

EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK

2024



Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack



This study is published by the **Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)**, which was formed in 2010 by organizations working in the fields of education in emergencies and conflict-affected contexts, higher education, protection, and international human rights and humanitarian law that were concerned about ongoing attacks on educational institutions, their students, and staff in countries affected by conflict and insecurity. GCPEA is a project of the Tides Center, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

Education under Attack 2024 is the result of independent research conducted by GCPEA. It is independent of the individual member organizations of the Steering Committee of GCPEA and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Steering Committee member organizations.

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Students learn at a re-opened school in Mali in 2023. Schools in Mali have been attacked and closed due to insecurity in recent years.

Attacks on education and military use of schools and universities in profiled countries, 2022-2023

● **Affected**

Reports documented 10-199 incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or 10-199 students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education

● **Heavily Affected**

Reports documented 200-399 incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or 200-399 students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education

● **Very Heavily Affected**

Reports documented 400 or more incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or 400 or more students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A 12-year-old girl, accompanied by others, on her way to school in northeast Syria, in April 2022.

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KEY FINDINGS

1. Attacks on education were frequent and widespread in 2022 and 2023. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) identified **around 6,000** reported attacks on students, educators, schools, and universities, as well as cases of parties to conflict using educational facilities for military purposes. Attacks on education and military use increased by nearly 20 percent in 2022 and 2023 compared to the two previous years.

More than **10,000** students and educators were reportedly killed, injured, abducted, arrested, or otherwise harmed by attacks on education in 2022 and 2023. The number of students, teachers, professors, and education staff killed or injured increased by over 10 percent compared to 2020 and 2021, the period covered in the last *Education under Attack* report.

Attacks also damaged or destroyed hundreds of education facilities, forcing temporary or permanent closures and weeks or months of lost learning. Some students also required psycho-social support after attacks on their schools or universities or were afraid to return to school after attacks.

2. In 2022 and 2023, the highest numbers of attacks on education were recorded in Palestine, Ukraine, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Myanmar. In each country, hundreds of schools were threatened, looted, burned, targeted with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), or hit by shelling or airstrikes.

During those same years, **India, Pakistan, Palestine, and Afghanistan** had high reported numbers of people harmed or killed in attacks on education. In some cases, students or educators were injured or killed in attacks on schools and universities, while in others they were targeted in abductions or arrests or harmed while en route to or from school or university.

3. Two countries not included in the previous report are profiled in this one, Egypt and Kyrgyzstan. Egypt was involved in a conflict with an Islamic State-affiliated armed group in its Sinai Peninsula, where more than ten cases of the military use of schools or universities were identified. Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan was engaged in an international armed conflict along its border with Tajikistan, in which over 20 schools were damaged or destroyed during a brief escalation of hostilities in September 2022.

4. Attacks on education increased in Ukraine, Sudan, Palestine, Syria, and Nigeria in 2022 and 2023, as compared to the previous two years. The escalation of the war in Ukraine meant a significant increase in attacks on schools and universities after February 2022, many involving artillery shelling, rockets, and airstrikes. After conflict erupted in Sudan in April 2023, attacks on educational facilities and their military use rose. In Palestine, attacks on education peaked in October 2023, following the escalation of hostilities. In Syria, children were recruited while on their way to school, and schools came under increasing attack in 2023, and, in Nigeria, the military use of schools rose that same year.

5. In **Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Mali, and Mozambique**, among other countries, attacks on education decreased during this reporting period, as compared to 2020 and 2021. These countries experienced shifts in conflict dynamics, including conflict de-escalation.

6. Globally, incidents of military use of schools and universities increased in 2022 and 2023, as compared to 2020 and 2021, rising to over 1,000 incidents. Reports were most prevalent in **Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Nigeria**, where armed forces or non-state armed groups occupied schools and universities to use them as bases, barracks, and weapons stores, among other non-educational purposes.

7. Girls and women were reportedly targeted because of their gender in attacks on education in at least ten countries. In certain contexts, such as **Afghanistan** and **Pakistan**, female students and teachers or their education facilities were targeted in an effort to prevent them from receiving an education. In addition, parties to conflict perpetrated sexual violence against women and girls at, or on the way to or from, schools or universities. **Students with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students; and students from Indigenous and ethnic minority communities faced greater vulnerabilities and were uniquely impacted by attacks on education.**

8. Explosive weapons were used in around one-third of all reported attacks on education in 2022 and 2023. These attacks included airstrikes, rockets, and artillery shelling, as well as the use of IEDs and landmines. During the reporting period, GCPEA identified the reported use of explosive weapons in a significant number of attacks on education in **Colombia, Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen.**

9. Between the publication of *Education under Attack 2022* and February 2024, six new countries endorsed the **Safe Schools Declaration**, with a total of 119 countries now committing to protect education in situations of armed conflict. The Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, and other global leaders underscored the importance of the Declaration. The UN observed the third and fourth International Day to Protect Education from Attack on September 9, 2022, and 2023. Governments and UN agencies also made advances in implementing the UN Security Council's Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict.

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

Attacks on education were frequent and widespread in 2022 and 2023. GCPEA identified around 6,000 reported attacks on schools and universities, students and educators, and cases of the military use of educational facilities during the reporting period. At least 10,000 students, teachers, professors, and education staff were killed, injured, abducted, arrested, or otherwise harmed in these attacks. In comparison, in 2020 and 2021, GCPEA collected over 5,000 reported incidents of attacks on education and military use that harmed approximately 9,000 students, educators, and personnel.¹

For instance, in **Sudan**, several shells hit the El Geneina University female dormitory and its vicinity in El Geneina, West Darfur, in June 2023. The shelling left a female student blind in one eye.² In **Myanmar**, Buanlung village, in Chin state, was attacked with explosives in October 2022, killing two primary school students who were on the way home from school, and injuring one other child.³ In March and April 2022, Russian forces used a school in Yahidne village, Chernihiv region, **Ukraine**, as a military base and detention center, holding more than 350 villagers in the basement, including at least 70 children.⁴ A school was hit in al-Maghazi refugee camp, in the Gaza Strip, **Palestine**, during Israeli airstrikes in October 2023; the strike caused structural damage to the school, which was run by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).⁵ In **Colombia**, an armed group allegedly entered several schools in Cimitarra municipality, Santander department, threatening at least 20 teachers during their classes. In response, schools reportedly suspended classes for two weeks and transferred some teachers to schools elsewhere.⁶

These examples show the death, injury, and damage brought by attacks on education, as well as their impacts on learning. They also show that attacks are not exceptional. **On average, eight attacks on education or cases of military use were recorded daily over the past two years.**

The *Education under Attack 2024* report profiles the 28 countries in armed conflict that were most affected by attacks on education in 2022 and 2023. Although attacks on education increased globally during this reporting period, complex conflict dynamics occurred between and within countries, with rates of attacks rising in some places alongside declines elsewhere. The Global Overview and country profiles provide background on the contextual factors driving these attacks, along with annual trends and incident reports.



The Al-Fakhoora educational facility in Al Rimal neighborhood, Gaza, Palestine, was attacked on October 10, 2023, in an early morning bombing.

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The damaged playground of the town kindergarten in Bohdanivka, Ukraine, on June 25, 2022. In March 2022, Russian forces stored munitions and parked military vehicles at the kindergarten, which was later destroyed in unclear circumstances.

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TRENDS IN ATTACKS ON EDUCATION AND MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN 2022-2023

GCPEA tracks five categories of attacks on education and the military use of educational facilities. The following are global trends for the 2022-2023 reporting period for each of these categories.

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

Attacks on schools were the most prevalent form of attack on education during the reporting period, making up more than half of all reported incidents of attacks on education and military use. In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA collected reports of over 3,250 attacks on schools in 27 profiled countries. These attacks included airstrikes, shelling, arson, looting, and threats; they caused the death or injury of over 725 students and educators, along with damage to hundreds of school facilities and significant lost learning.

In 2022 and 2023, **Ukraine** and **Palestine** were the countries most affected by attacks on schools, with Ukraine experiencing around 700 attacks and Palestine at least 640. In **Ukraine**, the majority of attacks on schools occurred in southern and eastern regions and involved explosive weapons, including airstrikes and shelling. In Palestine, between the escalation of hostilities in October and December 2023, the UN reported that at least 352 schools were damaged in the Gaza Strip, representing more than 60 percent of all schools.⁷ **Burkina Faso**, **DRC**, **Myanmar**, and **Yemen** were also heavily affected by attacks on schools.



“She always said, ‘Even if I am killed, let it be in the name of education.’”⁸

In **Afghanistan**, on September 30, 2022, an explosive attached to a suicide bomber detonated at the Kaaj private tutoring center in Dasht-e-Barchi, Kabul, killing at least 54 people and injuring at least 114, most of whom were Hazara women and girls.⁹ The father of a 19-year-old killed in the blast shared with *The New Humanitarian* that his daughter understood the risks but nonetheless attended classes at Kaaj tutoring center. The mother of another one of the students killed in the tutoring center blast told *The New Humanitarian*¹⁰:

“She wanted to be a doctor, but now she’s under the dirt. My brilliant daughter was torn to pieces.”

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

GCPEA collected about 800 reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in profiled countries in 2022 and 2023. Around 5,000 students or educators were killed or harmed in these attacks; around 1,100 of them were killed, injured, or abducted and over 3,850 were reportedly arrested or detained. These are in addition to students or educators killed or injured in attacks on schools and universities.

Myanmar and **Palestine** were the most impacted by attacks on students and educators during the reporting period, with more than 165 students or educators killed, injured, or abducted in each country, followed by **Cameroon** and **Iraq**.

In **India**, more than 2,700 students and teachers were arrested or detained for participating in education-related protests during the reporting period, and in **Pakistan** the number was over 540.



“We were terrified because it was the first time it happened, and most of the students there were traumatized because the bomb exploded right on the roof of the school,” said a student from a school affected by armed clashes in the **Philippines**, as reported in local media.¹¹

Clashes between military forces and a non-state armed group occurred near at least five schools in Masbate province in March 2023. In-person classes were reportedly suspended in many schools in the province, with some students moving to distance learning lessons. The clashes affected 112 schools and 31,764 students.¹²

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA identified over 1,000 reports of military use globally. Armed forces, other state security forces, or non-state armed groups used schools and universities as bases, barracks, firing positions

or for other non-educational purposes in 25 profiled countries. This represents a significant increase in reported cases of military use, as compared to 2020 and 2021 when around 570 reported cases of military use of schools and universities were identified.

GCPEA noted an increase in reports of military use of educational facilities in many countries, including **Afghanistan**, **Colombia**, **Mozambique**, **Nigeria**, **South Sudan**, **Sudan**, **Syria**, and **Ukraine**, compared to the previous reporting period. As in the last report, **Myanmar** experienced significant military use of schools and universities, with over 190 incidents reported in 2022 and 2023.

CHILD RECRUITMENT AT, OR ON THE WAY TO OR FROM, SCHOOL

GCPEA collected reports of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school in five countries, in 2022 and 2023: **Colombia**, **DRC**, **Somalia**, **Syria**, and **Yemen**. This is one more than in the last reporting period. Students may be recruited as fighters or spies, for domestic work, or to transport weapons or other materials.

In one example, at least two Indigenous students were recruited on their way to school in Caloto municipality, Cauca department, **Colombia**, in March 2022.¹³ Fear of recruitment kept some students from attending schools in several affected areas of the country.¹⁴



“Students get depressed and scared if they are interrupted many times and, also, the fighting today is inside the University of Tripoli with fighters being killed in front of the university gate,” a University of Tripoli professor told *University World News*. **“Academic performance, as well as other research activities, is largely affected, due to frequent interruptions and facilities damage.”**¹⁵

In **Libya**, nearby armed clashes caused the University of Tripoli to close for several days in mid-August 2023. Deadly fighting reportedly occurred within the campus of the university, and at the university gate, which was also damaged by shelling.¹⁶

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT, OR ON THE WAY TO OR FROM, SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY

In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA identified reports of sexual violence perpetrated by armed forces, law enforcement, and other security entities, or non-state armed group, at, or on the way to or from, school or university in eight countries. Seven of these countries are profiled in the report: **Cameroon, Colombia, DRC, Niger, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen**. In comparison, *Education under Attack 2022*, which covered 2020 and 2021, included reports of education-related sexual violence in seven countries.

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA collected over 360 reported incidents of attacks on higher education in profiled countries. Of these, around 100 were attacks on university facilities, while around 260 were attacks on university students and staff. More than 2,460 higher education students or staff were killed or harmed in these attacks; around 760 of them were reportedly killed, injured, or abducted, while over 1,700 were detained or arrested.

The country most affected by attacks on higher education facilities was **Ukraine**, with more than 35 reported attacks; **Palestine, Sudan, and Yemen** were also affected by attacks on higher education infrastructure, with ten or more reported incidents in 2022 and 2023. Many of these attacks involved the use of explosive weapons, including airstrikes or shelling.

The countries with the most attacks on higher education students and staff were **India, Türkiye, and Afghanistan**. In **India**, over 1,220 students and academics were reportedly arrested or detained during education-related protests or in relationship to their academic work. GCPEA collected reports of the arrest or detention of more than 200 higher education students and staff in **Türkiye**. In **Afghanistan**, more than 70 students and academics were reportedly killed, injured, or abducted while over 65 were also arrested or detained.

GENDERED DYNAMICS OF ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified ten countries where girls and women were targeted in attacks on education because of their gender. In some countries, such as **Afghanistan and Pakistan**, girls' schools were bombed or burned in an effort to limit their education. In other contexts, such as **Cameroon, Colombia, South Sudan, and Sudan**, armed groups, military, or other security forces committed sexual violence against girls and women at, or on the way to or from, school or university. In **Syria** and elsewhere, armed groups recruited girls from schools.

GCPEA research has found that women and girls are differentially impacted by attacks on education, including experiencing more difficulties in resuming education after an attack.¹⁷

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“The children will be busy at school during the day,” Muhawe, a mother, said about the opening of temporary learning centers. **“They will come home, do their homework and then go to bed. This routine gives us a bit of normalcy and it keeps the children out of harm’s way.”**¹⁸

Interruptions to education because of conflict and attacks on education have long-term impacts. In 2022, the conflict in North Kivu, **DRC**, forced Muhawe to flee her village with her son Isaac, aged seven, and he did not finish the school year. In 2023, temporary learning centers were set up at Bushagara displacement camp to enable displaced children to continue their education.¹⁹



A burned-out classroom in the government primary school in South-West Cameroon, destroyed by an alleged armed group on February 7, 2022.

© Private, February 8, 2022

An 8-year-old from Burkina Faso was shot in the arm during an attack on his village. His arm eventually had to be amputated. Now displaced, the boy is in school in the north central region of Burkina Faso.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

As attacks on education increase in several countries around the world, many students and educators face mounting risks to their lives. Students, teachers, and staff are injured and killed while schools are damaged or destroyed, with girls and women and students with disabilities differentially impacted. Whether through school or university closures or students remaining home from fear, education is under threat.

In this context, endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration is crucial. In line with the Declaration, GCPEA offers several recommendations to prevent, mitigate, and respond to attacks on education globally.

END ATTACKS ON EDUCATION AND IMPLEMENT THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION AND GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES FROM MILITARY USE DURING ARMED CONFLICT

- Parties to armed conflict should immediately cease attacks on education.
- States should endorse, implement, and support the Safe Schools Declaration in a gender responsive manner to ensure that all students and educators can learn and teach in safety.
- Armed forces and non-state armed groups should avoid using schools and universities for military purposes, including by implementing the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.
- In contexts in which armed parties have been listed by the UN Secretary-General, they should engage in dialogue with the UN toward an Action Plan with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to end and prevent attacks on education, including military use of schools, and other grave violations such as recruitment of children and sexual violence.
- States should implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict.
- Non-state armed groups should sign and implement Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict, including as it relates to educational spaces.

MONITOR AND REPORT ON ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

- States, international humanitarian and development organizations, civil society, and other monitoring bodies should strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education, while ensuring the protection of personal data and sources, to improve efforts to prevent and respond to attacks on education. This includes disaggregating data by type of attack on education, gender, age, disability, location, person or group responsible, number of days the institution was closed, and type of institution. Use GCPEA's *Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education*.

HOLD PERPETRATORS TO ACCOUNT AND PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO SURVIVORS

- States and international justice institutions should promptly and impartially investigate attacks on education and prosecute those responsible.
- States and other institutions should provide non-discriminatory assistance and protection for all survivors of attacks on education, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, or other attributes, while taking into account their distinct needs and experiences based on gender, and potential vulnerabilities such as disability and displacement.

PLAN FOR AND MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

- Where feasible, states should maintain safe access to education during armed conflict, including by working with school and university communities and all other relevant stakeholders to develop gender- and disability-responsive strategies to reduce the risk of attacks, and comprehensive safety and security plans in the event of these attacks.
- In the case of distance learning or catch-up classes, education providers should ensure that learners who previously ended their studies due to attacks on schools, conflict, or displacement are included, with a specific focus on female students and students with disabilities since they may encounter additional barriers to education.
- Education providers should ensure that education does not exacerbate conflict but promotes peace and provides physical and psychosocial protection for students, including by addressing gender-based stereotypes and barriers that can trigger, exacerbate, and result from attacks on education.
- Education providers should “build back better” after attacks on education and ensure funding not only to repair but to improve schools and universities and make them safer and more inclusive to all students and educators.

In Iraq, a mural on the wall of a school in Basra alerts children to the dangers of landmines and unexploded ordinance in March 2022.

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