

AFGHANISTAN

Although reports of physical attacks on educational institutions, students, and educators in Afghanistan appeared to slow, the number of reported threats targeting education, particularly girls' education, rose dramatically. Additionally, state military forces and non-state armed groups used schools and universities as barracks, as sites to recruit and train children, and for other military purposes.

Context

After 13 years of engagement in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), led by NATO, began to withdraw most troops from the country in 2014. The following years saw an upsurge in violence across the country, with the UN calling nearly half of Afghanistan's provinces areas of high or extreme risk.²²⁹ The Taliban and other non-state armed groups, including 'IS,' expanded their geographical presence and carried out numerous attacks on the civilian population, particularly in provincial areas and in and around the capital city, Kabul.²³⁰ Key parties to the conflict included the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), pro-government militias, the Taliban, other non-state armed groups, including 'IS', and NATO forces.²³¹ Contested elections in 2014 led to further political tensions that contributed to instability throughout the reporting period.²³² In 2017, NATO said it would increase its "training mission" in Afghanistan by 3,000 troops.²³³

The escalating conflict resulted in sustained high levels of displacement, with at least 360,000 people displaced in 2017.²³⁴ The UN Secretary-General noted in September 2017 that civilians continued to be the people most affected by the ongoing conflict.²³⁵ The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan verified more than 40,000 civilian casualties between the beginning of 2013 and the third quarter of 2017.²³⁶ Conflict also challenged the advances made in educational enrollments since 2001, with increasing reports of chronic teacher shortages and "ghost" schools.²³⁷ According to Afghanistan's Ministry of Education, an estimated 3.5 million children were out of school in 2016, 75 percent of them girls.²³⁸

Direct targeting of the education of girls and women by non-state armed groups, particularly the Taliban and 'IS', contributed to educational and gender inequalities, including high rates of gender-based violence, women's and girls' restricted ability to work and study outside the home, and limited access to justice.²³⁹ According to a survey conducted by REACH in 2017, security concerns and violence were the most commonly cited obstacles to girls' education.²⁴⁰ Data collected by GCPEA indicated that a growing proportion of attacks in Afghanistan over the course of the reporting period targeted girls' schools, as well as female students and educators. There were reports that armed groups, including 'IS' and the Taliban, forced schools to close.²⁴¹ At the same time, provincial education authorities in provinces including Herat and Nangarhar reportedly expressed satisfaction with cooperation received from the Taliban in overseeing and supporting schools.²⁴²

From 2013 to 2017, reports of incidents that negatively affected education increased, although they did not reach the level reported in *Education under Attack 2014*. In December 2017, OCHA reported that more than 1,000 schools had been destroyed, damaged, or occupied in incidents related to conflict and insecurity over an unspecified period of time.²⁴³

Afghanistan was among the first group of 37 countries that endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration on May 29, 2015.

Attacks on schools

GCPEA documented approximately 180 attacks on schools across Afghanistan between 2013 and 2017. The rate of attacks on schools peaked in 2014 around the time of the presidential election, but in general fewer attacks were documented than during the 2009 to 2013 period tracked in *Education under Attack 2014*. It was not clear whether this trend was due to fewer monitoring resources or to insecurity, both of which made it more difficult to track and investigate incidents, or to a real decline in physical attacks on schools.

There was some evidence that community-based schools—those in local communities supported by either the government or an NGO—were less susceptible to attacks. One study found that the Taliban widely accepted community-based education and argued that this explained the lower number of attacks on community-based classes.²⁴⁴

Direct attacks on schools included arson, suicide bombings, and use of other explosives.²⁴⁵ Armed opposition groups were often suspected to be behind these attacks, even if they did not claim responsibility. Schools were also caught in fighting between militia forces that competed to gain control of them as a source of funds.²⁴⁶ Most commonly, schools were damaged in explosions occurring nearby, or struck by rockets aimed at other targets. Of the reported attacks compiled by GCPEA, just over one-quarter that occurred between 2013 and 2017 targeted girls' schools and female education.

The UN reported that at least 73 attacks on schools occurred in Afghanistan in 2013, including suicide bombings and explosive devices planted on school grounds by armed opposition groups, along with one drone strike. These attacks resulted in the death of at least 11 children and injury to 46 others.²⁴⁷ Data collected by GCPEA showed that girls' schools comprised approximately one-quarter of those targeted in 2013. Examples of attacks on both boys' and girls' schools included the following:

- International media and UNAMA reported that, on June 3, 2013, a motorcyclist with no clear affiliation detonated a bomb outside a boys' high school in Chamkani district, Paktya province. The explosion, which targeted a passing ISAF convoy, killed 10 students and injured 15 other people, including school children.²⁴⁸
- Media sources reported that unidentified assailants set a girls' school on fire in Kunduz city, Kunduz province, on July 19, 2013, damaging the building.²⁴⁹
- Media sources also recorded a rocket attack that hit a girls' school in Asmar district, Kunar province, on November 25, 2013, injuring four teachers. Authorities claimed that the Taliban was responsible.²⁵⁰
- The UN found that, on November 27, 2013, a drone struck Shahid Ghulam Sakhi High School in Logar province, killing one 10-year-old boy.²⁵¹

Attacks on schools peaked during 2014 and were largely related to the presidential election, when non-state armed groups targeted schools used as polling stations. The UN verified 163 attacks against schools and education personnel.²⁵² The HRC found similarly that, of 155 incidents of attacks on schools and on students and education personnel, and of military occupation, 79 directly targeted schools used as polling centers.²⁵³ Indeed, on June 14 alone, the second day of run-off elections, UNICEF documented 22 attacks on schools, most of them in the central, eastern, and north-eastern regions of the country.²⁵⁴

Apart from election-related violence, patterns of attacks in 2014 were similar to those of the previous year, including both targeted and indiscriminate incidents. The Taliban and other armed opposition groups were responsible for the majority of the attacks (94 out of 163 documented by the UN).²⁵⁵ Of the 163 incidents reported by the UN, 28 involved IEDs being placed on school premises.²⁵⁶ At least one suicide attack targeted a school in 2014. Data collected by GCPEA indicated again that one-quarter of the attacks on education in 2014 affected girls' schools. These incidents included the following:

- International news sources reported that, on December 11, 2014, a suicide bomber detonated his device inside the auditorium of a French-run high school in Kabul that was full of people. At least 7 were killed and 15 injured, according to *Al Jazeera*.²⁵⁷
- According to media sources, unidentified assailants burned down one girls' school in Farah province on November 19, 2014, another in Jawzjan province on November 29, 2014, and a third in Herat province on December 10, 2014.²⁵⁸ During the attack in Jawzjan province, the assailants beat and injured a school guard. According to sources cited by the media, the aim of the attack was to disrupt exams.²⁵⁹

The number of UN-reported attacks on schools dropped slightly in 2015, with 132 verified attacks on schools and education personnel. As in previous years, the UN reported that the Taliban was responsible for the majority (82) of these incidents. Afghan government forces and affiliated groups were responsible for 23 cases, and 'IS' was responsible for at least 13 attacks, a higher number than what was reported in previous years.²⁶⁰ Citing the UN, Human Rights Watch reported a spike in attacks on schools between April and June 2015, which it attributed mainly to Taliban activity in Kunduz, Ghor, and Nuristan provinces. However, the organization noted that threats by pro-government groups also resulted in school closures.²⁶¹

Forms of attack in 2015 remained similar to those seen in previous years, including indirect attacks involving gunfire or rockets, and direct attacks employing IEDs and arson. Examples of attacks on schools included the following:

- UNAMA found that, in August 2015, ‘IS’-affiliated fighters forced 25 schools in Deh Bala district, Nangarhar province, to close, which affected 14,102 students. As of December 31st of that year, 10 of the institutions remained closed, leaving 7,087 children still out of school.²⁶²
- Local media reported that, on May 31, 2015, a rocket struck a school in Logar province, resulting in the death of a teacher and two students.²⁶³
- According to a joint UNICEF and UNAMA report, on January 29, 2015, an anti-government group detonated an IED in a girls’ high school in Nangarhar province, destroying three classrooms. The group also left a written warning calling girls’ schools “brothels” and warning the community to stop educating females. The note referenced an attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, and stated that a failure to cease girls’ education would result in a similar attack.²⁶⁴

Rates of reported attacks on schools declined further in 2016, with 77 incidents affecting schools and personnel verified by the UN, compared to 132 in 2015. The Taliban was responsible for 51 incidents, the majority of verified attacks. A further seven were attributed to ‘IS’, twelve to undetermined armed groups, four to Afghan national forces, and one incident was jointly attributed to the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Taliban.²⁶⁵ UNAMA reported a total of 94 conflict-related incidents affecting education, including 17 cases in which IEDs, looting, and other forms of intentional damage affected educational facilities.²⁶⁶ Girls’ schools appeared to be targeted in a slightly higher proportion of incidents in 2016 than in 2015, with 23 incidents directly targeting girls’ education, according to the UN.²⁶⁷ Additionally, UNAMA reported 16 incidents of intimidation and threats directed at girls’ schools.²⁶⁸ Reported incidents included the following:

- UNAMA and media reports both indicated that, on January 10, 2016, anti-government groups fired rockets in Bak district, Khost province. The rockets landed at a primary school where children were playing, killing at least three students and injuring several other children.²⁶⁹ UNAMA reported that a 9-year-old was killed in the attack, while the Ministry of Education released a statement saying that at least two female students died.²⁷⁰
- Human Rights Watch reported that fighting in April between the Taliban and government forces in Baghlan province caught one school in the crossfire, destroying all five tents that comprised the school.²⁷¹
- On May 18, 2016, suspected anti-government groups carried out three similar attacks in the Dara-e-Pech area of Kunar province, according to media reports that GCPEA was able to verify. The assailants set fire to two boys’ schools and one girls’ school and assaulted and temporarily abducted the guard at each school.²⁷²
- On October 28, 2016, armed men broke into a girls’ school in Jawzjan province. They set fire to the school and beat the security guards. According to local sources, the incident appeared to be connected to a local commander who was opposed to girls’ education.²⁷³

In 2017, the UN verified 31 attacks on education facilities.²⁷⁴ Likewise, attacks on schools were reported less frequently. GCPEA identified 39 incidents, according to the media and local sources. It was not clear whether these lists overlapped or drew on the same definitions of attacks on schools. Approximately one-quarter of the incidents identified by GCPEA affected girls’ education.²⁷⁵ UNAMA documented 51 attacks on educational facilities and education-related personnel during the first three-quarters of 2017 but did not disaggregate how many of these incidents affected schools.²⁷⁶ According to the UN-verified information, the Taliban was responsible for the majority of education-related attacks, followed by ‘IS’ and undetermined armed groups.²⁷⁷ For example:

- On February 25, 2017, two students were killed when a mortar struck a classroom at Shaheed Mawlawi Habib Rahman High School, a government school in Laghman province. At least five other students suffered injuries in the attack. Afghan security forces may have fired the mortar and missed their target, but this information was unconfirmed in media reports.²⁷⁸
- According to UNAMA and OHCHR, the Taliban fired mortar rounds that landed close to a high school in Kunduz city on May 25, 2017. The group was reportedly targeting international forces located near the school. One 9-year-old male student was killed in the attack.²⁷⁹

- *Voice of America* reported that ‘IS’ members destroyed a high school for girls in Darzab district, Jawzjan province, in late June 2017. The acting governor of the province told the reporters that the group had burned and looted other schools in the area. ‘IS’ had reportedly warned the schools to teach a curriculum the group considered acceptable.²⁸⁰
- In an attack reported by the media, which GCPEA was able to confirm with local sources, a school was destroyed during a US air strike on Kunduz province on July 15, 2017.²⁸¹

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Abductions, targeted killings, and intimidation were the most common forms of direct attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel between 2013 and 2017, as they were between 2009 and 2012. The Taliban and, increasingly, ‘IS’ were responsible for the majority of attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel.²⁸² Male and female students faced threats for distinct reasons, males because of their political affiliations and females because of their status as learners. Overall, the annual number of attacks on students and education personnel appeared to rise over the course of the reporting period. However, according to the data compiled by GCPEA, cases of abduction and intimidation drove these increases, while killings of education personnel declined between 2013 and 2017 from the number killed between 2009 and 2013.²⁸³ According to UNAMA and UNICEF, threats and intimidation targeting education-related personnel rose 376 percent between 2013 and 2015.²⁸⁴

Female students and teachers were the targets of approximately one-quarter of all attacks on students and education personnel, according to the information GCPEA collected. Intimidation and threats forced the closure of some girls’ schools, sometimes affecting tens of thousands of students.²⁸⁵ In addition, media sources reported approximately 20 cases in which hundreds of school children became ill in alleged poisonings by unidentified attackers. The vast majority of these cases took place at girls’ schools. World Health Organization and other investigators reported to international media that the illness was most likely linked to fear and stress and that it was unlikely poison had been used, but the incidents illustrated the climate of fear surrounding education, particularly for girls.²⁸⁶

During 2013, UNAMA and UNICEF reported that 46 teachers were killed or injured and 12 were abducted.²⁸⁷ The number of teachers killed or abducted that was verified for the UN’s annual report on children and armed conflict was much lower (13 cases).²⁸⁸ Ministry of Education numbers, reported in a media source, were considerably higher, citing approximately 100 education personnel killed between January 1 and August 10 of 2013.²⁸⁹

Attacks recorded in 2013 included the following:

- Media sources reported an incident on March 27, 2013, in which unknown assailants shot and killed three teachers who were on their way to school in Balkh province.²⁹⁰
- UNAMA reported that on May 31 the Taliban abducted and killed a 7th-grade student in Khost province, reportedly for writing anti-Taliban poetry.²⁹¹
- According to the UN, in May 2013 the Taliban issued a letter in Nangarhar province warning that students, teachers, and other personnel associated with girls’ schools would face attacks, including with acid, if they continued to attend school.²⁹²

According to UNAMA and UNICEF, the number of incidents of threats and intimidation against education personnel increased to 26 in 2014.²⁹³ In contrast, the agencies reported that killings and injuries of teachers and other education personnel declined slightly, to 37.²⁹⁴ Additionally, 14 teachers were reported abducted in 2014, as compared to 12 in 2013.²⁹⁵ Examples of attacks included the following:

- The US Department of State reported that in May 2014 the head of the security detail for the minister of education was kidnapped and killed.²⁹⁶
- The UN reported that in August 2014 the Taliban abducted a teacher from his school in Zabul province, later killing him, because he had ignored warnings to stop teaching.²⁹⁷
- According to media sources, unknown assailants shot and killed a teacher in Logar province on December 13 and one in Uruzgan province on December 24.²⁹⁸

UNICEF and UNAMA reported 26 teachers and other education personnel killed and injured in 2015, fewer than documented during the previous year. In addition, of the 75 incidents directly affecting education personnel through abduction or homicide, anti-government groups such as the Taliban were responsible for 74 attacks, and one was attributed to pro-government forces.²⁹⁹ For example:

- UNAMA reported that, on April 14, 2015, members of a pro-government group shot and killed a teacher in front of his students at a school in Kunduz province for allegedly not following the group commander's instructions.³⁰⁰
- The UN documented an incident on April 30, 2015, in which two teachers were kidnapped from a boys' school in Kunar province and killed soon after.³⁰¹

Reported abductions and cases involving threats and intimidation against students and education personnel rose dramatically in 2015. There were 49 cases of kidnapping and 74 of threats reported.³⁰² UNAMA's annual report on the protection of civilians cited a similar number of cases of intimidation (68).³⁰³

'IS' activity in the eastern region, particularly in Nangarhar, contributed to a significant proportion of this increase. Sixteen incidents occurred in the east, including twelve in Nangarhar, up from four cases reported in that province in both 2013 and 2014. Eight of the twelve incidents in Nangarhar were attributed to an 'IS' affiliate.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, 9 out of 14 cases of intimidation reported by UNAMA and UNICEF led to the partial or full closure of 213 schools, primarily in Nangarhar and Herat provinces, areas with high levels of Taliban and 'IS' activity. These threats severely affected girls' education. Ninety-four of these schools had served both genders but were then closed to girls while remaining open for boys. The two agencies reported five other instances in which girls' education was banned or restricted by anti-government actors.³⁰⁵

Throughout 2016, threats and intimidation, including attacks affecting girls and women, continued to be the most common forms of attack directed at students, teachers, and other education personnel, although the total number of incidents appeared to decline from the number in 2015. UNAMA reported 44 cases of threats and intimidation directed at education personnel and facilities in 2016.³⁰⁶ Several of these cases were directed at girls' education or at the content of education. For example:

- On January 7, 2016, approximately 15 armed, masked, and unidentified men entered Khoja Dokoh Female High School in Jawzjan province with guns and issued a warning that the girls should wear burqas. The school director made the requirement a school policy following the threat.³⁰⁷
- UNAMA also reported that, on September 4, anti-government groups ordered girls' high schools in three districts of Laghman province to close and asked that community leaders bar girls from attending higher levels of education.³⁰⁸
- UNAMA reported two cases in which anti-government groups made threats aimed at having subjects such as science removed from the curriculum, to be replaced with Islamic studies.³⁰⁹

Targeted killings and abductions also continued to affect students and education personnel in 2016. UNAMA reported 13 attempted or actual targeted killings of education personnel, which killed 11 and injured 10, and 12 incidents of abduction, which targeted 55 students and education personnel.³¹⁰ GCPEA collected information on the following incidents, for example:

- UNAMA reported that on April 11, 2016, an IED struck a shuttle bus carrying Ministry of Education officials in Kabul province, killing the driver and his assistant. Five ministry employees were injured in the attack.³¹¹
- Nine days later, a stray bullet struck a school headmaster while he was teaching, killing him in front of the class.³¹²
- UNAMA also reported that, on September 7, 2016, an anti-government group singled out 13 students on a public bus they had stopped in Farah province. They held the students for three days, releasing them following negotiations with community leaders.³¹³
- The UN reported that in September 2016 Afghan forces took seven boys from a school, reportedly with the goal of pressuring the Taliban to release a soldier; it was unclear how the boys' abduction would create such pressure.³¹⁴

The UN verified 16 attacks on education personnel and 22 threats of attack against education personnel and facilities in 2017.³¹⁵ The latter category was not disaggregated. Separately, GCPEA identified reports of 32 incidents of targeted assassinations, abductions, or threats of students and education personnel in 2017, collected from UN, media, and local sources, close to half of which affected girls' education.³¹⁶ For example:

- Media sources reported that, on January 15, 2017, assailants stating allegiance to 'IS' abducted twelve teachers and two administrative personnel from a government-run madrassa, or religious school, in Nangarhar province. Almost two months later, on March 4, all 14 individuals were freed unharmed.³¹⁷
- The UN reported that threats by anti-government groups closed six girls' schools in Farah district, Farah province, between February 10 and February 20, 2017. According to the UN report, only 10 percent of students returned to the schools when they reopened on February 20.³¹⁸
- In September 2017, 'IS' sent hundreds of families in Darzab district, Jawzjan province, letters urging them not to send their children to school, according to *Gandhara*, a local media agency.³¹⁹
- *Pajhwok Afghan News Agency* reported that an IED targeted and killed the deputy of the Parwan province education department on November 14, 2017. The explosion also injured the head of the Parwan education department. The two were traveling home at the time of the attack.³²⁰

Military use of schools

Armed forces and non-state armed groups continued to use schools; the number of cases reported in 2013 and 2014 was similar to the number in 2012. Documented instances of military use of schools rose in 2015. Government forces and pro-government groups used the majority of these schools, but non-state armed groups occupied educational institutions as well.³²¹

According to UNAMA and UNICEF, 10 schools were used for military purposes in 2013 and 12 in 2014.³²² For example:

- The UN reported that the ANFS took over three schools in Badakhshan province in October 2013 and continued to use them into 2014.³²³
- In June 2014, the ANA took over a girls' school in Kunduz province for more than three weeks, also according to the UN.³²⁴ Advocacy from the country taskforce on monitoring and reporting (CTFMR) succeeded in getting one school vacated in June 2014.³²⁵
- Media sources reported an incident on September 16, 2013, in which gunmen, whom the local authorities said were Taliban, used a school to shield themselves while they attacked a nearby Afghan border police checkpoint in Nangarhar province.³²⁶

In 2015, the UN verified 51 cases of military use of schools. Armed opposition groups used 26 schools, the ANA used 9, Afghan National Police used 7, pro-government groups used 6, and international military forces used 3.³²⁷ According to a separate report by UNAMA and UNICEF, pro-government groups used 15 schools in Kunduz province alone for military purposes during 2015.³²⁸ UNAMA and UNICEF also reported that international forces used schools in 2015. Examples included the following:

- According to UNAMA and UNICEF, Afghan local police used a school in Baghlan province as a base from April 28 to September 16, 2015. The police broke down chairs and desks to be burned as firewood. Approximately 700 students and 20 teachers were prevented from entering the school during that time.³²⁹
- According to the same sources, US Special Forces took over a school in Uruzgan. They left the school when the local community asked them to go, but by May 2015, the school was largely destroyed due to fighting that occurred while the Special Forces were present.³³⁰

According to the UN, there were 42 verified cases of military use of schools in 2016.³³¹ These included 34 by government forces, 7 by armed groups, and 1 by a pro-government armed group.³³² Among the documented cases were the following:

- The *Guardian* reported that two schools in Helmand province were used as Afghan military bases in 2016. Soldiers built a watchtower on the roof of one and frequently walked around the schoolyards while heavily armed. A teacher at one school reported that gunfire sent students running for cover on multiple occasions.³³³
- The Institute for War and Peace Reporting noted in December 2016 that the ANA had been using a girls' school in Pasaband district, Ghor province, and that the Taliban had been using a school in Charsada district, also in Ghor province, for two years.³³⁴
- Human Rights Watch reported on 12 schools in Baghlan province that were or had been used by either Afghan forces or anti-government groups. Multiple schools were used several times by each of these groups and had sustained damage in armed combat.³³⁵ For example, Khial Jan Shahid Primary School, which opened in 2014 after being constructed with funding from the Swedish government and UNICEF, was occupied by the Taliban for approximately five months from late 2015 into early 2016, and again in April 2016. After the Taliban left, government forces occupied the school. The school was largely destroyed in fighting between the two groups.³³⁶

In 2017, the UN verified 14 incidents in which schools were used for military purposes.³³⁷ Separately, OCHA reported in December 2017 that 41 schools were being used for military purposes.³³⁸ It was not clear how many of these cases overlapped with those reported by the UN during the previous year. Reported cases of schools used for military purposes included the following:

- Afghan soldiers were reportedly stationed at a high school and a middle school in central Baghlan province as of January 2017. Both schools had been closed for several months at that time.³³⁹
- The Afghanistan Protection Cluster reported that two schools, Peerakhil and Kamboare, both in Kogyani district, Nangarhar province, were being used by non-state armed groups in November 2017.³⁴⁰

Child recruitment at, or en route to or from, school

There was limited and anecdotal information available on child recruitment that occurred at schools during the reporting period. In 2016, Human Rights Watch reported that the Taliban was increasingly using madrassas in northeastern Afghanistan to train boys between ages 13 and 17 for action in their military operations.³⁴¹ According to Human Rights Watch, many of the children recruited from madrassas were deployed in combat.³⁴² Other reports stated similarly that the group recruited boys from madrassas where poor parents sent their children for free education and lodging despite, or because they were unaware of, the possible risk of recruitment.³⁴³

Sexual violence by armed parties at, or en route to or from, school

Two cases of sexual violence affecting male students were reported, both documented by UNAMA. UNAMA reported that sexual abuse of boys by Afghan police was allegedly common, but that cases of such violence were difficult to verify. It was also not clear how often these practices occurred in relation to education.³⁴⁴ Reported cases included the following:

- On February 2, 2013, Afghan police forces arrested three male students from a religious school in Kandahar. One of the boys, who was 16 years old, reported that all three were tortured, raped, and beaten.³⁴⁵
- On October 17, 2016, the Afghan National Army Special Forces forcibly stripped and photographed a 16-year-old boy at his school in front of teachers and other students. When the students and teachers protested, they opened fire inside the school, injuring a second student. They also beat another student until he was unconscious. Five ANA members were arrested for the incident. Three soldiers were released and two were convicted in Special Corps Court: one for unlawful use of force and another for the beating. No one was charged with sexual abuse or exploitation.³⁴⁶

Attacks on higher education

Attacks targeting institutions of higher education or their personnel were reported with increasing intensity throughout most of the reporting period, beginning with two incidents reported in 2013 and rising to ten in 2016, before falling to six in 2017. These mostly took the form of explosives or gunfire on university campuses. However, targeted killings and

abductions of university personnel also occurred. Both types of attacks occurred during each year of the reporting period.

Attacks on higher education included at least two reported incidents in 2013, both carried out by unidentified assailants. One targeted a university, and the other was directed at personnel:

- A motorcycle laden with bombs exploded in the courtyard of Jalalabad University's education faculty building in Nangarhar province on February 2, 2013. The explosion injured at least seven students, according to media sources.³⁴⁷
- The head of Mawlana Jalaludin Muhammad Balkhi Institute of Higher Education, located in Balkh province, was reportedly abducted and killed in mid-April 2013, according to media sources. The reasons for the abduction were unclear.³⁴⁸

In 2014, the number of reported attacks on higher education rose, as did the number of people affected. There were at least seven reported incidents affecting approximately forty students and education personnel, according to data collected by GCPEA.³⁴⁹ Thirty-eight of the forty people were affected in the two incidents described below:

- On June 10, 2014, gunmen stopped a bus carrying approximately 35 university professors and students from Kandahar University to Kabul. They forced the passengers at gunpoint to disembark and board other vehicles, and then used the vehicles to take the victims to an unknown location.³⁵⁰ The Taliban admitted responsibility for the abduction and released the professors and students two weeks later.³⁵¹
- An IED exploded near a university in Kabul on November 10, 2014, wounding three individuals.³⁵² It was not clear if the three people who were injured were professors or students at the university.

Reported attacks on higher education again rose slightly in 2015. At least nine attacks occurred, including explosions that targeted universities and abductions of students and personnel.³⁵³ Abductions were reported much more frequently than in previous years, when reported incidents affecting education personnel more often took the form of gun attacks and other physical violence. The incidents reported in 2015 included the following:

- On January 28, 2015, attackers attempted to kidnap 15 university students on a highway in Faryab province. Security forces intervened, and the attack was unsuccessful. Media sources alleged that the Taliban was responsible for the attack, but no group claimed responsibility.³⁵⁴
- According to media sources, explosions occurred at Kandahar University on March 31, injuring one person;³⁵⁵ at Kabul University on May 16, injuring two lecturers;³⁵⁶ at the Teacher Training Center in Kandahar city on May 26, killing at least one person and wounding two others;³⁵⁷ and at Kabul Education University on November 24, killing three civilians.³⁵⁸ The perpetrators of these incidents were unknown.
- The principal of a technical and vocational institute in Wardak province was abducted by unidentified assailants on May 20, 2015. His fate remains unknown, according to media sources.³⁵⁹

Ten attacks on higher education were reported in 2016, including several high-profile attacks.³⁶⁰ These attacks were of a wider variety than in previous years, including explosions, kidnappings, a beheading, and more complex methods that involved organized armed raids. For example:

- Six people were injured in an explosion that occurred at a teacher training center in Maqumud Raqi district of Kapisa province on May 25, 2016, according to media sources.³⁶¹ The perpetrators were unknown.
- International media reported that, on August 7, 2016, two foreign professors—an American and an Australian—who taught in the English language center were kidnapped while on a road close to their university.³⁶² The Taliban was still holding the professors hostage at the time of writing.³⁶³
- On August 22, 2016, a university student was reportedly abducted from a vehicle and beheaded by suspected anti-government groups. The student was found with explosives planted in his body. According to a media report, the provincial governor's spokesperson suggested that the attack was aimed at discouraging higher education.³⁶⁴
- A complex attack involving suicide bombers and gunmen took place at the American University of Afghanistan on August 24, 2016, when armed assailants stormed the campus, trapping students in classrooms for almost 10

hours. Local and international media reported that seven students, one lecturer, and two campus guards were killed in the attack. No group claimed responsibility.³⁶⁵

There were at least six reported attacks on higher education in 2017, including one targeted killing of a scholar.³⁶⁶ For example:

- According to *Pajhwok Afghan News*, on May 12, 2017, Saifur Rahman Stanikzai, the deputy head of Islamic science at the Afghanistan Academy of Academic Sciences, who was also completing his doctorate at Nangarhar University, was shot and killed on his way from home to a mosque.³⁶⁷
- On October 17, 2017, an explosion shattered the windows of a building at Paktia University, slightly injuring a student, according to the *Guardian*. The blast had targeted a military training center located just over one mile away.³⁶⁸
- Local media sources reported that members of the Taliban kidnapped a lecturer and a student at an agricultural institute in Nangarhar province on December 27, 2017, and executed them both two days later.³⁶⁹
- International media sources reported that, on December 28, 2017, 'IS' attacked a Shia cultural center where dozens of students were attending an event.³⁷⁰ According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the 'IS' news agency, *Amaq*, stated that the center was targeted because "it sends students to Iran to learn from the ayatollahs."³⁷¹ More than 40 people were killed and 80 injured in the attack. It was not clear how many of those harmed were students.³⁷²

²⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2016*, Afghanistan chapter. UN OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018: Afghanistan* (OCHA: Afghanistan, December 2017), p. 5.

³⁰⁰ Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Isis in Afghanistan: 'Their peak is over, but they are not finished'," *Guardian*, November 18, 2016. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2017* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2017), Afghanistan chapter. UNAMA, *Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017*, October 12, 2017, p. 2.

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