

Synthesis of Secondary Evidence on the Impact of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on Protection of Civilians and Human Rights

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INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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Contents

- Summary 3
- I. Introduction and objective 5
- II. Background..... 5
- III. Methodology 6
- IV. Secondary Evidence Synthesis Results..... 11
- V. Conclusion 23
- Annex 1: Management Response 24
- Annex 2: Evidence gap map 27

Summary

In its effort to assess the impact of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) on the protection of civilians (POC) and human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during the period 2010-2023, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) synthesized available secondary evidence from a selection of articles, internal and external reports and publications which met the OIOS quality criteria established for the purpose.

The protection of civilians (POC) constitutes a common objective shared by United Nations actors to protect civilians from risks and threats to their physical integrity, including those arising from armed conflict. POC by United Nations peacekeeping operations takes place alongside broader protection efforts, including the promotion and protection of human rights and humanitarian protection, which seek to prevent, mitigate, and stop threats to individuals' human rights and fundamental freedoms, ensure that these rights are respected and protected by duty bearers and ensure access to basic services and humanitarian assistance (the Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping, 2023).

The synthesis of available evidence revealed that, globally, the United Nations peacekeeping operations, including MONUSCO, have promoted peace and stability in their areas of operation. MONUSCO's overall effectiveness in protecting civilians and human rights was judged to be mixed, and sub-national, local examples provided a nuanced and positive assessment of the Mission's success. Stability was created in several provinces such as in Kasai, Kasai Central and Tanganyika Provinces which allowed MONUSCO to embark on the progressive, sustainable, and responsible transfer of its tasks to the host State.

In the DRC, MONUSCO contribution to the evolution of the POC concept across United Nations peacekeeping was widely affirmed. Nevertheless, despite its thirteen-year lifespan in its present configuration, the synthesis of research found the Mission to have achieved mixed results in protecting civilians due to pervasive external factors, primarily the complex relationships between the armed groups, the political elite, and the regional actors. In the absence of a sustainable peace arrangement between the Government and various armed groups, MONUSCO was seen as relying on military measures to address the conflict dynamics. This gave rise to negative consequences, such as: a) a potential loss of the protected status of MONUSCO military component and, by extension, of its civilian components; b) an increased risk of reprisals against Congolese civilians following MONUSCO joint operations with the Congolese forces; c) strained relationships with prominent troop contributing countries (TCCs); and d) loss of public trust in the Mission's capabilities. Over time, the Mission's military posture declined due to lack of the host State's political will to sustain the posture, reduced cooperation with the Congolese armed forces, insufficient combat capacity partly because of TCCs' reluctance to engage, and the inhospitable terrain of operation.

As part of its overall protection mandate, despite various efforts, the Mission's ability to bolster progress in the security sector reform and the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, repatriation, and resettlement of ex-combatants was significantly impeded, attributed to the lack of incentives on the part of the Government.

Similarly, MONUSCO was criticized for its approach to stabilization, which overlooked the micro-level tensions within the communities as the conflict became increasingly ethnic in nature. The early warning systems set up and facilitated by the Mission's community liaison function were applauded for their timely intelligence, which supported the combat of armed groups by the peacekeepers; however, such warnings often did not elicit a timely response from national security forces.

In the area of human rights, MONUSCO was commended for introducing much needed essential services which did not previously exist and filling crucial institutional gaps in the fight against impunity for human

rights violations, including sexual violence and grave violations against children. However, the environment within which the Mission operated was acknowledged as being challenging as its mandate necessitated collaboration with Congolese security forces with documented violations in these areas. This was seen as contributing to a loss of public confidence towards MONUSCO resulting in popular uprisings against the Mission. The national authorities' low performance in combatting impunity exacerbated the pervasiveness of these violations, and further tarnished the Mission's public image.

In addition to overall human rights protection, MONUSCO efforts to open safe corridors were lauded for facilitating the return of many displaced persons, but the fleetingness and fragility of peace in the Eastern part of the country left populations in an extremely vulnerable position. While the security environment for people in need was seen to have improved during times of peace, it was at the cost of an increased risk to peacekeepers, civilian staff, and aid workers in other areas.

In view of the paucity of information and analysis on the impact of several of MONUSCO activities as experienced in this exercise, OIOS generated one important lesson for the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and active missions to consider: improve the conduct of evaluative activities as well as gather, generate and share credible knowledge about United Nations peacekeeping activities and results overall.

DPO expressed reservations in the use of evidence synthesis as a method to assess a mission's impact, given the diversity in the quality and approaches used in the underlying studies. The Department differed with certain interpretations by some scholars, such as that relating to the legal status of peacekeepers executing an offensive mandate. Overall, DPO maintained that the conclusions arrived at using such a method should be used with caution.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of this Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation was to consolidate and synthesize available credible secondary evidence on the impact of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) on the protection of civilians (POC) and human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) over the period 2010 - 2023. The topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment described in the inception paper produced at the outset of the exercise.¹ The evaluation conforms with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System.²
2. MONUSCO management comments were sought on the draft report and considered in the final report. The MONUSCO response is included in Annex 1.

II. Background

Mandate

3. In its resolution 1925 (2010), the United Nations Security Council established MONUSCO under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, replacing the United Nations Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC) which had been established under resolution 1279 (1999).
4. MONUSCO was mandated to ensure POC under imminent threat of physical violence, as well as support stabilization efforts in the DRC in close collaboration with and in consideration of the leading role of the Government. Responding to the complex and volatile security situation in Eastern DRC, the Council in its resolution 2098 (2013) authorized the establishment of an Intervention Brigade with a distinct mandate to neutralize armed groups through targeted offensive operations.³ Over the years, the mandate of MONUSCO was renewed annually and POC remained a core priority task. Following the first peaceful transfer of power between the heads of State in the DRC in 2019, the Council in its resolutions 2463 and 2478 (2019) underscored the need for a responsible and sustainable drawdown and exit of MONUSCO. The Mission consequently reduced its footprint over time, including in the Kasai, Kasai Central and Tanganyika provinces, and consolidated its presence in the three provinces in Eastern DRC, viz., Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu.
5. POC was central to its annually renewed mandate and remained at the core of MONUSCO priority areas of engagement, increasingly guided by its approach of ‘protection by projection.’⁴ Nevertheless, the security situation remained particularly volatile, with Eastern DRC being the epicenter of conflict involving both national and foreign armed groups. The DRC was often listed amongst the lowest ranked countries on both the Human Development Index (ranked 179th in 2021)⁵ and on the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Index⁶ (ranked 159th in 2023). It also faced one of the world’s

¹Inception Paper Assignment No: IED-2023-012.

² [United Nations Evaluation Group \(UNEG\)](#). Norms and Standards for Evaluation, 2016.

³ Hereinafter, referred to as the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB).

⁴ A key component of Mission’s POC activities starting 2018 whereby the Mission implemented quick, flexible, and proactive short-term deployments of military force accompanied by civilian staff based on established early warning systems.

⁵ <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/COD>.

⁶ <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/congo-dem-rep>.

longest humanitarian crises housing the largest population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa,⁷ thereby exacerbating POC and human rights concerns. In December 2023, responding to a request from the Government of the DRC, the Security Council resolution 2717 took full note of the comprehensive disengagement plan agreed between the DRC and MONUSCO, comprising three distinct and successive phases of disengagement, and decided to implement the gradual handover of responsibilities to the Government of DRC.

Overall peacekeeping effectiveness⁸

6. A predominantly quantitative body of peer-reviewed research that encompassed large population studies demonstrated that, globally, United Nations peacekeeping promoted peace and stability. On average, its presence and interventions were effective in achieving key objectives, including reducing civilian fatalities and battle-related casualties; shortening civil conflict duration by being deployed to conflict-prone locations; preventing conflict spillover across borders; sustaining commitment to the peace agreement; decreasing the likelihood of conflict recurrence when coupled with mediation; increasing post-conflict peace duration; and building stability and socio-economic development in post-conflict environments.
7. Large multi-dimensional missions, such as MONUSCO, were found to be more effective than monitoring or peace enforcement missions in preventing conflict recurrence and reducing the levels of violence against civilians. Compared to regional peacekeeping forces, United Nations missions were generally found to be more effective in preventing violence perpetrated by rebels than by state actors. This underlines the challenges associated with the Mission's dependence on the host government's consent to operate in conflict zones.
8. Furthermore, positive, unintended consequences of peacekeeping were observed on local economic growth, democratization, and lowered risk of electoral violence, better environmental quality (i.e., safe water access and sanitation), as well as improved educational attainment in conflict zones with considerable gains for women and girls.

III. Methodology

9. A synthesis of secondary evidence from internal and external sources was adopted as the method to explain whether and how the Mission was seen to have made a difference to POC and human rights in the DRC.⁹ This method identified, categorized, and synthesized selected available credible evidence from published literature focused on the effects of MONUSCO interventions.

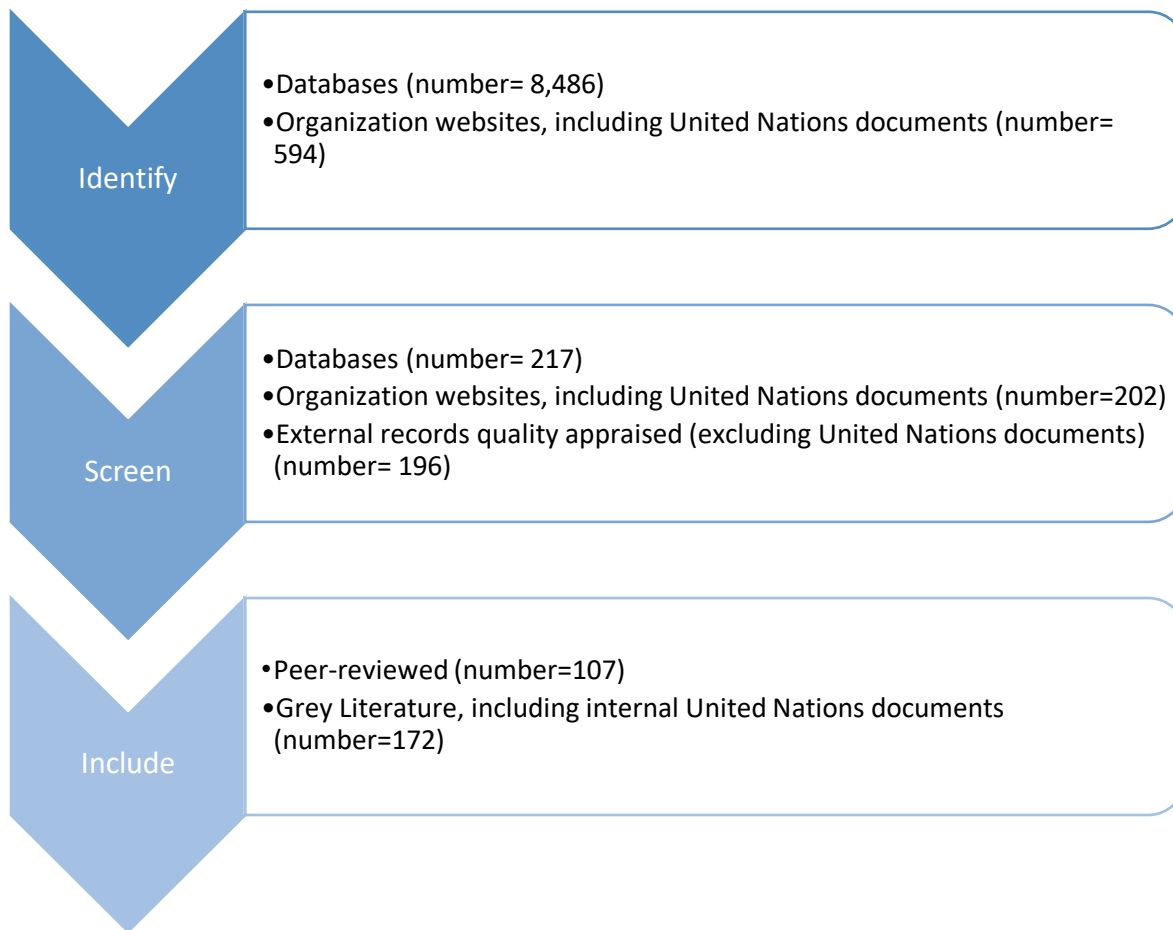
⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM): [Displacement Tracking Matrix, October 2023](#).

⁸ Research cited in this section included MONUSCO (and to some extent MONUC) in its scope, assessing mission performance based on various variables such as geographic coverage, troop size, and so on.

⁹ Evidence synthesis was selected as the main methodology for two primary reasons. First, it provides for a higher degree of triangulation of empirical evidence on the activities and accomplishments of MONUSCO, which otherwise was neither feasible nor attainable via primary, conventional data collection techniques available to OIOS. Second, when conducted transparently and systematically, this approach generates aggregated results, contributing strategic insights into the debate on peacekeeping effectiveness, and is reproducible, contributing to the evaluation capacity of the entity in question.

10. An industry standard evidence synthesis protocol was followed to ensure the quality of the secondary evidence included in this evaluation. This protocol has three main steps: identification, screening, and quality review of evidence to include, as outlined in figure 1.¹⁰

Figure 1. Evidence screened and included.



11. MONUSCO long-term outcomes and impact were conceptualized in the Theory of Change (see Figure 2) developed by OIOS and translated into search syntax in collaboration with the United Nations Dag Hammarskjold Library. Only reports that satisfied the criteria as seen in Table 1 were included in the evidence synthesis.

¹⁰ Complete bibliography along with the detailed account of the steps taken to conduct the synthesis was shared with the Mission via supplementary annexes.

Figure 2. Theory of Change: MONUSCO

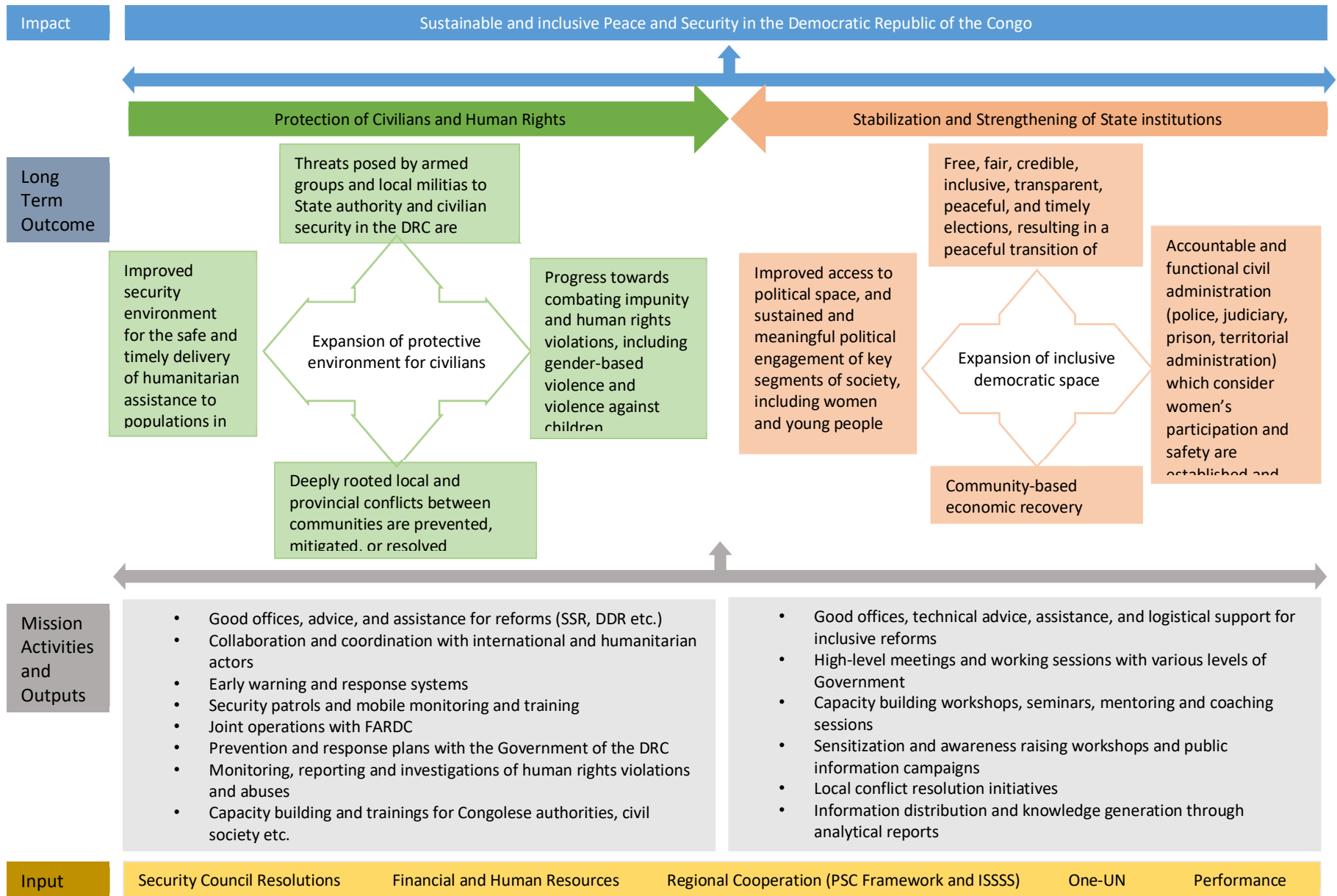


Table 1. Inclusion criteria

Criteria	Description
Publication date	Published and digitally accessible between July 2010-June 2023
Target groups/exposure of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affected populations in the DRC (women, men, girl, boy), often referred to as civilians or/and Congolese. • International actors, especially United Nations system entities • National and foreign armed groups and militias operating in the DRC
Geographic location	Mission areas of operation (team sites and headquarters) between 2010-2023 including Kinshasa, North and South Kivus and Ituri, Kasai, Tanganyika
Language	Published in English and/or French
Study design	Experimental, quasi-experimental (regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences etc.), non-experimental (survey research, ethnographic, phenomenological, ecological etc.) with qualitative only, quantitative only or mixed-methods that are either cross sectional or longitudinal that triangulated data from more than one source.
Types of publications/evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic reviews, review of reviews, evaluation synthesis • Impact evaluations • Performance, process, implementation evaluations • Grey literature (technical papers and reports published by UN system entities and other bilateral, multilateral actors) • Peer-reviewed scholarly, original studies and theses/dissertations
Reported outcomes	Whether the outcomes of interest are reported: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threats posed by armed groups or armed group activities in the DRC • Safe and timely humanitarian assistance • Fight against impunity and human rights violations • Resolution of inter-communal conflict

12. The quality of each identified study was appraised using specific criteria (see Table 2) to ensure the credibility of the findings contained therein, as well as to eliminate any bias emanating from the study design or data analysis.

Table 2. OIOS quality review criteria

Criteria	Rating		
	Yes	No	Unclear/ cannot tell
1. Is there a clear statement of the purpose/objectives of the research/evaluation?			
2. Does the research/evaluation address a clearly focused question (in terms of populations, interventions given, and outcomes considered)?			
3. Is the research/evaluation design appropriate to address the objectives of the research/evaluation?			
4. Does the report have a clearly delineated methodology or conceptual framework?			
5. Are important and relevant sources of evidence and methods identified and clearly described?			
6. Is the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?			
7. Are there clear statements of findings?			
8. Was there any sensitivity analysis performed on the results (what would be alternative to the observed effects?)			
9. Were adverse or unintended effects clearly described?			
10. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?			

13. All selected studies were analyzed using NVivo (a qualitative analysis software) based on the generative logic of causality, whereby each study was coded by the context¹¹ in which MONUSCO devised and implemented mechanisms¹² to explain and predict the outcomes¹³ and impact. Findings and conclusions were synthesized from these analytical outputs, and thereafter, evidence gaps existing in the literature were identified and mapped.

14. The evidence synthesized in this evaluation and presented in Section IV below was extracted from publications of peace and security, and human rights scholars, researchers, and practitioners, some of whom work at the United Nations system entities. Relevant comments from DPO have been inserted in italics throughout this document together with rebuttal from OIOS, as required.

Limitations

15. OIOS did not verify the underlying raw data, the analytical techniques deployed, or the peer-review mechanisms used beyond a prima-facie review of what was articulated in the publications.

¹¹ Economic, geographic, historical, social, environmental, and political circumstances and the cultural values of target groups.

¹² MONUSCO activities, processes, initiatives, structures, and interventions.

¹³ Intended or unintended, short, medium, or long-term effects observed.

16. Scanning, sifting, and analyzing documents for this synthesis was completed within four months by OIOS with a team of five persons with wide diversity in background and experience in research, evaluation as well as the peace and security and humanitarian sectors.
17. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of the published literature, covering different MONUSCO outcome areas, time periods and activities in varied depth, limited the ability to draw precise synthesis of evidence in some cases. Some studies suffered from data unavailability and inaccessibility and were overly reliant on descriptive analysis of a selective event (e.g., the fall of Goma) or a single Mission component (e.g., the military) which led to a potential overreporting or overestimation of negative or positive results in some outcome areas.
18. *DPO maintained that reliance on secondary sources is problematic as they have distinct methodological approaches and perspectives and cover a long-time span.*

IV. Secondary Evidence Synthesis Results

- A. MONUSCO contribution to the protection of civilians varied across its area of operation and over time, but secondary evidence suggested that, without the Mission, the situation relating to POC could have been far worse.
19. Within the United Nations peacekeeping environment, and given its long-standing presence in the DRC, MONUSCO became a laboratory for POC initiatives (e.g., three-tier POC framework, joint protection teams, protection by projection), local community engagement tools (e.g., protection plans, early warning, and response systems), and its fight against conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), which were considered best practices transferable to other peacekeeping operations. The Mission's other innovative approaches included use of modern surveillance tools including drones (although there were some caveats such as perceived inaction of contingents, access rights to the intelligence gathered, and their use by courts). Furthermore, MONUSCO provided impetus to the local economy by building infrastructure; contributed to democratic engagement, civic activism, and dialogue through its Radio Okapi; and built a network of civil society organizations and media.
20. Notwithstanding the above, and despite being one of the longest-standing, largest and most expensive multidimensional peacekeeping missions, MONUSCO was assessed to have achieved overall mixed results in stopping violence and bringing peace and stability across its areas of operations. This was primarily because the Mission's effectiveness depended on when and where the troops were dynamically deployed throughout the lifespan of the Mission in response to conflict flare-ups and hot spots. On the one hand, stability was created in several provinces such as Kasai, Kasai Central and Tanganyika, thereby facilitating the progressive and sustainable transfer of the Mission's tasks to the Government and seen as a success. On the other hand, the continued presence of armed groups and the ongoing violence and serious human rights violations committed by them as well as State actors, especially in Eastern DRC, proliferated. As an unintended consequence of these two opposing conditions, MONUSCO was perceived to have diminished the role of the State in protecting its civilians and created dependency, undermining the principle that the primary responsibility of protecting civilians rests with government. Despite occasional success in protecting civilians from harm inflicted by armed groups, the population perceived the Mission's security role negatively, (partly due to a lack of understanding of MONUSCO mandate). These negative perceptions triggered

multiple calls for the Mission's exit by the DRC government, the Congolese population, and international actors in 2023.

B. MONUSCO had limited impact on reducing the threat of armed groups against civilians due to a variety of factors, some of which were beyond the control of the Mission.

B.1. MONUSCO was unable to articulate an overarching political solution to address the ambiguous relationships between the armed groups, the political elite, the State security institutions, and regional actors.

21. The Mission's POC successes were undermined by a complex and shifting web of domestic and regional interests and alliances and the absence of a comprehensive and sustainable peace arrangement in the DRC between the parties to the conflict. The most comprehensive political agreement was the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) signed in 2013 but its implementation was deficient due to lack of political will. There were over a hundred-armed groups in the DRC that exploited the absence of State authority, and these continued to fragment, proliferate, and consequently shift power relations.¹⁴ Some of the prominent armed groups maintained regional networks. Tensions repeatedly rose between the Governments of the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi over cross-border support (i.e., direct military interventions or material support) to armed groups, especially in Eastern DRC, thereby jeopardizing stability and contributing to the proliferation of armed groups.

22. Against this backdrop, MONUSCO was unable to articulate an overarching political solution towards a comprehensive and durable peace. The Mission's political analysis was found insufficient, lacking critical assessment of each conflict actor and the complex relations among these actors. The Mission's structure (i.e., location of the senior management, Heads of Offices, and military component across Kinshasa and Goma and the reporting lines thereof) was believed to have created a disconnect in integrated planning towards a much-needed political solution to the conflict.

23. A political solution to instability and armed conflict in Eastern DRC and the region had long been brokered through regional mechanisms beyond MONUSCO immediate sphere of operations and, to some extent, influence. The implementation of the PCSF (2013) as well as the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (2020) were championed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region. The most recent Nairobi process was initiated by the East African Community in 2022, composed of a political dialogue and a regional military force. MONUSCO provided good offices supporting the process.

B.2. In the absence of a political solution to the conflict, MONUSCO was mandated to adopt a military approach to address the threat of the armed groups, which created adverse effects for the local populations as well as for the Mission's own performance.

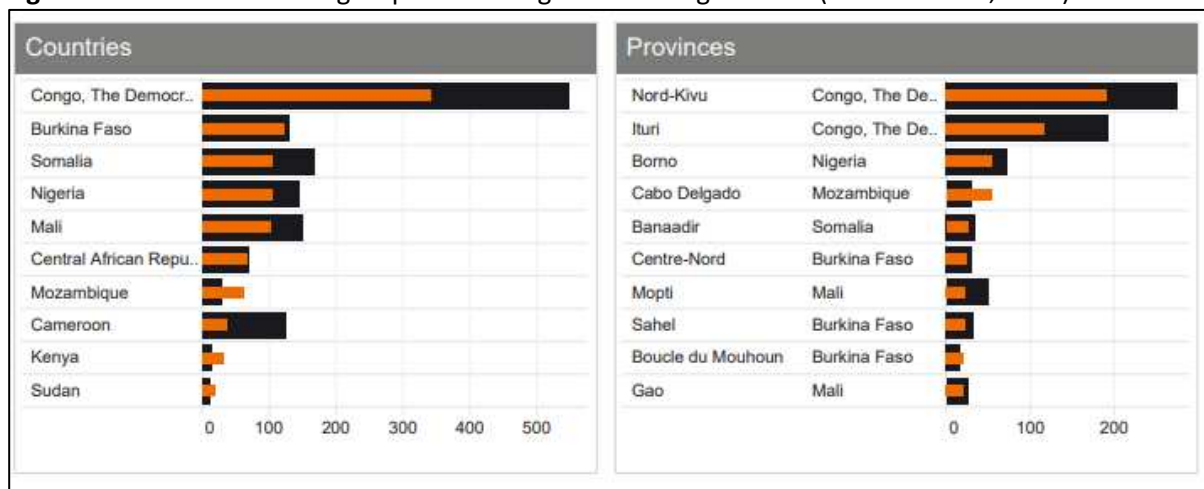
¹⁴ The main armed groups in North and South Kivu, Ituri, Tanganyika and the Kasai provinces were the Tutsi-dominated March 23 Movement (M23), and the Hutu-dominated Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Other groups included the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP); the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CEDEO); RED-Tabara, as well as self-styled local defence groups such as the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (FRPI), and assorted community-based militia groups also referred to as 'Mai Mai'.

24. As per available external research, the Mission's robust approach to neutralize armed groups was criticized on grounds of being State-centric and reliant on military measures. The overriding focus on security measures was seen as generating adverse consequences, thereby undermining the Mission's overall impact. Although mandated by the Security Council, the FIB's use of intentional lethal force to neutralize armed groups raised questions among jurists and experts about the legality of killings under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights Law (HRL). The FIB mandate was also seen by some legal experts as implicating the Mission into an active party to the conflict, thereby jeopardizing its ability to negotiate a political settlement between the parties and address the main drivers of conflict. *DPO commented that this assertion misinterprets the nature of impartiality as a peacekeeping doctrine, which refers to the impartial implementation of its mandates provided by the Security Council and does not imply neutrality towards all armed actors. MONUSCO, like all multidimensional United Nations peacekeeping operations established in recent years, is tasked with prioritizing the protection of civilians under a Chapter VII clause, which authorizes the mission to use all necessary means to protect civilians.*
25. MONUSCO's joint operations with the Congolese army increased the risk of harming civilians. Following these operations, there were reports of increased kidnappings, displacements, arbitrary killings, and reprisals against civilians. The well-documented human rights violations allegedly carried out by the State armed forces highlighted the protection risks of joint operations, compounding the humanitarian situation. *DPO disagreed with this assertion, noting that MONUSCO's protection of civilians and other activities also aim to prevent and deter reprisals by armed groups after military operations, which are frequent occurrences regardless of whether operations are conducted unilaterally by FARDC or jointly with MONUSCO.*
26. The Mission's credibility in the eyes of the public fluctuated over time, reaching a point of "crisis of legitimacy" in 2022 when local perception, considered a key determinant of the Mission's success, was at an all-time low. Polls showed that the population was aware of MONUSCO offensive operations but had mixed sentiments about their effectiveness given the increased risk of potential reprisals from armed groups, and their effects on the overall peace process. Some of these perceptions were attributed to a lack of understanding of the Mission's mandate, its strained relationship with the Government, partnership with the Congolese army, and disinformation and harmful messaging on social media – which tended to be high during times of uncertainty, such as during the resurgence of the armed group M23 in the DRC – that at times led to widespread public demonstrations and risk of imminent harm to peacekeepers.
27. The Mission's robust mandate also disrupted its relationships with some member states. Prominent troop contributing countries (TCC) posed caveats against the deployment of their troops in hazardous situations to execute combat operations, on grounds of compromised impartiality and increased threats against the safety of their contingents. In addition, the FIB mandate generated division and misunderstanding in the interpretation of the POC mandate within the MONUSCO Force. For instance, the framework brigades in Eastern DRC appeared more passive over time towards the use of all necessary means to protect civilians and operated on the assumption that the use of force was the sole responsibility of the FIB.

B.3. Despite its reliance on military measures, the intensity, frequency and effectiveness of the Mission's offensive operations and military posture declined over time, leading to the resilience of armed groups, and worsening of the security situation in Eastern DRC.

28. The Mission’s major military achievement, thus far, was recorded as defeating M23 in 2013 and the FRPI in 2020 together with State forces (i.e., *les Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* or the FARDC).¹⁵ It was widely accepted that these successes were largely possible due to support received from the Government at the time, the international pressure on Rwanda to not interfere in support of M23, as well as significant amounts of force used by the FIB including deploying drones. The Mission continued to support the FARDC in its joint operations against sanctioned armed groups such as ADF, LRA, FDLR and Mai-Mai by supplying food, water, ammunition, artillery fire support, and medical evacuations.
29. However, the intensity and effectiveness of these operations declined over time. Despite occasional losses, the leadership structures of the armed groups and their main sources of income were not fundamentally altered or dismantled. The armed groups remained resilient and active, starting asymmetric threats using improvised explosive devices and uncrewed aerial vehicles, thereby causing the security and humanitarian situation to deteriorate further in areas where they operated. Some of these groups were documented to have expanded in size or maintained their strength which was a destabilizing factor in the region, with the number of armed and self-defense groups peaking at 130 in 2019. M23 resurrected in 2017 and then 2022 with more modern weaponry than MONUSCO and further strained regional dynamics.
30. Eastern DRC continued to be the epicenter of conflict, causing the security and humanitarian situation to further deteriorate. Between November 2017 and October 2019, the DRC was recorded as one of the top ten deadliest countries in the world in terms of both attacks perpetrated by non-State armed groups and the resulting fatalities. Between August 2021 and August 2023, most of the attacks that took place in sub-Saharan Africa were recorded in the DRC, most specifically in North Kivu and Ituri (Figure 2 below). The ADF and M23 were among the most frequently reported non-State armed groups perpetrating these attacks.

Figure 3. Number of armed group attacks August 2021-August 2023 (Source: Janes, 2023)



*Black bar: 4 August 2021- 3 August 2022, Orange bar: 4 August 2022- 2 August 2023

¹⁵ FRPI signed a peace agreement with the Government in 2020 resulting in the demobilization of over a thousand armed elements.

31. Four main reasons were recorded as to why the Mission's military operations waned in terms of intensity and effectiveness. First, political support for these operations declined over time. It was argued that the deployment of the FIB reduced the Government's incentive to negotiate with M23, marking the beginning of the decline of political will in addressing the root causes of the conflict. Offensive operations were stifled by the Government numerous times due to its desire to maintain the existing balance of power nationally and regionally. For example, the Government's selection of two generals with poor human rights records for the joint operations against FDLR constrained MONUSCO's ability to cooperate with them, as per the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP).
32. Second, MONUSCO cooperation and information sharing with the FARDC was limited, thereby impeding its ability to implement its protection mandate. The FARDC appeared unwilling at times to provide MONUSCO with the necessary information required to assess the risks of supporting joint operations. The MONUSCO Force and the FARDC seemed to have negative perceptions about the other's capacity and culture. For example, the FARDC perceived MONUSCO troops as "*soldats de luxe*" (luxury soldiers), who were technologically advanced but with limited knowledge of the conflict dynamics and armed groups on the ground. In contrast, MONUSCO troops saw the FARDC as disorganized, lacking discipline, and with limited capacity and equipment.
33. Third, the combat effectiveness of some FIB contingents, including their training, posture, intelligence, and surveillance capacity, as well as the sufficiency of the Mission's essential assets and resources (e.g., aviation, military engineering, medical and serviceability of equipment) was questioned regarding their ability to engage in sustained combat operations against armed groups as mandated.
34. Finally, the variety of armed groups, the multiplicity of conflict hotspots, the vastness of the terrain, limited infrastructure, and the lack of paved and passable roads made it difficult for the FIB to defeat the armed groups and sustain gains made along the way.

B.4. MONUSCO achieved limited progress in security sector reform (SSR) primarily due to continued collusion between State security actors and the armed groups.

35. One impeding factor against the restoration of peace in the DRC was the lack of progress in SSR, which was perceived to be a failure. There was no comprehensive national SSR strategy, adding to a lack of judicial framework and of a unified professional army, despite extensive international support over the years, including from the European Union and MONUSCO.
36. Two major factors impeded MONUSCO's ability to support meaningful SSR. First, State actors reportedly undermined the reform efforts, labeling them as "infringements on its sovereignty," and preferred bilateral support to equip and sustain the FARDC, instead of allowing MONUSCO to coordinate the support received from many donors competing to provide support in this field. A lack of earnest buy-in and long-term vision on the part of the Government was attributed to the political elite's desire to sustain the benefits from the status quo, whereby security forces continued to fuel instability in Eastern DRC in complicity with the armed groups.
37. Second, the lack of adequate and timely payment of wages and difficult service conditions were identified as the primary reasons why the FARDC and the Congolese national police (*La Police nationale congolaise* or the PNC) were colluding with the armed groups and participating in profiting from extractive industries. The shortcomings of the security institutions, such as: poor training, lack

of equipment, ineffective leadership, command and control problems, operational inefficiency, and lack of morale, were mentioned as being detrimental to SSR progress.

38. The evidence synthesis highlighted that in this difficult political, security and socio-economic environment, where systemic corruption was deeply entrenched, and transgressions by the security forces and the political elite on the communities regularly occurred, the Mission's efforts to support SSR were reduced to technical interventions and logistical support such as provision of fuel, rations, and transport. In return, the FARDC reportedly provided limited intelligence and information on its operations to the MONUSCO Force. The Mission's good offices, capacity building and logistical support to help the FARDC and the PNC evolve into accountable, professional forces were insufficient compared to the magnitude of the problem.

B.5. Despite sporadic gains, MONUSCO was unable to sustain the progress achieved on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration/repatriation, resettlement (DDR/RR) due to various external and internal factors.

39. All three phases of the national DDR/RR programmes were significantly delayed and suspended several times, illustrating the conflict continuum and the sustained military capacity of the armed groups. The peaceful transfer of power following the 2018 elections incentivized several armed groups to join the DDR programme. However, a lack of strategic framework and reform agenda between the Government and international actors, including MONUSCO, hindered the process. Although an estimated 110,000 ex-combatants were disarmed and demobilized during the first two phases of the DDR programme, a high caseload of ex-combatants was found ineligible and excluded from the initial and largest programme while renewed recruitment by armed groups was occurring, posing a risk to stability.
40. In a context where there was no peace to keep and basic conditions for DDR/RR were not fully met (i.e., a sustainable peace arrangement, the host government's engagement and ownership, capable national institutions, and adequate funding), DDR/RR remained a largely donor-driven process, focusing on the technical and security aspects and falling short of addressing political and structural differences among the groups as well as their socio-economic needs to reintegrate into civilian life.
41. In the absence of a national strategy for a DDR programme and a structured database to track the participants, United Nations reports revealed that the Mission used its military operations to encourage or coerce the armed groups to surrender and participate in the MONUSCO DDR programme. However, other evidence suggested that MONUSCO being a party to the conflict reduced incentives for the armed groups to demobilize due to loss of trust in the process. Over the years, MONUSCO fell short of meeting its targeted number of ex-combatants to be demobilized and/or repatriated due to a reduction in operations against armed groups and evident deficiencies in its weapons and ammunition collection, storage, and destruction. While some armed groups refused to disarm completely and declined to leave their military bases, others did not even participate in any DDR programme due to fear of loss of power over, and benefits received from the communities.
42. One positive result of MONUSCO advocacy and sensitization activities was in achieving commitments from the FARDC and some armed groups to end grave violations against children, and their systematic

MONUSCO early warning and response systems

The most frequent criticism of the early warning systems was the lack of timely and satisfactory response from MONUSCO following alerts provided or information shared at protection meetings, discouraging the community members from further engaging with the Mission. *MONUSCO confirmed that most of these alerts were transferred to FARDC, PNC or other protection actors and therefore, it no longer had visibility or feedback on the overall response. In addition, a lack of common joint analysis between the Mission military and civilian components based on the information received, and the lack of involvement of military personnel in the development of the community protection plans hampered the effectiveness of these networks and thereby, the Mission's efforts to mitigate intercommunal or armed conflict.*

In 2017, as MONUSCO was developing new mobile capabilities, a reduction in resources coincided with an increase in the number and types of protection threats. Financial pressures led to MONUSCO's closure of some bases, reduced presence of CLAs on the ground, and compromised communication networks with the communities, making it increasingly challenging for the Mission to gather and act on information in a timely manner.

release. This led to a decline in the number of children recruited and used in armed conflict in the DRC, and the delisting of the FARDC from the Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict for recruitment and use of children in 2017.

C. In complying with the mandate to strengthen the capacities of the central government and State forces, the Mission could not adequately address the root causes of conflict in the DRC.

43. Mandated to strengthen the capacity of the central government and State forces (which escalated tensions as they were parties to the conflict), the Mission was operationalizing top-down, militaristic interventions against macro-level threats posed by organized armed groups and/or regional actors. However, there were also a series of intercommunal clashes which were underpinned by the ethnic character of the armed groups, many of which positioned themselves as authorities over people, resources, and land. Local level clashes were often related to disputes over land, natural resources, and customary and political power, as well as ethnic grievances. These were exacerbated by State sources of destabilization (such as lack of provision of basic services), which alienated the local populations further, thereby creating missed opportunities for sustainable peacebuilding. Although MONUSCO was found to have made commendable efforts to address local conflicts in cooperation with relevant authorities, per its mandate (see paragraphs 45-46 below), it was criticized for lacking the necessary institutional capacity, training, and analytical frameworks to understand, analyze and resolve local conflict and for, instead, implementing peacebuilding activities in the form of short-term quick impact projects that could not address the root causes of the multi-layered conflict. *DPO commented that the above characterizations of MONUSCO's activities in support of local conflict resolution did not recognize the inherent limitations in MONUSCO's mandate and capacities. Notably, the peacekeeping mission has not had an executive or administrative authority mandate, but instead has acted in line with its mandate to help bring the State and local authorities to the areas which they did not control.*

44. One of the most commended activities of the Mission at the local level was appointing Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) who managed Community Alert Networks (CANs) and

selected members to the Local Protection Teams (LPTs) to provide early warning on the security

situation and reported threats facing the communities. At numerous times, information gathering, and triangulation of information obtained from within communities by the CLAs, enabled response from the Joint Protection Teams and Standing Combat Deployments against intercommunal or armed conflict. MONUSCO found a strong correlation between the CANs and military operations against the armed groups in 2014. This was supported by the research finding that UN peacekeepers were better prepared to face imminent attacks when they cooperated with and collected intelligence from local communities.

45. In addition, MONUSCO used its good offices to engage with senior government and provincial authorities, undertook intercommunity and intracommunity dialogue and mediation processes, set up local conflict resolution mechanisms and traditional peace committees to mitigate and reduce intercommunal tensions and violence. The Mission's contribution to local peace agreements however had limited effect in reducing conflict caused by the conduct of armed actors. Secondary evidence suggested that political negotiations or settlements with the armed groups were short-lived, did not reduce conflict, and at times made it possible for the armed groups to renew violence by giving them impunity.

D. While MONUSCO had a positive impact on the human rights situation in the DRC, including sexual violence, its efforts were insufficient given the scale and pervasiveness of the violations.

46. MONUSCO took several measures to combat persistent human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law including war crimes and crimes against humanity in the DRC, with notable achievements. The Mission supported the establishment of legal institutions such as mobile courts, leading to a conviction of some armed group leaders and a decrease in the risk of severe human rights violations. Toll-free lines for victims to report crimes led to increased investigations. Recommendations put forward by the Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (based on Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism which was co-led by MONUSCO) contributed to the listing of various parties to the conflict over the years for committing various grave violations against children. Despite these measures, human rights violations continued, predominantly in the conflict-affected Eastern provinces.
47. The Mission's biggest challenge in implementing its human rights activities lay in its cooperation with the FARDC, which continued to commit violations, at times greater than the armed groups. State forces were engaged in 'subcontract warfare' using local armed groups in their military components against foreign armed groups. The distinction between State actors and armed groups, in relation to human rights violations, became blurred. As per the HRDDP, MONUSCO would not cooperate with, or support elements of Congolese armed forces known to have been implicated in human rights abuse incidents. However, the Mission had limited political leeway in implementing the policy, as many of its activities relied on cooperation with the State, which was crucial for strengthening the State's capacity. It was difficult to demonstrate whether the HRDDP was having an impact on the FARDC behavior. This harmed the Mission's image among the civilian population. In addition, the process to clear units/commanders was too long for effective offensive operations. Despite a downward trend observed in systematic and large-scale human rights violations by the FARDC, its leadership still faced difficulties in implementing a consistent human rights prevention framework.
48. *DPO commented that engagement with national security forces through the implementation of the HRDDP concretely contributed to the protection of civilians and the fight against impunity, through a process focused on establishing risk mitigation measures and monitoring mechanisms to enable the*

provision of UN support and capacity building for national forces. HRDDP processes, originally developed by MONUSCO, define clearance requirements along clear timelines on the basis of information provided by national security forces requesting support and fully utilizing human rights information available to the United Nations.

D.1. MONUSCO's strategies in combating sexual violence were generally effective, albeit insufficient given its pervasiveness across the DRC.

49. MONUSCO efforts to combat sexual violence yielded tangible results. MONUSCO good offices and advocacy led to the establishment of a reparation fund for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and other serious crimes. The Comprehensive Strategy on Combatting Sexual Violence in the DRC improved tracking of victims and the provision of referral services due to concerted efforts of the Mission, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). The Mission trained the FARDC unit commanders on the prevention of CRSV and the fight against impunity. In 2021, 52 FARDC officers signed a commitment to combat impunity for crimes related to sexual violence.

50. Despite these efforts, sexual violence remained a significant problem. It was often weaponized during the conflict and tied to human trafficking by the FARDC and the PNC. Sexual violence in the DRC occurred within a context of social poverty, State resource scarcity, changing gender relations, eroding community cohesion, varying trust in institutions, and war. Polls suggested that most people in the DRC did not believe that combating sexual violence was a priority for the Government and did not view its performance positively. Victims rarely reported crimes to law enforcement, with less than five percent of recorded cases thought to have been brought to the attention of judicial authorities. The FARDC and the PNC allegedly continued to be responsible for significant levels of CRSV and colluded with armed groups, contributing to various forms of sexual violence. Lastly, MONUSCO credibility was tarnished by proven incidents of sexual misconduct by peacekeepers, undermining their achievements and making false allegations more credible.

E. While MONUSCO created safe corridors for humanitarian assistance in the dynamic landscape of conflict and displacement, the distinct mandate of the FIB amplified the risks to aid workers and its own civilian and non-offensive military personnel by association, thereby increasingly making them targets of physical attacks and disinformation campaigns.

51. The number of IDPs became both a proxy as well as a barometer for the increasing level of violence in the DRC over the years. Its use as a proxy reflected the complexity of causes displacing people, such as clashes between armed groups and the FARDC especially in mineral rich areas, intercommunal conflict, land disputes, and natural disasters. Displaced persons were not only victims but also drivers of conflict, as they were prime candidates for recruitment by armed groups claiming to represent the interests of a particular aggrieved ethnic group. These factors were perceived as creating a vicious cycle of violence that underscored the need for more interventions to augment security.

52. MONUSCO was credited for the safe return of IDPs due to the distinct mandate of the FIB; however, the dynamic nature of the conflict presented a challenge such that peace achieved in one area may have been offset by brewing violence elsewhere. For example, in 2018, despite security improvements leading to the return of almost one million IDPs, concurrently, 2.1 million people were displaced due to conflict elsewhere. Similarly, while MONUSCO enabled the return of many IDPs after the defeat of

M23 in 2014, its resurgence caused renewed displacement in 2022. Beyond these efforts, MONUSCO engaged in diverse activities, including establishing safe corridors for the delivery of humanitarian aid to IDPs, conducting joint assessment missions to facilitate their return capacity building, and actively patrolling and projecting in camps.

53. In the meantime, the distinct mandate of the FIB in the use of offensive force resulted in increasing the peacekeepers' vulnerability to attacks. Researchers analyzed that the United Nations crossing the line from peacekeeping to peace enforcement resulted in a perceived tension with the doctrinal concept of impartiality. From a legal standpoint, one potentially significant interpretation was that the peacekeepers may have lost their protected status under the IHL. Attacks on MONUSCO peacekeepers could therefore be argued as not being criminal acts under the Rome Statute and the IHL. Only two United Nations peacekeeping Missions (the United Nations Operations in the Congo and the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur) engaged in more battles involving peacekeeper fatalities than MONUSCO, but it is concerning to note that there have never been any convictions for the killing of the peacekeepers.¹⁶
54. The research synthesis also highlighted that the FIB's use of offensive force mandate presented an additional risk of MONUSCO civilian components losing their protected status. The FIB operated under the command and control of the MONUSCO Force Commander, and MONUSCO premises could be categorized as a military target under the IHL. Every unit of the Mission would be excluded from special protection once the Force became a combatant in the conflict to which the law of international armed conflict therefore applied. This problem was further exacerbated by the fact that FIB contingents were not visibly differentiated from other Mission contingents, which increased the latter's vulnerability to become targets.
55. During the Ebola outbreak and COVID-19 pandemic, assaults and shootings against health personnel in the DRC contributed to making 2019 the worst year on record for aid worker casualties worldwide. The response to the Ebola outbreak became heavily securitized, with United Nations agencies relying on military escorts and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing relief finding it challenging to maintain an independent stance. Some NGOs complained about the militarization of the response and restricted their use of security or military support so as not to aggravate tensions with local communities.
56. MONUSCO's military security support to humanitarian organizations during the health crises, coupled with widespread disinformation, contributed to a loss of trust in MONUSCO among the local populations, as well as escalated violence towards both humanitarian workers and MONUSCO. Throughout 2022, anti-United Nations protests took place across the DRC. Groups of protesters attacked multiple MONUSCO bases in North Kivu, leading to looting and destruction of Mission properties and resulting in the deaths of three peacekeepers in Butembo, alongside civilian casualties.

F. Significant gaps remained in understanding the specific mechanisms and pathways through which MONUSCO contributed to the mandated end-states in its area of operation.

57. Figure 2 below (and Annex 2) presents an evidence gap map tailored to this synthesis, consolidating available research on MONUSCO to identify current knowledge gaps. The matrix shows the number of research papers or grey literature documents for each outcome area (row) referencing each of the

¹⁶ The sole conviction for the killing of United Nations personnel was for the assassination of two members of the United Nations Group of Experts and four Congolese nationals in 2017, not peacekeepers.

Mission’s activities (column). Most of the studies focused primarily on armed group activities (74) and their intersection with MONUSCO joint offensive operations (40). This was in line with the assumption that MONUSCO was often associated with its military activities and most especially, the offensive operations of the FIB. The second most frequently covered topic was sexual violence (38) and DDR (28) and their intersections with Mission technical support (9 and 14, respectively). Offensive operations (63), high level meetings and good offices (52), and technical and logistical support (39) were other frequently covered activities in the available research.

Figure 4. Evidence Gap Map

	High Level Meetings	Patrols and Joint Patrols	Offensive Operations and Joint Operations	Humanitarian Escort and Facilitation	Early Warning and Response System	Field Missions	Human Rights Monitoring and Fact Finding Missions	Capacity Building Workshop	Public Information Sensitization	Reports	Technical and Logistics Support	Demining
AG Presence and Activities	15	10	40	3	4	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
SSR, FARDC and PNC Capacity	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	9	0
DDR	8	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	14	0
Public Perception	1	2	8	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
People in Need Safety and Security of Aidworkers & Peacekeepers	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	0
Overall HR & Impunity	3	1	6	2	0	0	1	0	4	1	0	0
Prevalence of SV	9	0	2	2	0	1	5	0	0	0	2	0
Intercommunal Conflict	7	0	2	7	0	1	4	1	5	2	9	0
	8	2	0	1	6	0	0	2	1	0	2	0

58. As can be seen in Figure 2 above and Annex 2, evidence was missing for the impact resulting from several of the Mission's activities. Compared to the Mission's reported activities in its annual budget performance,¹⁷ external studies seldom mentioned the Mission's mine action, capacity building workshops and trainings, knowledge products and reports, and field missions/visits. Similarly, the volume and depth of evidence regarding the Mission's human rights monitoring and reporting covered in the external research was not commensurate to the Mission's actual performance reporting.
59. A sizable number of documents concluded on the achievement of the Mission's specific outcomes but did not clarify how MONUSCO accomplished or could not accomplish these outcomes. Where research covered MONUSCO as one of many cases, it did not provide details on the specific mechanisms through which MONUSCO may have produced change. In contrast, some research papers analyzed one specific activity or outcome in great detail without making references to the overall effectiveness of the Mission. In such a scenario, grey literature often provided information to fill these gaps in terms of Mission interventions, activities, and their effectiveness.
60. The lack of quality data and its systematic use appeared to be an inherent challenge preventing empirical research on, and the evaluation of, the Mission's overall effectiveness and impact. Even though the Mission had made improvements over time in its data analysis activities with the establishment of its Joint Operations Center (JOC) and Joint Mission Analysis Center (JMAC), using tools such as the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE) and the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS), these initiatives were not without challenges as the scope and level of observation in Mission data sets did not lend themselves to answer or predict peacekeeping impact questions (and other theoretical phenomena), but instead, were geared towards situational awareness and immediate response and action, raising questions about the interoperability of Mission data with the data required for empirical research. The Mission acknowledged major data gaps, lack of data literacy at all levels, and a lack of a centralized and structured data collection mechanism across civilian and military components. The MONUSCO results-based budgeting framework was found to be insufficient in explaining how success indicators were achieved. Despite its paucity, researchers' calls for permitting access to Mission's internal operational data were made multiple times with limited response.
61. *DPO clarified that the current focus of the Department is to strengthen the use of data to improve internal strategies, operations, and overall mandate implementation. Peacekeeping data is governed by existing policies and guidelines on information classification and handling which will place restrictions on sharing of live data for academic research. The Department is also implementing a Digital Transformation Strategy for the United Nations Peacekeeping that includes efforts to establish an integrated data and digital ecosystem in alignment with business priorities, interoperability, and sustainability. The Department confirmed that MONUSCO is using CPAS as a centralized database with over 50 impact indicators, as well as Unite Aware SAGE for situational data to create evidence-based analysis on its activities and results.*

¹⁷ OIOS reviewed and mapped all Mission implemented activities between 2010-2023 as part of this evaluation.

V. Conclusion

62. The synthesis of available evidence concluded that MONUSCO had an overall positive impact on the POC and human rights in the DRC during its deployment, although the escalation of violence in March 2024 in Eastern DRC starkly revealed the lack of sustainability of its results. Furthermore, limited data availability in a conflict setting constrained adequate understanding of the mechanisms underlying the achievement of these outcomes, as well as acknowledging their associated, sometimes adverse, repercussions. Nevertheless, the evidence synthesis clarified the challenges MONUSCO had faced when mandated to support the Government of DRC, whose interests and attitudes changed over time. While the Government gave its consent to the Mission's presence and operations over a period of thirteen years, there was limited evidence that it had fulfilled its own obligations to protect civilians in the DRC. The Human Rights Due Diligence Policy was therefore insufficient to navigate situations where the Mission's mandate and the interests of the Government diverged. As a result, MONUSCO found itself grappling with implementing a military strategy that was not backed by a political commitment forged under the aegis of a peace arrangement that was both endorsed and upheld by the parties to the conflict. The dichotomy between the Mission's offensive mandate and its need to maintain an impartial posture proved to be counter-productive to its own safety and security, and with no abatement of violence against civilians, became irreconcilable in the eyes of the Congolese public, leading to calls for its exit in 2023.
63. An important lesson that emerged from this synthesis was that the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and missions should consider improving the conduct of evaluative activities, as well as gather, generate and share credible knowledge about the United Nations peacekeeping activities and results. To achieve alignment with Priority 5 of the Secretary-General's Data Strategy, the peacekeeping performance framework, including data governance, quality, accessibility, and literacy at the mission-level needs further improvement. This would entail reviewing the existing data sources and identifying gaps for all active Missions and forging partnerships with credible research organizations, where feasible, to fill in these gaps and to make mission operational data accessible for empirical research and evaluation. The latter would require developing a data governance framework for ensuring the collection and warehousing of timely, accurate, and reliable outcome and impact data both at the headquarters and mission levels.
64. *DPO expressed the view that conclusions drawn through a reliance on secondary sources would be better served by avoiding sweeping statements and definitive, but questionable assertions. Fundamental debates such as on the distinction between robust peacekeeping and peace enforcement, are not as settled as the synthesis' conclusions appear to convey. Consequently, DPO maintains that the findings and conclusions of this synthesis, and any impact evaluation of the legacy of a complex mission, should be grounded in a contextualized and nuanced understanding of both peacekeeping as well as the particular Mission.*

Annex 1: Management Response



TO: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Under-Secretary-General
A: Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 27 August 2024

Mr. (Eddie) Yee Woo Guo, Director
Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

REFERENCE: DPPADPO-2024-01629

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

FROM: Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General
DE: for Peace Operations

Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General
in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations
Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

SUBJECT: **Management Response to the Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight
Services Synthesis of Secondary Evidence on the Impact of the United Nations
Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
(MONUSCO) on Protection of Civilians and Human Rights**

1. The Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) appreciate the opportunity to submit this management response on the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Inspection and Evaluation Division, on the Synthesis of Secondary Evidence on the Impact of MONUSCO on Protection of Civilians and Human Rights, as transmitted by OIOS to DPO and MONUSCO by memo dated 12 August 2024. We also appreciate the incorporation of comments received from DPO on previous drafts into this final version, and we thank OIOS for the spirit of consultation demonstrated throughout this process.

2. In the years since MONUSCO took over from the previous peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with an expanded mandate, MONUSCO has implemented complex Security Council mandates calling for multidimensional peacekeeping, capable of leveraging both civilian expertise and uniformed capacities to support political processes, protect civilians, promote human rights and perform a range of other tasks. Increasingly, missions and United Nations headquarters have taken responsibility for not only the work of multidimensional peacekeeping, but also for explaining multidimensional peacekeeping in understandable terms

for the populations that missions serve and for the global community. In part due to MONUSCO's size and duration and the diversity of its successes and challenges, it has long been the focus of in-depth research and analysis by members of the global peacekeeping community. A significant and varied body of literature reviewing MONUSCO's mandate implementation has thus been produced by the United Nations itself and by academic institutions, non-governmental organisations and other groups, with varying affiliations and methodologies. This body of literature is a vital resource to help foster a better understanding of the impact of MONUSCO and the wide range of perceptions on its role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

3. As expressed in our earlier informal comments, DPO and MONUSCO have taken note that to develop the present report, OIOS produced a synthesis of available secondary evidence, drawing on the extensive literature on MONUSCO, and did not in this instance follow its usual procedure to gather evidence for its findings using primary sources, including interviews with peacekeeping personnel and other key stakeholders. We remain concerned that this departure from the approach normally taken by OIOS suffers from serious limitations that go beyond those highlighted in the methodology section of the report. For instance, the lack of citations, resulting from the use of synthesized evidence, makes it difficult to assess the extent to which selection bias, data quality, and the comparability of methodological approaches adopted by the secondary sources selected by OIOS may have had an impact on specific findings.

4. Some of the report's assertions would appear to apply to the entire 13-year timespan reviewed in the synthesis report, coinciding with MONUSCO's support for multiple local and regional political processes, significant shifts in key conflict dynamics and major changes in the focus of MONUSCO's efforts. Key assertions about the balance of military and civilian-led activities undertaken by MONUSCO in pursuit of its mandate overlook the importance of the mission's political activities aimed at preventing human rights violations and abuses and mitigating harm to civilians. Moreover, the protection of civilians cannot be reduced to a singular event, such as the neutralization of an armed group, but is a mission-wide effort involving a combination of complex, coordinated actions, which must adapt to an ever-evolving political and security environment. External studies may not adequately capture the operational tools and coordination mechanisms that constitute best practice in the protection of civilians. In this regard, it is unfortunate that OIOS was unable to include a recent, in-depth internal assessment of MONUSCO's early warning system in its synthesis.

5. Due to these factors, while some of the report's findings do reflect MONUSCO's experience on the ground, we are concerned that the report draws sweeping conclusions about the impact of MONUSCO drawn largely from secondary sources. For example, fundamental debates, such as those around the distinction between robust peacekeeping and peace enforcement, are not as settled as the report's conclusions would suggest. Consequently, we maintain that the findings and conclusions of this synthesis and any evaluation of a complex mission should be grounded in a contextualized and nuanced understanding of both peacekeeping as well as the particular mission.

6. Towards reaching these key understandings, and in service to the populations where peacekeeping missions are deployed as well as the global community, DPO accepts OIOS's

proposal in the report's conclusion to continuously improve its own evaluative activities and sharing of results and impact, while better leveraging data. We look forward to continued engagement with OIOS in these regards.

CC: Ms. Catherine Pollard, DMSPC
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Annex 2: Evidence gap map

