

LIBYA

Attacks on education persisted in Libya, particularly before the UN-brokered ceasefire agreement in October 2020. Compared with previous years, attacks on schools and universities increased in 2020, while attacks on school students and teachers declined.

Context

After nearly a decade of intermittent conflict in Libya, the United Nations (UN) brokered a ceasefire agreement in October 2020 between the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), supported by armed groups in the west, and the Interim Government, supported by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), formerly known as the Libyan National Army (LNA), in the east.⁹⁴² Foreign governments also provided political support, military equipment, and supported foreign fighters in the conflict; Turkey and Qatar supported the GNA while the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Russia supported the LAAF, according to Human Rights Watch and International Crisis Group.⁹⁴³ The armed conflict in Tripoli and its environs ended in June 2020 after the GNA drove LAAF forces east.⁹⁴⁴ Despite the ceasefire in October 2020 and formation of a Government of National Unity in March 2021, low-level violence persisted in several parts of Libya, including Sirte, while local and foreign-backed armed groups remained active in 2021.⁹⁴⁵

Conflict-related violence harmed and killed civilians and damaged civilian objects in 2020.⁹⁴⁶ The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) documented more than 485 civilian deaths and injuries between January and June 2020, with civilians living in western Libya most affected.⁹⁴⁷ Ground fighting in populated areas was the leading cause of civilian casualties in mid-2020, followed by explosive remnants of war and airstrikes.⁹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch also reported that all sides of the conflict continued to shell indiscriminately in 2020.⁹⁴⁹

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that there were 179,047 internally displaced persons in Libya in November 2021.⁹⁵⁰ In addition, the UN reported that the country hosted over 41,404 asylum-seekers and refugees from various countries, including Syria, Eritrea, and Sudan.⁹⁵¹ According to the UN and Human Rights Watch, armed groups arbitrarily detained migrants and refugees and forced them to work.⁹⁵² In October 2021, Libyan security forces arrested over 5,000 asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.⁹⁵³

Fighting in Tripoli closed more than 200 schools in early 2020, many of which were later used to shelter displaced families.⁹⁵⁴ In the first half of 2021, 23 schools across the country sheltered displaced persons.⁹⁵⁵ Conflict also impacted the provision of health services as well as access to water, forcing families to drink bottled or unsafe water, according to the UN.⁹⁵⁶

In January 2020, the UN reported that nearly 200,000 children in Libya were out of classes due to the proximity of violence and attacks on schools.⁹⁵⁷ Two months later, in March 2020, schools closed in both GNA- and LAAF-controlled territories to prevent the spread of Covid-19, disrupting the education of at least 1.3 million children.⁹⁵⁸ In January and February 2021, more than two-thirds of schools reopened after several postponements.⁹⁵⁹ During closures, many institutions turned to online teaching, including the University of Tripoli.⁹⁶⁰ However, conflict-related electrical outages and damage to infrastructure limited students' internet access.⁹⁶¹

Attacks on Schools

GCPEA identified at least 22 attacks on schools during the 2020-2021 reporting period. In comparison, *Education under Attack 2020* included 14 and five reported attacks in 2019 and 2018, respectively.⁹⁶² Shelling, crossfire, and explosive weapons attacks affected schools during both reporting periods.⁹⁶³

Shelling closed schools during the reporting period. According to the UN, in early 2020, ten schools in Ain Zara, Tripoli, and some schools in Misrata city closed due to hostilities, but reopened around March 4, 2020, affecting more than 127,000 students. In addition, eight schools near Mitiga Airport, in Tripoli, closed due to risk of shelling on March 8, 2020.⁹⁶⁴ Shortly thereafter, on March 15, 2020, schools across the country closed to prevent the spread of Covid-19.⁹⁶⁵ In addition, the UN reported that, between 2019 and 2021, 700 schools were closed in the West due to their proximity to areas of conflict.⁹⁶⁶

The UN verified 22 attacks on schools in 2020.⁹⁶⁷ In the first three months of 2020, UNSMIL recorded eight incidents of crossfire and artillery shelling between LNA- and GNA-affiliated forces affecting schools and one incident of the detonation of an improvised explosive device (IED), which injured three male students and was attributed to LNA-affiliated forces.⁹⁶⁸ Between April and June of that same year, UNSMIL documented nine attacks impacting schools, none of which were attributed to a particular conflict actor.⁹⁶⁹ Separately, between April 2019, when the LNA's offensive on Tripoli began, and April 2020, the UN documented attacks on 16 schools in the area, affecting over 15,000 students.⁹⁷⁰ Since the number of attacks occurring in 2020 compared to 2019 remains unclear, and may overlap with the count from UNSMIL, these attacks are not included in the total number of attacks on schools for the 2020-2021 reporting period.

GCPEA identified nine incidents of attacks on schools in 2020 from media sources,⁹⁷¹ which may have been included in the above UN counts and so were not included in the total number of attacks on schools. Most attack reports were concentrated in and around Tripoli. For instance:

- On January 28, 2020, shells reportedly landed near Rajab Al-Naeb School in Al-Hadba Al-Badri, Tripoli, killing three children and injuring others, aged between nine and 12, while on their way to school, as reported in local media.⁹⁷²
- A backpack containing a bomb was reportedly detonated in a school in al-Zawiya city, Zawiya district, on February 10, 2020, according to local media outlets. Three students reportedly sustained minor injuries in the blast.⁹⁷³
- A rocket hit the Nour Al-Maaref School in Tripoli's Al-Akwakh neighborhood on February 29, 2020, as reported by a local media outlet. No casualties were reported.⁹⁷⁴
- On March 9, 2020, two shells reportedly stuck the playground of Al-Fida School in Abu Salim, Tripoli. According to local media outlet *Libya Observer*, the school was closed at the time, since it was in the line of fire, and no casualties were reported.⁹⁷⁵
- In late March 2020, a local media outlet reported that three shells struck at Al-Ghazali School in Qasr Bin Ghashir, Tripoli district.⁹⁷⁶
- On April 17, 2020, shells reportedly struck at Bir Diab School in Qasr Bin Ghashir, in Tripoli district, according to a local media outlet.⁹⁷⁷

In 2021, GCPEA identified one report of an attack on a school. In June, unidentified assailants engaged in crossfire near a school in Al-Ajeilat municipality, Zwara city, Nuqat al Khams district, injuring two students.⁹⁷⁸

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified one reported attack on school students. In comparison, *Education under Attack 2020*, which covered 2017-2019, included eight reported attacks on school students and personnel, several occurring in 2017 and 2018 with none in 2019.⁹⁷⁹

UNSMIL and local media reported that on December 2, 2020, one 16-year-old boy was killed, and two other students were injured, while leaving a school in Al Ajaylat city, Nuqat al Khams district.⁹⁸⁰

Military use of schools and universities

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, military use of schools occurred sporadically. This trend is similar to previous years; GCPEA identified one or two reports per year in *Education under Attack 2020*.⁹⁸¹

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least two reports of military use:

- In November 2020, *All Africa* news outlet reported that armed groups near Tripoli used schools to store weapons and as observation posts.⁹⁸²
- Around the same time, the government army reported the presence of Russian private security forces in a primary school in Sirte city, Sirte district, according to *Anadolu News Agency*.⁹⁸³

GCPEA did not identify any incidents of military use in 2021.

Attacks on higher education

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified approximately eight reported attacks on higher education. This represents an increase compared to previous years, when GCPEA gathered one and two reports of attacks on higher education in 2019 and 2018, respectively.⁹⁸⁴ As in the last reporting period, attacks involved reported abductions of university staff and indiscriminate shelling near higher education buildings.

In 2020, GCPEA collected approximately seven reports of attacks on higher education personnel and facilities.⁹⁸⁵ For example:

- On January 26, 2020, the police department's explosive ordinance disposal unit reportedly located and defused an explosive device planted by an alleged armed group at Sirte University, in Sirte city and district, according to local media.⁹⁸⁶
- On March 10, 2020, unidentified assailants allegedly entered a council meeting at Almargeb University in Al-Khums city, Murqub district, to abduct a member of the university council, who they later killed, as reported by local media.⁹⁸⁷
- On April 22, 2020, shells reportedly struck near the back gate to Al-Fatah University in Al-Fernaj, Tripoli, according to a local media report.⁹⁸⁸
- *Al Jazeera* and other outlets reported that shells fell on a University of Tripoli dormitory in Al-Fernaj, Tripoli, where displaced persons were staying, on May 16, 2020, killing at least six civilians.⁹⁸⁹

On July 3, 2021, members of a militia entered a university in Ejeilat city, Nuqat al Khams district, indiscriminately fired, and abducted one student from the Faculty of Arts building, according to local media outlet *Libya Review*.⁹⁹⁰

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⁹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021: Events of 2020* (New York, Human Rights Watch: 2021), Libya chapter.

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