

PALESTINE

Over 420 attacks on, or interferences to education occurred in Palestine in 2020-2021. Attacks peaked in May 2021, when bombardments affected over 290 kindergartens, schools, and higher education facilities in Gaza. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, demolition or stop-work orders, teargas or other weapons firing at or near schools, military presence near schools, and checkpoint delays affected thousands of students and educators.

Context

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, Palestinians in the West Bank continued to be affected by the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.¹³²³ In addition, Israel continued to enforce a closure of the Gaza Strip, including a travel ban and heavy restriction on the entry and exit of goods, as it had for the past 14 years.¹³²⁴ According to Refugees International, the combined effect of Covid-19 restrictions and the blockade caused the Gaza population to experience a “double quarantine,” and exacerbated already high unemployment rates.¹³²⁵

Although fighting between the Israeli armed forces and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza decreased in 2020 as compared to previous years,¹³²⁶ an 11-day escalation of hostilities in 2021 saw the heaviest fighting in Gaza since 2014. Between May 10 and May 21, 2021, Palestinian armed groups launched over 4,000 rockets towards Israel, while Israeli armed forces carried out over 1,500 airstrikes, according to the UN.¹³²⁷ The fighting caused the deaths of over 260 Palestinians, including 67 children, and the injury of over 2,200 people; in Israel, 13 people were killed, of which two were children, according to the UN.¹³²⁸ Furthermore, 15,000 housing units in Palestine were damaged, along with water, sanitation, and other civilian infrastructure.¹³²⁹ Around 113,000 internally displaced people took shelter at schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).¹³³⁰

Israel continued to occupy the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and permitted Israeli settlement expansion during the reporting period, according to Human Rights Watch.¹³³¹ The UN reported that demolitions increased during the pandemic, with Israeli authorities demolishing roughly 65 Palestinian-owned buildings per month.¹³³² In 2021, the UN recorded the highest number of demolitions in West Bank and East Jerusalem since 2016.¹³³³

Quality of education, insufficient infrastructure, a shortage of teachers, conflict, and poverty all negatively impacted Palestinian children’s access to education during the reporting period.¹³³⁴ The Covid-19 pandemic caused the closure of Palestinian schools from March 2020 until early August 2020 in Gaza, and until early September 2020 in the West Bank,¹³³⁵ with schools intermittently shuttering throughout the 2020-2021 school year.¹³³⁶ In the Gaza Strip, over 50 percent of the school-aged population lacked access to a computer, a reliable power supply, and internet in 2020 which inhibited remote learning.¹³³⁷ In 2020, the UN estimated that 100,618 Palestinian children did not have safe access to schools.¹³³⁸ By the end of 2021, the UN estimated that 579,173 Palestinian children needed humanitarian assistance to access education.¹³³⁹ In East Jerusalem, Israel applied pressure on Palestinian schools to use the Israeli curriculum instead of their own, which threatened academic freedom and the right to education, according to the UN.¹³⁴⁰

Attacks on schools

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified over 429 reported attacks on schools and interferences to education in Palestine, with both the West Bank and Gaza affected. The rate of attacks on schools declined in 2020 as compared to 2019, largely due to Covid-19 related school closures and hybrid online learning, as well as a decrease in fighting in Gaza,¹³⁴¹ however attacks rose sharply in 2021. For instance, in 2019, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Education Cluster reported 328 education-related incidents in 2019.¹³⁴² In 2018, the UN verified 118 incidents of attacks on education and interference with education.¹³⁴³

In 2020, the UN verified over 119 incidents of attacks on schools and interferences to education in Palestine that affected 7,757 students and 615 education personnel.¹³⁴⁴ These include incidents of targeted attacks on schools by both Israeli armed forces and settlers, threats of attacks or demolitions, and teargas fired at or near schools. Four incidents occurred in Gaza and 115 incidents occurred in the West Bank.

According to the reports identified by the oPt Education Cluster, 53 schools in the West Bank were under threat of being

demolished by Israeli authorities in 2020,¹³⁴⁵ with schools in the Israeli-administered Area C of the West Bank particularly vulnerable to this form of violation, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the oPt Education Cluster.¹³⁴⁶ NRC reported that Israeli authorities systematically denied Palestinian applications for building permits and frequently demolished or issued stop-work orders on primary or pre-primary schools without necessary permits throughout Area C, with Hebron especially affected in 2020.¹³⁴⁷ NRC also found that the threatened or actual demolition of schools negatively impacted children by both inflicting psychosocial harm and affecting access to education, since many families reported not being able to pay for transportation costs to attend schools in other villages.¹³⁴⁸

Examples of threatened or actual demolitions or stop-work orders in 2020 included:

- Local media reported that on or around February 5, 2020, Israeli armed forces issued a stop-work order to a pre-school in Susiya, Yatta municipality in Area C of the West Bank.¹³⁴⁹
- On February 19, 2020, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) and OCHA reported that in Susiya, Yatta municipality, West Bank, Israeli armed forces, accompanied by military construction vehicles and Israeli authorities, confiscated a mobile classroom.¹³⁵⁰
- Between August 31 and September 10, 2020, Israeli armed forces seized school property and materials, including the roof, desks, and chairs, and construction materials, from Ras-at-Tin, a herding community east of Ramallah.¹³⁵¹ The attacks forced the school's 50 students to study outside in extremely hot weather conditions, according to B'tselem, an Israeli human rights organization.¹³⁵² The European Union (EU), several EU member states, and the United Kingdom had provided humanitarian funding for the school.¹³⁵³

Also in 2020, Israeli security forces stormed or fired teargas inside or near school buildings. The oPt Education Cluster verified 21 incidents involving Israeli security forces firing teargas at or near education facilities or students, affecting 2,850 students and 217 education personnel.¹³⁵⁴ While these incidents occurred less frequently, as compared to 2019 due to school closures, they injured student dozens of students:

- NRC, PCHR, and OCHA reported that on February 2, 2020, Israeli armed forces fired teargas into the schoolyard of a co-educational high school in Burin village, Nablus governorate. Students had allegedly clashed with armed Israeli settlers at the school's gates prior to the arrival of Israeli soldiers. A teargas cannister wounded the head of an 11-year-old student, who required treatment at a nearby hospital, according to NRC. The school closed for a day.¹³⁵⁵
- *The Palestine Chronicle* reported that on December 20, 2020, Israeli armed forces fired teargas into a school in Anin village, Jenin governorate. Dozens of students were allegedly injured, and learning was interrupted.¹³⁵⁶

In 2020, Israeli settlers in the West Bank also attacked schools. For instance:

- On January 28, 2020, alleged Israeli settlers set a classroom on fire and vandalized the school walls in Einabus village, Nablus governorate, according to the UN, the Education Cluster, and local media.¹³⁵⁷
- In March 2020, OCHA reported that Israeli settlers attacked a school in H2 area of Hebron city.¹³⁵⁸

In 2020, in Gaza, schools came under fire during attacks between Palestinian armed groups and Israeli security forces. GCPEA identified at least two reported incidents, including the following:

- OCHA and the oPt Education Cluster reported that in mid-August 2020, during fighting between Palestinian armed groups and Israeli armed forces, attacks by Israeli forces on open areas and military positions led to the minor damage of two UNRWA schools and other surrounding civilian property.¹³⁵⁹ In one school, an explosive remnant of war (ERW) was found after the fighting, causing the school to close for three days and affecting 1,781 students.¹³⁶⁰
- In Gaza city, on December 26, 2020, three schools, including one facility for disabled students, one elementary school, and one UNRWA-run school, were reportedly damaged during an Israeli airstrike on Gaza, according to PCHR. At the UNRWA-run school, the strike damaged 52 windows and six doors. Around 1,500 students were allegedly affected by the attacks.¹³⁶¹

In 2021, the oPt Education Cluster recorded 183 education-related incidents affecting 12,070 students and 501 personnel, marking an approximate 50 percent increase in incidents as compared to 2020.¹³⁶² Driving this increase was the

11-day escalation in Gaza in May 2021, during which over 265 education facilities, including private, public, and UNRWA schools and kindergartens, were damaged due to fighting, according to the oPt Education Cluster.¹³⁶³ The escalation interrupted the education of around 600,000 children as schools were closed for the safety of students and teachers.¹³⁶⁴ Additionally, sporadic conflict-related incidents in Gaza affected schools during 2021. Examples of attacks on schools in Gaza included:

- On January 23, 2021, a store of explosive weapons exploded in Beit Hanoun, Gaza, according to the UN. The blast damaged three schools, along with other civilian infrastructure.¹³⁶⁵
- On May 11, 2021, airstrikes hit the al-Sayedah Khadijah Girls' School and the Ahmed Harb al Kurd school near Deir al-Balah, Gaza. The Ahmed Harb Al-Kurd School, which served 550 students, was fully destroyed and the Sayedah Khadija school, which served 400 girls, sustained damages, according to PCHR.¹³⁶⁶
- On May 11 and 12, 2021, the UN and media reported that Israeli airstrikes hit two UNRWA schools in Gaza. The strikes inflicted severe damage to at least 29 classrooms and the schools' compound wall.¹³⁶⁷
- PCHR reported that on May 13, 2021, airstrikes targeted at the Ministry of Interior's security headquarters in al-Sheikh Zayid area of Gaza led to the damage of the Ministry of Education building and a boys' secondary school.¹³⁶⁸

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in 2021, the oPt Education Cluster reported 111 education-related incidents including 31 cases of teargas or weapons firing near or at schools, and nine cases of military entry in schools.¹³⁶⁹ At the end of 2021, 54 schools had demolition or stop-work orders against them, according to the oPt Education Cluster.¹³⁷⁰ GCPEA also identified at least 11 reports of attacks on schools in the West Bank in 2021 from UN, media, and human rights organizations.¹³⁷¹ Examples included:

- The UN reported that on January 17, 2021, the Umm Qussa school in Hebron, which was recently constructed, received a demolition order under Military Order 1797.¹³⁷²
- On May 14, 2021, Israeli settlers from Yitzhar settlement, accompanied by Israeli military forces, allegedly entered Urif village and engaged in clashes with Palestinian residents, according to *Palestine News and Information Agency*. During the fighting, Israeli settlers allegedly destroyed solar panels on top of a school.¹³⁷³
- On August 29, 2021, Israeli military forces allegedly raided two schools and fired stun grenades and teargas canisters towards two schoolyards in Al-Khader, according to *Palestine News and Information Agency*. The two schools were evacuated as Israeli soldiers entered the school complex and no injuries were reported.¹³⁷⁴
- On October 15, 2021, Israeli forces partially demolished a donor-funded school in Hammamat Al Maleh, Tubas, according to the West Bank Protection Consortium and the oPt Education Cluster.¹³⁷⁵

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 85 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, or other education personnel in Palestine. Attacks on students and staff declined during the reporting period, in part due to the prolonged closure of schools in 2020 which limited movements along school routes where students and staff were frequently targeted in earlier years. By comparison, in 2018 and 2019, GCPEA collected dozens of reports of incidents that harmed hundreds of school students and staff, primarily in the West Bank.¹³⁷⁶ In 2019 alone, the UN verified 37 incidents of detention of children commuting to or from school.¹³⁷⁷

In 2020, the oPt Education Cluster verified eight incidents in which students were detained at school, or on the way to or from school, 32 cases of delays at checkpoints, and five cases of intimidation while commuting to school that impacted 110 male students.¹³⁷⁸ Multiple incidents of weapons firing at students who were en route to or from school also occurred during the reporting period, according to the oPt Education Cluster.¹³⁷⁹ In 2020, Save the Children documented the arrests of students on the way to or from school, some of whom were detained for months.¹³⁸⁰ In some cases, arrests happened when clashes or protests occurred near school.¹³⁸¹ GCPEA also identified three incidents of arrest, or threats of arrest, of students and teachers in 2020:

- *Wafa News Agency* reported that on February 2, 2020, Israeli armed forces allegedly detained and took the fin-

gerprints of several students from a school in Tuqu town, Bethlehem governorate. The report claimed that soldiers were frequently present near the school, but did not specify a reason for the arrests.¹³⁸²

- Two days later, on February 4, 2020, Israeli armed forces allegedly arrested two Palestinian teachers on their way to the same school in Tuqu, Bethelam governorate, according to *Wafa News Agency*. The soldiers also reportedly threatened to storm the school.¹³⁸³
- *Wafa News Agency* reported that on December 8, 2020, Israeli armed forces blocked teachers on their way to work at Susiya school in Yattah municipality, Hebron governorate. The soldiers allegedly threatened to detain the teachers after stopping them on the road.¹³⁸⁴

In addition, GCPEA identified at least four reported incidents of violent attack with rubber bullets, ammunition, or teargas, on school students while they were on their way to, or outside, schools in 2020.¹³⁸⁵ These included:

- On February 15, 2020, OCHA and PCHR reported that a rubber bullet fired by Israeli police struck an 8-year-old student on his way home from school in Al Isawiya neighborhood of East Jerusalem. The attack caused severe injury and the loss of an eye.¹³⁸⁶
- On May 30, 2020, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 32-year-old disabled student who was walking to his school for special needs students in East Jerusalem, according to Human Rights Watch, *The New York Times*, *BBC*, and PCHR. Police officers reported that they had wrongly assumed that the student was carrying a gun, and opened fire.¹³⁸⁷
- OCHA reported that in mid-October 2020, in Al Jalazun, Ramallah governorate, Israeli armed forces allegedly fired teargas at school children who allegedly threw stones at the soldiers. Soldiers then followed students into the school and reportedly locked students into classrooms.¹³⁸⁸

In 2021, the oPt Education Cluster verified at least 23 cases of arrests or detention of students at, or on the way to or from, schools, and 27 cases of intimidation or delays at checkpoints or on the way to or from school, and three threats of violence to students and staff, among others.¹³⁸⁹ In addition, GCPEA identified 19 reported incidents attacks on school students and education personnel in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem;¹³⁹⁰ some of these incidents may be included in the oPt Education Cluster's count. GCPEA observed that most of the reported incidents occurred between September and December 2021, with the town of Al-Lubban Al-Sharqiya, near Nablus, particularly affected. In some cases, both Israeli settlers and Israeli security forces perpetrated attacks.

Examples of arrest or detention in 2021 included:

- On March 14, 2021, local media reported that Israeli soldiers arrested two male Palestinian high school students who were on their way home from school in Zabbouba village, near Jenin, West Bank.¹³⁹¹
- PCHR reported that on May 31, 2021, Israeli armed forces arrested a 15-year-old male student as he was leaving school in the al-Tur area of East Jerusalem.¹³⁹² The oPt Education Cluster verified that Israeli soldiers detained a male student who was on his way home from Al Khader Secondary School in Jenin, West Bank, on October 12, 2021. The soldiers hit and handcuffed the student, forced him inside a vehicle, and sprayed gas inside the vehicle; soldiers detained the student for around six hours and threatened to arrest him.¹³⁹³

In 2021, examples of teargas or weapons firing on students included:

- On September 22, 2021, the *Foundation for Middle East Peace*, along with local media sources reported that a Palestinian youth was injured by an Israeli rubber-coated steel bullet after a confrontation between Israeli military forces and residents broke out near the al-Tur Secondary Boys' School in East Jerusalem.¹³⁹⁴
- On November 16, 2022, Israeli security forces reportedly fired teargas at dozens of female school students who were on their way to school in Al-Lubban Al-Sharqiya village, Nablus, West Bank. Media sources reported that around 70 students were injured due to teargas and that one student was hospitalized after being beaten with the butt of a rifle.¹³⁹⁵
- On November 25, 2021, five military vehicles carrying 30 Israeli military forces stationed on the route to As-Sawiya Al Lubban Secondary School, in Nablus, West Bank while students were on their way to class. Students

and the soldiers clash, resulting in the injury of one student who was struck in the eye by a piece of a rubber-metal coated bullet.¹³⁹⁶

Israeli settlers and armed forces also threatened students and teachers or prevented them from accessing schools in 2021:

- On August 18, 2021, Israeli armed forces blocked the entrance of Tayasir Boys School in Tubas, West Bank and prevented students from entering. engaged in clashes according to UN and media sources. On the same day, the UN reported that two students were injured in clashes that erupted near the school.¹³⁹⁷
- On November 28, 2021, Israeli settlers, alongside Israeli security forces, entered Al-Lubban Al-Sharqiya, Nablus, West Bank, and harassed and chased students and blocked them from entering the school, according to ACLED and local media.¹³⁹⁸

Military use of schools and universities

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified several reports of military use of schools annually in Palestine, as in previous years. For instance, in 2019, the UN verified four cases of military use of schools.¹³⁹⁹ While the oPt Education Cluster monitored military presence near schools, GCPEA could not determine how many of these met GCPEA criteria for military use.

The oPt Education Cluster identified 17 incidents of Israeli military presence around schools in the West Bank in 2020, with Tuqu, H2-Hebron, and south Nablus most affected.¹⁴⁰⁰ Also in 2020, GCPEA identified one reported incident of military use of schools. On May 8, 2020, PCHR reported that Israeli armed forces entered al-Aroub refugee camp in Hebron and positioned themselves near the camp's UNRWA schools. During the operation, they also allegedly raided homes and arrested two children.¹⁴⁰¹

In 2021, the oPt Education Cluster verified 16 cases of military presence around schools in the West Bank.¹⁴⁰² In addition, GCPEA identified five cases of military use of schools, some of which may have been included in the oPt Education Cluster's count. Of these, three occurred in the West Bank and involved Israeli armed forces positioning themselves near schools to launch operations in surrounding communities, as reported by local human rights monitors.¹⁴⁰³ For example, according to the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Israeli troops reportedly engaged in training near a school in Tayasir, Tubas, West Bank on August 24, 2021.¹⁴⁰⁴

The other two cases of reported military use occurred in Gaza in May 2021 and involved Palestinian armed groups reportedly building underground tunnels underneath schools to support their operations. For example:

- The UN and Israeli media reported that Palestinian armed groups had built a tunnel around 7.5 meters beneath an UNRWA compound housing two boys' schools. The tunnel was discovered after an Israeli airstrike hit the school courtyard and uncovered the tunnel on an unknown date between May 13 and 15, 2021, according to the UN.¹⁴⁰⁵
- Israeli media made an unverified report that on May 15, 2021, Palestinian armed groups had allegedly stored rocket launchpads underneath a school courtyard in Gaza.¹⁴⁰⁶

Attacks on higher education

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA received reports of at least 19 attacks on higher education. Attacks on higher education occurred at a similar rate to the 2017-2020 reporting period when GCPEA identified between five and eight reported incidents annually. In 2020, Scholars at Risk reported that sources at Birzeit University estimated that over 80 of its students were detained by Israeli authorities.¹⁴⁰⁷

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least four incidents of attacks on university students and staff. These cases involved the arrest or detention of Palestinian scholars, often in direct relationship to their scholarship or roles as campus leaders. For example:

- On March 6, 2020, Israeli armed forces reportedly arrested five university students after conducting a raid on student dormitories at Birzeit University in Ramallah, West Bank. *International Middle East Media Center* re-

ported that Israeli authorities accused the students of belonging to the Islamic Bloc, a student branch of Hamas movement.¹⁴⁰⁸

- Scholars at Risk and local media reported that on June 4, 2020, Israeli security forces arrested the secretary of Birzeit University Student Council's planning committee from his home in Tulkarm. Few details about the student's detention were available at the time of writing; however, Scholars at Risk reported that students of Birzeit University had been increasingly targeted by Israeli security forces since 2019.¹⁴⁰⁹
- On July 9, 2020, Israeli security forces reportedly detained a female student of Birzeit University from her home in Ramallah, West Bank, according to Scholars at Risk and local media. Few details of the arrest were available; however, Scholars at Risk reported a recent pattern of arrests of university students.¹⁴¹⁰
- Scholars at Risk and the Scientific American reported that on July 16, 2020, Israeli security forces detained an Al-Quds University professor at a checkpoint while he was returning home from work. The scholar was allegedly targeted for his posts on social media.¹⁴¹¹

In addition, GCPEA identified at least one reported attack on a higher education facility. PCHR reported that on December 26, 2020, in Gaza City, airstrikes hit on or near the Eastern Gaza Directorate of Education training center, damaging its windows.¹⁴¹²

In 2021, GCPEA collected at least three reports of attacks on higher education students in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza City. The Birzeit University, located in the West Bank, reported in August 2021 that Israeli armed forces had repeatedly targeted its students throughout the 2020-2021 academic year and disrupted learning and violated academic freedom.¹⁴¹³ For example:

- PCHR reported that on February 7, 2021, Israeli armed forces detained a male student at a checkpoint near Tulkarm while he was on his way to Abu Dis University.¹⁴¹⁴
- Local media sources reported that on July 14, 2021, Israeli armed forces arrested 33 students from Birzeit University who were traveling by bus near Turmas Aya.¹⁴¹⁵ Birzeit University reported in early August 2021 that 14 students remained in detention without a hearing in military court.¹⁴¹⁶
- *The Al Mezan Center for Human Rights* reported that on September 22, 2021, Gaza Strip police forces allegedly assaulted Palestinian students who attended Al Azhar University in Gaza, as well as campus security. Some students were taken to the hospital for their injuries.¹⁴¹⁷

Attacks on higher education facilities increased in 2021, particularly within the context of renewed hostilities in Gaza. In May 2021, a human rights monitor reported that 12 higher education facilities were damaged within the context of renewed fighting in Gaza.¹⁴¹⁸ GCPEA also identified four incident reports of attacks on university facilities during the hostilities, two occurring in the West Bank and two in Gaza. These were:

- On May 13, 2021, an airstrike damaged al Quds University and a vocational center located in al-Sheikh Zayid area of northern Gaza, according to PCHR.¹⁴¹⁹
- Local media sources reported that early on the morning of May 14, 2021, Israeli armed forces fired teargas and stun canisters at Al Quds University in Abu Dis, Al Quds, West Bank, resulting in a fire in one of the university's buildings.¹⁴²⁰
- On May 14, 2021, *Reuters* and local media reported that airstrikes hit a multi-level building in Gaza city that housed education centers belonging to the Islamic University and other institutes. The building also had a bookstore and printing press.¹⁴²¹
- Scholars at Risk and media reported that around 100 Israeli security forces forcibly entered Birzeit University on December 14, 2021, where they damaged learning materials, physically assaulted campus security guards, and confiscated students' personal items.¹⁴²²

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