

ETHIOPIA

Attacks on schools and universities increased in 2020 and 2021, with Tigray, Afar, and Amhara regions particularly impacted. GCPEA also identified approximately 70 incidents of military use of schools and universities, an increase compared to the previous two years.

Context

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, armed conflict erupted in Tigray, Ethiopia's northernmost region, and spread south to Amhara and Afar regions; violence also continued in south-central Oromia region. In November 2020, the central government sent troops to Tigray after alleging that forces affiliated with the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), attempted to seize control of a national military base.⁷¹⁶ The Ethiopian army, supported by Eritrean troops and militias from Amhara region, gained control of most of Tigray region in under a month.⁷¹⁷ Tigrayan forces counterattacked and the national government unilaterally declared a ceasefire. Tigrayan forces retook the regional capital, Mekelle, in June 2021.⁷¹⁸ The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch reported that all sides of the conflict committed abuses against civilians in Tigray region in 2020, including indiscriminate shelling on homes, hospitals, schools, and markets,⁷¹⁹ as well as massacres at Aksum and Mai-Kadra.⁷²⁰ In mid-2021, the conflict expanded into neighboring Amhara and Afar regions, leading to abuses against civilians and displacement.⁷²¹ In Oromia region, intercommunal violence and fighting between the Oromo Liberation Army and government forces continued during this reporting period, according to media reports.⁷²²

The police and National Defense Force reportedly used excessive and lethal force against bystanders and protesters demonstrating against the imprisonment of community and political leaders in Oromia region and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' region in 2020, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.⁷²³ In November 2021, arrests of Tigrayans also reportedly increased in Addis Ababa after a state of emergency was declared.⁷²⁴

In December 2021, the UN estimated that 9.4 million people required humanitarian food assistance in northern Ethiopia, where more than 2.1 million people were displaced by conflict.⁷²⁵ However, the government restricted the delivery of humanitarian aid to areas of Tigray region, as well as suspending internet, phone, and banking services, during parts of 2021.⁷²⁶

Violence and Covid-19 restrictions impacted access to education. According to the UN, 48,500 teachers required psychosocial support after hostilities in Tigray region,⁷²⁷ and more than 1.42 million students were out of school in northern Ethiopia due to hostilities, as reported by authorities.⁷²⁸ In Tigray region, schools were also used as temporary shelters for displaced persons in Mekelle, Shire, and other cities in 2020 and 2021,⁷²⁹ and the University of Aksum sheltered over 45,000 people in March 2021.⁷³⁰ The government closed schools in March 2020 to limit the spread of Covid-19, affecting more than 26 million school students and around one million tertiary students in the first months of the pandemic.⁷³¹ Less than ten percent of school students accessed remote education during that period.⁷³² Schools reopened gradually beginning in late October 2020; however, schools closed again in Tigray region following the outbreak of fighting in early November, then began opening again in June 2021.⁷³³

Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 32 reports of attacks on schools. In comparison, GCPEA collected at least 15 reported incidents in 2018-2019.⁷³⁴

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, Ethiopian authorities, NGOs, media, and UN agencies reported on the widespread damage or destruction of schools during conflict in Tigray, Amhara, Afar, and Benshangul-Gumuz regions. Much of the reporting did not specify the year in which damages occurred. Furthermore, it remained unclear whether damage to schools resulted from attacks by armed forces or armed groups rather than other violence, looting, the presence of internally displaced persons in schools, or another cause. As such, these reports are not included in the total number of attacks on schools for the 2020-2021 reporting period.

In August 2021, the *BBC* reported that 7,000 schools had been damaged during hostilities in Tigray, Afar, and Amhara regions, citing Ethiopia's Minister of Education; however, GCPEA could not confirm whether all the damages resulted

from attacks and how many schools were damaged in each year.⁷³⁵ GCPEA collected further reports that schools in Tigray region were extensively damaged and looted during the reporting period.⁷³⁶ Citing the Ministry of Education, the UN reported in 2021 that at minimum 25 percent of schools in the Tigray region were damaged, including destruction of classrooms, sanitation facilities, and offices.⁷³⁷ In the region's capital, Mekelle, the UN also reported in 2021 that fighting and looting had damaged a "large majority" of public schools.⁷³⁸ Meanwhile, EHRC reported findings from the Ministry of Education that over 1,000 schools experienced damage, looting, or the presence of explosive weapons, in Tigray region.⁷³⁹

In Afar region, approximately 760 schools were damaged or destroyed during conflict across 21 woredas, or districts, affecting over 150,000 students, 45 percent of them girls, and more than 4,000 teachers in 2021, according to a needs assessment led by the Afar Regional Education Bureau, as cited by the UN.⁷⁴⁰

In Amhara region, approximately 1,660 primary and secondary schools were damaged or destroyed during conflict as of September 2021, equivalent to 17 percent of schools in the region, the UN reported, citing the Regional Education Bureau. The damage to schools affected more than 1.2 million children, approximately half of them girls.⁷⁴¹ The majority of the damaged schools were located in zones of Amhara region bordering Tigray region, namely, North Gondar, South Gondar, Waghembra, North Wollo and South Wollo.⁷⁴²

In addition, in western Ethiopia, approximately 194 primary and secondary schools were damaged during the reporting period, in conflict in Metekel zone, Benshangul-Gumuz region, according to the Regional State Education Bureau, as reported by local media in September 2021.⁷⁴³

In 2020, GCPEA collected at least eight reported incidents of attacks on schools.⁷⁴⁴ For example:

- Human Rights Watch reported that on November 9, 2020, artillery shells detonated near schools in Humera town, Tigray region.⁷⁴⁵
- On November 17, 2020, mortar shells reportedly struck near Shire elementary school in Shire, Tigray region, according to Human Rights Watch.⁷⁴⁶
- Human Rights Watch reported that on November 28, 2020, shells hit and damaged a school in the Ayder area of Mekelle, Tigray region. Witnesses said the school was empty and that they had not seen military forces or fighters in the school when it was shelled.⁷⁴⁷

In 2021, GCPEA collected at least 24 incidents of attacks on schools in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions.⁷⁴⁸ For instance:

- Around January 5, 2021, armed assailants reportedly burned down a school administered by the Development and Inter-Aid Church Commission in Shimelba refugee camp, in Tigray region, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council and a media report.⁷⁴⁹
- In August 2021, TPLF forces looted a primary and a secondary school, destroying learning materials and administrative records, in Gasay town, Amhara region, according to EHRC.⁷⁵⁰
- EHRC reported that between August 18 and 20, 2021, TPLF forces looted the Kimir Dingay Higher Secondary School in Kimir Dingay town, Amhara region. The forces took a laptop and six computers, a plasma tv, photocopier, and microphones, as well as damaging doors and lockers, and intentionally leaving administrative records exposed to the elements so they would be destroyed.⁷⁵¹
- During the summer months of 2021, heavy weapon fire hit and damaged five schools in Afar region, namely, Ala Mohammed Secondary School and Askoma and Fluaruwa Primary Schools in Ewa district, Galikoma Primary School in Gulina district, and Eligolo Primary School in Yallo district.⁷⁵²
- International news outlet *Reuters* reported that between July and December 2021, TPLF forces looted and destroyed multiple schools in Gashena town, Amhara region, while the group controlled the area.⁷⁵³

Military use of schools and universities

GCPEA identified approximately 70 incidents of reported military use in 2020 and 2021, marking an increase compared to past years. In 2018 and 2019, GCPEA collected only sporadic reports of military use of schools and universities. In

addition to the significant increase in reports in 2020 and 2021, GCPEA also observed that cases more often involved the military use of schools, while previous years typically included instances of military presence on university campuses.⁷⁵⁴

In 2020, GCPEA identified approximately ten incidents of military use from UN, media, and NGO sources.⁷⁵⁵ For example:

- Beginning in June 2020, TPLF forces camped at Ullaga Kebele primary school in Bissober village, Tigray region, while it was closed due to the pandemic, according to EHRC, Human Rights Watch, and media outlets.⁷⁵⁶ Approximately 250 troops camped at the school, according to international media outlet *Agence France Presse*; the troops dug trenches near classrooms and stored weapons in the principal's office.⁷⁵⁷ After several months of military use, the school was damaged by heavy artillery fire in November 2020 during clashes between TPLF forces and the Ethiopian army, as reported by EHRC and Human Rights Watch.⁷⁵⁸
- Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported that in 2020, the Federal and Addis Ababa Police used a school in Addis Ababa as a detention center.⁷⁵⁹
- Between September 6 and 13, 2020, a militia reportedly used a primary school as an execution site for civilians in Metekel zone, Benishangul-Gumuz region.⁷⁶⁰
- Amnesty International reported that suspected Oromo Liberation Army members used a school to detain and kill more than 50 civilians, including children, on November 1, 2020, in Gawa Qanqa village, Oromia region.⁷⁶¹
- In November 2020, Eritrean forces reportedly occupied Basen primary school, in Axum city, Tigray region. According to Human Rights Watch, the Eritrean troops camped at the schools after Ethiopian and Eritrean forces took control of the area.⁷⁶²
- Human Rights Watch reported that Tigrayan forces occupied a secondary school in Shmelba, Tigray region, in late 2020 or early 2021.⁷⁶³

In 2021, GCPEA collected around 60 reports of military use. In Tigray region, in April 2021, the UN reported that the military was occupying 15 schools.⁷⁶⁴ In the summer of 2021, TPLF forces used 42 schools in Afar region, with most cases occurring in areas bordering the Tigray region.⁷⁶⁵ Also in 2021, GCPEA identified approximately five individual reports of military use of schools and universities.⁷⁶⁶ Some of these may overlap with the above cases of military use in 2021; to avoid double counting, no individual incidents in Tigray or Afar regions were included in the total number of cases of military use for 2021. Examples of reported military use in 2021 included:

- Human Rights Watch reported that in September 2021, TPLF forces occupied a school in Chenna town, Amhara region.⁷⁶⁷
- Government forces used Atse Yohannes preparatory school as a barracks, in Mekelle, Tigray region, beginning in late November 2020, according to Human Rights Watch, the UN, and EHRC. After several weeks, the soldiers left the school, having looted computers and food. In February 2021, the soldiers reportedly returned to occupy the school, including using sandbags and stones to build walls, posting armed guards at the gates, and placing weapons on the roof. When troops left in mid-April 2021, classrooms, science labs, and offices in the school were damaged, as were student records, learning materials, and hundreds of chairs. The military occupation impacted approximately 2,000 students and 150 teachers and staff members who attended or worked at the school.⁷⁶⁸
- Around November 2021, TPLF forces reportedly used two Wollo University campuses, in Dessie and Kombolcha towns, Amhara region; the armed group allegedly used Kombolcha campus as a training ground and Dessie campus as a command post. Classes were suspended in late 2021 due to extensive damages, according to the University's Vice President, interviewed by *BBC Amharic*. Air-launched strikes that occurred while TPLF forces occupied the campuses also reportedly caused damage.⁷⁶⁹

Attacks on higher education

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified approximately 14 reports of attacks on higher education. In *Education under Attack 2020*, GCPEA identified around five reports of higher education attacks in both 2018 and 2019.

The Dembi Dolo University students abducted by unidentified assailants in November 2019, covered in *Education under Attack 2020*, remained missing during this reporting period.⁷⁷⁰ While previous years primarily included incidents of repression of education-related or on-campus protests, this reporting period included shelling and looting of higher education facilities.⁷⁷¹

In 2020, GCPEA identified six reported attacks on higher education.⁷⁷² For instance:

- On January 10, 2020, security forces reportedly fired at demonstrating students, allegedly causing one death and around 12 injuries, at Bule Hora University in Bule Hora town, Oromia region, according to local media outlets. The students reportedly protested the ongoing conflict in west Oromia.⁷⁷³
- On March 26, 2020, police officers reportedly used excessive force, including firing shots, when dispersing student protests at Hawassa University's extension campus in Yirga Alem town, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' region. According to media outlet *Addis Standard*, students demonstrated after administrators rescinded transportation assistance when the university closed due to Covid-19 precautions. Around 50 students, including women, were allegedly injured in the incident.⁷⁷⁴
- Human Rights Watch reported that mortar shells struck twice near Shire University's agricultural campus in Shire city, Tigray region, on November 17, 2020. At the time, displaced persons from towns in the region were staying in the university.⁷⁷⁵
- On November 19, 2020, an airstrike reportedly hit a university in Mekelle city, Tigray region, wounding over 20 students, according to international media outlets such as the *Associated Press*.⁷⁷⁶
- Human Rights Watch reported that in November 2020, Eritrean troops looted food and learning materials from Axum University, in Axum city, Tigray region.⁷⁷⁷
- In 2021, GCPEA collected approximately eight reports of attacks on higher education.⁷⁷⁸ For example:
- On February 20, 2021, unidentified assailants reportedly fired on a bus of students in Adi Mesno town, Tigray region, who were returning from a graduation ceremony at Mekelle University. According to international media outlet the *BBC*, at least six students were killed and another ten injured as the bus travelled from Mekelle city to Addis Ababa. Two members of the Defense Forces escorting the students were also reportedly killed.⁷⁷⁹
- In late June 2021, Ethiopian soldiers reportedly fired on students at Mekelle University, in Mekelle city, Tigray region. International media outlet *NPR* reported that two students were killed and three wounded in the attack, which occurred while Tigrayan forces retook parts of Mekelle, causing Ethiopian forces to retreat.⁷⁸⁰
- On October 22, 2021, an airstrike hit near Mekelle University, in Mekelle, Tigray region, as reported by international news outlets *VOA* and *The Guardian*.⁷⁸¹

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