

MALI

Between 2017 and 2019, attacks on education, including attacks on school buildings and actual or threatened abductions or assaults of teachers, caused closures across northern, central and southwestern areas of Mali. Non-state armed groups continued to loot and burn schools, inciting fear in many communities. Military use of schools appeared to decline during this period.

Context

Between 2017 and 2019, insecurity in Mali increased due to a spike in attacks by armed groups, intercommunal violence, and ‘counterterrorism’ measures led by government and peacekeeping forces.¹¹⁴⁷ Armed groups expanded into the north and center of the country following a military coup in 2012.

In 2018, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), the official branch of Al-Qaeda in the region, increased its attacks against civilians. Formed in March 2017, JNIM arose through the convergence of Ansar Dine, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Macina Liberation Front (FLM, also known as Katiba Macina) and Al-Mourabitoun.¹¹⁴⁸ ACLED reported that JNIM perpetrated 20 incidents of remote violence targeting civilians in 2018, as compared to one in 2017.¹¹⁴⁹ Fatalities resulting from targeted attacks on civilians increased by over 300 percent in Mali, from November 2018 to March 2019, as compared to the same five-month period in 2017 and 2018.¹¹⁵⁰

Intercommunal violence also affected civilians during this period. For example, on March 23, 2019, over 150 Fulani civilians, including at 85 children, were killed in an attack on Ogossagou and Welingara villages in Mopti region, according to the UN.¹¹⁵¹ The violence occurred in the context of intercommunal conflict between Dogon and Fulani communities, and an influx in ethnic militias.¹¹⁵²

In the first half of 2019, 202,000 people were newly displaced, six times as many as during the same period in 2018, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council.¹¹⁵³ In August 2019, OCHA identified 3.9 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, an increase of 700,000 from the beginning of the year.¹¹⁵⁴ The UN reported that in 2018, the number of grave violations against children increased by one-third, to 513 incidents.¹¹⁵⁵ These trends continued in 2019, when in the first six months, the UN reported that recruitment and use of children in armed groups doubled as compared to the same period in 2018.¹¹⁵⁶

Armed hostilities severely impacted children’s access to education. In December 2019, OCHA reported that over 1,200 schools had closed due to insecurity, an increase of over 400 since the previous year. These closures affected over 365,000 children, particularly in Mopti region, where at least 60 percent of affected schools were located.¹¹⁵⁷ Attacks on education occurred most frequently in Mopti, Ménaka, Gao and Timbuktu regions, according to the Mali Education Cluster.¹¹⁵⁸

Evaluations by NGOs and UN agencies in 2018 showed that conflict aggravated problems of teacher absenteeism, due to insecurity and the explicit targeting of Western education.¹¹⁵⁹ For displaced children, difficult learning conditions and absence of infrastructure disrupted children’s attendance and learning.¹¹⁶⁰ In June 2019, Mali’s Displacement Tracking Mechanism found that 91 percent of internally displaced children between the ages of six and 15 were out of school due to financial constraints, school closures, and absence of teachers, amongst other reasons.¹¹⁶¹

Attacks on schools

Over the 2017-2019 period, UN, media, and NGO sources reported that armed groups pillaged, partially burned, or destroyed schools in conflict-affected areas at an increasing rate. In *Education under Attack 2018*, GCPEA found that more than 130 schools were damaged or destroyed by armed groups in the north of the country in the first years of the reporting period.¹¹⁶²

In 2017, the UN verified 41 attacks against schools, 21 of which were attacks on students, school teachers, and parents.¹¹⁶³ In 2018, the UN 81 verified attacks on schools and protected personnel, doubling from 2017, however disaggregated data was not available to determine how many were attacks on schools.¹¹⁶⁴ These attacks included arson and physical attacks on school personnel, as well as direct threats made to teachers, which led to the closure of at least 40

schools. The UN reported that 50 schools in Mopti and 20 in Koulikoro were affected by violence. The UN Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Mali also reported that JNIM threatened local populations on multiple occasions when secular schools reopened in the center and north of the country.¹¹⁶⁵

In addition, GCPEA research identified six reported incidents in 2018 in which non-state armed groups burned schools or parts of schools in Mopti and Timbuktu regions.¹¹⁶⁶ These included the following incidents:

- Local media reported that on March 29, 2018, assailants burned the mayor's office and school in Diona, Mopti region.¹¹⁶⁷
- Local media reported that on July 9, 2018, armed elements attacked the village of Mbana Gakou, Mopti region and burned down both the school and teachers' residences.¹¹⁶⁸
- Local media reported that on December 1, 2018, armed individuals on motorbikes attacked the village of Agoufou, Timbuktu region captured a local teacher from his home, threatened him, and burned down the school's office. It is reported they later released the teacher.¹¹⁶⁹
- Local media reported that on December 25, 2018, armed elements burned a school in Niambourgou, Timbuktu region.¹¹⁷⁰

In addition, there was at least one reported attack on a school during presidential elections on July 29, 2018. *Reuters*, local media, and ICG reported that on July 29, 2018, militants fired mortar shells at a MINUSMA base in Aguelhok, Kidal region, striking a nearby school which was also used as a voting center. ICG reported that JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack.¹¹⁷¹

In 2019, attacks on schools escalated within a context of increasing insecurity in Mali. Between June and September 2019, the UN verified ten attacks on schools.¹¹⁷² In addition, GCPEA collected at least 14 reported incidents of attacks on schools from UN and local and new media,¹¹⁷³ 12 of which occurred in October, at the beginning of the academic year. In some incidents, armed groups accompanied attacks on schools with threats to or abductions of teachers. In most cases, armed actors set fire to schools, causing damage to the building or to materials, which also served as warnings against the reopening of schools. Examples included:

- *Studio Tamani* and *Malijet* reported that armed elements pillaged a school, and also threatened teachers, reportedly occurring on January 17, 2019 in Attara, Timbuktu region.¹¹⁷⁴
- On October 6, 2019, *Studio Tamani* and media sources reported that members of a non-state armed group raided the school and burned teaching materials in Yourmi village, Timbuktu region,¹¹⁷⁵ One day later, on October 7, 2019, a similar incident occurred in nearby Echelle village.¹¹⁷⁶
- *Studio Tamani* reported that dozens of armed actors attacked the market and burned the school in Garbamé village, Gao region.¹¹⁷⁷

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collated at least 60 reported incidents of attacks and threats made against school personnel. This represented an increase from the period covered in *Education under Attack 2018* when GCPEA identified two reported incidents and anecdotal evidence of this violation in 2015 and 2016; however not all data was disaggregated between schools and personnel, so other incidents may have occurred.¹¹⁷⁸

The UN verified 21 incidents of attacks and threats against educational staff, students and parents, predominately occurring in Mopti region in 2017.¹¹⁷⁹ While the UN did not fully disaggregate attacks on personnel and schools, at least 40 schools closed after direct threats made to teachers in 2018.¹¹⁸⁰ This upswing in attacks corresponded with a general increase in violence and targeting of civilians in Mali, as well as the spread of Islamist armed groups who explicitly target schools.¹¹⁸¹

GCPEA recorded four accounts of abductions of teachers and personnel in 2018, which may have been included in incidents verified by the UN, one of which occurred during an attack on a school and thus is described in the previous section:

- The research NGO Menastream and *Studio Tamani* reported that on May 17, 2018, armed elements abducted two secondary school teachers in Tenenkou, Mopti region who were later released.¹¹⁸²
- Local news media reported that on December 13, 2018, FLM claimed responsibility for the abduction of an English language teacher in Tenenkou, Mopti region.¹¹⁸³
- International digital news media *RFI* reported that FLM took responsibility for the abduction of a teacher between Tenenkou and Mopti towns, Mopti region, on December 22, 2018.¹¹⁸⁴

In some cases, armed groups threatened teachers and forced closures of schools, affecting the education of thousands of children. GCPEA documented one such case, in addition to those verified by the UN in 2018:

- Local news media *Studio Tamani* reported that on November 1 and 2, 2018, FLM militants threatened teachers, who then fled due to fear of attacks, forcing the closure of over 20 schools in two communes in Koulikoro region in southwestern Mali.¹¹⁸⁵

In 2019, armed groups continued to abduct, threaten, or use force against teachers across the north and center of the country. GCPEA identified three reported attacks against school teachers and personnel that occurred in Gao, Mopti, and Timbuktu. As in previous years, teachers were abducted, threatened, or targets of gunfire. Two of the incidents occurred in October, around the beginning of the school year:

- *Malijet* and *Studio Tamani* reported that on October 15, 2019, the interim director of a primary school in Arabébé, Niafunké district, Timbuktu region, was abducted. *Malijet* cited reports from a teachers' union's press release demanding the release of the educator.¹¹⁸⁶
- On October 25, OCHA and international media reported that unidentified armed assailants reportedly abducted six teachers in Korientzé, a village outside Mopti. The same actors raided a school and set fire to classrooms and learning materials during the same attack. *Jeune Afrique* reported that the armed group released the teachers on October 28, 2019.¹¹⁸⁷
- *Malijet* reported that on December 6, 2019, armed actors opened fire on the director of the Gao school district, although the official remained unharmed. Armed groups allegedly targeted other state officials in attacks during the same period.¹¹⁸⁸

Military use of schools and universities

GCPEA identified at least 13 reported incidents of military use during the 2017-2019 reporting period. The UN verified the military use of one school in Timbuktu between October and December 2018.¹¹⁸⁹ This represented a significant decrease from 2017, when the UN documented at least 12 schools under use by armed groups.¹¹⁹⁰ In *Education under Attack 2018*, military use appeared to peak in 2014, with 20 incidents verified by the UN, and gradually declined in subsequent years.¹¹⁹¹

¹¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2018* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018), Mali chapter; "Rapport d'Évaluation Rapide de Protection des PDI de N'Tillit et Gossi a Gao [Rapid Evaluation of IDP Protection in N'Tillit and Gossi, Gao]", AMSS-UNHCR, July 27, 2018.

¹¹⁴⁸ Hilary Matfess, "JNIM: A rising threat to stability in the Sahel," ACLED, February 1, 2019.

¹¹⁴⁹ Hilary Matfess, "JNIM: A rising threat to stability in the Sahel," ACLED, February 1, 2019.

¹¹⁵⁰ Sam Jones, "Political Violence Skyrockets in the Sahel According to Latest ACLED Data," ACLED press release, March 28, 2019.

¹¹⁵¹ Patrick Rose with Eliane Luthi, "A shattered life, slowly on the mend in Mali," UNICEF.

¹¹⁵² Amandla Thomas-Johnson, "What's behind Mali massacre and how to stop escalating violence," *Al Jazeera*, June 13, 2019.

¹¹⁵³ Norwegian Refugee Council, "On-the-record update: Crisis in central and northern Mali," News release, July 10, 2019.

¹¹⁵⁴ OCHA, "Mali Situation Report (Mali Rapport de situation)," September 12, 2019 p. 1.

¹¹⁵⁵ OCHA, *Humanitarian Response Plan 2019: Mali*, (OCHA: Geneva, December 2018, pp.3-4.

¹¹⁵⁶ "Sharp increase in grave violations against children in Mali, warns UNICEF," UNICEF, Press release, August 13, 2019.

¹¹⁵⁷ OCHA, "West and Central Africa: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot (10-16 December 2019)," December 17, 2019.

¹¹⁵⁸ Mali Education Cluster, "Snapshot of the Education Humanitarian Response (Apperçu de la réponse humanitaire en éducation)," January 8, 2019.

- ¹¹⁵⁹ IRC and NRC, “Report of the Rapid Needs Assessment for RRM - Menaka (Rapport d’Evaluation Rapide des Besoins RRM: Menaka),” November 22, 2018.
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- ¹¹⁶¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Government of Mali, *Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Report June 2019 (Matrice de Suivi des déplacements (DTM) Juin 2019)* (Bamako: IOM and Government of Mali, June 30, 2019).
- ¹¹⁶² GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, pp. 169-170.
- ¹¹⁶³ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict,” S/2018/465, May 16, 2018, para. 118.
- ¹¹⁶⁴ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict,” S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 118.
- ¹¹⁶⁵ “‘Urgent need’ to stop Mali violence with ‘effective’ military response: UN expert,” UN News, February 12, 2018.
- ¹¹⁶⁶ A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_references.pdf
- ¹¹⁶⁷ *Mali Actu; Koulouba*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI1935; “Douentza: armed men pillage and burn the mayor’s office and school in Diona village (DOUENTZA : la mairie et l’école du village de Dionna saccagées et brûlés par des hommes armés),” *Radio Tamani*, March 29, 2018.
- ¹¹⁶⁸ *Studio Tamani*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI2133; “KORO; attack on Banagakou village (KORO : attaque du village de Banagakou),” *Studio Tamani*, July 9, 2019.
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- ¹¹⁷⁰ *Studio Tamani*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI2543; “Insecurity in the north and center: targeted attacks on schools and teachers (Insécurité au nord et au centre: at-taques ciblées contre des écoles et des enseignants),” *aBamako*, December 28, 2018, as cited in “Education in Danger: December 2018,” *Insecurity Insight*, January 2019, p. 2.
- ¹¹⁷¹ Walid Le Berbere; Reuters; Mohamed Mahmoud Abu al-Maaly, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI2172; ICG, *Crisis Watch*, July 2019.
- ¹¹⁷² UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Mali,” S/2019/782, para. 69.
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- ¹¹⁷⁴ *Studio Tamani*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI2585 (data downloaded February 11, 2019); “Niafunke: Des assaillants brulent les documents d’une école a Attara,” *Malijet*, January 23, 2019.
- ¹¹⁷⁵ Whatsapp; *Studio Tamani*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI3229 (data downloaded December 14, 2019); “Timbuktu: several schools burned by alleged jihadists (Tombouctou : plusieurs écoles incendiées par des présumés jihadistes),” *Studio Tamani*, October 9, 2019.
- ¹¹⁷⁶ “Timbuktu: several schools burned by alleged jihadists (Tombouctou : plusieurs écoles incendiées par des présumés jihadistes),” *Studio Tamani*, October 9, 2019.
- ¹¹⁷⁷ *Réelle Afrique; Studio Tamani*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI3266; “Gao: attack on the weekly market in the village of Garbamé (GAO : attaque contre le marché heb-domadaire du village de Garbamé),” *Studio Tamani*, October 30, 2019.
- ¹¹⁷⁸ GCPEA, *Education under Attack*, p. 170 -171.
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- ¹¹⁹⁰ Information provided by a UN respondent, February 22, 2018.
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