

BURKINA FASO

Attacks on education continued at a high rate in the 2022-2023 reporting period, with over 270 attacks on schools. In addition, GCPEA identified reports of the military use of schools, as well as reports of attacks against higher education students.

CONTEXT

Armed conflict-related violence intensified during the reporting period. Deadly attacks by armed groups increased, including by Al Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel).¹ In addition, soldiers and government-supported civilian army auxiliary groups (Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie, VDP) allegedly perpetrated violence against civilian populations.² The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported in mid-2022 that JNIM carried out at least five times as many attacks on civilians as IS Sahel, but that attacks perpetrated by the latter were more deadly, killing almost twice as many people.³ UN data showed that attacks by armed groups involving the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) increased three-fold from 2020 to 2022.⁴

Ten of the 13 regions in Burkina Faso experienced attacks by armed groups during the reporting period;⁵ the UN reported in December 2022 that Sahel and Centre-Nord were the regions most affected by conflict.⁶ Approximately 46 localities were besieged by armed groups in 2023,⁷ and 840,000 people lived in areas that armed groups had cut off from the rest of the country and from basic services.⁸

Burkina Faso experienced two coups d'état in 2022. In a deadly coup on January 24, 2022, the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration, MPSR), led by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Henri Damiba, overthrew President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, who had been re-elected in 2020.⁹ Damiba was deposed in a second coup, on September 30, 2022, when Captain Ibrahim Traoré became the new transitional president, and reiterated his predecessor's commitment to hold elections in 2024.¹⁰ Traoré's military government reported an attempted coup in September 2023.¹¹

In 2023, the UN reported that 5.5 million people, including 3.2 million children, in Burkina Faso were in need of humanitarian assistance, representing more than one in four people.¹² The number of internally displaced people also increased during the reporting period. As of March 2023, 2.2 million people had been internally displaced, including over 800,000 newly displaced in 2022, according to the UN.¹³

Education continued to be heavily impacted by conflict during the reporting period; in March 2023, the UN reported that half of the children in Burkina Faso were out of school.¹⁴ The number of school closures increased significantly, from 15 percent in March 2022 to 22 percent in November 2022, with 6,253 schools reported to be closed by the end of that year, affecting more than one million children.¹⁵ Est, Boucle du Mouhoun, and Sahel regions were most affected by school closures,¹⁶ as well as road closures and blockades, which meant that

some teachers were reportedly only able to access schools by helicopter.¹⁷ Teacher shortages were ongoing, with reports that teachers refused to return to work because of insecurity.¹⁸

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

GCPEA identified over 270 attacks on schools during the 2022-2023 reporting period. This marks an increase as compared to the previous reporting period when GCPEA identified 78 attacks in 2021 and at least 70 attacks in 2020.¹⁹ The majority of attacks were attributed to armed groups.²⁰

GCPEA identified 99 attacks on schools in 2022 which reportedly destroyed at least 31 schools and damaged at least 53; over half of the attacks involved arson.²¹ Separately, in 2022, the UN verified 120 attacks on schools and protected persons in relation to schools, the majority of which were perpetrated by armed groups.²² However, GCPEA was unable to determine how many of these were attacks on schools rather than attacks on school students and staff, so the UN count was not included in the total number of attacks on schools for the report. Examples of incidents identified by GCPEA included:

- On February 10, 2022, in Bougui village, Gourma province, Est region, unidentified armed assailants allegedly burned a classroom, accommodation, and food store at a Catholic school, and also allegedly stole cash, a vehicle, and electronics from the school, as reported by ACLED and local media *Info24*. A number of the seven staff and over 140 students reportedly fled and some were temporarily missing.²³
- On February 19, 2022, members of an alleged armed group burned a school in Kikideni village, Gourma province, Est region, affecting the education of at least 450 students, as reported by local media.²⁴
- On March 19, 2022, unidentified armed assailants allegedly looted a school and burned school furniture and education materials in Nindangou village, Gnagna province, Est region, as reported by ACLED and regional media *Afrique sur 7*.²⁵
- On October 24, 2022, members of an armed group attacked a secondary school in Boudangou town, Gourma province, Est region, ordering the teachers to cease all instructional activities, according to the UN.²⁶ They also allegedly fired guns in the air and burned two motorcycles and stole three others, as reported by local media *AIB*. A nearby secondary school also reportedly closed as a result of the attack.²⁷
- On October 28, 2022, in Bondokuy village, Mouhoun province, Boucle du Mouhoun region, unidentified armed assailants allegedly burned an education office, as reported by local media *Le Faso*.²⁸
- The UN reported that, on November 10, 2022, and November 15, 2022, an armed group attacked the Youba displacement site in Yatenga province, Nord region, firstly setting a temporary school on fire, and five days later looting a primary school canteen.²⁹

GCPEA received reports of 170 attacks on schools in 2023.³⁰ Separately, the UN reported 33 attacks on schools.³¹ Since some of these may have overlapped with incidents identified by GCPEA, they were not included in the total, to avoid double counting. Incidents identified by GCPEA included:

- On February 4, 2023, a primary school was burned in Bani town, Seno province, Sahel region, as reported by international media *Africa News*.³²

- On May 7, 2023, alleged members of an armed group destroyed buildings used to house teachers in Bandaoghin village, Gourma province, Est region, as reported by ACLED.³³
- On October 16, 2023, explosive weapons reportedly struck near to a school in Djibo city, Soum province, Sahel region, as reported by ACLED and local media *Libre Info*.³⁴

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

In the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 14 reported attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in Burkina Faso, which killed at least 18 and injured at least five. This is a slight decrease as compared to the period covered by *Education under Attack 2022*, in which GCPEA identified at least 23 such attacks in 2021, and ten in 2020.³⁵

GCPEA identified at least 13 reported attacks in 2022.³⁶ For example:

- On February 3, 2022, in Nouna town, Kossi province, Boucle du Mouhoun region, suspected members of an armed group allegedly threatened teachers, which led to classes being suspended, as reported by local media.³⁷
- On March 18, 2022, the Education Cluster and Government of Burkina Faso reported that armed men fired shots in the vicinity of a schoolyard in Markoye town, Oudalan province, Sahel region, killing one boy student.³⁸
- The UN reported that, on October 24, 2022, members of an unidentified armed group threatened teachers and ordered them to stop education activities at a primary school in Potiamanga village, Gourma province, Est region.³⁹ Local media *AIB* reported that teachers were enrolling students ahead of the school reopening.⁴⁰
- On December 4, 2022, in an attack that targeted teachers according to the Ministry of Education, armed men reportedly shot and killed five teachers in Bittou town, Boulgou province, Centre-Est region.⁴¹

GCPEA identified at least one attack on students and teachers in 2023:

- On October 6, 2023, suspected members of an armed group reportedly detained and killed 12 teenage students who were on their way to classes near Nouna town, Kossi province, Boucle du Mouhoun region.⁴²

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

GCPEA identified at least 11 cases of the military use of schools in the 2022-2023 reporting period. In comparison, GCPEA identified two cases of military use in 2021 and at least four cases in 2020.⁴³ The UN reported five cases of military use in 2022, by Defence and Security Forces, JNIM, and IS Sahel.⁴⁴ In mid-February 2022, members of army auxiliary VDP group reportedly detained two men in Bougui village, Gourma province, Est region. The men's bodies were later discovered behind a primary school.⁴⁵

GCPEA identified six reports of military use in 2023. Six schools were reportedly occupied by Defence and Security Forces and armed groups in Est, Centre Nord, Boucle du Mouhoun, and Sahel regions.⁴⁶ Separately, the UN reported that five schools were used for military purposes in 2023, and that the military use of another school continued from prior years.⁴⁷ Since it is unclear whether these reports overlap, they were not added, to avoid double counting.

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

GCPEA identified at least five reported attacks on universities or higher education students and staff in the current reporting period, including protest repression and an attack involving the use of an explosive device. This represents an increase as compared to the previous reporting period, when GCPEA identified no such incidents in 2021 and one in 2020.⁴⁸ In addition to attacks on higher education, at least one university was closed for over a year during the reporting period as a result of insecurity; *University World News* reported that classes were suspended in March 2022 at Dori University Centre, Seno province, Sahel region, affecting 1,800 students.⁴⁹

GCPEA identified at least four incidents of attacks on higher education in 2022.⁵⁰ For example:

- On January 13, 2022, in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso, Houet province, Hauts-Bassins region, police reportedly responded to a student protest at the Nazi Boni University with tear gas and live rounds; several students were reportedly injured, some severely.⁵¹ Students reportedly blocked roads and burned tires.⁵²
- On August 16, 2022, in Ouahigouya town, Yatenga province, Nord region, a car being used by Ouahigouya University staff to recover materials following an arson attack the night before hit an IED allegedly planted by members of an armed group near the University, according to local media citing the Minister of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation. The explosion reportedly severely wounded the driver and destroyed the car.⁵³
- On November 12, 2022, a reported armed clash between an armed group and the military near the University of Fada N'Gourma, Gourma province, Est region, led students to abandon classes.⁵⁴

GCPEA identified one attack on higher education students in 2023. On April 13, 2023, police reportedly used tear gas to disperse a student protest against changes to university entry criteria, at Joseph Ki Zerbo University in Ouagadougou, Kadiogo province, Centre region; some students were reportedly injured, according to ACLED and local media *Le Faso*.⁵⁵

ENDNOTES

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