a relatively small number of incidents by unidentified but related armed elements, which does not fall specifically within one of the two categories described above, but which bear a link to the conflict based on the suspected perpetrators, location, modus operandi and other factors. These actors were primarily engaged in opportunistic violence and were responsible for 2 per cent of all affected victims documented in 2021.

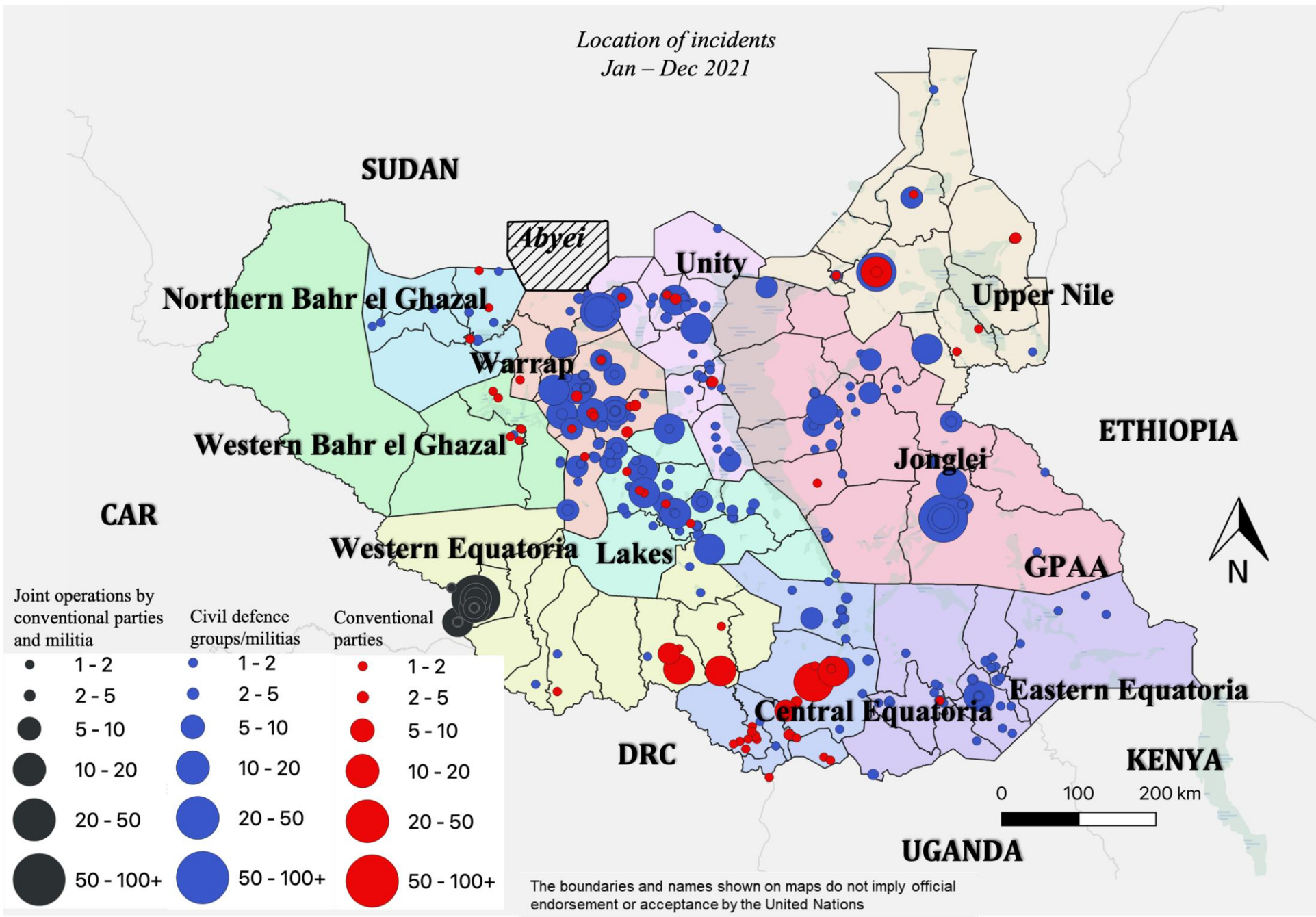
## GEOGRAPHIC TRENDS

In 2021, Warrap was the most affected region, accounting for 24 per cent of victims recorded throughout South Sudan, followed by Western Equatoria, which accounted for approximately 19 per cent of the victims. Jonglei and GPAA were accounted for 17 per cent of all victims. Except for Western and Central Equatoria, most regions were mostly affected by sub-national violence involving civil defence groups and/or community-based militias.

The notable reduction in number of victims in Jonglei/GPAA (1,869 to 545), the most affected region in 2020, may in part be attributed to efforts by UNMISS and partners in late 2020 and early 2021 to deescalate the cycle of violence, including grassroots reconciliation efforts. Since January 2021, HRD, in partnership with UNHCR, Save the Children, and Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO), carried out various trust and confidence building measures to facilitate the tracing and return of abducted women and children, as part of the project funded by the Reconciliation, Stabilization, Resilience Trust Fund Fund (RSRTF).



Location of incidents  
Jan - Dec 2021



## VICTIMS

HRD documented at least 3,414 victims of one of the four main types of harm experienced in South Sudan, a marked decrease (42 per cent) as compared with 2020 (5,850).

Men continued to comprise the majority of victims among local populations (75 per cent or 2,567 men), followed by women (14 per cent or 481 women) and children (11 per cent or 366 children).

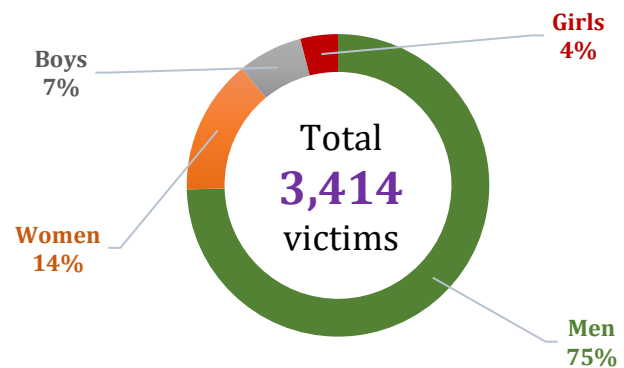
In line with trends observed in the previous years, HRD's findings established that the vast majority of men (91 per cent) were killed or injured, while the remainder were mostly abducted for the purposes of forced military recruitment and/or forced labour. In 2021, at least 200 men were victims of abduction, primarily in the areas of Yei, Central Equatoria (53 per cent of abducted men), largely attributable to NAS, and Western Equatoria (33 per cent of abducted men) due to the armed conflict in the Tambura area.

Women were primarily subjected to killing (39 per cent or 187 women) for the most part during localized violence. Conflict-related sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, accounted for 28 per cent of adult female victims (135 women). Abductions accounted for 19 per cent of women victims (93 women)

Overall, the number of women recorded victims of CRSV decreased slightly (7 per cent) between 2020 and 2021. However, UNMISS has reason to be concerned that women and girls were often subject to sexual violence in cases of abduction as well (93 women and 69 girls).

Abductions remain the major violence against children: 49 per cent were abducted (178 children), 32 per cent were killed (119 children), 11 per cent were injured (39 children) and eight per cent (30 children) were subjected to conflict-related sexual violence. Similar to trends from the previous year, abductions remain concentrated in Jonglei; 123 children abducted in Jonglei by community-based militias made up 69 per cent of all abducted

*Victims desegregated by sex and age group*



## PERPETRATORS

Among the three main categories of alleged perpetrators involved in armed violence, civil defence groups and/or community-based militias remained the primary actors causing harm to civilians, illustrating that conventional parties to the conflict do not possess a monopoly on the use of violence in South Sudan.

In 2021, civil defence groups and/or community-based militias involved in sub-national violence were responsible for 68 per cent of victims or 2,279 victims. This represents a decrease of more than half compared to 2020 (4,525 victims). Although the structure of these groups remains complex and rooted in the traditional dynamics within and between local communities, HRD found that some groups have a degree of organization, with established command structures headed by identified leaders.

As explained above, HRD has created a separate category for the ongoing violence in Tambura due to the high level of coordination and support between the conventional parties and militias. Joint operations by conventional parties and affiliated armed militia in Tambura accounted for 20 per cent of violence against victims.

The third category of perpetrators causing the most harm to civilians are conventional parties to the conflict. Government forces and opposition armed groups, such as SPLM/A-IO/RM and NAS, were responsible for 16 per cent of victims (461 individuals). As illustrated in the section on geographic trends, some specific hotspots were affected by the presence of conventional parties (Central Equatoria, Western Equatoria and Unity).

Unidentified but related armed elements also continued to account for a small proportion of victims, primarily in the form of opportunistic violence. HRD found that these actors were responsible for two per cent of all victims documented.

*Victims, disaggregated by category of perpetrators*

