

Report on the Second On-line Training on Implementing the Safe Schools Declaration
**Co-hosted by the Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation (AECID) and the Global
Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)**

May 25 - June 8, 2023

SUMMARY:

Background to the Training:

- The second on-line training on implementing the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) (SSD), held over three weekly sessions between May 25 and June 8, 2023, was co-hosted by Spain and GCPEA, co-sponsored by Argentina, Nigeria and Norway and delivered as part of the State-led Implementation Network on the Safe Schools Declaration.
- [Significant progress](#) has been made in protecting education since 2015, when the Safe Schools Declaration was opened for endorsement. The Safe Schools Declaration has proven to be an effective instrument to prevent and mitigate damage inflicted on students, teachers, educational institutions, and the community in general, during armed conflict.
- During the Third International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration in Palma, Spain, in 2019, Spain announced its commitment to organize training programs for endorsing states as a concrete action to enhance further implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration.
- The first on-line training on implementing the Safe Schools Declaration, hosted by Spain and GCPEA, took place in February and March 2021, with the participation of 90 representatives from 20 endorsing states. At the conclusion of the training, Spain committed to working with GCPEA to continue delivering these trainings on a regular basis.
- Around 80 participants from the following 22 states joined the second training in 2023: Australia, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malaysia, Malawi, Mexico, Moldova, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Slovenia, Somalia, Togo, and Tunisia.
- Representatives and experts from other countries such as Niger, Mali, Yemen, and the Central African Republic, as well as from international NGOs, universities, and international institutions, also joined the training. Many participated as speakers, moderators, and facilitators, sharing their expertise, knowledge, and reflections. They played a critical role in fulfilling the main objective of the training: finding practical solutions and testing the application of the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict (the Guidelines)* in real-life situations.

Objectives of the Training:

The specific objectives of the online training were to:

- **Enhance** participants' knowledge of the Safe Schools Declaration and its accompanying *Guidelines*;
- **Support** the operationalization and institutionalization of the *Guidelines* to enhance the capacity of the security sector and relevant State actors to protect educational facilities from attack and military use;
- **Encourage** participants to reflect upon protecting education within their own context and consider the specific impacts of attacks on education on students, teachers, and other education staff;
- **Stimulate** stronger responses and encourage deeper, gender-responsive implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration commitments;
- **Share** good practice and lessons learned in preventing and mitigating the impact of attacks on education and military use of schools; and
- **Raise awareness** of UN Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021) to protect education during conflict and discuss ways to strengthen political support and accountability for attacks on education.

Content of the Training:

- Combining theoretical presentations with practical exercises, the online training was structured around three thematic areas:
 1. Attacks on education and use of educational infrastructure for military purposes, with a special focus on the specific impacts on women and girls;
 2. Implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and the *Guidelines*; and
 3. Strengthening political support for protecting education in conflict, as well as accountability for attacks on education.
- The first part of the training was dedicated to the global scale and gender impact of attacks on education and the role of the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on preventing the six grave violations against children in conflict, and attacks on schools and school personnel in particular. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict warned about a sharp increase in the number of attacks on schools. A rise in attacks on girls' education was also highlighted, particularly in Afghanistan and in the Lake Chad basin region, affecting girls' access to education.
- The ways that attacks on educational facilities, students, and teachers frequently limit the educational use of schools and generate absenteeism or abandonment, with a higher incidence for girls, was highlighted through case studies. In many situations, families perceive that it is unsafe for girls, in particular, to attend school, due to attacks or occupation by armed groups or armed forces. The importance of considering the different situations of girls and women and the risks they face was underscored. The impact of attacks on education on students with disabilities was also discussed. Students with disabilities are more likely to remain out of school

if their education is interrupted, and have less access to remote and online learning, as they often require adaptations to meet their needs.

- A practical exercise on monitoring and reporting of attacks on education made clear that systematic collection of data is needed to measure the impact as well as the incidence of attacks on education, which can be used to inform prevention and response strategies, among others. Participants discussed common scenarios and learned how to identify different forms of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities. They gained knowledge of basic principles of monitoring and reporting attacks on education applying a gender approach, using a standard monitoring form.
- The importance of avoiding the use of educational facilities for military purposes was discussed. Dissemination of the Safe Schools Declaration and raising awareness among all parties to conflict on the Declaration commitments and the *Guidelines* was deemed essential, since often armed forces and armed groups are not aware of the commitments and the *Guidelines*.
- The training shared many examples of practical implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, inspiring further action, and emphasizing the importance of incorporating the Declaration and the *Guidelines* into policies, legislation, and operational frameworks.
- Recent examples of implementation highlighted included:
 - The National Plan for Implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration developed in Colombia after its endorsement of the Declaration in November 2022, which includes a mapping of attacks on education that will allow for territorial differentiation in the prevention and response strategy. Awareness raising and training of state forces will also be part of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration.
 - The many steps taken by Nigeria, which include hosting the hybrid Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration in Abuja in 2021, and the recent adoption of the National Plan on Financing Safe Schools. As part of implementing the Plan, the National Schools Security and Emergency Response Centre was established at the beginning of 2023, and 400 security personnel were trained on safe schools, according to the government.
 - The intersectoral and inter-ministerial work of the technical committees that were established in Mali at national, regional, and local levels, including the development of Action Plans for each committee. Capacity building and training of stakeholders led to a change in the conduct of the defense and security forces. They ceased occupying schools and used prefabricated military buildings instead. Agreements were reached with non-state armed groups to respect the Declaration and the *Guidelines*, and to reopen closed schools under certain conditions. A draft law on the protection of schools and universities in armed conflict is currently going through legislative processes in Mali.
 - The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) issued a directive protecting schools from military use in their operations, and all schools previously used by MINUSCA troops were vacated. The directive has recently been reviewed to include civilian personnel and the adoption of

mitigating measures for schools used as polling stations. In 2020, the government of the Central African Republic promulgated the Child Protection Code, which criminalizes attacks on, and the military use of, schools.

- A National Manual on Safety and Security in Schools was adopted by the Ministry of Education in Yemen with the support of Safer Yemen, a national organization which facilitated dialogue and cooperation between the different ministries and actors on the protection of education in Yemen.
- Experiences were also shared on engaging non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in implementing international humanitarian norms. The Geneva Call *Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict*, for example, is an instrument that NSAGs can sign to commit to avoid using schools for military purposes. It was noted that some NSAGs provide education in areas which they control. Experts highlighted the importance of engaging in dialogue with NSAGs in some contexts, to build awareness of the *Guidelines* and to encourage compliance with humanitarian norms.
- At the international level, participants learned about UN Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021), the first Resolution that focuses specifically on protecting education. Co-sponsored by 99 states, the Resolution shows a high level of political will to safeguard, protect, respect, and promote the right to education during armed conflict. It recognises schools as providing a lifesaving environment for children, emphasizing the importance of prevention of attacks on education and focusing on the specific needs of girls. Monitoring and reporting on these attacks, putting in place early warning systems, and developing action plans to respond to violations against children in conflict are key to ensure operationalization of the Resolution on the ground.
- The training also focused on measures to ensure accountability for attacks on education. The relevance of the role of the International Criminal Court in investigating and prosecuting attacks on education with a child-rights approach and a gender perspective was underscored, as well as the responsibility of national criminal courts to end impunity for war crimes. At the national level, few cases of attacks against education reach the court systems, since they are often not prioritized. This shows a limited understanding of the profound impact of these attacks, which reaches beyond the destruction of the infrastructure and has a long-term impact on the transformative power of education. States should criminalize these attacks, adapting their legislation to enable effective investigation and prosecution within domestic frameworks. Ensuring adequate expertise and capacity to work with child victims and witnesses is also essential.
- Participants had the opportunity to discuss a scenario to consider how the *Guidelines* might be relevant in practical situations, and how they could guide decision-making and cooperation between different stakeholders. The discussions reflected the varied roles, perspectives, and considerations that different actors, for example, civilians, military, non-state armed groups, civil society, and governments, might have, and the assessments they might make, before taking action in a specific situation. A case study on responsibility and accountability for attacks on

education was also discussed, highlighting the importance of monitoring and reporting to support investigation and prosecution of attacks.

- Through a combination of presentations, scenarios, facilitated discussions, and other practical exercises, the training sought to explore the complexity of implementing the different commitments within the Safe Schools Declaration, while also offering direction in terms of how competing demands and nuanced circumstances can be navigated to optimize protection and minimize risk.

CONCLUSIONS:

Recommendations:

- Implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration at different levels needs to be maintained. In particular states should:
 - Continue advocacy work to ensure that more states endorse the Safe Schools Declaration;
 - Develop and approve national action plans based on existing good practice and adapted to the specificity of each context;
 - Recognize the crucial role of local authorities and communities, without whom implementation cannot be successful;
 - Actively participate in the State-led Implementation Network on the Safe Schools Declaration and share experience and good practice implementing the Declaration with other states.
- Multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary approaches are essential. States should:
 - Maintain and reinforce negotiations between states at the highest level, and foster cooperation among all actors, including civil society;
 - Continue to increase knowledge, dissemination and respect for the Safe Schools Declaration and the *Guidelines* among all actors. The *Guidelines* are not legally binding but can have a positive effect on the behavior of armed forces and non-state armed groups;
 - Take into account the diversity of armed groups in different contexts and ensure analysis of each case developing tailored measures;
 - Recognize that success in implementing the Safe Schools Declaration depends on all actors that interface with education, including state actors, non-state armed groups, religious leaders, and civil society. Dissemination of, and information and training on, the Safe Schools Declaration and the *Guidelines* should include all actors;
 - Ensure that all actors, including non-state armed groups, are committed to respecting human rights and international humanitarian law. A permanent dialogue should be maintained with all actors in line with the principles of precaution, protection, prevention, and mitigation;

- Ensure accountability for attacks on education, adapting domestic legislation to enable effective investigation and prosecution.
- A multi-temporal approach is critical. States should:
 - Act not only in response to an attack but also on medium- and long-term school safety plans, which include risk assessment and prevention measures;
 - Implement protocols in all schools and ensure that educational authorities and the school community are aware of them;
 - Meet on a regular basis to assess progress made on the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration.

Next steps:

- Spain sent out an evaluation to all participants on the central aspects of the training. The general feedback from participants is very positive. The evaluation has been reviewed and comments and suggestions received will be taken into account for future trainings on the Safe Schools Declaration and the *Guidelines*. These include increasing the length of the training to allow for deeper discussions, while keeping each of the modules shorter, and organizing in-person trainings.
- Considering these recommendations, Spain will co-host, together with Norway and GCPEA and as part of the State-led Implementation Network, an in-person workshop on implementation in West and Central Africa to take place at the end of 2023. Spain will also organize, with the support of GCPEA, an in-person workshop for the Latin America and the Caribbean region, aimed at countries affected by armed conflict, as well as countries affected by other situations of violence which have an impact on education.
- GCPEA stands ready to support states in their critical work to implement the Safe Schools Declaration, including by sharing resources such as the [Factsheet on the practical impact of the SSD](#) and the report [Protecting Schools from military Use: law, policy and military doctrine](#). Moreover, the [Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education](#) seeks to standardize and strengthen data collection and analysis to better capture the extent of attacks on education and their impact, so as to inform prevention, response and accountability measures. GCPEA will be happy to work with states or organizations to analyze already existing data, as well as provide guidance on data collection tools, and provide orientations on the Toolkit.
- GCPEA will also offer other forms of support, including identifying and disseminating good practice, conducting research on the extent and impact of attacks on education, as well as building capacity and offering technical guidance.
- GCPEA is very eager to continue working closely with Spain to roll out more trainings, as well as in-person workshops, tailored to particular contexts, or focused on particular Declaration commitments, and taking into account the participants' suggestions and feedback. These activities will consider the participants' different backgrounds and contexts, in order to adapt the training content, materials and case studies to ensure they are relevant, and to ensure meaningful participation and experience sharing.
- GCPEA is also honored to support Norway in coordinating the State-led Implementation Network on the Safe Schools Declaration, and to support the exchange of good practices in the

form of webinars, as well as bilateral and multilateral dialogue. All endorsing states are invited to join the Network, engage in its activities, and share their good practice with others.

- The Fifth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration will be an opportunity to showcase the lessons learned by states from this training, as well as the concrete actions they have taken to save lives and preserve the right to education in situations of armed conflict.