



Global Coalition to **Protect**
Education from Attack

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

Key findings and recommendations from the expert
roundtable in Geneva



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Attacks on education must be recognised in the totality of their harm – not just as damage to buildings, but as violations of fundamental rights that devastate students, teachers, and entire communities. Education-related crimes must be explicitly criminalised, and their investigation and prosecution prioritised. Accountability must be victim-centred, focusing not only on punishment but also on reparations and restorative justice. Without decisive and sustained action, the right to education will remain unprotected and violations will continue with impunity.

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Lisa Chung-Bender
Executive Director, GCPEA

Cover photo:

The ruins of a school attacked by a non-state armed group in Burkina Faso

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This report is based on key informant interviews with participants and the discussion held during the expert roundtable on ‘Strengthening accountability for attacks on education’ organised by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) in cooperation with the Government of Spain and the Education Above All Foundation.

Executive summary: key findings and recommendations from the expert roundtable to strengthen accountability for attacks on education

“ *This event was groundbreaking. It was the first time that such a diverse group of domestic and international prosecutors and justice experts came together in a single forum to share their experiences and views on enhancing accountability for international crimes targeting or impacting education. It created unprecedented opportunities for collaboration and momentum. A commitment to finding ways to protect education was palpable in the room. The practitioners’ guidance GCPEA will produce could not be timelier.* **”**

Federica Tronchin

Head of International Justice Programme and Senior Gender and Child Rights Advisor,
Justice Rapid Response

Attacks on education are a grave and rising concern. Despite the prevalence and gravity of attacks on education – and the clear prohibition and criminalisation of certain types of attacks under international law – justice remains elusive for the overwhelming majority of victims, survivors, and their families as incidents are rarely investigated and prosecuted, domestically or internationally.

On 11 July 2025, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), the Permanent Mission of Spain, and the Education Above All Foundation (EAA) convened a historic gathering of national, regional, and international experts in Geneva and online, in the framework of GCPEA’s Accountability Project project supported by EAA, Justice Rapid Response (JRR), Norway and Spain. Building on the findings and key recommendations outlined in GCPEA’s Guide on *“Enhancing accountability for attacks on education: investigating and prosecuting education-related crimes”*, the roundtable drew on diverse experiences and areas of expertise to inform and guide the development of tools to equip investigators, prosecutors, lawyers, judges, and other relevant domestic, regional, and international judicial and non-judicial actors with guidance to strengthen accountability for education-related crimes.

Discussions highlighted the complexity of addressing education-related crimes within both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, and the pressing need to equip investigators, prosecutors, lawyers, judges, national human rights institutions, and other relevant actors with practical tools to advance accountability with a series of tailored and adaptable tools and capacity-building.

Key take aways

- Social behaviour change and, crucially, political will are essential to ensure that attacks on education are criminalised, prioritised, investigated, and prosecuted as serious international crimes. As a first step, lawmakers, investigators, prosecutors, among others, need to understand and recognise specific acts as attacks on education. This requires policy reform, advocacy, and shifts in societal attitudes.
- There is no single tool that can ensure accountability for education-related crimes. Instead, a comprehensive and contextually adaptable toolbox made up of a series of tools targeting

different aspects of accountability is required to bring perpetrators to justice. The expert roundtable highlighted a range of potential tools available to prevent and respond to education related-crime. Effective responses must recognise that different settings demand different combinations of tools used together to enhance accountability, deliver justice for victims, and deter future attacks on education.

- National proceedings are the first forum for addressing international crimes. A basic precondition for domestic accountability is that States have robust legislation in place, and related capacity, to investigate and prosecute international crimes at the national level, including education-related crimes, in accordance with their international obligations. As a first step, participants proposed practical tools like legislative checklists or model laws. They noted that checklists and model laws can help relevant actors assess, use, and enhance their legal frameworks and create an enabling environment for accountability and justice for victims. These tools should include clear definitions, cover key international crime elements, exclude defences like superior orders, remove statutes of limitation, and provide for reparations, among others. Domestic laws need to be robust to ensure accountability for both state and non-state actors in situations of armed conflict and non-conflict situations, in line with international humanitarian, criminal, and human rights law.
- Accountability is a broad concept that extends beyond formal judicial and administrative proceedings. To effectively protect education and enhance accountability for education-related crimes, a range of judicial and non-judicial implementation measures and tools are needed – tools that engage diverse systems, structures, and institutions at the national, regional, and international levels.
- Justice responses must be child-centred and survivor-focused to guarantee effective remedies, provide meaningful redress, and support recovery. Ensuring that child victims and witnesses are treated with care and respect, in line with international standards, is critical when they seek access to justice or participate in judicial processes.

“ *We stand at a critical crossroads in protecting education from attack. In rural areas, primary schools face mounting threats while attacks are barely investigated, not criminalised or included in our criminal code – directly violating children's fundamental and constitutional right to education. When young students lose their chance at primary education, their path to secondary school narrows, and university becomes an increasingly distant dream. For children and young people living under constant threat from armed groups, their future grows darker by the day. Criminalising these attacks isn't merely an option – it is our only hope for compelling states to take decisive action against this suffering.* **”**

Giovanni Álvarez Santoyo

Director – Unidad de Investigación y Acusación
Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP)

Key findings and recommendations from the expert roundtable

Summary and recommendations from the experts roundtable – 11 July 2025

Overview

Attacks on education are a grave and rising concern. In most conflicts around the world, students, and education personnel are increasingly and deliberately targeted by State and non-State armed groups for unlawful killings, torture and sexual violence. Children are abducted at school and recruited and used by parties to conflict. Educational facilities are destroyed or damaged through indiscriminate and targeted attacks. Armed forces and armed groups also use schools and other education facilities for military purposes, often turning them into military targets and endangering the lives and safety of students and education personnel.

“Education is the best inheritance we can foresee for our children and youth, the best method of reparation for victims in conflicts, and a basic need...Silence is the best friend of impunity.”

Alejandra López García
Counsellor,

Permanent Mission of Spain to the United Nations in Geneva

The consequences of attacks on education are devastating and profound for children and girls in particular. The immediate effects may include death or serious physical and psychological harm, school closures or shortages of qualified teachers. In the longer term, children may never return to school, depriving them of educational opportunities that could transform their lives and enable them to realise their right to development. Despite the prevalence and gravity of attacks on education – and the clear prohibition and criminalisation of certain types of attacks under international law – justice remains elusive for the overwhelming majority of victims, survivors, and their families as incidents are rarely investigated and prosecuted, domestically or internationally. While international accountability mechanisms have a key role to play, States have the primary obligation under international law to investigate and prosecute (or extradite for prosecution) a wide-range of international crimes, and must take all necessary legislative and executive measures to enable them to do so effectively. As such, the Toolkit is primarily geared toward domestic actors, and national-level implementation.

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) defines attacks on education as any threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport staff, education officials, education buildings, resources, or facilities (including school buses). In addition, when armed forces and non-state armed groups use schools and universities for military purposes, putting them at risk of attack and denying students access to education.

GCPEA's Accountability Project

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) published its new Guide *“Enhancing accountability for attacks on education: investigating and prosecuting education-related crimes”* in January 2025. The Guide aims to contribute to advancing accountability for education-related crimes amounting to crimes under international law, providing key recommendations that domestic and

international actors working on accountability can adapt, draw from and build on, depending on their local context and mandates. Putting the Guide’s recommendations into practice, GCPEA’s Accountability Project aims to advance accountability for attacks on education and secure justice for victims through four interconnected actions. The goal of the project is to partner with national, regional, and international justice actors to challenge impunity for education-related crimes, advance justice for victims, and build resilience to sustain education and peace long term.

Expert Roundtable

GCPEA, together with the Government of Spain and EAA, convened a one-day roundtable on 11 July 2025, bringing together key experts and practitioners from national and international judicial and quasi-judicial mechanisms, government and state institutions, the United Nations, regional bodies, academia as well as civil society organisations. National participants were drawn from three affected States.



The roundtable provided a dedicated space for technical discussions on good practices, lessons learned, and challenges in criminal justice responses to attacks on education. The hybrid in-person and online expert roundtable was closed-door, following Chatham House rules, allowing for candid and in-depth exchange among participants.

Insights from the expert roundtable were intended to guide GCPEA’s development of an *Accountability Toolkit* and shape its scope, objectives, audience, and format, ahead of its presentation at the Fifth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration in Kenya (December 2025) and to pilot workshops later that year and into early 2026. More precisely, the roundtable was a platform to:

- **Discuss challenges and barriers to accountability:** Discuss the reasons why attacks on education and the military use of educational facilities are rarely prosecuted. Examine legal, institutional, and operational obstacles to holding perpetrators accountable.
- **Facilitate the exchange of good practices:** Bring together national and international experts and practitioners from diverse jurisdictions to share experiences, strategies, and successes in criminalising, investigating and prosecuting attacks on education.
- **Conduct an expert-driven needs assessment:** Gather insights from practitioners on the specific legal, technical, and procedural challenges they face. Identify gaps in resources, training, and capacity that hinder effective accountability efforts.

The roundtable featured two key thematic sessions. The first thematic session focused on ensuring domestic legal frameworks explicitly criminalise education-related crimes as war crimes and crimes against humanity, in compliance with international obligations. Discussions were focused on identifying specific tools (e.g., templates, compliance checklists, advocacy resources, etc.) to support States in reviewing and reforming domestic laws to explicitly criminalise education-related crimes.

The second thematic session sought to identify challenges and best practices to inform the development of tools to build the capacity of national and international mechanisms to prioritise, investigate, and prosecute education-related crimes effectively and in a timely manner. The session was focused on identifying practical tools needed (e.g., training curricula, evidence management systems, collaboration

platforms, etc.) to strengthen the capacity of accountability mechanisms, ensuring effective and victim-centered investigations and prosecutions of education-related crimes.

National response to the roundtable

Following the roundtable, participants from the Office of the Prosecutor of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) informed GCPEA that they are reviewing their case load to identify and classify incidents as attacks on education, including acts not previously recognised as education-related crimes. Building on this review, the Office plans to publish a national report documenting patterns of victimisation, impacts, and geographic trends. It will also advocate for legislative reforms to explicitly criminalise attacks on education, ensuring alignment with principles of restorative justice that place victims and communities at the center of recognition and reparation. In parallel, the Prosecutor's Office is preparing an internal resolution to establish clear guidelines for investigating, documenting, and responding to these crimes within the JEP's mandate. These efforts reflect the Office's commitment to advancing the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration by ensuring that attacks on education are fully recognised, investigated, and prevented within Colombia's transitional justice framework.

Sensitisation and social behaviour change as a first step

Participants emphasised that accountability for education-related crimes can only be achieved by shifting both institutional and individual mindsets. As an initial step, advocacy materials should be developed for specific cadres. For lawmakers, sensitisation is needed to build political will, ensure the gravity of these crimes is recognised, and prioritise their criminalisation within legislative agendas. Tools targeting lawmakers include **awareness raising tools** through the development of training sessions/workshops for parliamentarians, legal advisors, and government officials on international legal obligations and implementation practices. **Informational tools** including factsheets which summarise key legal obligations, checklists which assess national compliance, and briefing papers could also be developed. These tools can also be tailored to support civil society organisations, national human rights institutions, and others to advocate for legislative changes. Participants emphasised the need to assess and review tools which currently exist and adapt them for the purposes of education-related crimes.

National Human Rights Institutes

National Human Rights Institutes (NHRIs) play an important role in the legal reform process as they often have a statutory mandate to promote and ensure the harmonisation of national legislation, regulations and practices with the international human rights instruments to which the State is a party.¹ Depending on the jurisdiction they may also have powers to consider individual complaints and carry out investigations, and secure effective remedies for breaches of children's rights. NHRIs must be included in awareness-raising for accountability on attacks on education and specific tools should be developed which include their mandates and are useful for their work.

Second, **investigators and prosecutors must be equipped to recognise specific acts as distinct crimes against education.** This requires a shift in mindset, social behaviour change, as well as policy reform. Participants noted that, when education-related crimes are prosecuted, they are rarely viewed in this way. Instead, they are often prosecuted under more generalised offences, such as murder or torture of

¹ See Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (the Paris Principles), s.3(b). Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/principles-relating-status-national-institutions-paris>.

students and teachers, without acknowledging the wider context. When schools are damaged or destroyed, investigations typically focus on economic losses rather than the violation of the right to education. This prosecutorial blind spot was powerfully illustrated by one participant, who explained that, in their national context, they had simply never considered this framing.

Third, advocacy and **sustained public awareness campaigns and policy engagement** are essential in making education-related crimes visible, elevating the significance of these crimes, building demand for accountability, placing them firmly on national and prosecutorial agendas. One participant highlighted similar campaigns on attacks on hospitals, emphasising that they are not a target.

The criminalisation of education-related crimes



Participants emphasised that an enabling legislative environment is crucial for enhancing accountability for international crimes resulting from attacks on education. It was acknowledged that education-related crimes are not specifically criminalised under domestic law in most jurisdictions. Instead, such acts are typically prosecuted, if at all, under general criminal statutes or under terrorism laws, especially where non-state armed groups are involved. If prosecuted as international crimes, they are charged more broadly as the war crimes of attacks on civilian objects or the destruction of property.²

A strong international legal framework already exists to address attacks on education, grounded in international humanitarian law (IHL), international criminal law (ICL), and international human rights law, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These instruments provide a solid legal basis for calling on States to act. For example, Article 4 of the CRC requires States to adopt legal, legislative, and other measures to realise children's rights. While this may include criminal legislation, such measures are required only when criminalisation is mandated by international legal instruments. Participants emphasised that these existing provisions must be championed, better understood, and more effectively connected across sectors to ensure a coordinated and rights-based response to education-related crimes. Specifically enumerating crimes against education provides a clear basis for investigation and prosecution, drawing attention to these offences, reducing the risk of them being overlooked, and acknowledging their severity. However, participants cautioned the use of the term "criminalisation". Instead, other terms should be considered, including "legal reform". Mali and Nigeria's draft legislation on attacks against schools during armed conflict which were drawn on as unique examples of law reform.

National laws should incorporate the principle of universal (or extraterritorial) jurisdiction

Participants emphasised that the obligation to criminalise education-related crimes is not limited to conflict-affected countries. They noted that 'champion' countries, including those not experiencing conflict, also have an important role to play. As a means of supporting efforts to address education-related crimes, participants highlighted the need to include provisions for universal jurisdiction over international crimes within national legislation. They stressed that this is essential for promoting accountability, as it allows a state to prosecute perpetrators of education-related crimes even where there is no direct link between the crime and the prosecuting state. Participants recommended that any checklist or model law should reflect this issue.



² See e.g. GCPEA Guide, pp. 20-21. Available at <https://protectingeducation.org/publication/enhancing-accountability-for-attacks-on-education/>.

Tools to support criminalisation: Practical, accessible reference tools such as a **legislative checklist** or a **model law** were suggested to provide technical assistance for legislative drafting. A checklist or model law should include clear definitions of terms such as protected persons and facilities, cover the elements of “attacks on education” as international crimes, modes of liability (including command responsibility), exclusion of certain defences (e.g., superior orders), remove statutes of limitation, and provide for reparations. It was emphasised that domestic laws should be as robust as possible ensuring accountability for both State and non-state actors, in both situations of international and non-international armed conflict in line with international humanitarian law as well as accountability in times of peace in line with international criminal law and international human rights law. Various tools were highlighted including the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child Model Law on Children Affected by Armed Conflict (ACERWC Model Law on CAAC).

Domestic legal framework assessment: Some participants noted that they were not in a position to wait around for a perfect law and that steps to prosecute education-related crimes should take place under the laws currently in place. It was suggested that the proposed legislative checklist could also operate as a **domestic legal analysis tool**, allowing States to recognise the gaps in their own domestic criminal frameworks, a process which could take place in parallel to ongoing prosecution efforts.

Legal definitions: Participants stressed that the concept of “attacks on education” is a policy definition that helps make visible the intersection between the right to education and other rights, and consequently different violations and crimes. They emphasised the need to ensure the **proper use of legal terms which are in line with international law**. For policy and legal precision, one participant advocated using terms such as “attack on schools,” similar to the terminology “attack on hospitals,” since it is attacks on hospitals and not attacks on healthcare in general that are criminalised under IHL. It was argued that this specificity helps prevent definitional confusion and enhances legislative clarity. However, it was concluded that the use of “education-related crimes resulting from attacks on education” is the best approach to ensure a comprehensive approach to legal reforms that would strengthen the protection of all education facilities, including universities.

Participants also pointed out difficulties that can arise when integrating definitions from international law into domestic law. It was noted that when criminalising international crimes, States often simply adopt verbatim the language provided in the Rome Statute. Other difficulties include States legislating in a way that omits crucial elements of international law definitions. A comprehensive checklist would assist in ensuring harmonisation, accurate legal definitions of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and the broadest possible capturing of the totality of the crime.³ It was recommended that GCPEA undertake a holistic review of current tools available when creating this checklist.

³ It was recommended that we review and leverage on existing available materials. See, for e.g., ICRC (2020). Checklist: Domestic Implementation of International Humanitarian Law Prohibiting Sexual Violence. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/checklist-domestic-implementation-international-humanitarian-law-prohibiting-sexual>.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that domestic criminalisation presents an opportunity for States to criminalise wide-ranging offending behaviour and fill gaps where the Rome Statute falls short. It is preferable that more detailed, comprehensive legislation should go above and beyond the core international crimes provided in the Rome Statute and with reference to other international human rights norms, e.g. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UN Convention Against Torture, Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, etc. For example, while the military use of educational facilities is not prohibited under international law, participants stressed the importance of its criminalisation. It was concluded that a checklist or model law should prohibit the military use of schools and include other human rights standards and other international justice norms. In this regard, participants noted that the military use of schools is a prohibited act under the ACERWC Model Law on CAAC.

“ *Legal recognition is crucial for raising awareness among policymakers, law enforcement, and the wider community that attacks on education are not merely incidental acts of violence, but rather violations of fundamental human rights and breaches of international law. It conveys a powerful message that those responsible will be held accountable and that education is a protected and inviolable right.* **”**

Dr Robert Doya Nanima

Special Rapporteur on Children Affected by Armed Conflict,
African Committee of Experts on Rights and Welfare of the Child

The checklist or model law should define “education” in a manner that protects all educational facilities. It should include all those involved in education, not just students and teachers but other education personnel. Definitions of “child” should be in line with the CRC, which defines a child as anyone under 18. Similarly, participants emphasised that definitions prohibiting the recruitment and use of children must align with international humanitarian and human rights law, setting the minimum age at 18. At the same time, the model law or checklist should ensure that children alleged as, accused, or recognised as having infringed penal law are treated in line with child justice standards.⁴

Best interests of the child

The best interests of the child is one of the guiding principles of the CRC and also a cross-cutting principle of the UN Guidelines. Participants emphasised the right of every child to have his or her best interests be a primary consideration in all matters involving or affecting them must be respected, especially when they are victims of education-related crimes. The best interests of the child must be considered at all stages of the justice process – when law enforcement and legal professionals handle cases involving child victims and witnesses, including when interviewing children, to when judges decide on whether to involve a child victim or witness, or when social workers provide support to them. It also applies in all situations and decisions, whether of a procedural or substantive nature, and courts must demonstrate that they have effectively taken a child’s best interests into account. Any checklist or model law should encourage States to include the paramountcy of the best interests of the child as a self-standing right and as a guiding principle.

⁴ See UN CRC Committee (2019). General comment No. 24 (2019) on children’s rights in the child justice system. CRC/C/GC/24.

Investigation and prosecution of education-related crimes



The principle of complementarity was emphasised, highlighting that the International Criminal Court serves as a court of last resort, intervening only when national authorities are unwilling or unable to prosecute. This underscores the critical importance of national-level accountability for serious crimes, including attacks on education. Domestic actors noted that they are already taking steps to address such violations and stressed the need for appropriate tools and resources to strengthen their capacity to investigate and prosecute these crimes effectively. Building strong and well-equipped domestic systems is essential for ensuring long-term accountability and the protection of education in conflict settings. Participants emphasised that empowering domestic authorities is crucial to long-term sustainability.

Tools and training to support a contextual analysis: Experts emphasised that a contextualised investigation that understands attacks on education can better address these crimes. The contexts in which attacks on education occur are often complex and intertwined with other crimes such as recruitment and use of children and sexual violence. A proper contextual analysis allows for patterns to be identified. Experts noted that adaptable tools and training which help investigators and prosecutors undertake a **contextual analysis** would be helpful.

Education-related crimes should be prioritised: The gravity of attacks on education must be recognised, and their investigation and prosecution should be specifically prioritised when the factual circumstances warrant it. In many contexts, however, the sheer volume and variety of crimes combined with limited prosecutorial resources, leads to education-related crimes being deprioritised or overlooked entirely. Since prioritisation is often a political decision, strong political will and **criteria-based prioritisation strategies/tools** are needed to ensure these crimes are no longer ignored. Any prioritisation tool should include international human rights obligations as a key consideration in case selection strategies.

Gathering of evidence of education-related crimes: In many contexts, difficulties in accessing crime sites and evidence combined with a lack of training in key areas such as open-source intelligence (OSINT) and digital forensic evidence collection hinders accountability and access to justice for victims. Tools to address these challenges include resources on OSINT evidence gathering methodologies and specific training modules tailored to education-related attacks.

“Attacks on education and schools should be continuously documented, investigated and widely published in order to facilitate accountability for perpetrators, to fight impunity and guarantee no-recurrence... Impunity for attacks on education undermines the rule of law and perpetuates violence. Therefore, strengthening accountability mechanisms is essential to break this cycle. But no matter how much effort we can do by ourselves on the national level, still there is a great need for cooperation and collaboration at the multilateral levels in this regard.”

Juhara Abdulaziz
Minister Plenipotentiary,
Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission
of the State of Qatar to the United Nations in Geneva

Child-sensitive procedures and training is needed: Gathering and utilising information from child victims and witnesses must be handled in a child-sensitive, trauma-informed and survivor-centred manner in order to be properly effective. Participants emphasised that effective, child-sensitive procedures must be available to children at the point of investigation. It was stressed that interactions with child victims and witnesses must be child-sensitive and undertaken by qualified professionals who have received role-specific and comprehensive training.

It was also noted that child interviewing practices vary across States and many lack protocols to guide professionals when they interview a child victim or witness. Assumptions about children's credibility, memory or capacity to understand what is being asked of them, or fears of retraumatisation often result in their exclusion. One participant noted that children are capable of recalling events, and research has shown that they can recount events as honestly as adults would. Accordingly, it was suggested that GCPEA develops child-sensitive interview guidelines as part of the Accountability Toolbox. Participants noted that **child participation protocols/guidelines** should be developed to ensure that children's participation in the justice process is in line with the best interests of the child.

Enhancing cross-border investigations and prosecutions: Ljubljana-The Hague MLA Convention

Cross-border investigations and prosecutions under universal jurisdiction and by international accountability mechanisms present significant operational challenges, particularly when crucial evidence lies beyond national borders. The complexity arises when investigators must gather evidence, locate witnesses, and assess crime scenes in another jurisdiction without the effective cooperation from that jurisdiction's authorities. Leveraging the new *Ljubljana-The Hague MLA Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes* was suggested in follow-up discussions. This new international treaty was created to close the impunity gap by improving cooperation between States in investigating and prosecuting genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other international crimes.

Access to justice and effective remedies for victims and witnesses

Participants emphasised that the enjoyment of human rights implies a right to access to justice – or the ability to seek, individually or collectively, and obtain a just, equitable and timely remedy for violations. For children, access to justice through avenues adapted to children were emphasised.

Reparations: Victims and survivors have a right to effective remedies, which involves reparations (i.e., measures that redress the harm done). The right to a remedy is implicit in the CRC and explicitly provided for in other major international human rights treaties⁵ and elaborated in the draft General Comment N°27 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on children's right to access to justice and to an effective remedy. Reparations include restitution, compensation, recovery and reintegration, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. Participants emphasised that remedies must be adequate, effective, prompt and proportional to the severity of the violation.

Participants emphasised that comprehensive reparations for attacks against education should address both individual trauma and collective harm, incorporating community-based restoration programs that rebuild educational infrastructure while fostering social cohesion and healing within affected

⁵ E.g. Article 8 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 2 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Article 14 of the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and Articles 4 and 39 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

communities.⁶ A new lens is required to understand justice, one rooted in restoration and societal healing.

Unnecessary contact with the justice system is avoided and intimidation of victims and witnesses is prevented: Measures to protect a child from safety risks before, during and after the justice process were discussed, including measures to avoid direct contact between a child victim or witness and the accused at any point in the justice process. Protection mechanisms require the implementation of safety protocols, secure communication channels, legal safeguards allowing for testimony to be given in safety, including protected identity procedures, emergency accommodation arrangements, and ongoing risk assessment and monitoring. Good practices were shared, including testimonial aids, including technological means such as the use of video conferencing which allows a child to testify from a remote location are employed by a number of States.

Right to privacy and protection from harm: Concern was raised about the disclosure of information relating to victims and witnesses. It was noted that in some jurisdictions protective measures provided by law are lifted when a child victim or witness turns 18, risking the disclosure of sensitive details. Participants highlighted the importance of child-friendly protections to safeguard this information. It was recommended that the legislative checklist include protections for victims and witnesses, and include them beyond childhood.

Multidisciplinary support and services: Protecting the child's best interests goes beyond protecting the child from retraumatisation and hardship while the child is involved in the justice process as a victim or witness. In line with the *UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime*, participants emphasised the need for an institutional, coordinated and integrated response pursued across all relevant sectors, including justice, law enforcement, social welfare, education, and health (including specialised trauma-informed psychological counseling). Comprehensive support measures was described as best practice to ensure meaningful victim participation throughout the entire criminal justice process, encompassing essential support services, protection mechanisms, information rights, and specialised child friendly support systems, including those with a gender dimension tailored to girls.

Restorative justice

Restorative justice was mentioned on numerous occasions as a means to complement formal legal mechanisms by providing meaningful participation, recognition of harm, and pathways to recovery. Participants emphasised the need for GCPEA to develop tools that are adaptable for restorative justice processes, highlighting their importance in addressing the harm caused by education-related crimes in a way that promotes healing, accountability, and community reconciliation. Such tools are especially crucial for ensuring that responses are survivor-centred, context-specific, and sensitive to the rights and needs of children, who are often the most affected.

Transitional Justice

The United Nations defines transitional justice as “the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past violations and abuses to ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation” (S/2004/616). Transitional

⁶ On education as a form of reparations, see Global Survivors Fund (2024), Available at https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Reports/2024_12_SREducation_Submission_GSF_Final.pdf

justice includes truth-seeking, criminal accountability, reparations, and institutional reform, working together to acknowledge harm, prevent recurrence, and support long-term peacebuilding. Participants stressed that justice must go beyond the punishment of perpetrators. It must also support victims, address the root causes of violations, and contribute to social healing and rebuilding. Reparations are one important component, offering both material and symbolic redress, but they must be accompanied by broader efforts to uncover the truth, reform abusive systems, and strengthen the rule of law. The roundtable emphasised that attacks on education must be explicitly integrated into transitional justice agendas and mechanisms, recognising that education is central to recovery, reconciliation, and sustainable peace.

Prevention and early warning

There is a need to establish an early warning indicator system to detect and prevent education-related crimes. While changes to curricula can serve as one such indicator, other factors should also be assessed. In some conflict-affected areas, schools may be repurposed, educational personnel targeted, or access to education deliberately restricted. Monitoring a range of indicators is essential to provide timely warnings of attempts to undermine or manipulate education systems and to support efforts to prevent further attacks on education.

Conclusion and way forward

The roundtable marked a groundbreaking convergence of voices that had previously operated in separate spheres. Coming together for the first time, participants described the roundtable as a “lightbulb moment” where connections were made and gaps in understanding of these crimes were bridged.

The expert roundtable highlighted the need for a comprehensive toolbox consisting of a variety of tools that can be adapted to different contexts and cadres of professionals. In recognition of this, the **Protecting Education Accountability Toolbox** (Accountability Toolbox) will be developed. The Accountability Toolbox presents a comprehensive approach over time through the development of a series of tools progressively aimed at preventing and responding to education-related crimes, starting with two tools that will strengthen the criminal justice response at the national level: a national checklist on the domestic implementation of laws addressing education-related crimes and a model law to protect education.



It aims to provide a comprehensive, adaptable set of judicial and non-judicial tools to empower lawmakers, governments, investigators, prosecutors, NHRIs, children and youth as well as other stakeholders to prevent and respond to education-related crimes, strengthen accountability across diverse legal and societal systems, and enhance protection of education at national, regional, and international levels. By equipping lawmakers, governments, investigators, prosecutors, NHRIs, and other stakeholders with adaptable judicial and non-judicial tools, the Toolbox enhances accountability mechanisms tailored to diverse legal and societal contexts.

This leads to explicit prohibition, criminalisation, prioritisation of education-related crimes, improved access to justice for victims, especially children, reduced impunity for perpetrators, and more robust protection of education systems across all levels. As emphasised during the roundtable, the approach will need to acknowledge that law is broad and can be used beyond formal judicial and administrative proceedings, that most justiciable problems are determined outside of formal justice systems, and that customary and informal justice (CIJ), non-legal processes and broader societal structures play an important role. Accordingly, in order to protect education and enhance accountability for education-related crimes, a number of judicial and non-judicial implementation measures and corresponding tools are needed which touch upon a variety of systems, structures and institutions at the national, regional, and international levels.

Over time, efforts will target a series of actors, including government officials, parliamentarians, judges, investigators, prosecutors and other legal professionals, armed forces and military personnel, national human rights institutions, civil society as well as children and young people. Accordingly, GCPEA will seek to develop tools to assist relevant judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, including but not limited to:

- Domestic Judicial mechanisms, including administrative, civil, criminal or constitutional courts
- Customary, tribal, indigenous, religious or informal community-based justice systems
- Independent institutions, such as National Human Rights Institutions and children's ombudspersons, commissioners or similar independent bodies with a mandate that includes children's rights
- Truth and reconciliation commissions, other transitional justice mechanisms and specialised commissions or bodies with the mandate to review and address systematic child rights violations focusing on specific contexts, groups or periods
- International and regional mechanisms, such as courts, commissions, or communications or complaint procedures by treaty bodies and other bodies, in particular the Optional Protocol to the Convention on a communications procedure

To support the rollout and effective use of the various tools developed as part of the Accountability Toolbox, GCPEA will design and deliver **tailored workshops** aimed at building the capacity of key stakeholders to apply the tools in their respective contexts. Designed in close collaboration with GCPEA and its partners, the workshops will be adapted to the needs of diverse audiences, including lawmakers, prosecutors, investigators, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), and civil society actors, and incorporate real-world case studies, legal analysis, and interactive problem-solving exercises. These workshops will also serve as platforms for peer learning and feedback, allowing for the iterative refinement of the Toolbox and the cultivation of a community of practice dedicated to strengthening accountability for attacks on education.

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), was formed in 2010 by organisations working in the fields of education in emergencies and conflict-affected contexts, higher education, protection, and international human rights and humanitarian law that were concerned about ongoing attacks on educational institutions, their students, and staff in countries affected by conflict and insecurity. GCPEA's vision is that all students and educators, and schools and universities, are protected from attacks during armed conflict, including through prevention and response measures. Its mission is to protect education from attack through advocacy that leverages the strengths of our diverse membership. For more information, visit <https://protectingeducation.org>.