

MALI

GCPEA identified over 90 reported attacks on schools in Mali in 2022 and 2023. Attacks on schools decreased while actual or threatened attacks against school personnel and students, as well as the military use of schools, remained sporadic.

CONTEXT

Armed violence continued in Mali during the 2022-2023 reporting period, and the security situation deteriorated, with the north particularly impacted.¹ Fighting between armed groups and government security forces supported by other security personnel increased, leading to an uptick in civilian fatalities during the reporting period.² Between July and December 2023, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) withdrew from the country at the request of the transitional government, which assumed leadership over civilian security.³ After the departure of MINUSMA, the Malian army reported the recapture of Kidal in the north.⁴

Malian armed forces conducted military operations against non-state armed groups during the reporting period, primarily in the center and north of the country.⁵ In March 2022, government forces and other security personnel reportedly killed at least 200 people in Moura town, Mopti region, for their alleged membership in armed groups.⁶ Sexual violence against women and girls was also reported by Amnesty International and the UN.⁷ In addition, Human Rights Watch reported that explosive weapons killed more than 70 people in 2022.⁸ Grave violations against children increased in 2022, according to the UN,⁹ and more than 450 children were recruited by armed groups and state forces.¹⁰

Violence against civilians increased in 2023.¹¹ Armed groups including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), and affiliated groups, conducted attacks against civilians and clashed with each other.¹² During the reporting period, clashes between armed groups in Ménaka and Gao regions in the north resulted in civilian fatalities and the displacement of thousands of civilians, as reported by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.¹³

The humanitarian situation in Mali deteriorated during the reporting period.¹⁴ The UN reported that 8.8 million people needed humanitarian aid in 2023, including 4.7 million children.¹⁵ Approximately 375,500 civilians were internally displaced in 2023, over half of whom were children.¹⁶

Insecurity continued to impact access to education during the reporting period.¹⁷ In October 2023, the UN reported that more than 1,600 schools were closed due to insecurity, impacting approximately 480,000 children;¹⁸ this was a slight decrease from June 2022, when 1,766 schools were closed due to insecurity.¹⁹ In addition, poverty, child marriage, and child labor were barriers to education.²⁰ Over two million children were out of school in 2023, with girls disproportionately impacted.²¹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

GCPEA identified around 90 attacks on schools during the 2022-2023 reporting period. In comparison, during the previous reporting period, GCPEA identified over 110 and 36 attacks on schools in 2021 and 2020, respectively, in addition to 489 threats against schools.²²

In 2022, GCPEA identified around 80 reports of attacks on schools.²³ Separately, the UN reported 83 attacks on schools and students and staff.²⁴ Since it was unclear how many of these attacks overlapped with reports collected by GCPEA, or how many of them were attacks on schools rather than protected persons, they were not included in the total number of attacks on schools in this report, to avoid double counting. Many of the incidents identified by GCPEA in news, UN, and Education Cluster reports involved arson and threats from non-state armed groups, usually ordering schools to close. For example:

- On April 20, 2022, a warning shot was heard in the vicinity of a school in Sangha commune, Bandiagara district, Mopti region, during an armed clash between two armed groups, according to the Education Cluster; no injuries were reported.²⁵
- On May 5, 2022, an unidentified armed group reportedly attacked Ommon school in Bondo commune, Koro district, Mopti region, and burned the director's office as well as school materials, as reported by the Education Cluster, local media, and ACLED.²⁶
- On May 17, 2022, a primary school was reportedly looted and vandalized in Anderamboukane town, Menaka region, according to ACLED.²⁷
- On June 10, 2022, presumed members of an armed group reportedly forced two schools to close and burned education material in Thierola and M'Piabougou villages, Banamba district, Koulikoro region, as reported by ACLED and local media *Mali Actu*.²⁸
- On November 28, 2022, schools were forcibly closed in Intechaq, Telabit, and Aoukenek villages, Tessalit district, Kidal region, as reported by ACLED.²⁹

In 2023, GCPEA identified at least 13 attacks on schools.³⁰ The UN reported 11 attacks on schools in 2023, but since it was unclear whether any of these overlapped with incidents identified by GCPEA, the number was not included in the total, to avoid double counting.³¹ Many attacks involved the use of explosive weapons and impacted hundreds of students. For example:

- On January 30, 2023, an unpinned grenade that had been left close to a school was discovered in Bara village, Ansongo district, Gao region, as reported by ACLED and local media *Studio Tamani*.³² The military conducted a controlled detonation.
- On April 22, 2023, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated near a primary school in Saréma, Mopti region, according to the UN; the school was damaged and classes stopped, affecting 217 students.³³
- On September 13, 2023, a grenade was discovered near a primary school in Ansongo town, Gao region, as reported by ACLED and local media *Studio Tamani*; the grenade was safely defused.³⁴
- On November 7, 2023, during airstrikes in Kidal region, a school was allegedly hit, as reported by interna-

tional media VOA; six children were reportedly killed, although GCPEA was unable to confirm whether they were students.³⁵

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

GCPEA identified at least 11 attacks on school students and teachers in the 2022-2023 reporting period. In comparison, during the previous reporting period, GCPEA identified nine such attacks in 2021 and eight in 2020.³⁶

GCPEA identified seven attacks on education personnel in 2022.³⁷ For example:

- In January 2022, armed men entered a school while classes were in session in Timbuktu region; they reportedly made threats, forced the students to leave, set fire to school equipment, and threatened to return if the school did not remain closed, according to the UN.³⁸
- On April 27, 2022, presumed members of an armed group attacked an education center in Klela village, Sikasso region, and held members of staff hostage for around 45 minutes, threatening them with violence and death, and stealing their property, as reported by the Education Cluster and local media *Mali Actu*.³⁹ The attack reportedly led six schools to relocate students⁴⁰
- On October 3, 2022, armed men threatened to kill the director of Zéréfani II primary school in Kléla village, Sikasso region, as reported by local media *Mali Actu*.⁴¹
- On November 9, 2022, presumed members of an armed group attacked Gairama and Bingata villages, Dire commune, Timbuktu region, forcing students to leave two schools, and physically assaulting teachers, as reported by OCHA. The armed men reportedly also set alight school documents.⁴²

GCPEA identified four attacks on school students and staff in 2023.⁴³ For example:

- On January 23, 2023, members of an armed group abducted three community leaders in Souba, Sagni and Kamiti villages, Segou region, including an education officer, and accused them of campaigning for schools to reopen, among other allegations, as reported by the UN and ACLED.⁴⁴
- In late October and early November 2023, members of an armed group interrupted lessons in several schools in Timbuktu and Sikasso regions, threatening teachers and students and ordering them to stop lessons, as reported by the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations.⁴⁵

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS OR UNIVERSITIES

GCPEA identified three cases of military use of schools during the reporting period. In 2022, the UN reported one instance of military use by Malian armed forces and two by Macina Liberation Front.⁴⁶ In comparison, during the previous reporting period GCPEA identified four cases of military use in 2020.⁴⁷

GCPEA did not identify any incidents of military use in 2023.

ENDNOTES

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